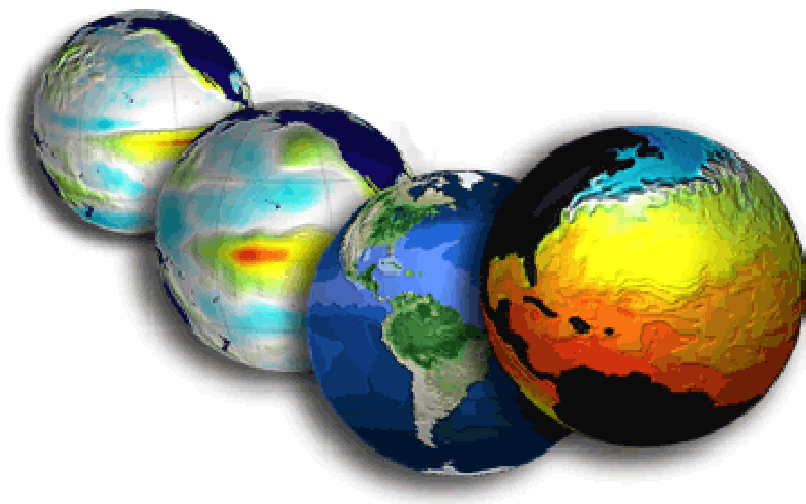


Changing Climates:

Integrating Psychological Perspectives
on Climate Change



**A conference organised by Psychotherapists and
Counsellors for Social Responsibility (PCSR)
and the Climate Psychology Alliance**

2 July 2011, NCVO, London

PCSR Conference Report II:

Changing Climates: Integrating Psychological Perspectives on Climate Change, 2 July 2011, London

This engaging one-day conference was a landmark in that it marked the launch of an Alliance now called the Climate Psychology Alliance (see the Alliance Mission Statement on page 17 of this bulletin). The event was opened by Judith Anderson, current Chair of PCSR. This was followed by an introduction from Paul Hoggett, Professor of Social Policy and Director of the Centre for Psycho-Social Studies at the University of West of England. Clive Hamilton, public academic, Professor of Public Ethics at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics (a joint centre of the Australian National University, Charles Sturt University and the University of Melbourne) and visiting academic, University of Oxford, then gave a keynote address.

There were four response to Clive's address. These were from: Nick Pidgeon (Professor of Environmental Psychology, Cardiff University), Tree Staunton (Integrative Body Psychotherapist and Course Director for Psychotherapy at BCPC), Sally Weintrobe (Psychoanalyst, Institute of Psychoanalysis) and Sandra White (Ecopsychologist). We decided to transcribe the papers from the day in their entirety, given the richness and diversity of themes. These are published in the following section. We apologise that due to a number of technical hitches we were unable to publish Tree Staunton's response. This will be published in the next edition of Transformations.

Four parallel workshops were offered during the afternoon before a whole group plenary to end the day. These were lead by:

- Sophy Banks, Co-creator of Transition Town Heart and Soul groups
- Paul Maiteny, Ecologist, Anthropologist and Integrative Transpersonal Psychotherapist,
- Nick Totton, Body Psychotherapist
- Rosemary Randall, Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist, Cambridge Carbon Footprint + Carbon Conversations project

Thanks in particular go to Judith Anderson and Sandra White for organising this conference.

Photos from the conference

Left: Nick Totton, Judith Anderson and Clive Hamilton during the final plenary.

Right: Tree Staunton and Mary-Jayne Rust.



Opening

From Judith Anderson
current Chair of the PCSR steering group



“pity the planet –
all joy gone
from the sweet volcanic cones”

I open with some verses from a poem by Robert Lowell:

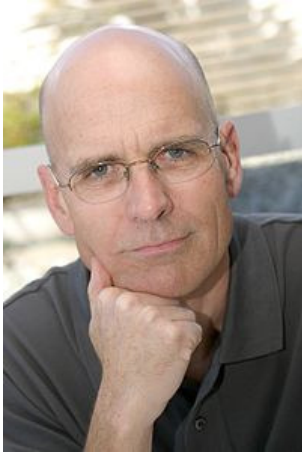
“Oh to break lose, like the Chinook
salmon jumping and falling back
nosing up to the impossible
stone and bone crunching waterfall

- raw jawed, weak fleshed there, stopped by ten
steps of the roaring ladder and then
to clear the top on the last try alive enough to spawn and die”.

So welcome to all of you in our apparently impossible endeavour. It almost feels redundant on these occasions to remind ourselves of the crunching waterfall of environmental catastrophe that makes this event ‘timely’. Yesterday’s Independent reported climate scientists stating that ‘the link between climate change and recent extreme weather events can no longer be ignored’. There has also been recent news of the appalling degradation of the ocean.

What I think we are exploring today is the significance of the environmental aspirations of those of us, therapists and counsellors, whose familiar territory is mainly to work with a handful of individuals in the consulting room and research with communities. We must come together to be as effective as we can possibly be.

I, with other colleagues - some here today - had a very good experience of working on an environmental sustainability and climate change policy for UKCP – one of the larger registering bodies for Psychotherapists in the UK. It seemed that when we had a task, our differences became a minor matter and did not negate our energy. Perhaps fundamentally our task is to help our communities engage with environmental degradation and climate change when deep in our hearts we are all terribly afraid.



Key Note Lecture: Denial, Evasion and Disintegration in the Face of Climate Change

Clive Hamilton is a public intellectual and Professor of Public Ethics at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, a joint centre of the Australian National University, Charles Sturt University and the University of Melbourne. He is also a visiting academic, University of Oxford.

Modern climate denial

Today I would like to talk about climate change denialism—the repudiation of a body of science for political and cultural reasons—and a broader phenomenon that might be called climate change evasion. Both are essential to understanding the wide and growing gap between what the best science says we must do to preserve a climate on Earth suitable for human life, and the actions governments have actually undertaken.

As a psychological phenomenon, denial has been remarked upon for a long time. In 1927, under the title “The Psychology of Antivaccination”, *The Lancet* commented on the passion of antivaccinators in terms that apply with eerie resonance to modern climate science denial. It noted that the value and limitations of vaccination against small-pox had been thoroughly researched and understood by scientific medicine, yet:

we still meet the belief ... that vaccination is a gigantic fraud deliberately perpetuated for the sake of gain. ... The opposition to vaccination ... still retains the “all or none” quality of primitive behaviour and, like many emotional reactions, is supported by a wealth of argument which the person reacting honestly believes to be the logical foundation of his behaviour.

If a belief depends on an emotional state we can by arguments only convince a man against his will, and the proverb tells us what happens next.

The proverb referred to observes: “He that complies against his Will, Is of his own Opinion still.”

The *Lancet’s* proposed solution to denial of the evidence for vaccination was to give it free rein.

The granting of validity to a conscientious objection to vaccination has the advantage of meeting the objector on his own ground;

moreover, since emotion is directed against persons rather than against things—in this case, perhaps, against personifications of authority, medical or legislative—the emotion is allowed a chance of subsiding.

The risk of allowing a part of the population to escape protection from small-pox may not be too great a price to pay if the result is to bring the vaccination controversy into that world of cold reason where two and two make four.

Regrettably, such a solution cannot apply to climate denial because we cannot contrive to ensure that the depredations of climate change will be visited solely on those who work so hard to obstruct preventive measures being taken.

Climate deniers comprise a movement made up of a network of organisations and with a loose membership. Members are defined by their strong devotion to a set of interlocking ideas: rejection of all of the main tenets of climate science; an exaggerated fear of the consequences of policies to reduce emissions; and a conviction that many scientists, scientific organisations and environment groups are engaged in a conspiracy to impose a set of pro-environmental political views on the rest of the world. (The Pentagon, which has issued reports warning of the strategic dangers of a world under climate change, must be counted as party to the conspiracy.)

While many prominent deniers openly articulate conspiracy theories in order to be able to explain widespread consensus among climate scientists, for some the idea of a well-organised and malevolent conspiracy goes too far. They are inclined to attribute the scientific consensus to a more benign process such as “group-think”. Either way, the strength of their convictions enables deniers to continue to assert the truth of their beliefs in the face of the accumulation of evidence that contradicts them, and to overlook inconsistencies in the body of beliefs they adhere to.

The psychology of group membership is powerful and is rooted in the belief that insiders comprise a select minority with a superior understanding of reality. Their special knowledge derives from their personal insightfulness and superior critical faculties; these set them apart from ordinary mortals. Those who hold the consensus view are regarded as deluded, weak or engaged in subterfuge. The determination with which deniers cling to their views is rooted in their belief that their special understanding has the ability to save the world from disastrous mistakes. This imposes on them a strong obligation to proselytize wherever an opportunity can be found, especially in the media and on the internet.

The club-like nature of the denial movement—built around a shared existence within a self-contained worldview marked by a siege mentality—renders members particularly uncritical of the claims made by its leaders. Those who rise to the top of the movement tend to be highly articulate and forceful individuals, sometimes charismatic or with the authority of apparent expertise. Among members, their shared special knowledge, salvation objective and victimhood causes them to bond closely and derive a major part of their sense of self from their participation in the group. This tends to encourage further suspension of critical faculties, confirmation of their beliefs, elimination of doubts and closer adherence to the self-contained worldview.

All of this suggests that in some respects the climate denial movement has the characteristics of a cult. It is, however, much looser than a cult and has no single powerful leader invested with extraordinary powers. In their recruitment practices, cults use manipulative techniques to prey on troubled individuals. Climate denial, on the other hand, does not recruit actively but draws in those who, for their own reasons, reject climate science and want to make that rejection a significant part of their life. What are those reasons?

While members of the climate denial movement think of themselves as individuals distinguished by their unusual ability to see through the lies of the scientific establishment, I have argued that, especially in the United States, climate science has been turned into a battleground in the wider culture war so that one can now make a good guess at an American's opinion on global warming by identifying their views on abortion, same-sex marriage and gun-control (1). So adopting climate denial has become a means of expressing one's membership of a cultural-political group, that of conservatives fearful that traditional cultural values are under attack from progressives. Thus it was quite natural that the Tea Party should seamlessly adopt denial of climate science as one of its defining positions.

Anti-relativism in Germany

Elsewhere I have described some other historical instances of denial that can teach us a great deal about modern climate denial, including the remarkable and largely forgotten campaign against Einstein and the general theory of relativity (2). In Weimar Germany in the 1920s Einstein's theory attracted fierce controversy, with conservatives and ultra-Nationalists reading it as a vindication of their opponents—liberals, socialists, pacifists and Jews.

1920 was a turning point. A year earlier a British scientific expedition had used observations of an eclipse to provide empirical confirmation of Einstein's prediction that light could be bent by the gravitational pull of the sun. Little-known to the general public beforehand, Einstein was instantly elevated to the status of the genius who out-shone Galileo and Newton. But conservative newspapers provided an outlet for anti-relativity activists and scientists with an axe to grind, stoking nationalist and anti-Semitic sentiment among those predisposed to it.

At the height of the storm in 1920, a bemused Einstein wrote to a friend:

“This world is a strange madhouse. Currently, every coachman and every waiter is debating whether relativity theory is correct. Belief in this matter depends on political party affiliation.”

Today it is common to hear taxi-drivers, shock jocks and newspaper columnists pontificate on areas of science that more cautious souls would not make judgments about without a Doctorate in Atmospheric Physics. Like Einstein's opponents, who denied relativity because of its association with progressive politics, conservative climate deniers follow the maxim that “my enemy's friend is my enemy”, so scientists whose research strengthens the claims of environmentalism must be opposed.

In Weimar Germany the threat to the cultural order apparently posed by the theory of relativity saw Einstein accused of “scientific dadaism”, after the anarchistic cultural and artistic movement then at its peak. The epithet is revealing because it reflected the anxiety among conservatives that Einstein's destabilisation of the Newtonian physical world mirrored the subversion of the social order then under way. Relativity's apparent repudiation of absolutes was interpreted by some as yet another sign of moral and intellectual decay.

Although not to be overstated, the turmoil of Weimar Germany has some similarities with the political ferment that characterises the United States today—

deep-rooted resentments, the sense of a nation in decline, the fragility of liberal forces, and the rise of an angry populist right. Environmental policy and science have become combat zones in a deep ideological divide that emerged as a backlash against the gains of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Both anti-relativists and climate deniers feared, justifiably, that science would enhance the standing of their enemies and they responded by tarnishing science with politics.

Einstein's work was often accused of being un-German, and Nazi ideology would soon be drawing a distinction between Jewish and Aryan mathematics. "Jewish mathematics" served the same political function that the charge of "left-wing science" does in the climate debate today. In the United States, the notion of left-wing science dates to the rise in the 1960s of what has been called "environmental-social impact science" which, at least implicitly, questioned the unalloyed benefits of "technological-production science".

It began with publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. By 1975 Jacob Needleman was writing: "Once the hope of mankind, modern science has now become the object of such mistrust and disappointment that it will probably never again speak with its old authority." The support of denialist think tanks for geoengineering solutions to global warming can be understood as a reassertion of technological-production science over impact science (3).

The motives of Einstein's opponents were various but differences were overlooked in pursuit of the common foe, just as today among the enemies of climate science are grouped activists in free-market think tanks, politicians pandering to popular fears, conservative media outlets like *The Times* and *Fox News*, disgruntled scientists, right-wing philanthropists, and sundry opportunists like Christopher Monckton and Bjorn Lomborg.

Since the first publication of Einstein's theory in 1905 and its explosion onto the public stage in 1920, the theory had naturally attracted intense debate and criticism within the scientific community. Some eminent physicists not only rejected relativity but were eager to make their arguments in public. The two most prominent were Ernst Gehrcke and Philipp Lenard.

While opposition to relativity came from both scientists and political activists, it soon became difficult to separate the two, just as today those scientists who reject climate science are quickly drawn into the web of right-wing think tanks at the heart of climate denial. The most prominent ones now appear alongside political agitators at the conferences of the Heartland Institute, currently the most active group.

Gehrcke developed an elaborate account of "mass hypnosis" to explain the public's gullibility in accepting a theory that was so manifestly untrue. Climate deniers have also been required to explain why most members of the public accept climate science and the need for abatement policies and to this end prominent denier Fred Singer has channelled Gehrcke's theory with his argument that climate science is a form of "collective environmental hysteria".

Anti-relativity activists established the Working Society of German Scientists for the Preservation of Pure Science, a front group created to give the impression that there was a credible body of scientists who resisted the Einstein craze. Today, several pseudo-scientific organisations are active against climate science, such as Fred Singer's Nongovernmental International Panel of Climate Change, described by *Der Spiegel* as "nothing but a collection of like-minded scientists Singer has gathered around himself" (4). The widespread use of the term "sound science" by climate deniers, to contrast with the "junk science" to be found in professional journals and IPCC reports, is similar to the anti-relativists' invocation of "pure science", although the contrast with "Jewish science" had racial overtones that are absent today.

In a forerunner of the petitions of recent years listing the names of scientists who reject the science of climate change, in 1931 a group including two winners of the Nobel Prize for Physics published a pamphlet titled *One Hundred Authors Against Einstein*. When called to respond, Einstein asked why 100 scientists were needed to refute relativity: "If I were wrong, one would have been enough".

Wishful thinking

In their active forms anti-relativism and climate denial were restricted to small minorities. But their influence spread much wider. Although most members of the public superficially accept the scientific consensus, by sowing doubt deniers provide a reason to accept it with less conviction. Doubts sown by deniers reinforce the psychological mechanisms we deploy to avoid the unpleasant feelings triggered by exposure to the warnings of climate scientists. In *Requiem for a Species* I call these mechanisms "maladaptive coping strategies". Instead of repudiating the science outright, they admit some of the facts and allow some of the associated emotions, but do so in distorted form. These strategies include distraction, blame-shifting and pleasure-seeking. It is common to hear people reinterpreting the threat by using narratives such as "people have solved these sorts of problems before", "scientists are probably exaggerating" and "if it were that bad the government would be doing something about it".

Not long ago in Cambridge I gave a talk similar to this one. Even though I had just focused attention on the various ruses we use to evade the full meaning of the scientific warnings, the audience reactions in question time and conversation afterwards saw each of those mechanisms unselfconsciously on display. One man was convinced that if only the IPCC adopted a double-blind peer review system all of the criticisms of deniers would melt away. Another was convinced we will solve the climate problem through the development of a new energy source derived from high-flying kites, which could, he said, displace coal-fired electricity within a decade. An American woman accepted everything I said but simply evinced, with a shining face, an unbounded optimism that something would come along. An ecologist argued that if we could put an economic value on ecosystem services then the politicians would immediately understand why it is essential to protect the environment, although at the end of our conversation she mentioned that her three-year old grand-child will probably be alive in 2100, at which point her eyes filled with tears of despair.

Some people derive a peculiar sort of pleasure in describing themselves as “an optimist”. It’s a kind of one-upmanship used to shut down those arguing that the evidence shows the future is not rosy. “Whatever you might say, I am an optimist”, they intone, implying that their interlocutor is somehow not bold enough to take on the challenge. It’s not so much passive aggression as a sunny aggression firmly rooted in the moral superiority of cheerfulness, a modern predilection exposed by Barbara Ehrenreich in her excoriating book *Smile or Die: How Positive Thinking Fooled America and the World*. If positive thinking can defeat breast cancer, why can’t it defeat climate change?

The power of wishful thinking, in which we allow our hopes for how things will turn out to override the evidence of how it will turn out, can be seen in some of history’s great acts of unpreparedness. In 1933 Winston Churchill began warning of the belligerent intentions of Hitler’s Germany and the threat they posed to world peace. In many speeches through the 1930s he devoted himself to alerting Britons to the dangerous currents running through Europe, returning over and over to the martial nature of the Nazi regime, the rapid re-arming of Germany, and Britain’s lack of preparedness for hostilities.

Yet pacifist sentiment among the British public, still traumatised by the memory of the Great War, provided a white noise of wishful thinking that muffled the warnings. Behind the unwillingness to re-arm and resist aggression lay the gulf between the future Britons hoped for—one of peace—and the future the evidence indicated was approaching—war in Europe; just as today behind the unwillingness to cut emissions lies the

gulf between the future we hope for—continued stability and prosperity—and the future the evidence tells us is approaching—one of danger and sacrifice.

Throughout the 1930s Churchill’s aim was, in the words of his biographer, “to prick the bloated bladder of soggy hopes” for enduring peace. But the bladder had a tough skin, far too tough to be penetrated by mere facts, even the “great new fact” of German re-armament, which, said Churchill, “throws almost all other issues into the background”.

The warnings of Churchill and a handful of others were met with derision. In terms akin to those now used to ridicule individuals warning of climate disaster—“fear-mongers”, “doom-sayers”, “alarmists”—he was repeatedly accused of exaggerating the danger, of irresponsibility, of using “the language of blind and causeless panic” and of behaving like “a Malay running amok”.

Late in 1938, Churchill’s trenchant criticism of Chamberlain’s Munich agreement—he called it “a total and unmitigated defeat”—earned him the fury of Conservative party members. Anti-Churchill forces in the party rallied and as late as March 1939—months before war was declared and a year before he was to become war-time Prime Minister—it seemed likely Churchill would be ousted as a Conservative MP by Government loyalists. Yet in the post-war years Britons preferred to remember the Churchill who embodied their bulldog spirit rather than the Churchill they ignored and ridiculed.

Benign fictions

Although we generally think of a willingness to face up to reality as a sign of mental health, a strong case can be made that the normal human mind interprets events in ways that promote “benign fictions” about oneself, the world and the future (5). Indeed, in some countries there is strong cultural pressure to adopt an optimistic outlook on life. Cultivating these benign fictions can be an adaptive response to an often unfriendly world in which one’s self-belief is constantly at risk of a battering, as many young people discover when they enter talent shows. It is well-established that holding a positive view of the future enhances mental health, and that chronic pessimism is associated with anxiety and depression.

“Unrealistic optimism” is a proclivity that leads us to predict what we would prefer to see happen rather than what is objectively most likely (6). Although it causes us to filter out or downplay incoming evidence that could contradict our expectations, unrealistic optimism has been shown to be associated with “higher motivation, greater persistence at tasks, more effective performance, and, ultimately, greater success” (7). So

while pessimism, especially if it morphs into depression, is likely to lead to passivity and brooding, optimism is more likely to lead to action. Indeed, one of the simplest and most effective treatments for depression is to turn this causation around so that instead of mood determining behaviour, behaviour determines mood. Taking action as a response to depression works from the “outside-in” (8).

Yet within the phenomenon of unrealistic optimism it is vital to distinguish between illusion and delusion. Illusions respond and adapt to reality as it forces itself on us while delusions are held despite the evidence of the outside world. Martin Seligman, the guru of “learned optimism” and “learned helplessness”, also recognises that cultivating optimism is helpful only when the future can be changed by positive thinking (9). The evidence that large-scale climate change is unavoidable has now become so strong that healthy illusion is becoming unhealthy delusion. Hoping that a major disruption to the Earth’s climate can be avoided is a delusion. Optimism sustained against the facts, including unfounded beliefs in the power of consumer action or in technological rescue, risks turning hopes into fantasies.

Camus’ *The Plague*

Some further insights into modern aversion to facing up to climate science can be drawn from Albert Camus’ 1947 novel *The Plague* (*La Peste*), which is typically read as a representation of how the French responded to German occupation. Bubonic plague breaks out in Oran, a town of some 200,000 people in Algeria. It is cut off from the rest of the world for months on end as thousands succumb to horrible deaths.

Dr Bernard Rieux, the novel’s protagonist, is the first to recognise that the mass die-off of rats and the strange symptoms of his patients signal the arrival of plague. It took others much longer to accept the facts before them. The citizens of Oran, wrote Camus, “did not believe in pestilence”. They told themselves “that it is unreal, that it is a bad dream that will end”.

In a comment that applies with great force to the contemporary climate debate, Camus observed that in denying the facts “we continue to give priority to our personal feelings”. As the story unfolds, Camus sees into the strategies used by the townspeople to deny or avoid the meaning of the plague. First they tell themselves the deaths are due to something else. Then they tell each other the epidemic will be short-lived and life will soon return to normal. Later, they cling to superstitions and prophecies, unearthing old texts that seem to promise deliverance or protection. They begin to drink more wine because a rumour has circulated that wine kills the plague bacillus. Then, when drunk, they offer optimistic opinions into the night air.

After months of the deadly epidemic everyone confined in Oran fears it will never end. There is Jean Tarrou, a mysterious visitor trapped in the quarantined town, who kept a chronicle of events in which the people of Oran were viewed from a distance, as through the wrong end of a telescope. Wrote Camus:

Yes, there was an element of abstraction and unreality in misfortune. But when an abstraction starts to kill you, you have to get to work on it.

As a means of abstracting from suffering, Tarrou’s telescope is akin to the approach of some scientists, like James Lovelock, who take up a position somewhere in space from which they dispassionately analyse the possible end of humanity in an abstract kind of way. After Father Paneloux, Oran’s Jesuit priest, sermons on sin and faith, Rieux observes: “Paneloux is a scholar. He has not seen enough people die and that is why he speaks in the name of eternal truths.” In 1945 Hannah Arendt described as “metaphysical opportunists” those who took flight from the reality of wickedness by engaging in abstract arguments about Good and Evil.

Those who are willing to face up to the meaning of the climate crisis can learn something of how to approach such a depressing situation from Camus’ hero. Dr Rieux works tirelessly against overwhelming odds. He knows that any victories against the plague will be short-lived. “But that is not a reason to give up the struggle”, he tells his friend; “... one must fight, in one way or another, and not go down on one’s knees”, an attitude sometimes read as a metaphor used by Camus for the stance of the French Resistance against German occupation.

Camus argued that the only way to maintain one’s integrity in such a situation is to adopt what he called an “active fatalism”, in which “one should start to move forward, in the dark, feeling one’s way and trying to do good.” Rieux’s active fatalism is similar to the distinction, drawn by Nietzsche, between the pessimism of strength and the pessimism of weakness. Pessimism as strength faces up to the facts as they present themselves, accepts the danger fully, and engages in sober analysis of what is. It is the pessimism of Dr Rieux, in contrast to that of other citizens of Oran who succumbed to despondency, adopted a submissive stance and capitulated to the situation through a weary knowingness.

The End of Humanism

So far I have considered evasion and denial as psychological processes, as “maladaptive coping strategies” deployed by individuals. But I wonder whether matters go deeper, beyond understanding them as mere human weakness or distorted expression of political objectives. I want to suggest that climate denial in both its active and passive forms is a means of

attempting to resolve a contradiction deep within the modern understanding of the world itself and our role in it.

The contradiction arises because the rationalistic, systematic way of understanding the world, which is the essence of the technological age, has thrown up some facts that challenge the other essential component of the modernist understanding of the world, that is, the conception of humans as autonomous agents able to control the future by exercising power over nature. The central fact of climate science, barely grasped by the public, is that extra carbon dioxide persists in the atmosphere for many centuries. So what we do in the next one or two decades (in addition to emissions from the past) will seal the fate of the Earth's climate for more than a thousand years, irrevocably transforming the world in ways less amenable to life. For two decades knowledge of the damage we are doing has been readily available yet we have not changed our ways.

The contemporary mode of understanding the world is much more than an intellectual construct but finds our understanding of ourselves and our lives; in other words, it has deep emotional and existential roots. It finds the conception of self and world we moderns carry around with us in daily life.

This fact drives a dagger into the heart of the modern understanding of the human being, that of world-maker, the Enlightenment subject who creates the future of the world. The idea of humans as world-makers has recently reached its full expression in the concept of the Anthropocene, "a new geological epoch defined by the action of humans", which has been put forward by geologists because the evidence "seems to show global change consistent with the suggestion that an epoch-scale boundary has been crossed within the last two centuries" (10).

Climate change in the Anthropocene shows us to be enormously powerful yet, like the Sorcerer's Apprentice, unable to control our power, destabilising our self-concept as autonomous subjects imposing ourselves on the natural environment. Climate disruption threatens to destroy the deepest idea of the modernity, that we create the world, shape our future, and determine our own destiny. If this is so then climate change challenges the ontological foundations of the modern world, and evasion goes much deeper than a mere psychological defence mechanism.

The edifice of humanism, the elevation of human concerns and human reason to primacy, is collapsing in on itself as it discovers that the human could never be extracted from its physical environment and that a fractious earth could intercede at any moment. In repudiating all higher authorities—tradition, myth,

god—humanism forgot that there may be "lower authorities" that needed appeasing, the gods of the underworld, so to speak. Humanism is then guilty of falsely isolating the subject, forgetting that the "object" may have something to say about it. As the "slumbering beast" of nature stirs, the idols of humanism—free will, reason, choice, technology, and unbounded optimism—seem to be losing their potency.

The recourse to technological thinking—through, for example, carbon capture and storage schemes or geoengineering or a hundred other blueprints—becomes a means of evading an imminent ontological truth, a covering-over of the meaning of the climate crisis by framing it in familiar terms, with ourselves as subjects conducting events.

If this is so then defeating evasion is not merely a question of changing our minds, for we can easily change our minds without changing the world—understanding within which our beliefs exist. And it goes beyond differences in "worldview" because the idea of worldview, as typically used, does not ask what type of being has a worldview. Overcoming evasion requires a kind of "gestalt shift"—which, in the context of climate change, has been more colloquially called the "Oh shit" moment (11)—a shift in which we see the world afresh. So to overcome evasion we must go much deeper than "examining the evidence", or any kind of intellectual cognition, to a reflection and experience of how we see the world and where we fit into it, a reorientation that goes to our being, our sense of what we are.

Yet before we can orient ourselves anew, the old must disintegrate. Recognising the gap between our sense of self and the disrupted future we now confront can be thought of as an instance of "positive disintegration", a term that captures the idea of our world "falling apart" when the situation makes untenable the assumptions we have used to construct an integral sense of self (12). The inner struggle to adapt ourselves to changed circumstances requires that we go through a painful process of dissolution involving strong emotions, including excitability, anger, anxiety, guilt, depression, hopelessness and despair. The ability to navigate them and reconstruct our selves is a sign of mental health. Accelerated psychic development requires a difficult transition in which the individual becomes an active agent in his or her own disintegration, self-reconstruction and reintegration into a new and more robust whole. If we are to respond adequately to the fractured future climate change presents, we each must first remake ourselves.

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Notes:

- (1) Clive Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species: Why we resist the truth about climate change*, Earthscan, London, 2010
- (2) Some parts of this paper are drawn from Clive Hamilton, "Why We Resist the Truth About Climate Change", A paper to the Climate Controversies: Science and politics conference, Museum of Natural Sciences, Brussels, 28 October 2010
- (3) See Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species*
- (4) Cordula Meyer, "The Traveling Salesmen of Climate Skepticism", Spiegel Online, 8 October 2010 <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,721846,00.html>
- (5) Taylor, *Positive Illusions*, p. 33
- (6) Taylor, *Positive Illusions*, p. 33
- (7) Taylor, *Positive Illusions*, p. 64
- (8) N. S. Jacobson, C. R. Martell and S. Dimidjian, 'Behavioral activation treatment for depression: Returning to contextual roots', *Clinical Psychology: Science & Practice*, vol. 8, pp. 255-70, 2001
- (9) Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism*, Knopf, New York, 1991, p. 292
- (10) Jan Zalasiewicz et al., The Anthropocene: a new epoch of geological time? *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* (2011) 369, 835-841. See also the paper on the six limits or whatever
- (11) <http://www.earthscan.co.uk/blog/post/The-e2809cOh-shite2809d-moment-we-all-must-have.aspx>
- (12) Kazimierz Dabrowski, *Positive Disintegration*, Little Brown & Co, Boston, 1964

Responses to Clive Hamilton's paper.

Professor Nick Pidgeon, University of Cardiff

Thank you to Clive for such a stimulating talk. Engaging ordinary people with the issue of climate change is probably the greatest challenge we face today. Our own work at the Cardiff School of Psychology seeks to understand the public response to climate change from a multi disciplinary perspective (integrating approaches from human geography, sociology, experiential and more psycho-social approaches). We seek to understand these responses both qualitatively and quantitatively.



Climate change is a human and social problem. While the proposed solutions include new technologies or economic instruments climate change is driven by human activity and its mitigation will require lifestyle changes.

So what do we know? We know that people are concerned. We know that they confuse climate change with other issues. That they tend to see it as a distant problem. That human activity has exacerbated climate change, but they

often fail to link the cause with its effects. In addition the immediate causes (our constant use of energy) are often invisible to us in everyday life. In discussing how to approach climate change we must look at what values really matters. And, of course, look at our behaviour in relation to all facets of everyday life: transport, heating, food preservation and preparation etc..

What are the barriers to facing climate change? There are many (see the paper from my colleague, Irene Lorenzoni, 2007) including: scepticism, distrust, a view that it is a distant problem, lack of political will, and externalising responsibility for climate change. In particular people see governments as primarily responsible for acting. It is not clear if these represent post hoc rationalisations or general barriers that are structured through the social and political contexts we inhabit?

National governments are indeed responsible for acting on climate change. But national governments feel constrained by the electoral cycle, so urge citizens to act. We thereby get a 'governance trap': governments looks to individuals to make changes, individuals look to the government to make changes, and in the process nobody changes.

Things are getting worse. From 2005 to 2010 there was less concern and more scepticism amongst the public about climate change. This worsening scenario is most likely due to recession, boredom/fatigue, distrust and a deeply-felt resistance—as Clive's text explains so cogently—to difficult truths about climate change.

Organised climate sceptics have also waged a long war on environmentalism. If we look at the demographics of scepticism (from survey work across Britain in 2010) those most pre-disposed to be a climate sceptic are older, male, and politically more conservative. They are likely to hold highly more traditional values and have low interest in the environment.

Uncertainty is a very important theme. We have to deal with facing uncertainty. Some things *are* certain, for example: the climate is changing, it is getting warmer and this is in part due to our actions and most of the long run impacts will be negative. But we can't say for sure what the change in daily maximum average temperatures in the summer might be in 2080.

So we have to deal with the tension of not knowing precisely what's going to happen in terms of temperature increase, or sea level rise, or more extreme weather. Of course, sceptics can use the lack of certainty to try to undermine the validity of climate change data and science. We need to learn to face uncertainty collectively. Perhaps we need to actively make reference to risk and uncertainty and the unknowns. In other areas of life we do this - for example, smoking is an uncertain risk for the individual,

but very successful support programmes – some involving professional counselling and psychotherapy- have helped many people to stop smoking. So can we transfer the lessons here?

How do we engage people? We need:

- To go beyond social marketing and the view that we can use the tools of consumer society to challenge consumption
- To be honest and forthright about the scale of the problem ("emotional engagement is important")
- To be honest about the impact of mitigating and adapting to climate change, with no single solution available
- To engage with peoples' emotional responses
- To promote pro-environmental views and social networks which support people in changing their lifestyles
- To look at the language we use in facing climate change, particularly the deeper messages and the values underlying what we say
- To demand policy change of the government and policy-makers

References:

Irene Lorenzoni, 2007, Lorenzoni, I., Nicolson-Cole & Whitmarsh. Barriers perceived to engaging with climate change among the UK public and their policy implications. *Gl. Env. Chg.*, 17, 445-459 (2007).

NB The bullet points at the end of this paper are taken from 'Communicating climate change to mass public audiences', a working document from the Climate Change Communication Advisory Group, September 2010.

Tree Staunton Integrative Body Psychotherapist and Course Director for Psychotherapy at BCPC



Interestingly I find myself in the 'denial' camp regarding the scientific evidence for vaccination. I have followed other research and evidence and I came down clearly on the side of anti-vaccination when considering this for my own child. Does this make me irrational? I hope so....

It is our irrationality which can at times save us from a lack of imagination which is vital to finding new solutions to old problems.....so I want to encourage us all to listen with our senses, and to allow them to respond to what we are discussing. Perhaps we will find answers in non-sense!

So I would like to begin by reassuring you, Clive that you do not need to worry about 'unrealistic optimism' with a bunch of psychotherapists in the audience. We love the darker side of life - staying with pain, immersing ourselves in it, having a sustained empathic enquiry.....all that richness!

I have some reflections as to what can happen when psychotherapists turn their attention towards political matters and themes such as the environment and climate change.

My own history of political activism has led me to understand that as campaigners we can become part of the problem, rather than the solution. There is a tendency to polarise discussions when we campaign - we believe that we are right, and that we need to convert the other to our viewpoint. This is in the nature of lobbying. The hope is that if the facts are laid out before people they will see sense, and change their behaviour. But is this effective? How do people change? How do we change?

As psychotherapists we understand that change is not at all simple and that it does not follow along rational lines of thinking....neither is it particularly fast. With escalating dangers to our survival - such as climate change - we are seeing that the speed of change that we generally expect in psychotherapy is not going to save our skins, and psychotherapists from all modalities are seeking faster, more direct methods. But whatever the method, we know that change is often slow.

One of the important dimensions of psychotherapeutic discourse which can be transferred effectively into political arenas is the focus on **process** rather than **content**. I know

that Rosemary Randall is employing this to great effect in her Carbon conversations. We know that the exchange with someone is largely nonverbal, that the way to reach another is often not through information but through subtler forms of communication, reaching out and making contact, listening, resonating and attuning. These are the ways of influencing people that we need to bring to the political arena - not in a manipulative way but in a sincere and authentic way to meet with our human dilemmas, beyond ideas of right and wrong.

Clive, you have told us that presenting the facts does not seem to change people's perception. So the question for us as politically motivated therapists is how can what we know make a difference to how we act? When we consider the issues that face us in catastrophic climate change, what kind of therapeutic work will enable us to really come in touch with and sense that is happening in our environment? It must be understanding through our senses: our bodily experience of ourselves in relation to our environment. Our disconnection is the problem - our inability to digest and assimilate the knowledge that is available to us. We know but we cannot act. We cannot take in our sense of things, and we are unable to respond appropriately to the threats of climate change because we simply cannot process the information. So how can we translate the knowledge in our heads into **knowing in our being?** Being with our bodies. As much and as often, using and utilising our senses.

Native American writer Linda Hogan says:

'Love for the body and the earth are the same love'.

Coming to love our bodies is an active work in progress, when we work with the body in psychotherapy. It is a fundamental shift in our self identity. Environmental philosopher Paul Shepard speaks of 'the self with a permeable boundary...whose skin and behaviour are soft zones contacting the world instead of excluding it' (Roszac 1995:13)

This connection between body and environment formed part of my enquiry in my research thesis exploring 'Body Consciousness' and I want to end with some of the voices of my research participants, who engaged with me in this project:

'Horizons were more expansive, felt more accessible'....'I was acutely aware of smells - cut grass, lavender... I couldn't get enough of it'.....'I felt spatially aware....there was no edge between me and my environment. It wasn't a different connection, but I stopped and gave it time'.....'I saw my little granddaughter, and I felt as if I saw things as she does - closer to them somehow'.....

Our bodies are our barometers, and our compasses. Can we find our way back before it is too late?

Sally Weintrobe, Psychoanalyst, Institute of Psychoanalysis



I am delighted and feel privileged to be asked to discuss Clive's important and rich paper. Time constraints mean I cannot discuss much that I found interesting and important, such as his cogent analysis of the effects of the 'denialism industry' and also the nuanced way he looks at the

complexity of optimism in the face of climate change (CC). Clive's writing enables and supports us to feel anxious, sad (1) and less alone. Perhaps in wanting to form our new Alliance we seek not only to broaden our understanding of CC but also to support each other to bear the reality. Understanding CC and a supportive environment actually go hand in hand; our increasing capacity to take in what CC really means depends on our feeling supported to bear the knowledge.

Clive points out that to engage with CC we need to allow disintegration of our existing ways of seeing ourselves in relation to our environment. Disintegration is a positive creative act, requiring the capacity to tolerate strong emotions and to mourn our illusions. I absolutely agree. The central illusion Clive addresses is that we are in charge of Nature and we control the future, with the help of our 'technological-production science'. Central to the illusion is our denial of our real dependence on Nature (2).

Clive points out that the narrative of the enlightenment backs up this illusion. This is an important point. We swim in the medium of this philosophy like fishes oblivious to being in water. We are clearly in great need of alternative philosophical narratives (3). People do not give up old structures without the prospect of new ones in place.

I want to add to Clive's account a psychoanalytic perspective on why disintegration can feel so threatening. I suggest the key to this is anxiety (4). A psychoanalytic model of people underpins my understanding of anxiety and I will first go into this model. It is that we are inherently in conflict between different parts of ourselves, that much of the conflict goes on at an unconscious level and that the biggest conflict we face in life is between the concerned part of us that loves reality and the more narcissistic part of us that hates reality because it inevitably thwarts us.

The part that loves reality recognises its true size and where it fits in the scheme of things, tolerates limits, tolerates having very ambivalent feelings about reality, tolerates being far from perfect, suffers feelings of anxiety, guilt, shame and loss, is motivated by loving concern, finds reality challenging and finds struggling with it is what

ultimately provides meaning and self worth. It is wedded to rational thinking. It aims to try to put right damage caused by the narcissistic part in real ways and to mourn an idealised world.

The part that hates reality – the narcissistic part - feels special and a bit god-like, hates limits, feels entitled to avoid difficult feelings such as anxiety, guilt, shame and loss and is prone to ‘wish fulfilment’ type of thinking. It aims to restore the sense of having perfect conditions for itself, and it uses omnipotent magical ‘quick fixes’ to try to achieve this. It expects admiration for its ‘quick fixes’.

Melanie Klein, following Freud’s pioneering work on the subject, recognised that anxiety is at the very centre of our work to face reality. She argued that the narcissistic and the reality-based parts of the self both face anxiety. The narcissistic part is anxious that if reality is accepted it will not survive. The realistic part is anxious that the narcissistic part, with its sense of greedy entitlement to flout reality’s rules, has caused actual damage.

Klein saw that the work of gradually accepting reality involves facing BOTH these kinds of anxiety. They are both survival anxieties. Anxiety is actually a vital signal that alerts us to threats to our survival. Klein’s point is that when faced with reality, especially that it can bring most hated and unwanted changes, we inevitably veer back and forth between protecting ourselves from these two very different kinds of survival anxiety. She also, crucially, pointed out that for the part of the self that loves reality to be more powerful than the part of the self that hates reality, we need emotional support to bear anxiety and also difficult feelings like guilt, shame and loss.

When anxiety gets too much to bear, we defend against it. A major defence is denial of reality. Denial usually involves minimising anxiety by finding magical ‘quick fixes’. It also involves minimising feeling helpless and vulnerable by feeling magically big and powerful.

There are two possible resolutions to our enduring inner conflict, the first where reality and rationality win – here illusion is mourned, and the second where unreality and irrationality win - this is the more stuck terrain of delusion.

Crucial to whether rationality or irrationality win is what type of denial we use when anxiety gets too much to bear, whether it is negation or disavowal.

Negation is maintaining that something that is, isn’t. It can be an ordinary early response to a reality that faces us with shocking losses, changes and anxieties. Negation is the first stage of mourning. It protects against the sense of ‘positive disintegration’ so vividly described by Clive. Part of the shock and sense of disintegration is that defences mounted

to protect against too much anxiety need to crumble if reality is to penetrate. Feeling big and powerful gives way to feeling helpless and perhaps humiliated, and anxiety that has been split off and minimised returns to flood and overwhelm.

By contrast, disavowal is failed or blocked mourning. It is when a quick fix solution is found such that reality is seen and not seen at one and the same time. Whereas negation is a more transient defence, more easily given up, disavowal aims to create a more entrenched, enduring, state of ‘turning a blind eye’ or ‘sitting on the fence’ in relation to reality.

Disavowal involves a severe attack on thinking. It results in confusion and a breakdown of proportionality in thinking. This is because with disavowal anxiety is minimised, guilt and shame – emotions that also cause us great anxiety – are minimised, and all this is achieved through ‘quick fix’ thinking. But, when reality is minimised and ridiculed, the rational sane part of the mind, always there, even if eclipsed and made small, becomes increasingly anxious.

With disavowal, lies and fraudulent accounting flourish. While negation does not distort the reality that is denied so much, disavowal does distort it.

Disavowal is actually a poor means of lowering anxiety, as it does nothing to address its real causes and thereby can lead to an escalation of underlying realistic anxiety that can feel increasingly unmanageable. The more disavowal is allowed to proceed unchecked by reality, the more anxiety it breeds and the greater the danger that the anxiety will be defended against by further defensive narcissism and further disavowal. Disavowal leads to a vicious spiral and it is this that makes it dangerous.

Whereas with negation, mourning is possible and rationality wins; with disavowal mourning is blocked and irrationality wins. This, I suggest corresponds to the distinction Clive refers to between illusion and delusion.

There is currently a growing body of opinion that we are in a culture of disavowal (see Hoggett, 2010).

What are our anxieties about climate change? I suggest our biggest reality-based survival anxieties are:

- We depend on the Earth for our very survival and Earth is showing signs of damage
- We face an uncertain and dangerous future and the potential loss of any future at all
- Leadership is not acting sufficiently to protect our very survival, deep down we know this, and it is traumatic to feel this abandoned and uncared for.

Our narcissistic survival anxieties are:

- We will be forced to give up seeing ourselves as special and entitled to have it all and be it all
- We will be forced to give up our sense of entitlement to apply our irrational quick magical fixes to the problems of reality.

What might cause a culture of disavowal to set in? The following causes have been identified:

- The reality has become too obvious to be simply denied with negation
- There is anxiety that the damage is already too great to repair
- There is felt to be not enough support and help to bear the anxiety and suffering that knowledge of reality brings.

If we look at these predisposing factors to disavowal, we see that they fit current realities about climate change very well.

As climate change progresses and its effects become ever more visible, unless greater support for facing reality is given, and unless group narcissism is challenged to a greater degree, we can expect disavowal to be the prevalent defence against the 'too much-ness' of the reality. Inaction on climate change does not only lead to soaring levels of CO2 emissions. It may lead to spiralling disavowal with dangerous consequences.

The kind of disintegration experienced when disavowal is acknowledged is far more severe than the kind of positive disintegration Clive is talking about. This is because it involves reintegrating crippling anxieties and burdens of guilt and shame back into the self, crippling because of having been allowed to build up and not dealt with because split off.

This leads to my final point. I think it really matters how we understand these different kinds of denial because they have such different underlying structures and implications. I think it is important to characterise denialism as Clive does as the repudiation of a body of science for political and cultural reasons but to keep a distinction between negation and disavowal (5) as forms of denial people use. Facing reality is less problematic with negation.

References:

- (1) Aldo Leopold once said that 'One of the penalties of an ecological education is one lives alone in a world of wounds' (1993:165)
- (2) Clive's point concurs with emerging psychoanalytic voices. For instance, Välimäki and Lehtonen (2009) have suggested that modern man is suffering from what they call an environmental neurosis, rooted in deep-seated annihilation anxiety resulting from our denial of our real dependence on nature, based on the illusion of our own

autonomy and backed by use of science (not science itself). (For their ideas in English see Välimäki and Lehtonen in Weintrobe ed. (in press) 'Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic Perspectives'. London: Routledge.

(3) a point made by Curry (2006) 'Ecological Ethics' London: Polity Press

(4) The full argument can be found in Weintrobe (in press) 'The difficult problem of anxiety in engaging with climate change' in Weintrobe ed. (op. cit.).

(5) This accords with Stan Cohen's categories of denialism and denial. Cohen equates denial with turning a blind eye – i.e. with disavowal. He does not distinguish between negation and disavowal, a distinction I think I crucial. (See Cohen (in press) 'The Elementary forms of denial' in Weintrobe (op.cit.)

Sandra White, Ecopsychologist



Let's start with a brief taste of something different. I invite you to feel your feet on the floor, your bottom on the seat of your chair, and your back against the back of your chair, and breath deeply and steadily. Close your eyes and think about somewhere outside in larger nature that you have enjoyed. See yourself there. You might

remember the last time you were there, or imagine yourself there now. Spend a minute there, right now, breathing in the atmosphere, feeling yourself there. Take your last breath there for now, and bring your awareness back to here, this day, this room. Breathing steadily, feel your back against the back of your chair, your bottom on the seat of your chair, and your feet on the floor. And open your eyes. Welcome back!

Take a moment to notice how you are feeling now and perhaps you'll share something of that during the discussion.

John Lennon said: "Reality leaves a lot to the imagination" While T S Eliot wrote: "Humankind cannot bear much reality". And I think we have heard much that is valuable about that, for which I thank you, Clive.

To provide historical and literary examples of the behaviours that are so problematic to us today is a real service. It helps us to understand the enormity of the task before us, in transforming the climate of opinion in ways which will enable the needed scale of practical change to be undertaken.

I especially appreciate your articulation of "the gulf between the future we hope for—continued stability and prosperity—and the future the evidence tells us is approaching—one of danger and sacrifice." It seems that our task is to learn how to bridge that gulf.

You also make it clear that it is not only a highly material

way of life that needs to be sacrificed, but also our underpinning ideas, our illusions of control over nature and thereby human destiny.

For me, there is another idea to be sacrificed if we are to learn how to bridge towards the people we seek to influence. In Hertford, where I live, I am in almost daily contact with the people I seek to influence, who might be called ordinary, aspiring, middle-class and upper-class people. A significant proportion commute to the financial centres of London. When it comes to environmental matters, the majority of them are silent, keeping their heads down as they rely on the continuation of 'business as usual' so that their worlds will remain intact. Once I became a little known in the town for things green, a few of them have crossed the street or turned their back on me in crowded rooms, in their effort to avoid meeting everything I have come to represent to them. And I think that what the green movement has come to represent to them is the loss of their whole world. Not *the* whole world, but *their* whole world; the home and way of life they have created for themselves with which they are completely identified and which, therefore, in a certain sense, they need. For me, then, what is also to be sacrificed is the idea that these things are '*only* psychological' and that, forgive me, Clive, denial itself is a "*mere* human weakness", a "*mere* psychological defence" or even a "*ruse*". Swiss founder of analytical psychology Carl Jung often described the internal world in terms of psychological "*facts*". With this word I think he was communicating, indeed insisting, that the inner world must be respected as *its own order of reality*.

I don't think in terms of illusion versus delusion. I think in terms of a clash between two *opposing, and equally valid realms of reality*: The realm of the physical, where the science is telling us that we *really must protect* the Earth's systems from further deterioration. And the realm of the psychological, where most people *really must protect* their personal emotional and mental systems from breaking down. Both are entirely legitimate.

As therapists we know this, but it is difficult to translate it on to activist ground. I have found that talking in this way sometimes takes me into territory akin to what Clive described in Weimar Germany, which is interesting! Talking in this way has sometimes been interpreted as my vindicating people who want to hold on to their lifestyles, and there has been some heat!

But if we can help people to really get this, if more of us can embrace the validity of the psychological needs of people identified with the dominant system, it can take us on a path which asks different questions. For me, a central question has become: "*what conditions need to be in place to enable people to face the unfaceable?*"

What is it that is unfaceable? I think that it is the death and destruction we are causing to our beautiful, sophisticated and wondrously abundant Earth. I think that E O Wilson was right when he coined the term "*biophilia*": the innate love for the natural world which is in all of us, however latently. And I think that feelings of grief, shame and guilt at what we are doing are unbearable for most people. The grief in particular, it's terrible. And so I think that denial does its job well in protecting them from what they cannot cope with. And I include us, too, for we are all at different levels of denial all the time.

So, when thinking about creating the conditions in which all this can be faced, psychotherapy provides a model from which we can learn. Psychotherapy creates a consistent, respectful, attuned and non-judgmental setting where suffering, journeying and sacrifice is compassionately accompanied and witnessed. American founder of person-centred psychology Carl Rogers defined the therapeutic attitude as "*unconditional positive regard*". Unconditional positive regard is vital even while someone confesses to doing terrible things, because it is precisely the condition which enables that confession, and the confession is the necessary forerunner to healing, integration and creative change.

Another question then is how to create these conditions in other places and forms which look nothing like psychotherapy. I think that, for example, the Transition Towns movement with its Heart and Soul aspect and Carbon Conversations in many ways do this. By generating groups of people who meet regularly and encouraging them to connect with the feeling level as a way of enriching and fuelling their practical action, it becomes possible to share, witness, accompany, and even love each other at deeper and deeper levels, perhaps related to how long the groups continue to meet. To my mind, these are also the main conditions for sacrifice, and so when they are in play commitment to more and more material changes and reductions can be made. I believe in what Euripides said: "*Love is all we have, the only way that each can help the other*". Loving connection is vital in enabling the depth of change we need. Clive, I wholeheartedly agree with you that each of us is to "*remake ourselves*", and I think that most of us must not do it alone. We must seek out the conditions which create enough safety for the risks to be undertaken. We must seek out others and do it together.

As many here will recognise, global philosopher and activist Joanna Macy has been one of the leading influencers of the Transition Movement and other like-minded initiatives, and I think that her "*Work that Reconnects*" equally creates the kinds of conditions I have described. Yet, part of what inspired Joanna was her utter repudiation of psychotherapy. Inspired by Tibetan

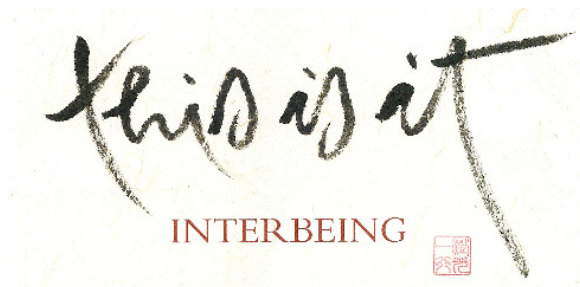
Buddhism and systems thinking, Joanna recognised that there was much more to her empathy and pain for non-human creatures who were suffering, than projection on to them of her own suffering. For if, as ecopsychology and some other religions and philosophies propose, humans are part of the Earth, not separate, not superior, then empathic recognition of the real suffering of others sharing Earth with us as home is integral to human experience, just as it is to creatures like elephants, cats, dogs and many others. As someone who believes in classical Freudian and Jungian approaches, I think it's a matter of allowing the possibility that such empathy is not always projection and seeing where that takes us, and I know this is starting to happen. In his ground-breaking book, "Living in the Borderland", American Jungian analyst Jerome Bernstein explores this territory, and openly shares something of his personal journey away from more traditional analytic thinking and towards that of the Navajo community nearby, who recognise the interconnectedness of all life. How he tries to integrate these perspectives is profound and moving.

Vietnamese peace activist and philosopher Thich Nhat Hanh teaches Interbeing, and I invite you to take into your hands now a piece of paper, any piece of paper, and look at it while I read to you some of his words:

INTERBEING (see shaded box to the right).

"Reality leaves a lot to the imagination."

If we are to create an Alliance which will powerfully help those involved in facilitating change towards greater and truer ecological sustainability, we, the broad psychotherapeutic community, will need a great deal of imagination! As is demonstrated here today, there are many different approaches within our vast field and there are both harmonies and tensions. For us to be able to collaborate well, I think there will need to be some sacrifices of some 'sacred cows' in all quarters and perhaps we also need to ask ourselves the question "what conditions do we need to create which will make those kinds of sacrifices possible too?"



There is a cloud floating on this sheet of paper that you are holding in your hand.

Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either; so the cloud and the paper inter-are.

If we look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. If the sunshine is not there, the forest cannot grow.

In fact, nothing can grow. Even we cannot grow without sunshine.

And so, we know that the sunshine is also in this sheet of paper; the paper and the sunshine inter-are.

And if we continue to look, we can see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. And we see the wheat. We know the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, and therefore the wheat that became his bread is also in this sheet of paper.

And the logger's father and mother are in it too.

Looking even more deeply, we can see we are in it too, because when we look at a sheet of paper, the sheet of paper is part of our perception.

So everything is in this sheet of paper. You cannot point out one thing that is not here - time, space, the Earth, the rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat. Everything co-exists with this sheet of paper.

'To be' is 'to inter-be'. You cannot just be by yourself, alone. You have to inter-be with every other thing. This sheet of paper is, because everything else is.

As thin as this sheet of paper is, it contains everything in the universe within it.

Words and calligraphy by Thich Nhat Hanh

Working Mission Statement for the Climate Psychology Alliance

Human-generated climate change and biodiversity loss are manifestations of the increasing threat our species poses to the planetary ecosystem, and therefore to ourselves. This is not alarmism, just an alarming fact. The viability of all human aspirations depends on our capacity to halt our destabilisation of the broad physical, chemical and biological equilibrium (characterising the Holocene era) which has characterised recent life on Earth and made human civilization possible.

It therefore seems obvious that a concerted effort should be made to influence priorities and behaviour in all parts of our society in response to this vast and complex problem. Nothing less than a cultural transformation in the direction of ecologically sustainable living will address the challenge we face. Many disciplines need to contribute their perspectives to this endeavour and there is growing recognition of the importance of co-operation in this common cause, particularly in the face of fear, ignorance and hostility. Transcending professional boundaries and rivalries may be hard to imagine, but a leap of imagination is exactly what is called for in the current situation. This is the vision behind the Alliance.

Natural science, technology, government and the media, as well as economic, manufacturing and financial systems are all clearly involved in this multi-dimensional picture. Another vital piece is "human science": the quest to understand the psychological and emotional processes which underpin our responses to the situation.

The founders of the Alliance recognise that a great deal of important psychological research has been done to elucidate cognitive and behavioural responses. However we believe there is a need to draw upon, and develop further, perspectives which emphasise the significant role of identities, emotions, conscious and unconscious meanings and defence mechanisms. Our view is that much is to be gained from seeking both to elaborate these other perspectives and integrate them into existing knowledge. This should help to foster collaboration within and beyond the wider field of psychology, in order to secure more widespread engagement with human-made climate change and ecological degradation.

The Alliance recognises the different approaches to be found in the broad range of psychological disciplines and practices and that there has been relatively little opportunity so far for much needed dialogue and collaboration.

In practical terms, the Alliance seeks to contribute to the following tasks:

1. Applying psychologically-informed insight to denial, to the consumerist paradigm of wellbeing, and other obstacles to understanding that long-term physical and psychological security lie in healthy functioning at a systemic, as well as an individual, level;
2. Fostering multi-disciplinary links, aimed at tackling the economic, ideological, political and psychological barriers to ecologically-informed living;
3. Clarifying the connections between personal health and environmental health; researching the implications of environmental deterioration for mental and physical health and wellbeing;
4. Providing specialist assistance to experts in fields such as climate science and ecology, government and business in the effective dissemination of their knowledge.

The Alliance has been initiated in the UK, and the main thrust of the work to date has been located here. Partnerships are forming with like-minded people in the USA, Australia, and mainland Europe. Given the global nature of the challenge, we seek every opportunity to link with initiatives in other parts of the world. Plans are under way to strengthen and exhibit these links, for example through an Alliance website.

If you are interested to participate in this initiative and be kept informed of its progress, please email Sandra White at: sandra.white@makingessentialconnections.co.uk

17th June 2011