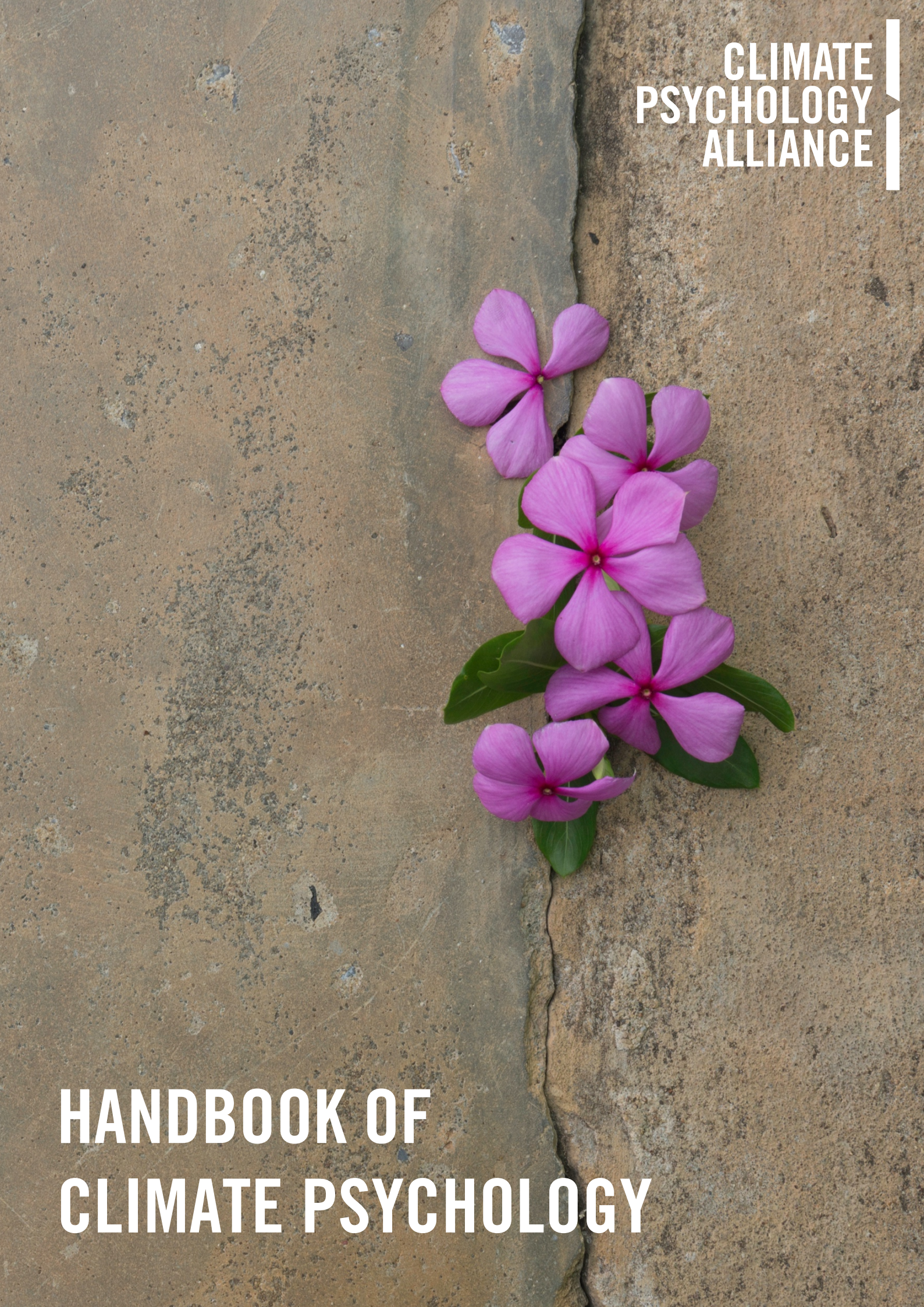
CLIMATE PSYCHOLOGY ALLIANCE



HANDBOOK OF CLIMATE PSYCHOLOGY

WELCOME TO THE CPA HANDBOOK OF CLIMATE PSYCHOLOGY

Our aims in this handbook are to develop shared understandings of what is meant by 'climate psychology' and to provide a valuable online resource. We include short explanations of key concepts, their importance to Climate Psychology and links to further reading or resources.

The Handbook will continue to unfold over time. There is no individual authorship of entries or of the Handbook as a whole. It is a CPA Handbook: an unfolding work of 'the commons'. We hope new entries will be produced by other members and it will continue to grow.

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CLIMATE PSYCHOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

Climate psychology is a new way of understanding our collective paralysis in the face of worsening climate change.

The Climate crisis is not a problem waiting to be solved. It is a paradigmatic challenge to an economic system driven by fossil fuels and consuming life.

At the deepest level, the psychological/cultural challenge lies in the belief that, as a species, we are different and special compared to other species; that nature is a resource for us to use.

FEELINGS MATTER

Climate change and environmental destruction threatens us with powerful feelings – loss, grief, guilt, anxiety, shame, despair. These are difficult to bear and can mobilise defence mechanisms and coping strategies, which can undermine our capacity to get to grips with the issue. Climate psychology seeks to understand how this plays out both in our individual lives and in our culture.

THE FOCUS OF CLIMATE PSYCHOLOGY

Climate psychology seeks to further our understanding of:

- the defences, such as denial and rationalisation, that we use to avoid facing these difficult feelings – and how such defences have become integral to sustaining our exploitative relations with both the non-human and human worlds
- the cultural assumptions and practices (e.g. the sense of privilege and entitlement, materialism and consumerism, the faith in progress) that inhibit effective change
- the conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes that individuals and groups face in negotiating change with family, friends, neighbours and colleagues, and
- the psychological resources – resilience, courage, radical hope, new forms of imagination – that support change.

THE PROBLEM WITH PSYCHOLOGY

It is now widely accepted that facts and information about the risk of climate change, taken alone, do not promote change. There is a growing acceptance that the climate change movement could be enriched by incorporating deeper psychological perspectives. But mainstream positivist psychology is often part of the problem, especially when it reduces the human being to an object to be measured, controlled and then harnessed to the profit-making machine that now threatens our collective future.

A DEEPER PSYCHOLOGY

We need a different psychology. Our richest psychological insights have come from literature, philosophy, world religions and the psychotherapies. From such sources, we glimpse some of the complexity and mystery of the human: the raw passions that often dominate our thoughts and behaviours; the internal conflicts and competing voices that characterise our internal lives and give colour to our different senses of self; the effect of systems of domination on the way we think and feel about ourselves.

CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

Viewed from this perspective, it is possible to see how our attempts to defend ourselves against the feelings aroused by worsening climate change are mediated by deep-seated assumptions about ourselves and society. For example, as western consumers, a powerful sense of entitlement may help us to shrug off guilt and shame, or a touching faith in progress can mitigate anxiety and induce complacency. Typically, we will feel torn between different impulses to face and avoid reality: between guilt and cynicism; between what is convenient for us and what is necessary for the common good.

A PSYCHO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Climate psychology draws upon a variety of sources that have been neglected by mainstream psychology, including psychoanalysis, Jungian psychology, ecopsychology, chaos theory, continental philosophy, ecolinguistics and social theory. It attempts to offer a psycho-social perspective – one that can illuminate the complex two-way interaction between the personal and the political. It uses this understanding:

- to promote more creative approaches to engaging the public with climate change
- to contribute to change at the personal, community, cultural and political levels
- to support activists, scientists and policy makers seeking to bring about change, and
- to build psychological resilience to the destructive impacts of climate change that are already being experienced.

AGENCY

When people become 'climate aware', if they are not part of an engaged community, feelings of powerlessness can easily lead to frustration, despair and depression.

'Agency' is the ability to act or have an effect. In sociology, it is contrasted with the social structures that shape people's actions. A subjective sense of agency is a major factor in wellbeing. Individuals experience agency, or the lack of it, in very different ways depending on personality, culture, social position and other circumstances. It can include being able to influence the course of our own lives, make things or shape events. It is bound up with our relatedness to human and non-human others and so our ability to influence them or resist being influenced by them, and to act with them or independently of them (Burkitt, 2016).

Image: Paul Hoggett

LIMITATIONS ON AGENCY IN THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Surveys generally show high public concern about climate change, but low uptake of actions to address it. People's agency is limited by the scientific and political complexity of the climate crisis, by the diversity of advocated responses and by controversy about what is worth doing. High carbon lifestyles are 'locked-in' by social and other influences. Considerable personal agency is needed to behave contrary to norms such as eating meat, driving or flying. That includes developing knowledge and narratives that justify non-conforming choices, and being able to cope with their emotional and social implications.

RATIONAL ACTORS, INFLUENCING AND MESSAGING

Scientists and NGOs have mostly assumed that, given the right information, people would do the right thing. Communicators would impart 'the truth', influencing audiences to adopt low-carbon choices. This assigns agency to the communicators and passivity to the audience. Some campaigners have moved on from this 'information deficit model' but they still search for the right way to influence people, rather than to support them in finding their own agency.

COMMUNITY AND RELATIONAL AGENCY

When people become 'climate aware', if they are not part of an engaged community, feelings of powerlessness can easily lead to frustration, despair and depression. On the other hand, identifying with a group engaged with ecological crisis does increase people's agency – sustaining pro-environmental behaviours, or gaining influence in the wider system. They also report improved well-being through congruency of their actions, values and identities (Veenhoeven et al, 2016).

ORGANISING FOR COLLECTIVE AGENCY

There is increasing adoption of organisational structures that respect individual agency while cultivating collective agency – for example, in Extinction Rebellion's 'self-organising system'. Activists are learning from management schools, with ideas about 'learning organisations', listening leadership and congruence of practices with espoused values (Wheatley, 2005; Argyris and Schön, 1996).

Activism has also been strongly influenced by spiritual and faith-based approaches to nonviolence, for instance via resources and practices shared through the Movement for a New Society (Green et al, 1994). Spiritual activism can involve work on self-awareness and self-relinquishment in focusing on 'right action' and non-attachment to outcomes. Rather than pushing or directing, this implies sensitive responsiveness, nurturing the conditions for things to happen and then 'flowing like water'.

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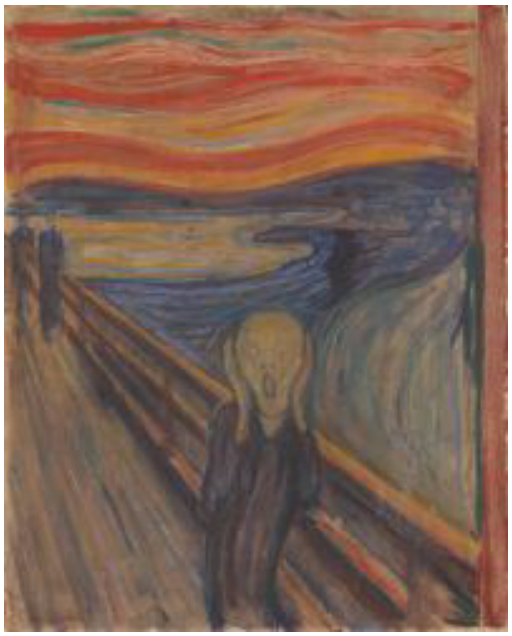
CATASTROPHISM

How can we get our fears 'in proportion' when even climate scientists cannot clearly discern the future contours of this threat?

CATASTROPHIC ANXIETY

Many people who seek therapeutic help are consumed by thoughts of impending disaster in their private lives. The objects of such fearful ruminations are many – imagined illnesses, set backs and failures, social humiliations – but whatever the focus, the terror can be so intense that it is sometimes referred to as 'catastrophic anxiety', as the self literally feels as if it is falling apart and one's world is coming to an end.



OVERWHELMING FEELINGS

We can be traumatised by our own imaginations as well as by real life disasters (Boulanger, 2007). But the terror of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War was almost wholly mediated by the imagination – nuclear war never came, it was the thought of it that was terrifying. In a similar way, climate change threatens the imagination with excess. How can we get our fears 'in proportion' when even climate scientists cannot clearly discern the future contours of this threat?

When an individual suddenly becomes aware, in more than an intellectual way, of the enormity of the threat of climate change, they can easily flip from a state of denial to one of overwhelm, in which the threat is experienced catastrophically. This can lead to paralysing distress, equivalent to a psychological trauma, which can have significant mental health impacts.

There is growing evidence of such impacts in Western societies. The Climate Psychology Alliance has established a network of members who are able to offer group or one-to-one therapeutic support to individuals experiencing such distress.

MANAGING ANXIETY

People are more likely to feel overwhelmed if they feel alone and helpless. When climate change feels like the elephant in the room that no-one wants to talk about, a 'socially constructed silence' is created that isolates us. So, creating a local climate (at work, with friends, etc) in which the heat can be taken out of

talking about climate change can counter isolation. As important is the sense of agency, the feeling that there are things you can do, feeling you have some power means that you are much less likely to feel overwhelmed by fear and despair.

However, whilst activity can be the antidote to despair, there is the danger that activism can become a defence against feeling, a kind of hyper-activity which is unsustainable and leads to burnout. There is good evidence to suggest that activism is best sustained by a conscious moving away from an intense preoccupation with the facts. These are not ignored, but they are put into the background, rather in the way that someone with a difficult medical condition makes the effort to concentrate on life, rather than the illness (Hoggett and Randall, 2018).

CATASTROPHIST MOVEMENTS

Looking back through history, we can see how societies have been gripped by fears of imminent catastrophe during periods of great social upheaval. Catastrophist movements such as the Crusades announced the coming of the end of the world. To the extent that such movements believed that 'the chosen' would be saved, they were also apocalyptic (Cohn, 1970). Today, many Christian fundamentalists in the USA have an apocalyptic outlook, believing themselves to be in the 'end times' and looking for signs (and climate change furnishes plenty of floods and fires) of the Second Coming. Their ranks overlap with a growing army of Preppers, ranging from quasi-military groups to billionaire hedge fund managers buying up boltholes on pristine tracts of New Zealand countryside.

SURVIVALISM

Some (Lasch, 1984) have argued that catastrophist and apocalyptic trends now saturate mainstream culture, including film and literature. As the following extract from an interview with a supermarket checkout worker indicates, these trends now provide the backdrop to our everyday lives:

"I remember watching, erm, The Day After Tomorrow…Oh God, I loved that film. I can't afford it mostly, but I have seen it so many times…I love disaster films…I know everything to do, I know all the countries to go to if anything terrible happens. I am telling you, I am well planned."

The danger is that survivalism becomes a facet of everyday life, encouraging us to live day by day, avoid attachments and long-term commitments except to one's own immediate group, to keep our heads down and maintain vigilance. It is sometimes said that once people understand it is our collective survival which is at risk from runaway climate change they will fight like hell. To the contrary, people committed only to survival are more likely to be preparing their refuge, whether this is in their mind, in the hills or, like Elon Musk, in outer space.

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Image: Patrick Perkins

CLIMATE CHANGE

What do we mean when we talk about 'climate change'? What do we hear when we hear the words 'climate change'? The answer: 'it depends', seems simplistic.

THE MANY MEANINGS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Acknowledging and understanding the myriad cultural associations with the terms 'climate' and 'climate change' can enable an appreciation of the blocks or defences that some people have in engaging with, and taking action on, climate change. This section will unpack some of the cultural understandings of climate change. It will encourage reflexivity around how the terms 'climate' and 'climate change' are used and understood culturally, and the meanings that may be attached to these terms.

SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDINGS

The scientific consensus on the causes and impacts of climate change is clear (e.g. IPCC, 2018), and it forms a key part of meta-narratives such as the Anthropocene (e.g. Steffen and Crutzen, 2007). However, such elite discourses have the potential to cause overwhelm and disengagement: it can seem too complex, too remote, too big, a hyperobject as some call it.

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS

Others question the usefulness of climate change as a universal concept laden with catastrophic outcomes and urge a broader approach to thinking about how climate change is communicated and used (Moser, 2014; Brace and Geoghegan, 2011; Hulme, 2009). This approach tries to account for different experiences of climate and climate change, which are influenced by and grounded in everyday cultural and physical contexts. For example, Brace and Geoghegan assert that public understanding of climate change needs to consider the "mingling of place, personal history, daily life, culture and values" (2011, p. 289). Other cultural considerations and influencers of climate change engagement include different perceptions of risk, proximity (for those not experiencing impacts, it is seen to be far away in place and time), personal agency and values.

Image: Marcus Spiske

AS A METAPHOR OR MYTHOLOGY

Hulme (2009) questions the unreflective use of the term 'climate change', arguing that it is used both as an index to describe the accumulated patterns of weather in places; and as an agent, as explanation for a wide range of likely physical and human outcomes. Taking the concept further, and giving examples of how different myths, or ways of seeing the world, can be attached to the terms, he suggests that 'climate change' could be an imaginative idea which circulates and influences every aspect of life. Building on this, Moser (2014) suggests that climate change can be used to think beyond the instrumental nature of action and communication and be used as an opportunity to "mirror who we are on the journey" (2014, p. 10).

PERCEPTIONS, INFLUENCE, RESPONSES

Does how we view climate change widen or restrict the range of possible responses? Does taking an orientation towards climate change as an idea or a challenge serve to open up the range of responses? Conversely, does the urgent need to take action, with climate change viewed as a meta-narrative or a problem to be solved, cause overwhelm, which can close down agency, or provoke an insubstantial response? There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but what emerges is a need for a critical reflexivity about the many ways climate and climate change are known and understood according to personal history, social context, geography and culture.

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...denial is not ignorance and to deny something we must first have seen it as real.

SEE NO EVIL

Many people now accept climate change but disregard its significance. Psychological and sociological theories of denial have been used to further our understanding of this. All start from the position that denial is not ignorance and to deny something we must first have seen it as real. Freud (1925) wrote of two kinds of denial, 'negation', when something known is repudiated as not true, not there, not happening, and 'disavowal' when something is known but treated as unimportant. Denial can also be conscious and cynical, this is sometimes called 'denialism'. This is industry-funded attempts to draw people to deny climate change. Denialism works to boost all the different forms of denial, to suit the purpose at hand, which is maintaining business as usual for the fossil fuel industry (Oreskes and Conway, 2010).

DISAVOWAL: DO NOT DISTURB

Disavowal is a term covering a complex set of ways of minimising felt emotional disturbance caused by facing reality. It can even enable a person to deny and acknowledge climate change at the same time, but with different parts of the mind. Disavowal is very similar to what the sociologist Stanley Cohen (2001) called implicatory denial, where facts are recognised without any consequent responsibility to act on them. It enables people to avoid feeling disturbed and hence responsible for their actions.

DISAVOWAL AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Within individuals, disavowal can assume many subtly different forms. Here are some examples:

"We went to India at Christmas, because we can [he laughs]; we did. Let alone what that means: what that nine hours of plane in the sky there and nine hours back meant for the environment – we didn't consider. Even though we are both intelligent enough to know that lots of other people doing that is probably not sustainable."

The salient word is ‘probably’. Lots of planes flying on fossil fuels is not sustainable. It is a fact. Falsely introducing probability presumably lessens the felt sting of knowing flying is currently harmful. This example shows disavowal as tricky, bending facts to justify one’s position so one does not feel implicated in the damage.

Image: Antonio Janeski

“I will fly to Canada and then go heli-skiing. It is wicked, terrible, for the environment, but I, that is what I like to do, so, I do it.”

This is not necessarily disavowal. It may be that the speaker is fully aware of the damage and has made a choice, possibly an amoral and cynical one. However, very often this kind of statement does involve disavowal. It relies on the person not fully seeing the destruction global warming brings. This leads to another potential form of disavowal, which is to use the phrase ‘climate change’ rather than the phrase ‘climate breakdown’. The climate is not ‘just changing’. It is breaking down.

Disavowal usually goes together with disassociation from care. The following example highlights the disassociation when opposite beliefs are held simultaneously:

> “Where you hear on the news about the rainforest being cut down in Brazil, and you think, oh no! But, because it is so far away … and it is not on your doorstep, then it is not going to bother you. But of course it will, because it will have an effect on the world.”

Active implicatory disavowal is not the same as finding a situation unbearable and having to screen that out to keep going. Here is an example of the latter:

> “It is not until you go up into the mountains above Los Angeles and look down into the soup, when you literally cannot see below you, the brown below you is not a cloud, it is actually pollution; but then you go down below and you forget again.”

To what extent is this person having to functionally forget what they basically know (the air they breathe is unbreathable and is slowly killing them) because to keep knowing that, moment by moment, is unbearable? To just call this disavowal would stretch the concept past its usefulness.

DISAVOWAL AND CULTURE

Zerubavel (2006) saw everyday denial as cultural: children learn from adults what to ignore as 'irrelevant' - taboos, euphemisms, tact, avoiding the obvious. Denial is socially structured: the silent bystander implicitly accepts the speaker's denial, and silence-breakers are sanctioned by being discredited or ridiculed. Norgaard's (2011) study of socially organised denial within a small Norwegian community showed how cultural norms, and the fear of social consequences, inhibited individuals from speaking freely about climate change. Randall's work with groups wanting to lower their carbon emissions (Carbon Conversation groups) has also highlighted the pressure groups can place on people to stay in disavowal (for example, said loudly in a work situation, "Here comes Barbara girls, best stop talking about flying!") (Randall & Brown, 2015).

Sally Weintrobe (2019) has written on how neoliberal culture actively disassociates us from our caring side. It works to un-care us. She has termed this a culture of un-care, hyphenating the word un-care to indicate this is actively driven disassociation.

Denial – and particularly disavowal – is a concept that can help us better understand our difficulties in facing and responding to the climate emergency, but not when applied in a blanket way. In general, the concept can help us see we have a range of ways to ward off reality, either by keeping it at bay for the moment or by finding more rigid ways to block awareness.

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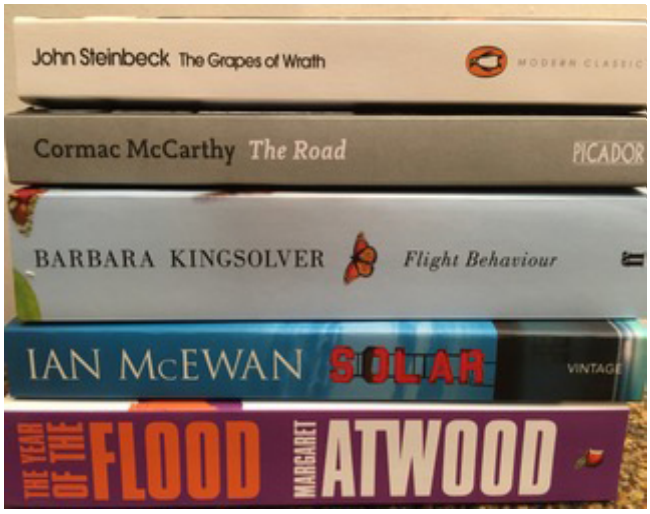
CLIMATE FICTION (CLI-FI)

...cli-fi novels and movies will play a big role in preparing humanity for what is coming down the road.

THE BIRTH OF 'CLI-FI'

The term 'cli-fi' was coined in 2008 by journalist and climate activist Dan Bloom to characterise novels, films, plays and poems that revolve around the issue of climate change. There is a close affinity with eco fiction, which can be traced back to The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck, published in 1939. Bloom expresses the hope on his website, www.cli-fi.net, that "cli-fi novels and movies will play a big role in preparing humanity for what is coming down the road".



FICTION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

Fiction offers a way of engaging with situations we would otherwise find too difficult or distressing to contemplate. Via a process of identification, we experience the harrowing circumstances in which characters find themselves, and share in their triumphs and setbacks. As a consequence, action in the external world becomes a more likely possibility. Neville Shute's novel, On the Beach, dramatically increased public engagement with the threat posed by nuclear weapons, while Steinbeck's novel raised awareness of environmental degradation and its human consequences. As Steinbeck himself commented: "One of the great gifts of this kind of fiction could be its ability to make the unthinkable more proximate."

THE SCOPE OF CLI-FI

Novels that fall within the cli-fi genre range from post-apocalyptic writing, portraying a future where society has been devastated by war, disease or environmental disaster – for example, The Road (Cormac McCarthy), The Hunger Games (Suzanne Collins) and Waterworld (Max Collins) – to work that depicts a time of transition, an altered but imaginable near future – for example, The Heatstroke Line (Edward Rubin), Flight Behaviour (Barbara Kingsolver) and I'm with the Bears (Bill McKibben).

A problem with some cli-fi novels, frequently flagged up in book reviews, is an overload of technical and practical details. Bill McKibben notes in the introduction to I'm with the Bears: "The problem with writing about global

warming may be that the truth is larger than usually makes for good fiction." (McKibben, 2011) Too much information, whether in the form of political context or technological explanation, can come at the expense of a narrative that takes the reader on a thought-provoking and emotionally engaging journey.

CLI-FI AND 'IMPLICATIVE DENIAL' (COHEN, 2000)

Guardian journalist, Anna Karpf, has described herself as a "climate change ignorer" (2012) – a person who fully accepts the reality of climate change and at the same time lives 'as if' things were not as they are. She attributes her implicative denial to the overwhelming sense of helplessness evoked by thinking about climate change. In this situation, cli-fi offers a way of thinking and knowing about the existential threat posed by climate change, without becoming overwhelmed. As readers, we are able emotionally and cognitively to inhabit a climate-changed world, while remaining in a physically safe space. We have the opportunity to explore our emotional responses to the events that occur and vicariously to exercise our problem-solving skills.

THE FUTURE OF CLI-FI

There are signs that the idea of entering a fictional world in order to engage with the difficulties and uncertainties associated with climate change is gaining ground. Amazon includes cli-fi as a separate category and cli-fi modules have found a place on the literature curriculum at many US colleges, various German universities and universities of Cambridge and UCL in the UK. Cli-fi dedicated reading groups have been formed in various places and a guide to writing cli-fi4 has found its way into print.

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Compassion... may have an important role to play in helping us to face the enormity of the earth's ecological and climate emergencies...

Compassion has many different facets. It can be thought of as an emotion, an attitude, a trait like disposition or a motivation. It is "a multi-textured response to pain, sorrow and anguish. It includes kindness, empathy, generosity and acceptance" and it is "the capacity to open to the reality of suffering and aspire to its healing" (Feldman and Kuyken, 2011). It enables us to respond with courage but also with an acceptance of the limitations of our powers and resources. Compassion can be directed towards our own suffering and towards the suffering of others.

Implicit within compassion are positive feelings of warmth, benevolence and love. These positive feelings don't suppress the negative, but rather they add an additional layer or dimension. With compassion we move away from pity, which can often be experienced from a perspective of superiority. With pity we see ourselves as different from or above those who are suffering; with compassion we recognise that suffering is universal.

CULTIVATING COMPASSION

We all have the potential for compassion within us, but it can also be cultivated through compassion training. Often this training is based on a foundation of mindfulness, which helps us to be fully present with our experience, enabling us to respond skillfully rather than to react. Through this process we can learn to move towards our discomfort or difficult emotions, rather than trying to move away from them.

Cultivating compassion can enable us to respond to our own suffering and the suffering of others without being overwhelmed or succumbing to empathy fatigue (Klimecki and Singer, 2012) as well as helping us to deal with feelings of guilt and shame (Held and Owens, 2015). Compassion, therefore, may have an important role to play in helping us to face the enormity of the earth's ecological and climate emergencies without resorting to sophisticated psychological defence mechanisms such as splitting. It can also help us to widen our circle of empathy, reducing in-group/out-group differentiations and fostering a

compassionate response to the suffering of all humans, non-humans and the natural world (Pfattheicher and Sassenrath, 2016).

Image: Bonnie Kittle

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Importantly, compassion has been shown to increase our sense of agency and our motivation to help (Leiberg, Klimecki and Singer, 2011). The recent Extinction Rebellion protests, dubbed the 'Compassionate Revolution', are a powerful example of this. Feelings of grief and sorrow, arising from an understanding of the scale of the environmental destruction we are now experiencing, were transmuted into non-aggressive (but disruptive and determined), acts of love and kindness. Protestors courageously faced arrest and potential imprisonment with chants of "We love you. We do this for your children". Perhaps all of us can learn lessons from this as we face the eco challenges that arise in our everyday lives.

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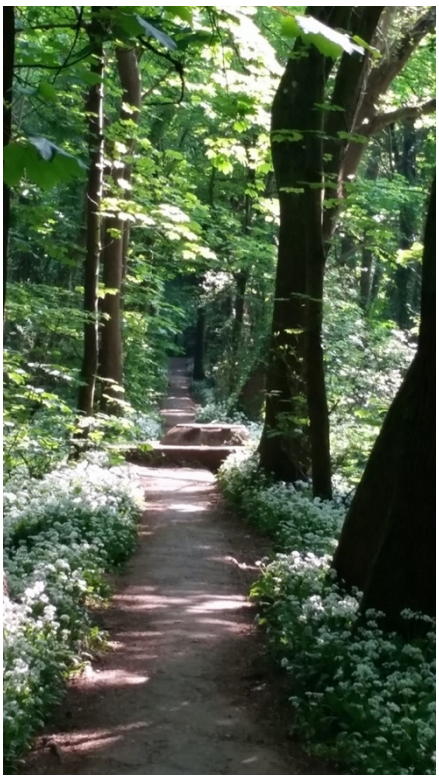
CONTAINMENT

BEYOND DENIAL

When we really come out of a state of denial about climate change, the reality of the disaster that we are now facing may feel overwhelming and we slip straight from denial to despair. To avoid this, we need to find ways of processing this experience, of working it through, so that the difficult truth can be faced and engagement with the issue sustained. Then we can stay with the trouble, finding commitment and agency to combat apathy and withdrawal. This capacity to stay with and work through potentially overwhelming experience is called 'containment'.

THE NON-HUMAN FOUNDATION

Our very first containing environment is a non-human environment extending to the biosphere – the world of our immediate lived experience; one we absorb via the realm of the senses – the smell or touch of a body, the light of a room, the pulsing of the foetal environment, the air passing by us and through us, perhaps a glimmering sense of space. This is the origin of the 'internal landscape' (Weintrobe, 2018) or the 'matrixial' (Hollway, 2022), that lies at the core of being human, a landscape that will be found and re-found as we go through life via experiences of nature, time and the universe. That sense of being something so small in something so vast is the foundational containment available to all of us.



THE ROLE OF THE OTHER

Together with this foundation of interconnection with the other-than-human (place, plants, animals), there is the containment to be had from other humans. A capacity that is internalised through encounters with others who, when we are troubled, provide the right balance of support (compassion, recognition) and challenge (perspective, a different point of view) to help us. Such encounters provide a containing psychological space in which experiences such as grief, hurt and rage arising from personal or political events can be digested (Winnicott, 1960; Bion, 1962).

CONTAINING CONVERSATIONS

Containment is crucial to any difficult conversation, including conversations about climate change (Randall and Brown, 2015). A person must first feel that

they have been understood before they might reach for a new understanding. Have their feelings, which might include resentment, been understood by you? Have the difficulties and dilemmas they face in making changes in their life been recognised? Do they feel that you are interested in them, curious to know more about their difficulties, or not? If these things are absent then a relationship in which new insights and different perspectives might occur is also absent.

SOCIAL CONTAINMENT

Having a sense of attunement to others provides containment, as does the realisation that one is not alone in having these thoughts and feelings. This is key to innovations such as Climate Cafés.

The solidarity of a group undoubtedly contributes to containment, but how might containment be provided at a cultural rather than individual level? Traditionally, this was one of the roles of ritual, particularly those marking key rites of passage in the life of the individual and community. The sharing of stories and dreams also performed this function, as did community leadership, and the role of village elders and wise women.

Whilst in modern society these have been largely lost in their original form, they can be, and are, created through works of art and fiction, through the adoption of creative ritual in environmental movements and protests (such as the Keystone Pipeline), and via containing political leadership (Alford, 1994) such as that offered by Vaclav Havel, Nelson Mandela and, today perhaps, Jacinda Ardern.

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COPING AND DEFENCES

Climate change and ecological crisis pose profound psychological threat: existential threat; threat to the integrity and stability of self-identity; and threat to self-esteem, life plans and internalised expectations of the future. We are reminded of the fact of our eventual death, and the morality of our behaviour is challenged (Crompton and Kasser, 2009).

STRESS

When encountering a perceived threat, the disequilibrium creates stress, which is both physiological and psychological. The human tendency is to attempt to alleviate stress and decrease negative emotions through defence mechanisms and coping strategies, in order to return to baseline functioning as soon as possible. These responses are part of normal human functioning, but can come to serve pathological ends if overused or situationally inappropriate (Cramer, 1998).

Shield bug

DEFENCES AND COPING

Cramer (1998) makes the case for a clear distinction between defences and coping; namely that defence mechanisms are unconscious and unintentional, and coping strategies are conscious and intentional. However, in psychology literature the terms 'defence' and 'coping' are often used interchangeably. Threat responses may in fact involve both conscious and unconscious dimensions, and the processes involved are dynamic: there is possibility for movement of thoughts between conscious and unconscious parts of the mind through processes of suppression and awareness. Threat responses interact with other psycho-social factors in complex ways to influence cognition and behaviour (Andrews, 2017).

TYPES OF RESPONSES

There are different ways of categorising defence and coping responses. For example, to classify into avoidant and approach types. Avoidant coping is a defensive form of regulation, involving denial, distortion or disengagement. Approach coping has three predominant forms: active coping, which is direct action to deal with stressful situation; acceptance, which is cognitive and emotional acknowledgement of stressful realities; and cognitive reinterpretation, which involves learning or positive reframing. We can also make a distinction between proactive and reactive coping. Proactive coping, also known as

anticipatory adaptation or psychological preparedness, is made in anticipation of an event, whereas reactive coping is made after. The two types merge when responses are made to an event in order to both diminish its impact and prevent its re-occurrence. Coping responses can be cognitive, affective or behavioural – or a mix of these.

ADAPTIVE OR MALADAPTIVE OUTCOMES

Coping responses have adaptive or maladaptive outcomes. Approach coping is generally considered adaptive because effort is directed towards resolving the stressful situation or overcoming the stress associated it, whereas avoidant coping, whilst it may relieve stress in the short term, if prolonged is likely to become maladaptive. Avoidant coping is associated with poorer health (Weinstein and Ryan, 2011).

With regards to climate change and ecological crisis, we can consider whether coping responses are adaptive or maladaptive, not just personally but also ecologically – in other words, do the responses promote psychological adjustment and stimulate appropriate and proportional pro-environmental action, or do they serve to protect the person from having to make radical changes or take significant action? As Rust (2008, p.160) says: "when we block out our feelings we lose touch with the urgency of the crisis". Adaptive coping is the basis for transformational resilience.

Ecologically maladaptive coping responses could include:

- denial or disavowal of ecological crisis (e.g. rejecting, deflecting, ignoring)
- distortion of facts (e.g. reducing size of threat, putting threat into the future)
- shifting responsibility (e.g. blame-shifting, denial of guilt, splitting, projection)
- avoidance of difficult emotions (e.g. suppression, escapism, numbing, pleasure-seeking
- diversionary activity (e.g. minor behaviour change or displaced commitment)
- non-action (e.g. resignation, passivity, lazy catastrophism)
- self-deception (e.g. wishful/magical thinking, unrealistic optimism)
- active catastrophism and self-destructive acts, and
- self-enhancement values orientation (e.g. materialistic behaviour to enhance self-esteem, or self-protection to enhance sense of security and being in control)

Ecologically adaptive coping responses could include:

- seeking information, engagement with facts about ecological crisis
- engaging with and regulating associated emotions (e.g. through mindfulness)
- compassion, self-transcendence, values orientation (care for human and non-human others)

- connecting with nature
- considered reflection on death and impermanence, and
- collaborative problem-solving

COPING IS PSYCHO-SOCIAL

Coping responses are not isolated psychological processes, they are psycho-social phenomenon, culturally sanctioned and maintained by social norms and structures. Understanding the processes involved in coping with psychological threat, and how they influence cognition and behaviour, is critical for designing interventions to subvert maladaptive responses to ecological crisis, at both individual and societal levels. Becoming aware of maladaptive responses as they arise offers the possibility for choosing a different response.

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Image: Andrew Neel

ECO-ANXIETY

Eco-anxiety is the most frequently used term in literature and research to describe heightened emotional, mental or somatic distress in response to dangerous changes in the climate system. The term climate anxiety is often used synonymously. A 2017 report by the American Psychological Association links the impact of climate change to mental health and references 'eco-anxiety' as "a chronic fear of environmental doom".

ECOLOGICAL THREAT RESPONSE

It is important to stress that CPA does not view eco-anxiety as a clinical condition, but an inevitable and even healthy response to the ecological threats we are facing, such as food/water shortages, extreme weather events, species extinction, increased health issues, social unrest and potentially the demise of human life on Earth. This has particular significance for children and young people who have little power to limit this harm, making them vulnerable to increased climate anxiety (Marks, Hickman, Pihkala et al, 2021).

Paying heed to what is happening in our communities and across the globe is a healthier response than turning away in denial or disavowal.

The notion of solastalgia is closely related to eco-anxiety. Coined by the philosopher Glenn Albrecht (2005), it refers to the existential pain experienced when the place where one resides is subject to environmental degradation.

A RANGE OF EMOTIONS

Whatever words we use to illustrate the psychological effects of climate change, fear and anxiety are certainly not the only emotions people experience in relation to the climate emergency. Anger, helplessness, sadness, grief, depression, numbness, restlessness, sleeplessness and other symptoms can befall those who are able to face the facts. Fear and anxiety are feelings that alert us to danger and can mobilise us into action. Without enough support, anxiety can escalate into panic on one end of the spectrum or evoke a freeze response and paralyse on the other end of the spectrum.

Rather than attempting to rid people of anxiety, therapists can support individuals and communities to build strong containers that allow the expression and exploration of their emotions without collapsing under it or turning away. With strong enough support structures in place, most people can sustain strong feelings without either dissociating and numbing or going into blind panic. They can engage with difficult truths whilst staying connected and grounded. Community groups, climate cafes, supervision groups, are just a few examples

of initiatives that can offer containment, sharing, witnessing, and empowerment.

TREATMENT

Whilst individuals may need support to increase their resilience to bear the unbearable, interventions to reduce suffering need to be on a systemic level rather than an individual one. Decisive global action to reduce CO2 emissions is therefore the appropriate 'treatment' for eco-anxiety, not medication or interventions to eradicate the discomfort.

If eco-anxiety is treated as a pathology, 'then the forces of denial will have won' says Graham Lawton (2019) from the New Scientist. He goes on to say that 'what we are witnessing isn't a tsunami of mental illness, but a long-overdue outbreak of sanity'.

Support needs to come in ways that enables people to experience the extent of their distress. We all need to expand our capacity to bear witness to suffering. With empathy, compassion and kindness, people can offer mutual support to each other, so that the contraction of fear does not cloud one's heart or dominate one's actions.

Grief is a normal human reaction to any kind of loss and loss is certainly a core characteristic of this time. It may include loss of a sense of home, loss of a sense of future, loss of trust in humanity, anticipatory loss for oneself or loved ones, loss of biodiversity etc. By processing these thoughts and feelings and bringing them into awareness, we prevent them from operating at an unconscious level. This is an important step in freeing us up to move forward in an empowered way.

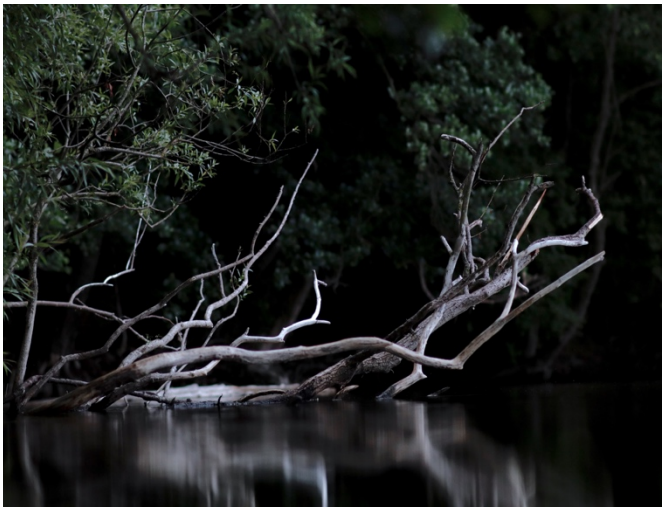

Image: Michael Held

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ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY

Psychology research finds that one of the factors influencing environmental behaviour is identity. Some identities are more likely to motivate pro-environmental behaviours than others. An identity that is positively associated with pro-environmental behaviour is a sense of self as part of and connected with nature, a so-called 'environmental identity' (Clayton, 2003). Other terms used to refer to similar constructs include ecological identity, ecological Self, nature connectedness, nature relatedness and inclusion of self with nature.

MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Identity is a complex and contested construct, and to discuss it further we first need to establish some clarity, for there are various different ways of defining and understanding identity. In psychology and sociology literature, the terms 'self' and 'identity' are often used interchangeably. In this entry, identity means self-identity and refers to how a person sees themself. Each individual has multiple identities that are hierarchically arranged in the mind in a dynamic manner. The strength and salience of a particular identity at any particular moment is influenced by contextual factors (such as whether social interactions affirm that identity), as well as by the commitment the individual has to that identity. Identities are not fixed or static, but rather are in a continuous process of formation, emerging and changing through our ongoing embodied interactions with the world. Identities may be integrated and unified to varying extents, with consequences for a sense of inner coherence and psychological wellbeing (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Some identities, if salient in the mind, can form a barrier to pro-environmental behaviour, even if the person also holds pro-environmental values. An example is self-identity as a car driver, which is reinforced by cultural messages, structural supports and the experience of convenience.

NATURE AS IN-GROUP

A sense of self as part of nature recognises other living beings as part of one's in-group; as kin. This identity can be strengthened through repeated immersive and embodied encounters with the natural world – interactions that are rooted in the specificity of a particular place and a relationship of care with the community of beings that live there (Andrews, 2018; WWF, 2011). These practices help to counter powerful social forces that undermine environmental identity by promoting the idea that humans are separate from the natural world and that non-human beings are part of one's out-group.

SEPARATE, SUPERIOR AND ENTITLED

As people tend to show bias towards those they see as being part of their in-group and show prejudice and discrimination to those they see as part of their

out-group, identifying nature as out-group may exacerbate human-wildlife conflicts and incline people towards environmentally harmful behaviour. The notion that humans are separate from nature is closely bound to beliefs that humans are superior to nature and, therefore, can achieve mastery over nature and transcend its limits. It is also accompanied by a sense of moral entitlement: the natural world exists for humans to exploit for our own ends. This set of beliefs is the story upon which the project of modernity is founded: it pervades our political and economic systems and underpins global responses to climate change. It is a root cause of ecological crisis, for it has led us to put human interests first and live as if there are no limits, over-exploiting nature's resources and overwhelming biospheric cycles and processes.

"A sense of self as part of nature recognises other living beings as part of one's in-group"

REWILDING THE PSYCHE

Being part of nature means that connecting with nature is also connecting with ourselves: it is a 'rewilding' of the psyche. This involves accepting and integrating parts that have become devalued and derogated through their perceived association with nature: emotion, the physical body, intuition, the unconscious mind (Hasbach, 2012; Totton, 2011). Nature connection is then a journey towards inner-outer wholeness and, for this reason, for many people, it has a strongly spiritual dimension.

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GRIEF

Grief is the name we give to the complex emotions people experience following a loss – the shock, disbelief and incomprehension; the anger, rage and blame; the dull, monotonous ache of hopelessness and the endless grey days that deliver no meaning. Eventually, out of the sadness, out of the fury, out of the melancholy and despair, drops of hopefulness may begin to coalesce and we may watch ourselves begin the slow climb back to a changed but possibly liveable life.

WHOSE GRIEF MATTERS?

The idea that climate change brings loss is now commonplace. But many of the losses take place far from the prosperous centres of civilisation. It is easy for the more fortunate to close their eyes to the experiences of those who suffer extreme weather events, lose their home, community or livelihood, or witness the disappearance of familiar habitats and species.

Those who ignore the traumas of displacement and the severing of human bonds which climate change brings, render these losses invisible and invalidate the sufferers' grief. If loss and grief are not discussed, not only is violence done to the experiences of those who suffer, but the policies proposed to deal with climate change are likely to be inadequate (Randall, 2009).

ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Those who do notice may find themselves little more than helpless witnesses to the suffering of others, or fearful anticipators of the losses which they know their children and their children's children will suffer.

Anticipatory grief may not match the distress of an actual bereavement, but it is still hard to deal with, as anyone who has watched and waited through the terminal illness of a loved one will testify. Are you realistically accepting the inevitability of death, or giving way to despair? Are you realistically accepting the inevitability of a 4°C temperature rise, or fatefully abandoning the struggle for 2°C?

Experiences of loss and grief are likely to become more common as the effects of climate change are felt more widely and its inevitability is more widely accepted. The primary psychological need of those affected is for a safe context in which to process the trauma and grieve for what is lost or will be lost, to talk, to be listened to and supported.

MODELS OF GRIEF

If we are trying to help each other through the distress of grief about climate change, it can also help to have a model for these experiences. The ground-breaking work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (Kübler-Ross, 1969) is often cited, but her model focuses on the experiences of the dying and not on the experiences of those who must somehow survive the death and continue to live.

William Worden (Worden, 1983) is more helpful. He conceives of grief as a series of tasks that can either be embraced or rejected. Although he lists them in a particular order, he emphasises that they are unlikely to follow a smooth or even flow, as the grieving person loops forwards and back, sometimes embracing the tasks, sometimes rejecting them, failing, trying again, revisiting, reprising and reworking until somehow, meaning, purpose and creativity are restored. The table summarises Worden's model.

	Embracing the tasks of grief	Rejecting the tasks of grief
1	Accepting the reality of the loss, first intellectually and then emotionally.	Denial of the facts of the loss; the meaning of the loss; the irreversibility of the loss.
2	Working through the painful emotions of grief (despair, fear, guilt, anger, shame, sadness, yearning, disorganisation).	Shutting off all emotion, idealising what is lost, bargaining, numbing the pain through alcohol, drugs or manic activity.
3	Adjusting to the new environment, acquiring new skills, developing a new sense of self.	Not adapting, becoming helpless, bitter, angry, depressed, withdrawing.
4	Finding a place for what has been lost, reinvesting emotional energy.	Refusing to love, turning away from life.

(Adapted from Worden, 1983)

Embracing these tasks of grief – about what we anticipate, about what has happened to us and about what has happened to others including the non-human with which we are connected – is an essential part of becoming fruitfully active about climate change. It is a key component in Joanna Macey's work.

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...the more data we have about hyperobjects, the less we know about them

In what follows, some brief extracts are taken from the transcript of a social dreaming event at which 16 climate artists, scientists and researchers convened; activists whose involvement faces them daily with the threats of climate change (Manley & Hollway, 2019).

The social dreaming matrix format is designed to reach a cultural unconscious that is at best thinly represented in available discourses. For this, it has relied on a psychoanalytically-informed psychosocial approach. These extracts, however, are selected to illustrate key features of climate change as a 'hyperobject', following the work of Timothy Morton, Humanities scholar and ecophilosopher. The idea is to see if the theory of hyperobjects can contribute a further dimension within a psychosocial approach.

Swimming with the Eels by Tess Johnson.

I dreamt all night and I kept waking up trying to hold on to the dreams. I couldn't grab them. I couldn't get back to it. Like being in a river and scooping up water, I couldn't hold on to the dreams. Like water pouring through my fingers. And I would do it again and they were turned into elvers, and then wriggled through my fingers. […] All I remember is this trying to hold the water, gather the water as it went through my fingers.

Morton's main contention is the impossible-to-grasp quality of climate change. Hyperobjects have an extension in time and space that makes them historically beyond the range of human cognition; they 'massively outscale us' (2013, p.12). Global warming (as Morton calls it) is paradoxically a highly abstract concept, not possible to pin down anywhere, yet at the same time it is "right here in my social and experiential space" (2013, p.27). It has a viscous quality: it sticks to everything.

The slippery nature of climate change became a recognisable thread during the Matrix, repeatedly drawing on the image of water and elvers (baby eels). The theme grew to include the elusiveness of numbers:

I was doing a Sudoku with elvers, and I was trying to arrange them in numbers and they kept moving. I couldn't get them to stop where they were meant to be. Trying to hold it back all the time […] not matching up like it was meant to be…

It has become widely recognised that the vast collection of scientific knowledge about climate change, which already many years ago established the actuality of the threat, has not succeeded in making climate realities accessible to most people. Morton grasps this paradox in the telling claim, "the more data we have about hyperobjects, the less we know about them" (2013, p.180).

Introducing artworks into the Social Dreaming event, and the experience of a containing space among like-minded others, enabled multiply-condensed imagery, which under normal circumstances cannot be brought to thought. These conditions helped to make sense of the awful experience of a hyperobject that is interconnectedly everywhere, outscaling human capacity to know, that science cannot hold, that sticks to everything, yet is non-local.

Image: Ameen Fahmy

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LEADERSHIP

"It is easy to identify leadership when we see it, but much harder to define it."

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

It is easy to identify leadership when we see it, but much harder to define it. When people talk about leadership they are often thinking about a leader's behaviour and personality: for example, whether or not they seem like a 'real leader', the skills they have or need to acquire. But it is also possible to see leadership as a constantly shifting, socially constructed process, which emerges through a complex series of conscious and unconscious negotiations within and between individuals in a group. Someone may be seen as a 'born leader' because their social identity is shared with other members of a group and because they represent, for now, something of what a group needs. As those needs shift, the perception of the leader shifts with them. The psychological aspects of human responses to the climate breakdown are likely to form part of the (often unspoken) needs of the group, from which leadership emerges and with which it interacts.

HOW LEADERSHIP RELATES TO CLIMATE PSYCHOLOGY

Climate psychology focuses in particular on understanding how processes such as denial and splitting help people defend against difficult truths. Having our difficult feelings contained – that is, held, heard, re-articulated back to us so that we can understand them – helps people to face reality better. The climate-related feelings that need containment may be particularly strong, involving catastrophism and a sense of being overwhelmed. The 'human relations' discourse of leadership assumes that it is the leader's role to provide containment of these difficult feelings. In this mindset, the leader is seen as a kind of therapist, containing anxieties and enabling thinking and thence sustainable action.

But the leadership being called for by other groups in society may be very different from this, and as climate psychologists we need to be aware of the different framings of climate change that underpin such calls. In the last twenty years there has been an expectation that climate change needs technocratic, controlling leadership, derived from what Simon Western refers to as the 'scientific management' discourse, 'rolling out' building retrofits, renewable energy schemes and free public transport. Those who frame climate change as

an emergency may claim that democracy cannot deliver the huge changes required and call for a dictator or messiah: Western refers to this as the 'transformational leadership' discourse. A fourth discourse of leadership may connect to the framing of climate change as a wicked problem. Western calls this fourth discourse 'eco-leadership': it involves connectivity, distributed leadership, flexibility and strong ethics, and is relevant within adaptive networked organisations.

EXAMPLES OF HOW LEADERSHIP FEELS

Reflecting the extremes of climate change, the powerful emotional experiences in their organisations, and the ways in which leaders function to absorb the feelings of their colleagues, environmental leaders may themselves experience a sense of opposing and sometimes impossible demands. One senior leader in a campaigning organisation may be used to bringing their positive, optimistic mindset to their leadership work, to enable a group to develop agency; but they may be increasingly aware that it is no longer possible to prevent catastrophic climate change. Insisting on optimism in these circumstances could feel dishonest, while acknowledging failure could make them feel as if they are placing an unbearable burden on their team.

Another leader might notice that there is constant talk in their organisation of the huge importance of the work being done, and at the same time a tendency in practice to focus heavily on small questions of organisational process. They are expected to manage both, and depending on their personality they may either try to do this or come down on one side of the polarity or the other.

These extreme polarities may in fact be too much for any one leader to bear, suggesting that sharing the leadership work is essential. The protest movements since 2007 have influenced today's emphasis on distributed leadership, which is argued to reduce the risk of burnout for individual leaders, to make best use of collective capability, and to experiment with the formation of a more just and equitable society. This approach may require members to take back some of the difficult feelings that people generally project on to leaders. The short-term impact of shared leadership, then - paradoxically perhaps – is likely to be a spread of anxiety around the organisation. If members can be supported to notice and understand what is happening, they may be able to find new ways of working with the dynamics between leadership and difficult feelings.

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LOSS

"Thinking about loss raises the question of what response is most appropriate."

LOSS: ABSOLUTE, TRANSITIONAL, ANTICIPATORY AND AMBIGUOUS

A 2009 paper (Randall) listed several types of loss in relation to climate change, most importantly absolute loss, transitional loss and anticipatory loss. All of these losses inevitably involve grief and mourning of some kind.

Examples of **absolute loss** are the 150,000 deaths estimated to be caused annually through climate change (WHO); the extinction of species; and the losses of home or livelihood brought about by drought, storm, flood or rising sea levels. These devastating and traumatic losses are often what first comes to mind in relation to climate change, but they are also frequently turned away from by those who are not suffering them.

The idea of **transitional loss** is helpful in thinking about how people in the over-developed countries make the shift to a sustainable, low-carbon life in which many of the luxuries of modern life are absent or rare. Transitional losses typically occur as people pass from one life stage to another, shift status or change job. The new state may compensate for the loss of the old – as for example when marriage is felt to compensate for the loss of sexual freedom – but it may not. There may be little in old age that makes up for the loss of physical capacity. As the transition to a sustainable low-carbon life is perpetually postponed, the pain of transitional loss is likely to increase.

Anticipatory loss originally described the experiences of those who know that someone they care for is terminally ill (Parkes, 1975). It is a useful term for describing the complexity of the grief felt by those involved in campaigning or research when they think about what climate change may bring and also the distress and anger which those who are (for example) watching the sea level inexorably rise around their homes may feel, not knowing how long they have or exactly what may transpire. Anticipatory loss is also what many of those who remain in states of disavowal are avoiding.

More recently the idea of ambiguous loss, first proposed by Pauline Boss in the 1970s to describe the experiences of families of soldiers missing in action, has been used to describe those losses which have begun but whose endpoint is unknown (Meehan, 2018).

APPROPRIATE RESPONSES

Thinking about loss raises the question of what response is most appropriate. Psychologically, it is essential to feel the grief and to mourn but beyond that there are many different routes.

Some contemporary projects have chosen to memorialise the losses of climate change and environmental degradation through public art, hoping thereby to facilitate the expression of grief. The Memo project on the Dorset coast plans a memorial in Portland stone to commemorate plants and animals that have become extinct in modern times.

Others focus on reparation, for example the Repair Acts project which looks "...towards the disconnect and the discarded, what is in ruin and broken as a means through which to reimagine what we define as growth".

A third response to terrible loss is political action, embodied most powerfully in movements such as Act Up (1990s response to the Aids crisis) and the contemporary Black Lives Matter. The idea of healing justice, which is an essential part of such movements, may have a particular resonance for climate activists struggling to find expression for their grief.

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Photo: Extinction rebellion protest, Oxford Circus, London. 23 November 2018. Taken by David Holt. Creative Commons License. https://www.flickr.com/photos/zongo/46017222011

What makes hope radical?

Or what distinguishes radical hope from just hope? Hope is often polarised with despair, as generating positive attitudes to life rather than negative ones. This can be a false dichotomy as TS Eliot suggests in East Coker:

I said to my soul, be still,
and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for
the wrong thing

The wrong thing is that escapist hope, which refuses to attend to the looming threat, such as when we fail to read the clear signs that a relationship is at an end, or that our culture's obsession with escapist entertainment might be a distraction from the signs that the climate is moving into strange and dangerous patterns. This denial is at the centre of Climate Psychology, as we explore 'facing into difficult truths'. This facing into the difficulty takes courage, whether it is a personal difficulty or a collective one.

COURAGE TO ADAPT

In his book, Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation, Jonathan Lear drew on the situation in late 19th century North America that faced Crow chief, Plenty Coups, to imagine the kinds of resources and ethical values that would be needed for the Crow to adapt to a new way of life after their traditional way of life had collapsed. There were many facets of this collapse, most pertinently stated by Plenty Coups as: "But when the buffalo went away, the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this, nothing happened" (p.2).

This is a profound poetic statement. It reflects the inability to make sense of what is happening when the very vehicles of meaning-making become defunct. Adapting required facing into the collapse, despite it going against so many of their values.

This facing into the collapse is the challenge for a different kind of hope. There is a strong parallel between societies facing collapse after depleting resources and the human psyche disavowal of its own failure. More simply put: this is denial and a refusal of cultural vulnerability. Lear's radical hope describes a cultural revolution in the Crow nation. It involved accepting a tragic destruction of their way of life as a means to imagining a new future.

WHAT IS IN THE SHADOW

This is what makes hope radical – that it involves relinquishing the old values and identifications, and embracing what has been held in their shadow. Psychologically, this means engaging what has been numbed – feeling into our helplessness, anguish, grief and destructive entitlement. Strangely, through facing into this dark shadow of our well-meaning persona, a new hope can be born that supports a resilience to our collective troubles and a capacity to engage the terrible reality that humans have produced with fresh and radical counter-cultural acts.

Image: Kristine Weilert

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SHAME

Guilt may be corrosive, but shame can pierce our very sense of identity.

Shame is the feeling of humiliation triggered by the real or imagined gaze of the other; bringing ridicule, exposing dishonourable behaviour or evoking a sense of failure to live up to important values. As with guilt, the interplay between internal/internalised elements (like conscience), and the force of others' judgements and reactions, is variable and can be complex. For instance, someone with strong self-belief will be less vulnerable to others' views. Perhaps the key difference between guilt and shame is that the former refers to what one has or hasn't done, whereas the latter is more about who one is. Guilt may be corrosive, but shame can pierce our very sense of identity.

In 'shaming', a deliberate social sanction is applied by one individual or group against another, to punish and/or alter behaviour, via exposure and a message of disapproval or reproach. The objective may be reinforcement of prevailing values (for example, against WW1 conscientious objectors), or spreading new values (as in flight shaming).
Shame and shaming have great relevance to climate psychology and it is worth looking at how they operate in this context, as well as considering their efficacy.

Here are some instances:

1. 'Greta Thunberg weaponised shame in an era of shamelessness'. (Hesse, 2019).

2. 'Flight shame could halve growth in air traffic'. (BBC News, 2019).

3. 'The real kicker is shame'. (CPA podcast).

Involvement in a collective sense of shame about climate and ecological degradation is a common feeling amongst those who have become sensitised to the climate emergency. This invariably co-exists with other emotions such as anger (outward-directed) and forms part of the distress which needs to be understood and contained in any therapeutic intervention based on climate psychology.

Each of these examples illustrates ways in which shame can be deployed. Example 3 also involves defences against shame. In example 2, there is a concerted effort by a group to shift the norms of acceptable behaviour, and the predicted outcome is a partial success because, given shared values, some recipients of the message are amenable to it. (Peer group values and reinforcement are a factor here). In example 1, the term 'weaponisation' reflects a more aggressive onslaught on widely embedded values and behaviour. Intense resistance is anticipated and is challenged with weapons/arguments such as inter-generational justice. The child-to-adult dynamic is used to intensify shame by pointing out that the 'grownups' are the ones acting irresponsibly.

Image: Marcus Spiske

The question underlying all these examples of shame and shaming is how effective they are in challenging the cultural complexes that underlie humankind's path of ecological and climate destruction. Several of these complexes have been named by climate psychology, for instance, the culture of un-care – the illusion of autonomy/denial of dependence and enduring sense of entitlement to high carbon lifestyles, together with the consumerist paradigm of wellbeing and indifference to the other-than-human world – which has been widely explored in ecopsychology.

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SOLASTALGIA

THE BACKGROUND

One of the sources that lends meaning to the term solastalgia goes back to the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer, who in 1688 established the term "nostalgia" based on observations of soldiers who, he concluded, were homesick.

Until the middle of the 20th century, homesickness was perceived as a diagnosable psycho-physical condition. This reflects a period in human history when people travelled far less than they do now. From the middle of the 18th century, nostalgia changed its meaning from homesickness to a sentimental desire to be connected with a positively perceived period or place in the past (Albrecht 2019, p.30). In light of the immense human and "more-than-human" displacement caused by climate change, the Hoferian concept of nostalgia signifying deep place-based distress is highly relevant today.

Image: Adam Stevenson

THE COINING OF THE TERM

The Australian environmental researcher and philosopher Glenn A. Albrecht coined the term solastalgia, which he based on the words solace (that which gives comfort) and algos (Greek for pain). He argues that if we seek solace in a much-loved place that is being despoiled, we suffer distress. Desolation is associated with feeling devastated, deprived or abandoned (Albrecht, 2019, pp.37-8).

Summarising the above, solastalgia refers to the pain or distress caused by the loss of a comforting place; the sense of desolation people feel, consciously or unconsciously, when their home or land is lost to e.g. road building, dam projects, deforestation and so forth. Albrecht argues that invasive changes like this to one's home environment are perceived as an attack on one's sense of place. Solastalgia is a reversed form of nostalgia: it is the homesickness we feel in (rather than for) our own home (Albrecht 2019, p.38).

INFLUENCING THINKERS – PHENOMENOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Freud's (1919) concept of the Unheimliche (the Uncanny) shares similarities with solastalgia, in the sense that both terms convey a disturbed, sinister or threatening sense of home life caused by adverse internal or place-based

changes of one's home environment. The fellow Australian Elyne Mitchell who published Soil and Civilization in 1946 was an inspirational source for Albrecht's work and influenced his conception of solastalgia.

Albrecht's conception of solastalgia is based on collaborative field-based research in the Hunter Valley in Australia's New South Wales, for which he interviewed people living close to open-cast mines. Individual accounts reveal participants' intense and enduring psychological and physical distress of having to live and farm close to the mines: solastalgia is place-based distress (2019, p.49).

ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

Solastalgia is closely related to Hippocrates' notion that human health is closely connected to a healthy environment (Albrecht, 2017), and to Elyne Mitchell (1946) and Aldo Leopold's (1949) conceptions of the interrelatedness of land health and human health: a depleted landscape where biodiversity is diminished can induce a sense of solastalgia. Mitchell (1946, p.4) was one of many marginalised female voices who pointed out that exploitative practices such as large-scale agriculture and colonisation have contributed to an endemic disconnect between humans and the planet.

In the light of the Covid-19 pandemic, emerging insights from science are clarifying the relationship between virus spread and habitat loss – due to exploitative practices such as large-scale deforestation (Mowat, 2020).

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF SOLASTALGIA

Whilst solastalgia has been felt for many centuries by many cultures, ecosystem distress and climate chaos have intensified the feeling described by the term. It is now used to describe the distress people experience in response to such phenomena as wildfires, flooding, drought, land clearing, overfishing and so forth.

Jules Pretty (2014), who has travelled to many regions where the natural world and people are under increasing pressure from development, reports a deep sense of solastalgia in response to the loss of traditional cultures and irreversible loss of home environments. See also a series of essays compiled by Cunsolo & Landman (2017) that portray ecological grief.

RELATED CONCEPTS

Kriss Kevorkian (2019) coined the terms "environmental grief" and "ecological grief" in 1999. The former describes the grief brought about by the loss of ecosystems as a result of natural or man-made events. He defines ecological grief as the grief resulting from the disconnection from and relational loss of our natural world (Kevorkian, 2019 para. 1 and 2).

Cunsolo & Ellis acknowledge that their own case studies on ecological grief resonate strongly with Albrecht's concept of solastalgia. They contend that ecological grief is a natural response to ecological loss, particularly for people who retain close living, working and cultural relationships with the natural environment. As more and more people globally experience the impact of anthropogenic activities, ecological grief is likely to increase dramatically (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018, p.275) and develop into a mental health crisis.

Image: Quinghill

CRITIQUE OF SOLASTALGIA

Albrecht's notion of solastalgia is not without criticism. De Bruyn (2020, p.13) states that whilst Albrecht deserves praise for his attempt to construct a new vocabulary for the Anthropocene psyche, he also needs to be challenged about a perceived lack of dialogue with other researchers in related fields. There is a sense that Albrecht does not give enough credence to peoples' ambiguous feelings about place. See De Bruyn, (2020) for a more elaborate critique of Albrecht's work.

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SPLITTING

"Splitting processes divide what should remain whole, but they also work to destroy connections"

DIVIDING WHAT SHOULD BE WHOLE

Do we have the psychological capacity to face up to our destructiveness as a species without either despairing of humankind or clinging with religious fervour to the idea of human progress? If we are unable to hold the tension between despair and hope, we end up splitting one from the other, creating an either/or opposition in the process. When we fail to contain the tensions, contradictions, ambiguities, dilemmas and paradoxes of life, we then 'split' reality into binary polarities. Perhaps the most fundamental of these is the nature/human binary and, having split humankind from nature, modern society then splits reason from emotion, equating the latter with the feminine.

ALL OR NOTHING/NOW OR NEVER

Splitting can affect our capacity for engagement with environmental issues when it results in an 'all or nothing' approach. We throw ourselves into an all-consuming commitment which, because it is all consuming, demands an immediate return. Then, when reality proves recalcitrant, despair sets in. As one activist put it:

> ...there's definitely a danger of tying your whole sense of worth and purpose to this challenge that is so much bigger than you and is never ending (Hoggett & Randall, 2018)

This binary is often linked to another which is 'now or never'. In climate change work this is manifested in the belief that 'we must all act now or it will be too late', a belief that can all too quickly slip into the perception that it is already 'too late', and that processes have already been unleashed which are irreversibly leading us to catastrophe.

NOT MAKING THE CONNECTIONS WE SHOULD

Splitting processes divide what should remain whole, but they also work to destroy connections so that things that should add up no longer do. This failure to make connections is a common defence in relation to our environmental

destructiveness. Here, a retired scientist talks about his daughter, who 'considers herself to be quite green' but also 'shops for England':

> ...she doesn't follow that logic or train of thought to the fact that these things are being made in sweatshops and then put on aircraft and shipped over here. So part of some of the connections are made, but they don't actually make any difference. (Tollemache, 2017)

Taken to extremes, this failure to connect can lead to bizarre inconsistencies. Visiting Shell's headquarters, George Marshall was struck by the fanatical obsession with health and safety of a company which was busy destroying the planet (Marshall 2014). Paradoxically, many fossil fuel companies manifest characteristics of a 'green' company culture. The following comes from an interview with someone who was close to the inside workings of one such organisation:

> ...there is a certain amount of kind of, erm, rather worthy continental European, you know, green living in the company sometimes, so sometimes you do go to parties, company parties in London, at which people comment how terrible it is you can't get around London on a bicycle, which seems strange (he laughs). (Tollemache 2017)

This example also shows how processes such as splitting need to be understood systemically, as they become manifest in networks, cultures and organisations as well as within the individual mind. Splitting can therefore lead to socially normalised but disassociated states in which, on the one hand, we know about climate change and yet carry on with life as if we didn't know. Donna Orange (2017) refers to this as 'double-mindedness', a kind of living in two worlds.

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Image: The rift in the Larsen C ice shelf. John Sonntag/NASA/AP.

SIMPLE AND COMPLEX TRAUMA

Trauma in the context of climate change may result from discrete events, which lead to the loss, for example, of homes through flooding or fire. Trauma in relation to environmental change may also appear as something less defined; a pervasive state similar to complex developmental trauma.

TRAUMA CAUSED BY PARTICULAR EVENTS

Discrete traumatic events may destroy the ability to feel safe. This kind of trauma is likely to induce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) such as nightmares, flashbacks and hyper-arousal. For a full psychiatric review of studies of trauma related to climate change follow this link.

COMPLEX TRAUMA

States of mind and bodily feelings potentially evoked by climate anxiety and systematic oppressions have much in common with complex or developmental trauma, where no direct experience of a traumatic event has been involved. In

relation to climate change, these may be linked to and interact with a range of traumas, such as anticipated trauma (pre-traumatic stress disorder), the experience of loss of continuity in the environment (see Solastalgia), and what Menakem (2017) terms historical, intergenerational and institutionalised trauma. This adversely affects the development of an internalised 'holding environment' or sense of containment; and may create a traumatised state of mind which becomes a subtly pervasive feature of collective experience manifest, for example, in constant vigilance.

ALIENATION FROM THE NATURAL WORLD

The alienation created in our modern lives from the more-than-human world also affects psychological resilience and the capacity to recover from any kind of traumatic experience. Harold Searles writes: "An ecologically healthy relatedness to our non-human environment is essential to the development and maintenance of our sense of being human." And the capacity to deal with the ordinary losses of life is "undermined, disrupted and distorted, concomitant with the ecological deterioration" (Searles, 1975).

TRAUMA AND LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

Van Der Kolk (2015, p203) found that patients acquired a kind of learned helplessness from repeated and/or continuous trauma:

"Trauma robs you of the feeling that you are in charge of yourself, of… self-leadership."

If disconnection from the natural world creates something similar to complex or developmental trauma then perhaps as a culture we are affected by learned helplessness. This may explain, in part at least, our apparent apathy in relation to climate change.

Image: Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona

THE EFFECT ON THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Prolonged and continuous climate-related anxiety affects the nervous system so that it may no longer easily regulate stress and rest responses, and it becomes unable to switch appropriately between the two. It may also disrupt normal patterns of sleep and rest, leading to a continuous state of hyper-arousal.

Van Der Kolk proposes that the way to heal complex trauma is through awareness of how the body's natural alarm systems have been affected by trauma and a re-training of neurological responses.

MANAGING CLIMATE-CHANGE-RELATED TRAUMA

A widely applied therapeutic response to psychological trauma (Herman, 2015) involves a three-stage recovery process:

- safety and stabilisation
- remembrance and mourning, and
- recognition and integration.

While effective in the healing of simple trauma, this formulation may not work so well for complex trauma in relation to climate change. The deep and pervasive effects of this require healing and change at not only the individual level but also that of community and culture.

HEALING COMPLEX TRAUMA

There is evidence that unless we can create a coherent narrative about traumatic events, we have difficulty recovering from them (Bednarek, 2020; Herman, 2015). Building the capacity to manage overwhelming feelings, and finding the courage and support to face these feelings, are essential parts of the healing process for all kinds of trauma. Joining with others to create resilient communities, regenerative cultures and more sustainable lifestyles may in the end be the only truly effective means of managing climate-related complex trauma.

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UN-CARE

"The culture of un-care works to promote a bubble-like 'as if' fake world..."

The word 'un-care' has come to have a particular meaning within climate psychology. Here, 'un-care' is a process, meaning actively promoting disassociation from the loving part of the self. The human self is, broadly speaking, divided. One part loves, seeks a truthful picture, is concerned, takes responsibility and wants to repair damage caused in genuine ways; the other part is more uncaring, self-involved and out for number one. It does not take responsibility for damage and suffering, but seeks 'as if' quick fixes for moral problems.

BRINGING OUT THE WORST IN US

Sally Weintrobe has argued that neoliberal culture actively un-cares us: it boosts an exaggerated sense of entitlement to be it all, have it all and not feel responsible. It undermines our capacity to care about others. She has called this the culture of un-care. It works to disassociate us from feelings of grief that the neoliberal economy is damaging the life support systems of people and planet, and grief about our collusion.

Culture refers to external culture (advertising, media, political framing, language framing, education and the academe) and also an inner psychic culture in which disavowal (turning a blind eye) can flourish. The culture of un-care works to promote a bubble-like 'as if' fake world in which everything is present and possible, and nothing is apparently lost.

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See also: www.sallyweintrobe.com for blogs on the culture of un-care.

VALUES AND GOALS

Values are guiding principles in life and represent what we consider to be important, whereas goals reflect aspects of life deemed worthy of striving for.

INFLUENCES BEHAVIOUR

Studies show that the more strongly individuals subscribe to values and goals beyond their own immediate self-interest (self-transcendence, prosocial, altruistic or biospheric values, intrinsic goals) the more likely they are to engage in pro-environmental behaviour (Steg and Vlek, 2009). These values are to do with care and concern for others, and for the natural world. Conversely, values and goals to do with enhancing your own status and having power over others, acquiring financial wealth, material goods and other external rewards (self-enhancement values, extrinsic goals) are associated with lack of concern for the wellbeing of other people or the natural world, and with higher materialism (Kasser et al, 2004).

ANXIETY-FREE OR ANXIETY-BASED

Whereas self-transcendence values are anxiety free, self-enhancement values are anxiety based: they are pursued to cope with anxiety in situations of uncertainty or threat (Schwartz et al, 2012). Likewise, people may orient towards extrinsic goals as a way to enhance their self-esteem and/or sense of security and of being in control (Crompton and Kasser, 2009). Anxiety has been shown to reduce empathy because it is linked to egocentrism (Todd et al, 2015).

PRIMING

It is thought that we have the full range of values and goals available to us but we may have a dispositional tendency to prioritise some over others. These tendencies can change over time. The strength and salience of values in individuals is influenced by the relative strength of these values in wider society (Kasser et al, 2004). We can be influenced, or primed, into activating certain values without us even being consciously aware that this is happening e.g. through advertising, the media, political discourse, and through being influenced by our social networks and group affiliations. When values are repeatedly activated, they become strengthened in the mind relative to other values, and this strengthening makes them subsequently easier to activate.

INTERACTION WITH OTHER PSYCHO-SOCIAL FACTORS

Values and goals interact with other drivers of behaviour in complex ways. There are many other psycho-social factors that influence how we act in the world including identity, type of motivation, and how a person copes with psychological threat (Andrews, 2017). We also make trade offs between different values and goals, so that a pro-environmental behaviour may be in line with one value or goal but in conflict with others. Depending on how salient these other values and goals are in the mind, the behaviour may not then be enacted or may be cancelled out in a rebound effect. Rebound is when environmental benefits from one behaviour are cancelled out by changes in behaviour in other areas, e.g. money saved through home energy efficiency is used on flights abroad.

Developing our understanding of the way that values, goals and other psych-social factors interact to influence our cognition and behaviour is critical for ensuring our responses to ecological crisis are adaptive rather than maladaptive.

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APPENDIX 1: CLIMATE PSYCHOLOGY READING LIST

Climate psychology is a relatively new field, rooted in psychotherapeutic ways of understanding human responses to the climate crisis. The writers listed below explore the nature of the human relationship to the rest of the natural world, the defences people use to avoid engaging with climate change, and the experiences of anxiety, loss, grief and mourning which people go through when they do face it properly.

Climate psychology draws on psychoanalysis, Jungian psychology, Gestalt and other humanistic approaches and on psycho-social studies. It is a fast-developing field, aimed not just at theoretical understanding but at developing psychotherapeutic practice and at supporting the broad-based practical and professional networks who are struggling to act on climate change.

The books and articles below are organised in chronological order so as to give some idea of how the field has developed and the list is selective. Where articles are behind paywalls, you can approach the author directly for a copy. More information about relevant events, workshops and conferences can be found elsewhere on this website.

PRE-2000

Between Harold Searles' 1972 paper and the millennium there is a tiny scattering of relevant literature. Searles' paper, written in response to growing environmental awareness in the 1970s and Roszak's 1995 collection are key beginnings, however – one from a conventional psychoanalytic perspective and the other from a Jungian and spiritual approach – while Macy and Brown offer the beginnings of a practice that has become influential in helping people face environmental crisis.

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Mishan, J. (1996). Psychoanalysis and environmentalism: first thoughts. *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*, 10 (1), 59-70. Available online at Research Gate.

Macy, J., and Brown, M. (1998). *Coming back to life: practices to reconnect our lives, our world.* New Society.

2000-2010

This decade saw researchers begin to explore the dynamics of denial, issues of grief and people's damaged relationship to nature in more detail. Stanley Cohen wrote the now-classic sociological text on denial, while Stoll-Kleeman, Randall and Norgaard began to unpick its processes in relation to climate change. Glenn Albrecht introduced the term 'solastalgia' to describe people's grief at environmental destruction and Renee Lertzman focused on how apathy could conceal similar feelings; Rosemary Randall explored the need for people to mourn the life-styles that would be lost in mitigating and adapting to climate change; and Mary-Jayne Rust picked up questions of the myths we live by and their relation to environmental crisis.

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