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Explorations in Climate Psychology Journal

Issue 3: November 2022

Staying with the trouble

FACING DIFFICULT TRUTHS

Climate Psychology Alliance

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Cover photo by Maggie Turp

Staying with the trouble

By the Editorial Team

The cover photo refers to the long shadow cast upon the earth by our species – specifically that bit of it concentrated in the global north. As **Breda Kingston**'s moving reflections indicate, to witness the dying of the living systems that constitute our earth can seem even harder to bear than acceptance of the death of a loved one. Coming out of denial in all its different guises, including fantasy solutions to the climate emergency such as carbon capture and storage, means having to deal with painful thoughts and feelings concerning loss, destruction, guilt and grief.

How to contain this emotional turmoil and stay with the troubling thoughts and feelings? That's the challenge if we aren't to become trapped in despair and fatalism.

We can't avoid despair but we can avoid acknowledging it. We can avoid it by projecting it into others, who we then construe as doom-mongers. Or we can split despair off from hope and oscillate wildly between the two, instead of containing the contradiction. We can face the worst but still find resolve, love and determination, in spite of what we experience in that encounter. After all, facing the worst does not mean accepting the worst. We have the capacity to look into the eye of the storm, recognise the difficult odds and still do all we can to achieve the least worst outcome.

Many of the contributions to this issue identify the raw pain of both ecological loss and the contemplation of future human loss. **Jenni Silverstein** gives a moving account of her engagement with the magnificent Redwoods, their 260-million-year presence threatened in the blink of an eye by California's colonisers. The raw pain can be particularly intense for children and young people who have not built up the protective defences of adults. As **Caroline Hickman** notes, we adults need to learn to stay with their trouble, to allow ourselves to be touched and disturbed by it. It's a big task, to contain our own troubling feelings and those of others, and few of us can stick at it permanently without going a bit mad. So we have to look after ourselves and this will often involve managing our engagement by switching off at times, by finding nourishment in nature or literature, or solidarity in a like-minded group.

Groups like the Climate Psychology Alliance are developing interventions like climate cafés to facilitate this process, and XR has developed 'listening circles'. It is often said that a basic requisite for community building is the creation of a safe space in which people can engage with each other. However, as this month's CPA dialogue reveals, 'safety' cannot be taken for granted. What is safe for one person or group may not be for another; for this is how class, race, gender and other inequalities can get played out.

As one participant in the group dialogue asked: "Imagine if everyone stopped pretending all at once, what would that look like?" Surely the time has now come to stop pretending. There is no going peacefully into this night, we must stay with the trouble and in doing so we will surely stir up trouble too.

Still from Tell the truth*, the Extinction Rebellion talk*

Facing individual death and facing the climate crisis

By Breda Kingston

CPA's original strap line, 'Staying with the trouble', continues to serve well in describing what we need to do and go on doing. But staying with the trouble, while ever more needed has become ever more difficult. The scale and exponential increase in environmental damage and biodiversity loss is truly terrifying. That, alongside the persistent failure of governments to respond with anything like adequate action that might prevent ever more catastrophic damage, can feel overwhelming and unbearable.

Individual death

As I go through my 70s, I am aware of what feels like a world of difference between facing one's own death, or the death of loved ones, and facing the devastation of the climate crisis, now and for future generations. In this short piece, and with the help of some poetry, I would like to describe how a recent personal experience brought home some of these differences.

This was the experience: After an initial investigation, my husband was told that he appeared to have a cancer and one with very low life expectancy. To our enormous relief, this prediction proved to be incorrect and the eventual diagnosis, four weeks later, was of a benign condition. During those weeks, when we had reason to believe that he would die within a year or two, I experienced a range of difficult and painful feelings including immense sadness, anxiety and apprehension about a future without him and dread for him for what he would likely go through. I felt heartbroken for our grandchildren – aged six and three – that they would lose their beloved grandad so early in their lives. But crucially, although I felt distraught, I could begin to take in what we then thought was our reality. It was possible to stay with it and to be open to whatever mental processing about it went on. Although I dreaded a future without him, somewhere I could glimpse in imagination the possibility of living with the loss and a 'coming to terms' with it in ways that feel impossible in relation to the effects of the climate crisis. I could imagine talking to our grandchildren about their grandad's illness and death in ways that I have not, as yet, been able to imagine doing about the climate crisis. I am aware that there might be some self-idealising in this imagining. Had the initial prediction been confirmed, who knows what disturbance might have followed – and I was not anticipating my own death. Nonetheless, I do want to try to convey how different staying with what we thought was an impending loss through death was, compared with staying with the trouble of the climate crisis.

The feelings of grief were about loss but not trauma. It was sad but not bad. There was an absence of guilt, shame, terror, feeling overwhelmed and that terrible sense of having betrayed the next generations – all of which are associated with the climate crisis. It was a very loving time. It felt like a very big personal sadness, but neither of us felt that it was a tragedy in the way that we both feel the climate crisis is.[1]

As my husband commented on his particular plight 'The difference is that it's not the end of the world'.

Photo by Toby Chown: 'Wild Auroch', from World of Stonehenge Exhibition, British Museum'

Support in grief

Acknowledging our mortality, the inevitability of death, and having a capacity to mourn, are central to our development. This acceptance allows us to become involved and to love in spite of the transience of our individual lives and the inevitability of loss. Shakespeare conveys this movingly in Sonnet 73:[2]

That time of year thou mayest in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold.
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night does take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.
This thou perceiv'st which makes thy love more strong.
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

1. This is not to deny that some deaths are both tragic and traumatic.

2. Shakespeare, W. Sonnet 73. In Bates, J., and Rasmussen E. (Eds.) (2007). *William Shakespeare: complete works*, p.2448. London: Macmillan.

The death of the individual is accepted. The individual will die but in the world he leaves behind – the cycle of birth, life and death – will continue. The boughs will be in leaf once more. It is not the death of the world as it is known. Coming to terms with individual death in the context of continuity of life on earth is possible. Coming to terms with the loss of continuity of life on earth as we know it does not feel possible.

During the period when we thought that my husband would die in the near future, I was aware of feeling held and supported by the relative familiarity of individual death, in a way that I do not begin to feel about the ravages of the climate crisis. Unlike the impacts of the climate crisis, our own deaths and the deaths of others are an inevitable part of life – even if we do keep death out of mind for much of the time. I do not hold any belief in a 'life after death' beyond symbolic survival, but there is support and there are consolations. Over the centuries, we have developed myriad social and religious rituals that support and console us in mourning the dead; both privately and publicly. We erect monuments in their memory and mark anniversaries. We commemorate the dead in literature through elegiac and biographical works, and in music with requiems. The painfulness of death, loss and grief is acknowledged universally and we talk to each other about it without the constraint that continues to persist in talking about the emotional impact of the climate crisis. Friends with whom it has been possible to share joys and sorrows over many years become less available as supports about the climate crisis. This absence of support can feel like an absence of kindness. The prevailing expectation around individual death and bereavement in our culture is that it will be responded to with kindness, and it is expected that whatever can be done to prevent, delay or ease death will be done. There is not, as yet, a similar prevailing response to the climate crisis and, instead, the conditions that fuel it are perpetuated, while climate-related deaths – particularly those occurring in the global south – are given scant regard.

Impact of the climate crisis on accepting one's own death

The continuation of the cycle of growth, death and regrowth – a potential consolation at the time of death – is interfered with by the reality of the climate crisis. The potential comfort of imagining future generations and all life on earth thriving on a liveable planet is much diminished. In place of being able to imagine development, there can be horror in imagining each successive generation being more affected by the catastrophic consequences of increasing climate chaos. As we approach death, guilt about the damage done to life on earth in our lifetimes is likely to cast a shadow on contemplation of our more constructive contributions.

There is a threat also to any consolation from the notion of symbolic survival. Hannah Segal, in exploring the psychological impact of the threat of a nuclear war wrote:

> *In natural death, or even in a conventional war, people die… with some conviction of symbolic survival in their children, grandchildren, in their work or in the civilization itself of which they were part… The existence of nuclear weapons and the prospect of nuclear war makes difficult a growing acceptance of death and symbolic survival. The prospect of death in atomic warfare leaves an unimaginable void and produces terror of a different kind… the real terror of annihilation.*[3]

The sudden and total annihilation that would result from a nuclear war differs from the more gradual but ever-escalating threats of tipping points and total breakdown of the climate crisis. However, the scale of the threat of climate chaos can feel unimaginable and the re-awakened threat of nuclear war adds to the traumatic sense of the trouble of these times.

Defences and a sense of entitlement

With the climate-related disasters of heatwaves, fire, flood, drought and species extinction becoming ever more frequent and sooner than predicted, the outright denial that has persisted in the face of scientific evidence for the last 40 years or so has become harder to maintain. But it has been replaced by tactics such as 'predatory delay' – principally by fossil companies so that they can continue to make vast sums of money – and by what Kevin Anderson[4] terms 'mitigation denial' whereby the scale and urgency of the intervention needed is denied or minimised. Given the dire urgency of the need to reduce carbon emissions drastically, these tactics are even more dangerous than denial, in that it can appear as if something constructive is being done. Otto Portner, on presenting the IPCC's 6th assessment report in February 2022, said: "Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future."

In spite of these warnings, fossil fuel companies continue to do all they can to promote our extractive culture. They carry a massive responsibility for the damage done, but all of us are implicated in this culture. Paul Hoggett writes of a "perverse culture" and so-called "progress", wherein the greedy, self-centred part of individuals is encouraged at the expense of the part capable of exercising restraint in the interests of others and the environment.[5]

Photo by Rice University: Memorial plaque to lost Icelandic glacier, Okjökull

3. Segal, H. (1997). Silence is the real crime. In *Psychoanalysis, literature and war. Papers 1972-1995*, pp.143-156. Hove: Routledge.

4. Anderson, K. (2019). Tweet available (online) at https://twitter.com/KevinClimate/status/1202876894070394880

5. Hoggett, P. (2013). Climate change in a perverse culture. In Weintrobe, S. (Ed.), *Engaging with climate change, psychoanalytic and interdisciplinary perspectives*. Hove: Routledge.

Disavowal, whereby we know the facts but act as if we did not know their meaning, or that they applied to us, continues to be widespread. All of us, particularly in the global north, can struggle with extracting ourselves from our fossil-fuelled culture even when that is possible.

Sally Weintrobe, writing about the psychological roots of the climate crisis, outlines the ways in which a "culture of uncare" is embedded in what she calls "neoliberal exceptionalism", which she suggests is at the heart of the climate crisis. 'The exception' in this culture feels entitled to have whatever he or she wants, regardless of the costs to others.[6] The following account is a glimpse of the experience of being at the receiving end of the indifference and disdain about the cost to others of being in the hands of those who feel entitled to ravage the earth for their own gain.

Jacob Rees-Mogg, a government minister, is the MP for the constituency adjoining ours. He is a risible figure in many respects but, nonetheless, he holds power. Usually, I can dismiss his pronouncements. One of his more recent ones got right under my skin and his words stayed in my mind, like wounds from a weapon, unprocessed for many hours. He said that he wanted to ensure that every last drop of oil is extracted from the North Sea; that oil companies must be supported to this end and therefore should not have a windfall tax imposed on them lest it diminished the chances of complete extraction. His words felt callous and cruel, with total disregard for the wellbeing of humankind and all life on earth. I experienced them as a form of torment and him as a torturer, and felt that he must have known how sadistic he was being. He is himself the very epitome of exceptionalism and here he was aiding and abetting his fellow exceptions towards bringing about the end of the world as we know it.

John Clare: Similarities and differences

John Clare's poetry is often turned to for solace about the natural world. He is seen as a guardian of the environment and community. He lived in the midst of the enclosures; environmental changes that were aimed at increasing profit for the few, while destroying the way of life of the many. John Clare well understood the mindset of entitlement. Writing in the first half of the 19th century, humankind's 'freedom' to do what humankind wishes in nature is a repeated theme in Clare's poems. Of the tree in 'The fallen elm', he writes:

> *Self-interest saw thee stand in freedom's ways*
> *So thy old shadow must a tyrant be [...]*
> *With axe at root he felled thee to the ground*
> *And barked of freedom [...]*
> *The rights of freedom was to injure thine.*[7]

Clare, referring to the enclosures, wrote: "*Inclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain / It levelled every bush and tree and levelled every hill.*"[8] Beyond that, he saw the destruction of a way of life and community living: "*Inclosure came and trampled on the grave / Of labour's rights and left the poor a slave.*"[9] His words on entitlement apply now, but one of the ways in which Clare's experience is different from ours is that he does not feel implicated in the damage done. When he writes: "*And man the only object that distrains / Earth's garden into desert for his gains*", Clare sets himself apart from 'man'. For Clare, man is a third person other. "*Leave him his schemes of gain – 'tis wealth to me / Wild heaths to trace.*"[10] Clare does not contribute to the "*ruder world's inglorious din*". He has "*no curb / Of interest, industry, or slavish gain / To war with nature.*"[11] He laments the impact of the Enclosures Act in '*The mores', where once: "Its only bondage was the circling sky... / Fence now meets fence in owners' little bounds / Of field and meadow large as garden grounds / In little parcels little minds to please.*"[12] He is not one of those with 'little minds'. He takes against those he sees as having taken against the earth, but of himself he writes in terms of righteousness. Unlike us, who are implicated in our fossil-fuelled lives, Clare feels free of guilt.

But the most crucial difference between Clare and his time, and us and ours, is about the scale and nature of the damage done. Clare could write about "The eternity of nature" when, in spite of being:

Photo by Toby Chown: 'Life and death in the woods'

6. Weintrobe, S. (2021). *Psychological roots of the climate crisis: neoliberal exceptionalism and the culture of uncare*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

7. Clare, J. (2000). The fallen elm. In Summerfield, G. (Ed.), *Selected poems*, pp.167-169. London: Penguin Books.

8. Ibid. Remembrances, p.197.

9. Ibid. The mores, p.170.

10. Ibid. The moorhen's nest, p.156.

11. Ibid. The robin's nest, p.152.

12. Ibid. The eternity of nature, p.158.

[...] trampled underfoot
The daisy lives and strikes its little root
Into the lap of time – centurys may come
And pass away into the silent tomb
And still the child hid in the womb of time
Shall smile and pluck them.[13]

Clare's natural world is not irremediably damaged. Clare's grief is in the context of continuity of life on earth. For Clare, "the womb of time" can bear fruit. He had the consolation of being able to envisage that the natural world would survive humankind's ravages and would continue to be a habitable earth. We no longer know whether that is possible and we cannot feel confident about what the future holds for "the child hid in the womb of time".

How do we live with staying with the trouble?

I find now that I look first at the conclusion of each climate-related article or book before reading the contents – hoping to find the "there is still time", "this will happen unless", "although closing rapidly, the window is still open" bit. In my conclusion, here are some of the things that I find supportive in trying to stay with the trouble.

First and foremost is the need for shared acknowledgement of how frightening these times can feel. Unlike individual death or bereavement, not everyone, including close friends, is able to share feelings about the terror of the climate crisis, but it feels mutually supportive when they can. Being part of CPA, where thoughts and feelings are shared, is a rich resource. So also is being part of other climate-related groups where there is a shared understanding of how serious the situation is and a drive to do something about it, whether through activism, conservation or regeneration.

Yes, we need to acknowledge our current reality, but we must not accept it. Unlike the inevitably of our own deaths, which we need both to acknowledge and accept, the climate crisis was not inevitable. It did not have to happen and could have been avoided.

Photo by Toby Chown: 'Hungry crocodile skull'

We need to acknowledge the reality of the climate crisis and the trajectory we are now on, but must never accept it. We must keep trying to do all that we can to divert from the trajectory.

I take inspiration from Bill McKibben's journalism and activism in his more than 30 years of dogged determination to keep on going on. He encourages us to fight for every single less-bad outcome possible. I take solace from Rebecca Solnit's writing on uncertainty. While the trajectory we are on is not in doubt, there is uncertainty about how humankind will respond. We live with a terrible anxiety about whether we and the governments of the world will take sufficient, sustained, effective action in time to avert catastrophic collapse. The uncertainty is hard to bear, but it can also be where hope lies. As Solnit writes: "When there is uncertainty, you recognise that you may be able to influence the outcomes – you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or a few million others." (Solnit, 2016).[14] Sally Gillespie, writing in a similar vein, says: "The end of the climate emergency story is not known. Each of us is a teller and a participant."[15] As long as there is uncertainty, we have a part to play and we might, with collective action, be able to influence the outcome.

I think also that it is very important to acknowledge any good or better news such as: the apparent rise in public awareness and concern; some increase in media coverage; an increasing number of valuable climate-crisis-related documentaries and films; some legal successes around inadequate government action; the legal status of ecocide; legal action against Exxon in preparation; a growth in climate movements; and, in particular, the youth climate movement. It is also important to acknowledge that significant leaders and thinkers are taking prominent roles in challenging governments and the fossil fuel industry. Apart from the thousands of climate scientists, people from academic fields including art, literature and architecture, psychology, sociology and health, economic and engineering disciplines, and many others, are using their particular expertise to fight climate disaster. Non-polluting sources of energy generation and economic models that do not promote infinite growth are available to us.

And it is very important for us to look after ourselves and each other. A movement and dance session was planned for the end of the most recent CPA AGM. In the course of chairing, Judith Anderson reminded us of Jonathan Lear's words in his account of the place of the Sun Dance in relation to the collapse of the Crow nation: "It is one thing to dance as if nothing has happened; it is another to acknowledge that something singularly awful has happened… and then decide to dance." We did dance and that felt good. The feeling and the resolve around it has stayed with me. Continuing to do what we love, with people we want to be with, will not take the threat away, but it can leave us feeling more resilient in bearing it.

Breda Kingston, now retired, was an NHS Consultant Clinical Psychologist and a psychoanalytic psychotherapist in private practice.

13. Ibid. The eternity of nature, p.158.

14. Solnit, R. (2016). *Hope in the dark: untold histories, wild possibilities.* Edinburgh: Canongate Books.

15. Gillespie, S. (2020). *Climate crisis and consciousness: re-imagining our world and ourselves.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Facing a troubling presence
A group dialogue among CPA members

Edited by ?

Contextual starting point

Staying with the troubling issue, symptom, dilemma is the therapeutic antidote to our escapist cultural patterns of avoidance, dissociation, distraction and generally trying to fix, solve, sort the difficulty. In this short time together (90 minutes spent in July), we aimed to stay with it, sensing how the climate crisis pervades our attempts to think about it. This edited contribution came from a recording of our conversation – 'we' being Brigitta Mowat, Yasmin Kapadia, Viviane Carneiro, Nick Drew and Chris Robertson.

Dream start

Chris: Let's start with a dream. The dream happened while I was writing a climate-related article about our need to connect with other animals. I was living in a hut within a campsite when I heard a fractious voice outside, complaining about someone writing about the other-than-humans. Clearly they were talking about me. I went outside to find my neighbour already engaged with two rather strange-looking people. I owned that it was me they were looking for and nervously asked what they wanted. I could not really hear their answer and looked to the neighbour. He said: "I can't translate for you, because I'm a human too." It dawns on me, the visitors are not human, that I'm also caught within a human-centred perspective.

And thinking about the dream, I realised that the impasse in the dream is very awkward for me, because I'm in the writing. I'm trying to find a way through to go beyond human exceptionalism. And yet, the dream is telling me I'm caught in it. And I was reflecting on how to be in this uncomfortable place and how easy it is to want to escape and either dissociate or find a miraculous way through. So, it was a very uncomfortable dream to stay with.

Brigitta: I guess I wanted to also bring a dream that I had early this morning. It started with a Diamond Jubilee procession with horses pulling a carriage. There was loud music. The Jubilee procession carried on. It turned into chaos and suddenly it got very dark and muddy everywhere. I was left with a sense of confusion and disgust.

It fits with my thinking about staying with the trouble or an aspect of what's caused the trouble. I'm thinking about the colonies, the colonisers that made the Queen so rich in the many estates that have been built by slaves. That mess I experienced in the dream left a really bad taste of our colonial past. In my dream, the Queen was dethroned and appeared somewhere in this mess. I've been thinking a lot about slavery, colonialism and oppression in relation to the more-than-human world – the rupture between us and Mother Earth, between the slave and the master.

Nick: I want to respond to Chris's dream. In lockdown, I tried to clarify my own journey around climate change. What emerged was that I needed to take a different perspective. Two things really spoke to me. One was the image of the earth as a pale blue dot, and the words accompanying that – how we were just this speck of life in the universe. And the other was a deep-time walk, reflecting the length of time that the earth has been around, and what a vanishingly small part of that history humans have been around.

Then today, I reflected on a chart from the *The limits to growth*,[1] talking about human perspectives, plotted against time and space. It suggests most people just worry about themselves and their immediate family, and they worry about the next few days. Very few people worry about a world scale and their children's lifetimes.

I realised that I've taken myself beyond that grid, to think beyond the world scale, to the universe and our place within that […] and a bigger timescale than just our children's lifetimes, to the whole of evolution. It's about framing this moment in the context of where we are… and this wider-than-human viewpoint felt important. It helps me to put a different context on where we are and what we're doing.

1. Meadows, D.H., Randers, J., and Meadows, D.L. (2004). *Limits to growth: the 30-year update*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company.

Yasmin: For most people I know, just getting by is hard enough, despite all the privileges we've got. But it's easy to, in a different way, somehow zoom right out and just focus on these really wide levels of thinking.

For me, the challenge is how do I weave between the two? How do I make sense of it all in a way that is both about me specifically, where I stand, my very unique perspective, and also connected to other humans, to the more-than-human and connected throughout time. It's about not losing my specific place in the order of things, but also not narrowing down.

Brigitta: I fleetingly read in *the Guardian*, that a million chickens are being killed every week. That sort of oppression that extends way beyond the human and this is deeply troublesome for some, maybe not for everybody? And why is it not troublesome for everybody? What makes me different to someone else who is not bothered by eating chicken from chickens that have been tortured? There are families that scrape by and can't afford to ask these questions.

Chris: I think the dream for me was sort of like the shadow side of really trying to make an effort to listen and think, but somehow negating human exceptionalism. I think this was my non-humbleness getting confronted. That's how I received the dream. And it was troubling. Like what you're saying Brigitta, this exploitation is deeply troubling.

I also think it's not just the physical abuse. I think it's about the attitude to what chickens are – that they're not very intelligent. They're stupid. They're not real life forms. That derogation is deeply troubling.

Colonial troubles and deep relief

Viviane: I was thinking about healing, as I'm recovering from Covid, wanting to reconnect with a sense of inner peace through nature… It made me think, how difficult it is for me to think about nature, and land. My land is holding a lot of trauma and violence… making it very difficult to find peace, to find healing.

I tried to draw strength from my grandad… How did he manage, in Colonial Brazil?

We cannot talk about colonialism in the past; it's called capitalism now. We just found a way of living with it... Switching on and off and disconnecting to cope. It's exhausting. It's very hard to find a ground to stand... to rest.

I was reading about the New Ukraine in Brazil, where in early 20th century Ukrainian immigrants established themselves, preserving their culture and language to this day. Recently, a historian questioned what happened to the local indigenous people, but nobody knew… most likely massacred like the others… What struck me was seeing the drawings found by the local tribe, showing their whole way of life. Their Oca had a much lower roof than usual; the interior was dug out into a subterranean spacious living space with different levels carved out of the earth walls. On such a hot day like today it made sense. It must have been very cooling in there.

It's painful to acknowledge the violent extermination of such culture. The trauma and tyranny of land occupation is still ongoing, not just in Brazil and Ukraine…

Brigitta: Your question Viviane, about how do we find peace, brought to mind someone that I saw this morning who is pregnant

Photo by Toby Chown: 'Staying with the trouble'

and wondering whether she can bring that child into this world or not. She was caught up with lots of really conflicting feelings. She described going to the local stream and just lying down like a foetus. That gave her a sense of momentary peace. There's something really soothing in the image of laying down next to a stream in a foetal position, connecting with nature and helped them to find some peace momentarily. I was very moved by this story.

Chris: I found both that story and what you are saying, Viviane, very touching. I think it's maybe part of the clue to staying with these difficult feelings. I don't know if anyone else has read *Thin Places*, by an Irish woman, Kerri ní Dochartaigh,[2] whose childhood was during the troubles in Northern Ireland; a very destructive, dangerous childhood. She returns later in life, a very poignant return, dealing with all these awful memories, but it does bring a healing peace through facing into it.

Yasmin: It reminds me of quite a lot of different XR activists that I've now met through the CPA Therapeutic Support Network. Quite often they will have had this kind of epiphany; often through attending something like the 'Heading for extinction' talk.[3] It's brought up a lot of fear and distress, and then they've channelled all this energy straight into joining their local group and getting very involved in activism. Some time later, they start to feel the impact beyond the manic defences of getting very busy with the activism. It starts to affect their emotional lives in ways that they can't ignore.

2. ní Dochartaigh, K. (2021). *Thin places*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books.

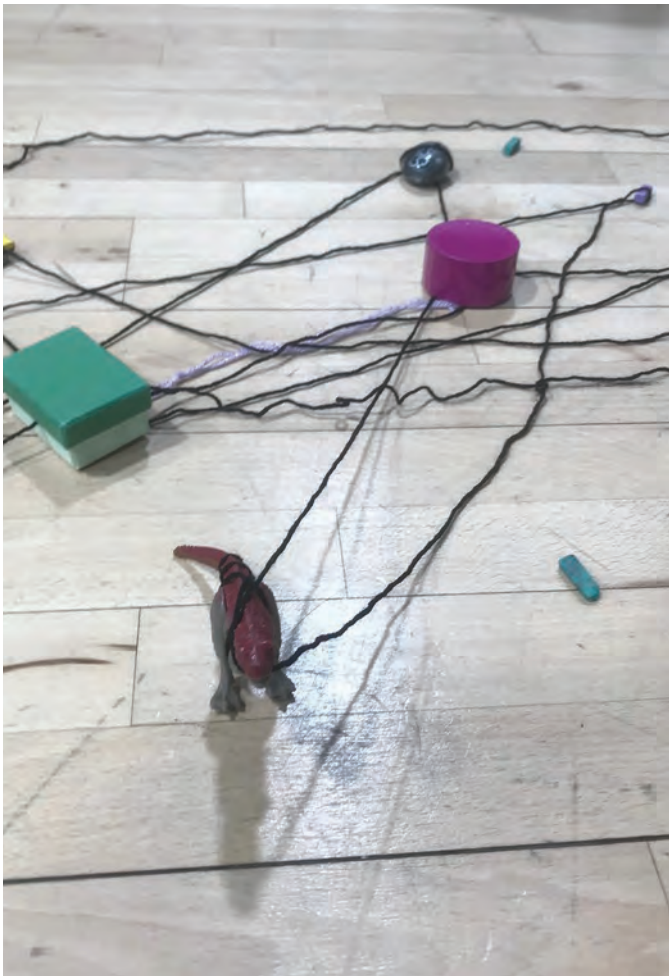
3. Extinction Rebellion. (2021). *Heading for extinction*. Available [online] at https://extinctionrebellion.uk/heading-for-extinction-download

They reach out and we start to talk in a contained and supportive setting. Recently, one of these XR activists was talking about the new policing bill, and the fear that he had about what this would mean for his activism. It might be less possible, given he can't risk doing prison time. If he was to not have activism anymore, what he would have to face… We nibbled around the edges until he was ready to look at the thing a bit more directly… There was deep worry for the future of young people, and a lot of despair. But what he'd been scrambling away from very anxiously, when he'd faced it, he realised that he felt very relieved.

It was this really deep relief that he felt – a devastating relief. It's somehow less troubling to really stay with the trouble than that unsettledness of anxiously trying to do anything but experience it. We had a moment together in this particular session under those trees, where we both felt this relief, very palpably. And then, in the next moment, we looked around us and, and, and it was beautiful there. In that park, we were sitting in, there were school children running around, and there were oak trees, and there were birds. He said this was the first real peace he had experienced in a long time.

Viviane: That's really nice to hear… the devastating release… How to stay with the trouble, how to digest the carnage and for it to be part of my nature, my past and the soil that I would lay on… that river, that water would also have blood running in it.

Brigitta: I think that there's an important theme emerging in this round, which is there's so much value and potential healing in feeling the trouble that we are in, because without feeling one becomes detached. I'm really touched by that image of curling up by the stream.



And whether to have a child or not; you will know what to do by listening to yourself. It's something so deep that we mustn't mess around with it – like what's happening in America with the anti-abortion – a profound messing around with women's lives, a deeply troubling imposition of rules. We can't even regulate ourselves as humans, let alone in relation to the other-than-human world.

Chris: I want to be able to try and think about that. It is horrendous, I agree. And what meaning do we try to give it? I think it's part of the work to be able to bear the feelings, and try to think.

Brigitta: I think for me, the starting point is myself and how I perceive what's happening. What's the point in intellectual understanding if we can't feel it? Is it just a very Western way of thinking, that we need to make these links rather than be?

But is it also because it's unacceptable to just speak from your heart? Let the links emerge; allowing myself not to make sense but to let sense emerge without making these clever links.

Stop pretending

Nick: I've got a small book in my line of sight beside my computer, which I just leave there: *What if we stopped pretending?,* by Jonathan Franzen.[4] It's just that message "what if we stop pretending?". It's always there, as a reminder, when I get distracted into not staying with the trouble. It just catches my eye. And I find something quite important in that – both the decision of what you do with your time, but also cherishing the moments that we do have as well. It puts into context the decisions that we make, big and small, day by day. It's quite an important thing to bring myself back to – almost like a mindfulness practice of noticing what's going on.

Yasmin: Just had a vision as you spoke, Nick, of imagining what if we did stop – all stop – pretending… If we all stopped pretending at once. Suddenly, I had this kind of real panicky vision of everybody going a bit nuts. Because the pretending is actually keeping things ticking, isn't it? Business as usual works because we all keep pretending. And if we suddenly stopped, would we even be talking here now?

Personally, for me, I would have to stop pretending that using Zoom is an okay thing to do. That there aren't data centres being cooled by water in Arizona that is being taken away from humans and other-than-human creatures, to keep the whole internet running. To make this conversation even possible right now, I'd have to stop pretending it's okay; all the different ways in which I'm complicit and through all the ways I'm acting every day. Not really sure what I would do if I completely stopped pretending. And that's just me, let alone the huge crowds of people I just shared my weekend with on Brighton beach; or all of us, like, everyone, stopping pretending, all at once. There is staying with the trouble, and then there's managing the trouble.

Chris: Managing the trouble you've stayed with?

Yasmin: Managing the trouble that you've stayed with. I mean, I think it's something like – there's something about becoming alert to the trouble. And then needing to manage it somehow. A friend's child came home from school recently. And she's nine. She said to her mom: "Did you know that 100% of the world's rivers have

4. Franzen, J. (2021). *What if we stopped pretending*? London: 4th Estate (an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers).

plastic in them?" I was shocked. But then listening to her describing how she processed that with him: there was the trouble that he brought home for the family to stay with; and then there was her management of that. There were no easy answers as to how to continue that conversation or contain it.

Chris: Processing. I wish we could find a better word for processing.

Brigitta: It sounds like processed food.

Nick: For me, it's sort of navigating. It's trying to find a course through what you feel.

Chris: Navigating is helpful. I think 'holding' is my preferred word, because it's got the feminine aspect of the womb as a container. I like a sense of being held. Sometimes nature can be holding for me, sometimes other people can be – maybe even Zoom conversations.

Holding difference

Brigitta: It just reminds me of the Climate Café on Saturday that I was leading with another CPA colleague, and we had participants from across the globe as far as Canada and America. What repeatedly came up for this group of men was that we can't talk about our feelings. This troubling time is due to other people's intolerance. Spaces like this, a Climate Café, can offer the relief that people can talk about their anxious feelings. One man broke down in tears as he talked about driving into a wild female mammal, who was carrying a young inside. He was so devastated by it.

Yasmin: Just makes me think that in order for that kind of sensitivity and tenderness to show itself, a relational holding is needed. And how much the question of belonging is a part of relating. If I'm coming to a space and I want to talk about my relationship with the other-than-human world or my fears for the planet, or my grief for the pollution or my terror about the heating, then I need first to feel safe enough within that human group to reach that to be able to articulate that.

This means also staying with the trouble of difference between us. Staying with the: "Is this a safe place to talk about racism?" "Is this a safe place in which to talk about differences in terms of sex or other differences?" And that kind of monitor inside a person for what's okay to talk about here. And how's it okay to feel grief at the difficulty that people from minority groups have to overcome before they can even get to a place where they can start to talk about their love and grief for the world. I experienced some of that myself for sure. I couldn't say even which was more painful for me or which was more tender; the pain I feel for the planet or the pain I feel for the parts of me that don't feel they belong in a group – specifically in a predominantly white group of middle-aged male academics.

Brigitta: I really welcome that you are talking about this. It's not you that has to do the work. We white people have to do the work.

Yasmin: For me, I'm coming to appreciate more and more this moment right here, where, what I feel is sort of a mixture of fear and shame in the field, and maybe grief, but it's between us, rather than kind of sitting inside any one of us. And to me, it feels impossible to have a meaningful conversation, a truly meaningful conversation about my relationship with anything else out there, until this is in the room and in the conversation. And I feel in CPA, we've been beginning to bring this dimension into the building of the container.

Chris: And maybe it arrived at just the right moment. Because, in a way, you did bring it in earlier Brigitta, but it didn't have the same quality. You were talking about slavery. It didn't have quite the same poignancy. And maybe these conversations have to percolate around until they reach a sort of rich moment of possibility.

Yasmin: Viv also brought it in really articulately in her descriptions.

Brigitta: I actually I feel it so much. And I bring it in because I feel it so much. A person of mixed race or a person of colour is really coming from a very different experience than mine, having grown up in a Swiss family that was racist. It wasn't even aware that it weas racist, but they were. And even then I felt this is wrong – possibly why I emigrated to a country that has so much to answer for. I feel really uncomfortable living in Britain.

Photo by Toby Chown: 'Barbed'

Grappling meaningfully

Yasmin: I kind of feel like if each of us were to really speak from exactly where we say we are, and where we stand. My experience is that when I do that, I disturb the peace. And I imagine each of us would. And I think that one person's peace or one group's peace is often achieved at the expense of another person or group. And so I don't really strive for peace. I strive to grapple meaningfully. I know if there are moments of peace, I'm grateful for that. But it's not the end. I'm a little bit suspicious if there's too much peace for too long – about who we're missing out here.

Brigitta: It's just when it gets so heated, that it's attacking each other. That's where I am challenged. I've been part of race conversations in the training where I teach. When it's around race, it isn't peaceful. That's not to say that we cannot strive for alliance.

Chris: Maybe it's also about practice with hot conversations. Yes, for groups, but also in relationships. I've done a lot of work with couples who have fiery intense conversations and expect therapists to cool it down. But I've found that to allow it, we came through troubles. I think it's really possible to have hot conversations, but I agree there has to be some holding to allow the risk. The fear of the heat may be worse than the heat.

Yasmin: Whatever's coming out that's so uncomfortable is being held by somebody in the group anyway and they're sitting there with all that discomfort, so at least it's being shared.

Chris: In closing, I wonder if we've got any reflections on our own conversation?

Nick: I'm reminded of a video with Roger Hallam saying: "Nobody knows what to do next."[14] Maybe you can work out an individual path for staying with the trouble. But collectively, what do we do now? And I feel that from being in this discussion. There's this sense that I haven't clarified anything in my mind. I think I'm still in that inner space of trying to stay with the trouble and work my way through it.

Brigitta: But there's tremendous value in being with the trouble. And now with each other and what's happening outside.

Yasmin: I take away the two dreams that were shared, and various descriptions that felt quite dreamlike – like yours Nick, on coming away not knowing what to do. I'm glad we talked.

Chris: I love the silences we had in this group. Unusual to have silences like this – pregnant, receptive, fertile silence. Perhaps possible, because of staying with each other.

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14. Hallam, R. (2021). *Nobody knows what to do next*. Available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOt1ob0VJb0&ab_channel=RogerHallam

Portrait of a ‘domestic extremist’

By Helen Moore

“Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine” – Henry David Thoreau

Dirty hippies, say the tabloids, pitching up unbidden
with our pallet kitchens, compost toilets,
caravans & tents – *layabouts & scum blighting the town*.

True our camp is decidedly ‘rainbow’
with prayer flags & banners: ***FRACK FREE ZONE!***
ARCTIC ICE IS GOING… STOP DRILLING!

Eye-catching pictures is one form of counter-defence –
o look, four hands glued to the gates!
(*And we’re live streaming!*) … Now for our next trick:

an old fire truck’s blocked the site entrance – *it won’t start,*
Officer, & has five Earth Protectors ‘D-locked’ on.
Such actions slow the fracking show & let us occupy the road,

chalking hearts & slogans with local kids & mums.
Sorry for the inconvenience, we’re trying to defend our home!
Sometimes it’s barely dawn when word arrives to *Mobilise*!

Scrambling from tents along the verge
we place unwashed arms round each other’s waists, shoulders,
go at snail’s pace with our backs to a phalanx of cops –

a black & neon-yellow swarm, which heralds dinosaur-scale trucks
bringing bits of rig – legbones of T-Rex;
& by Xtreme Transporter, the huge, nefarious drill.

Peaceful protest is our mode, but if we hold business up too long,
we’re dispensed sleight of foot to satisfy some quota….
(*Sarge, how many more to nick off site?*)

This is how it rolls – testing skills till Lilias decides she’s going solo
& backwards. With the next cortege of juggernauts,
patrol boots march up to her ten bare toes on the tarmac,

while we’re an avenue of trees, mycorrhizae trembling,
& this eco-warrior glints like sun-infused clouds…
her swaying silver mane on slim shoulders in a pink sundress,

while her feet half-step, half-step, half-step.
Doubtless someone has the footage, & I’ve got it hard-wired
in my mind. Not that we need to lionise people –

we trust we’re all cells in Earth’s immune system,
rising as & when we can
to take this crazy show off the road.

(Just that in Lilias I glimpsed how I
hope to grow older…)

Helen Moore is an award-winning British ecopoet, essayist, short fiction writer, community artist and nature educator, currently based in Bristol, SW England. Find her at: https://www.helenmoorepoet.com

Making trouble
Carbon capture and storage

By Jonathan Marshall

"Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places. In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe… [but] staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present…"[1]

Solutions and troubles

'Staying with the trouble' is particularly important when we consider solutions to problems or neuroses (social as well as individual), as it is easily possible our proposed solutions may not work, or may even make matters worse. Perhaps most solutions generate future problems. When this happens, we may need to modify those solutions, abandon them, and hopefully learn from them. However, it is often easier to repress awareness of the troubles, especially if the solution is all we apparently have to keep going, or is really a defence mechanism against realising we need to commit to systemic change.

Let's take some examples of troubles with energy transition.

1. We cannot replace or reduce fossil fuels by renewables, at this moment, without using fossil fuel energy to make the renewables, as extra energy does not come out of nowhere. While this course of action may be necessary, we need to stay with the unease, or fossil fuels could become locked in, or even intensified in the long term, resulting in increased greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

2. When renewables are installed in neoliberal capitalist economies, or through State imposition, it can lead to dispossession, displacement, inequity and harm. This trouble needs to be observed, no matter how uncomfortable, and fixed – perhaps by encouraging bottom-up community energy transitions, which might be less controllable, but more equitable and acceptable to local people, and less harmful.

3. The world is still making less new renewable energy than new fossil fuel energy. Much energy is not used to produce electricity, so the list of things we might have to use energy to electrify, in order to power them by renewables, is huge – and again might increase emissions, hopefully temporarily.

4. Carbon capture and storage (CCS) through technology is a possible, and often demanded, solution to carbon emissions from fossil fuels, but it is an old technology that has never worked at the needed levels, and has little chance of working at those levels. It seems to function as a way of avoiding the troubles of lowering fossil fuel emissions, while also persuading people that fossil fuel companies are working on emissions reduction. CCS should be distinguished from reforestation or other 'natural' forms of drawdown, although these also have problems. Technological versions of CCS seem emphasised by fossil fuel companies and governments.

This essay argues that technological CCS is more of a social defence mechanism, or way of avoiding the trouble, than it is a solution. CCS illustrates the ways that individuals and governments attempt to avoid problems. All human technology involves psychology, and technology's problems can teach us about overall individual and collective problems. As Carl Jung writes:

> *We should not try to 'get rid' of a neurosis, but rather to experience what it means, what it has to teach, what its purpose is. We should even learn to be thankful for it, otherwise we pass it by and miss the opportunity of getting to know ourselves as we really are.*[2]

Technology and psychology

Human technology arises in social milieus. It can be used to enforce or disrupt power relations, often with unintended consequences. For example, technology can be designed to show people their place as a worker under surveillance, or as a person doing surveillance. Rather than the internet becoming a new public sphere of calm discussion, as hoped for, it became a place where people shout at and abuse each other, and separate into mutually uncomprehending worlds. Technology also conditions life and consciousness as it changes the ecology or system that it is situated within. Imagine the difference between people working the fields and those working with noisy, unresponsive factory machines that allow no pause for human rhythms or exhaustion.

1. Haraway, D.J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

2. Jung, C.G. (1964). *Collected works of C.G. Jung, Volume 10: civilization in transition*. Princeton University Press.

Technology can also function as a model for understanding the world. The clock offers a model for the Newtonian cosmos, computers now act as models for the human mind or even for physics. These technological metaphors can condition people's worldviews consciously and unconsciously. The clock metaphor could persuade people to think that the universe was fundamentally dead, or that it could be manipulated with controllable consequences. Fossil fuels can be used to convince people that energy is free, cheap and inexhaustible. As technology can be implicated in forms of social power, powerful groups can enforce its application, or use it to gain and reinforce their dominance. Imagined technology can be used to persuade people of the way things should be, or will be, as was common in the space age and in the nuclear technology imagined in the '50s and '60s – or when computers were supposedly going to free everyone for a life of leisure. Imagined, as well as real, technology can shape awareness of reality and our place within it.

Fantasy is important to life, as we cannot see the future or predict the future completely accurately. Anticipations of the future can never predict exactly what will happen in all ways. Weather, economic and sports forecasting is difficult, and rarely completely accurate. We now understand that this arises from the nature of the 'complex systems' in which we live. Trends can perhaps be predicted, but predicting specific events is difficult, especially when the predictions themselves can change people's behaviour. Because of this normal complexity, we have to imagine the future. Imagining is essential and helpful, but it is never constrained by reality. Anticipations become involved in dominance struggles about what the future should be like, how technology should be used, what various people might have to sacrifice to get there, and what the unintended consequences of our actions might be (assuming that unintended consequences are considered at all).

When we talk about technological transitions, we are engaged in fantasy. This conjoins with a tendency for people in Western societies to behave as if technology were magical. This encourages us to think that because we can do one thing, or one device can be said to resemble another, then we will soon be able to do something else, which may be difficult or impossible. For instance, because we can travel to the Moon, we might believe we could soon have a Moon base and colonise the solar system. Or we might think that computers resemble minds, so we could soon download minds into computers and gain immortality. We might believe we can capture CO_2 emissions from coal, therefore we will soon have emissions-free coal burning everywhere.

However, even if these things were possible, it does not mean that they will be made quickly or cheaply enough to save us, or even that they will be used to solve the problem.

Carbon capture

The need

There are many international policy statements expressing the need for CCS technology to tackle rising GHGs. Fatih Birol, the head of the International Energy Agency, wrote:

> *one of the key technology areas for putting energy systems around the world on a sustainable trajectory will be carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS)….*
>
> *CCUS is the only group of technologies that contributes both to reducing emissions in key sectors directly and to removing CO_2 to balance emissions that cannot be avoided. This is a critical part of reaching 'net' zero targets…*
>
> *Without it, our energy and climate goals will become virtually impossible to reach.*[3]

'CCUS' further expresses the hope that we can not only store CO_2 but we can utilise it, making the cost of extracting it more economic. However, extracted CO_2 is often used for 'enhanced oil recovery'; that is, for pushing more oil out of old wells to be burnt, therefore increasing emissions further. CO_2 utilisation is not always beneficial.

As I have already argued, desire and need does not mean that something is always possible or likely. This report itself admits:

> *The story of CCUS has largely been one of unmet expectations: its potential to mitigate climate change has been recognised for decades, but deployment has been slow and so has had only a limited impact on global CO2 emissions. This slow progress is a major concern.*[4]

Need and hope do not make reality.

The reality

According to the latest report by the IEA (International Energy Agency) on CCUS and the energy industry,there is only one "commercial power plant equipped with CCUS […] in operation" after the US-based Petra Nova coal-fired plant stopped storing carbon in May 2020.

> *Based on projects currently in early and advanced deployment, the potential capture capacity of all CCUS deployment in power is projected to reach [about] 60 $MtCO_2$ in 2030 – well short of the 430 $MtCO_2$ per year in the net zero emissions by 2050 scenario.*[5]

3. IEA. (2020). *Special report on carbon capture utilisation and storage: CCUS in clean energy transitions*, p.2. Paris: IEA. Available [online] at: https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/181b48b4-323f-454d-96fb-0bb1889d96a9/CCUS_in_clean_energy_transitions.pdf

4. *Ibid*, p.18.

5. IEA. (2021a). *CCUS in power*. Paris: IEA. Available [online] at: https://www.iea.org/reports/ccus-in-power

Even this reduced goal assumes that all the difficulties with CCS which have stopped previous projects will not disrupt newer projects. Yet the reality is that CCS has been used since 1972. It is an established technology, with little likelihood of further rapid improvement.

In 2021, the IEA also argued that:

> *Net zero means huge declines in the use of coal, oil and gas.... Beyond projects already committed as of 2021, there are no new oil and gas fields approved for development in our pathway, and no new coal mines or mine extensions are required.*[6]

In short, there shouldn't be any new sources of emissions, and CCS projects that enable increasing emissions are not effective or useful. For instance, one of the biggest CCS projects in the world, the Gorgon project in Western Australia (involving both Chevron and Shell), only stores the CO_2 found in the gas it mines. This CO_2 would normally be burnt as it interferes with the transit of cooled gas within the plant set up. At Gorgon, even this storage is difficult (despite the care taken in choosing the site). It has been running late, and is miniscule compared to the CO_2 produced through burning the gas it produces.[7] Shell's CCS projects, which amounted to about five million tonnes of CO_2 stored per year, are tiny in comparison with their total emissions, which amount to about 656 million tonnes per year.[8]

The total estimated current global storage of 40 million tonnes of CO_2 each year,[9] – assuming that all works are as advertised – is a small and almost pointless fraction of the total 35-6 billion tonnes of socially generated CO_2 emissions per year.[10]

Furthermore, doing CCS uses energy, and is therefore likely to increase costs as well as increase the emissions needing to be stored. As a cost likely to reduce profits, CCS is not a commercial priority unless a large carbon price is imposed, with all the many problems of measuring carbon emissions.

Function

Once we accept that CCS has not, and probably will not, have a significant effect in reducing emissions, then we must stay with its troubles, and "experience what it means, what it has to teach, what its purpose is [and] know what we [and our society] truly are".[11]

Having trust in the rhetoric of CCS, may mean that 'we' accept more GHG emissions on the grounds that they can be stored now or in an imagined future. For example, Andrew McConville the Chief Executive of the Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association wrote:

> *Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) is already well established as a safe, large scale, permanent abatement solution.... Accelerating the roll-out of CCS projects could assist in reducing emissions from the energy, industrial and power generation sectors.*[12]

and

> *Australia needs low-cost carbon abatement to maintain its position as a leading energy exporter and ensure international competitiveness in a cleaner energy future.*[13]

In other words, fantasies about CCS can function as political reasons for fossil fuel producers to produce more emissions and retain sales and profits.

Defence mechanism

Another way of phrasing this is that fantasies about the success, or potential success, of CCS act as a defence mechanism which allows people who accept it to pretend they are acting on climate change, without having to act. Indeed, its effectiveness as a defence mechanism might depend on CCS not being installed, as installing it might increase awareness of the problems and costs. Hence, perhaps, the refusal of the coal industry in Australia to bother with CCS installations, despite the amount of taxpayers'

6. IEA. (2021b). *Net zero by 2050: a roadmap for the global energy sector.* Paris: IEA, Paris. Available [online] at: https://www.iea.org/reports/net-zero-by-2050

7. Marshall, J.P. (2022). A social exploration of the West Australian Gorgon gas, carbon capture and storage project. *Clean Technologies, 4*, pp.67-90. Available [online] at: https://doi.org/10.3390/cleantechnol4010006

8. Butler, C. (2020). *Carbon capture and storage is about reputation, not economics: supermajors saving face more than reducing emissions.* Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis. Available [online] at: https://ieefa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CCS-Is-About-Reputation-Not-Economics_July-2020.pdf

9. IEA .(2021c). *About CCUS: April 2021*. Paris: IEA. Available [online] at: https://www.iea.org/reports/about-ccus

10. Our World in Data. (2022). *CO2 and greenhouse gas emissions*. Oxford: Our World in Data. Available [online] at: https://ourworldindata.org/co2-emissions

11. Jung, C.J., *op. cit.*

12. APPEA. (2020). *APPEA welcomes Labor's CO2 storage commitment.* Canberra: APEA. Blog, 24 June 2020, available [online] at: https://www.appea.com.au/all_news/appea-welcomes-labors-co2-storage-commitment

13. APPEA. (2021). *Good move to unlock carbon capture and storage*. Canberra: APEA. Media release, 29 June 2021, available [online] at: https://www.appea.com.au/all_news/media-release-good-move-to-unlock-carbon-capture-and-storage

money made available by Australian governments for this purpose. Indeed, in Australia, some of this research money was spent on advertising the benefits of coal.[14] Perhaps to be truly effective CCS has to stay a fantasy.

Defence mechanisms are usually seen as ways of nullifying perceptions or events which cause anxiety, or which diminish a socially valued view of one's group's way of living.[15/16] They can involve eager acceptance of fantasies which preserve important aspects of a person's self-image, group belonging, or way of life. They may also separate conflicting emotions or contradictory ideas into separate contexts; someone may worry about climate change, but consider all their air travel, or mail order consumerism, totally necessary.

Defence mechanisms are ambiguous, in that they may be both necessary and dangerous: "People who lack […a] defence mechanism are vulnerable to threats, and people who overuse it are vulnerable to its destructive side effects."[17] People may need defence mechanisms to continue to survive in threatened states, but the modes of survival, and the order they create can unintentionally increase the threats.

Recognising the climate crisis challenges many socially valued modes of self-actualisation, group behaviour and organisation, which are derived from normal orders of life and energy use in Western society. Even when people reject notions of climate change, they face conflict with others who do, and this conflict challenges their normal order of life. Jaques[18] suggests that when a source of anxiety resists conscious control, as is the case with climate change, then defence of a shared worldview, or mode of living, may become a primary element of social life. It is hard for many people to stay with the problems and the discouraging paradoxes of the energy transition, and the possible collapse of 'progress' and valued ways of living. This can lead to both recognition and exaggeration of fossil fuel's importance for a way of life, and an acceptance of fantasies allowing us to keep burning fossil fuels and even increase their use.

Staying with the troubles of CCS tells us much about how socially based wish-fulfilment can obstruct the painful recognition that reality will not always bend to fantasy or our wishes, and that our primary obligation is to change our lives and social organisation to be able to lower GHG emissions from their current levels, not increase them – not because this may multiply the pleasures of life in a predictable way, but because it is necessary for survival and our children's survival. Increased emissions are harmful and nature does not accept fantasy trade-offs that lead to increases. Of course, in lowering emissions, we may find that we don't need more consumer goods, fulltime employment, and constant travel to be content. But with this knowledge can come a painful questioning of the meaningfulness of the lives we had previously been living.

Conclusion

CCS appears to be a largely fantasy technology which is being used to direct people's consciousness away from the problems of increasing fossil fuel use and increasing GHG emissions. It probably works as fantasy because of people's reluctance to risk changing their lives, their sources of energy, their sources of profit, and their willingness to hope for an easy solution that allows life to stay the same, when that is in fact the danger. CCS may also seem plausible because modern societies so often bury waste and pollution, or export it elsewhere, hiding it, while continuing to pollute. Both the problem and the solution feel familiar. To counter these destructive fantasies, we need to stir up the trouble to make that trouble even more visible, so we can be truly present to it – no matter how depressing it seems. From this encounter with reality, we can try to forge a new path, bearing in mind what we have learnt from staying with the trouble.

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14. Browne, B., and Swan, T. (2017). *Money for nothing*. The Australia Institute. Available at: https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/P357-Money-for-nothing_0.pdf

15. Baumeister, R.F., Dale, K., and Sommer, K.L. (1998). Freudian defense mechanisms and empirical findings in modern social psychology: reaction formation, projection, displacement, undoing, isolation, sublimation, and denial. *Journal of Personality 66(6)*, 1081–1124, p.1082.

16. Jaques, E. (1974). Social systems as a defence against persecutory and depressive anxiety. In: Gibbard, G.S., Hartmann, J.J., Mann, R.D. (Eds.), *Analysis of groups*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

17. Baumeister et al., *op. cit.*, p.1114.

18. Jaques, E., *op. cit.*

Village building at the end of the world by Chris Wilson

Reviewed by Els van Ooijen

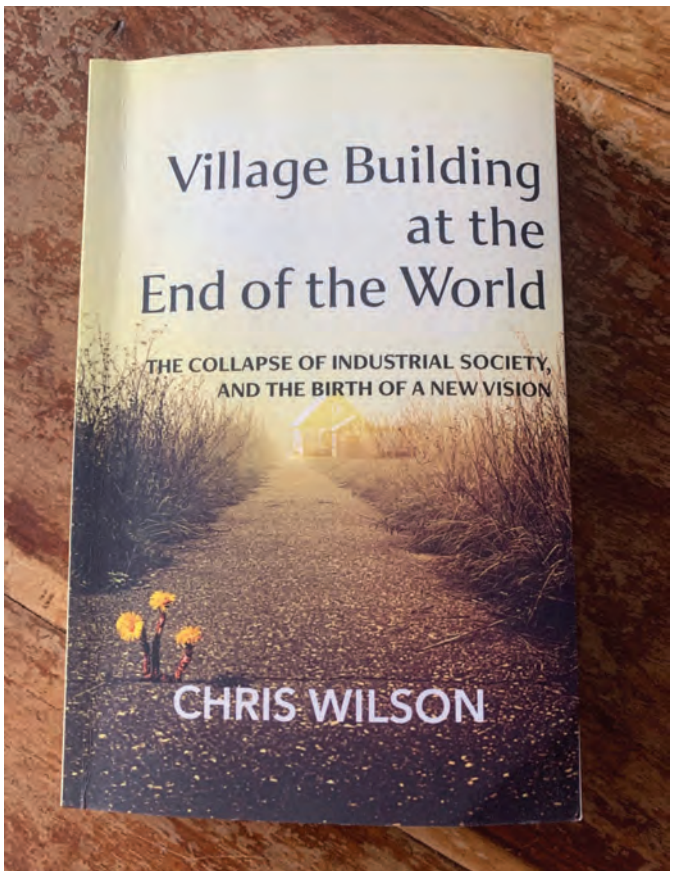
The introduction to Chris Wilson's book[1] states: "We're in a gigantic mess. Our civilisation is collapsing, and we're dragging the whole Earth down with us. How do we make sense of such an awful situation?"

From the start, Wilson sees climate breakdown as a symptom of a sick culture with a life-threatening condition. He argues that our "ultra-sophisticated" lifestyle has grown into a "monstrous life-destroying machine". He uses the word 'machine' rather than 'cancer', as it is the mechanical and unhuman nature of our current socio-economic system that he sees as the problem. Although we created this system ourselves, we now seem unable to control it – indeed, it now controls us. Within the machine, everything is based on the 'market', which leaves zero space for caring for each other, let alone the earth and its creatures.

First intended as a series of blog posts, the book is written in a refreshingly direct and often humorous style. It developed a life of its own when Wilson went to live with Lizzie, his mother-in-law, suffering from dementia. While he was there, her mental deterioration resulted in increasingly bizarre behaviour that struck him as similar to the madness in the world. The story of Lizzie's ongoing dementia offers a metaphor to link together the chapters of the book, in which Wilson looks at our sick world through a wide range of lenses to understand where we went wrong. Dementia is a scary condition in which sufferers sense their mind slipping away, without being able to do anything about it, so everything becomes incomprehensible and frightening. Lizzie responded by trying to exert control over what she thought was going on, without regard for anyone else's needs. We act in a similar blind fury of selfishness, not caring who or what we destroy: like Lizzie, we have indeed gone mad.

Wilson describes his experience of living off-grid in the Yorkshire Dales, where people had to cooperate and help each other in order to survive. He says that people have no real sense of what it feels like to be at one with nature until they actually live this way. He talks about the importance of having a 'sit spot' in a wood, to just sit and become aware of the subtle energy field that every tree makes around itself, and how all the trees combine into the wood's one great energy field. This continuous immersion helped him realise that the earth is one, big, living entity and not a random conglomeration of different things.

In another chapter, he investigates the historical, cultural and psycho-spiritual roots of our culture's terminal condition. One of those is the "so-called Enlightenment" in which we increasingly replaced our eternal and spiritual values with a mechanistic view of



life. Supported by Christian doctrine, we came to see ourselves as separate from the world, and controlling and dominating nature as our task. This meant that we no longer saw the intrinsic spiritual nature of ourselves and everything around us, which many people now see as a mistake. In this book, the author writes about the very personal loss and grief felt when, for example, trees are chopped down to make space for roads and telephone poles, or when natural areas are bulldozed to build housing estates.

Like others, he concludes that our infatuation with progress has resulted in many unintended consequences. He refers to Iain McGilchrist's book, *The master and his emissary,*[2] which states that our culture's obsession with (left brain) rationality means that the 'servant' has usurped the 'master'. However, the servant is not up to the job: it lacks care, humility or wisdom and does not understand its own limitations. Wilson argues that consequently the servant sees the earth, or Gaia, as feminine and passive and needing to be controlled, and has created a Frankensteinian monster that is out of control. The solution would be to kill the monster, but it has so integrated itself into all aspects of our lives that we are afraid to do so. Our terminal condition, Wilson argues, is a spiritual sickness, a sickness of the soul, demonstrated by our suicidal war on nature: the relentlessness of our destruction of rainforests, and the people that live there and protect them, is an

1. Wilson, C. (2022). *Village building at the end of the world: the collapse of industrial society, and the birth of a new vision.* Settle, N. Yorkshire: 2QT (Publishing) Ltd.

2. McGilchrist, I. (2009). *The master and his emissary: The divided brain and the making of the western world.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

attack not just on the earth, our mother, but also on ourselves. It is Thanatos, the death instinct in action.

Meanwhile, Wilson points out, Gaia's patience may have come to an end and we may soon (if we do not already) feel her wrath. Like Lizzie, we too know that things are out of control, but don't know what to do about it, so we switch off and focus on our obsessions, such as Brexit or immigration. Like Lizzie, we no longer know who we are and are unable to create a meaningful and coherent narrative about ourselves and our world. We cling to the myth of progress, as we want to believe that everything will get better and that we will find answers in technology. At the same time, we ignore the costs of our actions that until recently were largely born by non-Western countries. It is only now, when we in the West are also beginning to be affected by unforeseen consequences that we begin to be afraid. This is causing an existential crisis – as indicated by increasing levels of anxiety and depression, particularly among young people.

Einstein said that we cannot solve a problem with the kind of thinking that created it, so it is our thinking that needs to change. Wilson argues that the very assumptions on which our entire culture is currently based need to be questioned. Rather than flee into denial or dissociation from what is happening, we need to stay with the trouble. He writes: "We are being invited into a very different future, more caring, more inclusive, more intimate and heart based." We owe it to the generations that come after us. How could they ever forgive us if we fail!

He states, "there is a new world waiting to be born". In other words, change is possible, but only if we work together, help each other, stay with what is happening and reconnect with the feminine and spiritual values and care for all as part of the earth.

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For the redwoods, with love

By Jenni Silverstein

My seven-year old and I join a group of volunteers carrying buckets of redwood saplings across a hillside. Red flags denote planting sites along the marshy edges of the creek. We dig in mud so saturated that water rushes to fill the holes before we can fit the baby trees inside. We name each one, say a blessing for its health and growth, and tamp it down into the soft wet ground.

The organisers of this planting have deliberately chosen the dampest ground around for the saplings. It has rained more than any of us could have hoped all month, but the upcoming forecast is bleak. Their intention is for the groundwater to sustain these babies as they root, even if the drought reasserts itself with the vengeance we all fear. The organisers have mapped out a strategy to truck in water all summer long, if needed, to keep these young ones alive. The last time they planted here, two years ago, only 15% of the saplings survived.

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I fell in love with redwoods at first sight, awestricken by their grandeur. I arrived in Humboldt County, California, having lived 20 years beneath the towering buildings of New York City. As a child, I would wander the manicured city parks, imagining the time when trees, not skyscrapers, dominated the landscape. Here was a reality even better than my fantasy. A world defined by trees that soared up to 30 stories in the air. Beneath the redwoods, I felt tiny and insignificant, yet inextricably part of a grand and ancient wholeness. The soft quiet of the forest floor was the antithesis of city cacophony, and a balm for my nature-starved soul.

Redwoods have been alive on this planet for 240 million years. Entering a healthy old-growth forest feels like stepping back into the pleistocene; even the sword ferns tower above our heads, and it is easy to picture the dinosaurs that once lived among them. Imagine what these trees have witnessed! We are like gnats circling their base, moving fast and furious, disappearing as soon as we arrive. Getting to know redwoods requires slowing our sense of time. If you slow down enough you can hear them whispering. They are offering. Standing solid, rooted and strong, they will teach to anyone willing to listen about how to ground, how to hold space, how to be.

Redwood forests teem with lifeforce energy. It is easy to see how they could survive for so long in this ever-changing world. Fallen logs are home to whole ecosystems of mushrooms, mosses, ferns, huckleberry and azalea. Though we cannot see it from the ground, the canopy tops are equally vibrant nurseries for hundreds of different species. Individual redwoods, with their thick fuzzy bark, are resistant to insects, disease, and fires. Burned trunks become tree caves, homes for tiny creatures and playgrounds for small humans, while the thriving treetops grow onwards, hundreds of feet above.

Redwoods are role models for interdependence and connection. Though they release thousands of seeds each year, they mostly reproduce by sprouting from their mother's roots. As the old one passes on, baby redwoods are nurtured by the established root system, maturing in groups fondly known as fairy rings. Botanists are just beginning to grasp how all trees coexist in relationships we cannot see, through chemical signals in roots and mycelium. But the subterranean relationships of redwoods are well known. These behemoths have surprisingly shallow roots that cannot hold up their height without help from their sisters. Beneath the ground they intertwine into a stable whole. Surrounded by their family, individual redwoods can live for thousands of years.

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It took California's colonisers less than 150 years to demolish 95% of ancient redwood forests. I arrived in Humboldt County in time to witness the desperate struggles to save what remained. The story that unfolded in Humboldt in the 1990s was a familiar American tragedy; a parable for our times. Pacific Lumber Company had once logged somewhat sustainably, providing the primary source of income for the area and nurturing generations of loyal employees. The company endured a hostile takeover by Maxxam, a Texas-based corporation with one mission: to recoup the losses of their purchase by selling off the 'assets' they had acquired. They clear cut the land at a furious pace, while efforts to stop them crawled slowly through the courts. The community was torn apart: Maxxam convinced their employees that their neighbours, in seeking to save the trees, were out to destroy their jobs.

My brief forays amongst the forest defenders were my first encounters with people who knew what it meant to relate to trees. People who experienced trees as sentient beings worth laying their lives on the line to save; not just for their beauty or habitat creation, or even the oxygen they gave. Simply because Redwoods should continue to be. Some spent years living in the canopy to protect a single tree from falling prey to the beasts of greed. Someone died. Others were maimed, and hunted by corporate and government forces.

By the time I settled to live on the North Coast, the timber wars had ended. Most of the remaining old growth had been protected. Very little old growth remained. Having clear cut their way out of business, the lumber companies declared bankruptcy and abandoned the loggers to their decimated land. The parable ended with definitive proof that the economy vs. environment dichotomy is, of course, a false one: we can't have a thriving economy without a viable habitat to sustain it.

My encounters with the forest defenders had given validation to the sentience I perceived in the trees. In the subsequent years, I developed a deep and powerful meditative relationship with the redwoods nearest my home. One particular tree had the perfect ledge for sitting. It was a second growth that sprouted, as redwoods so often do, from the stump of its felled mama. A short climb up and I could rest with my back against the bark, my whole body held in the base of this great being. When I wanted to feel grounded, the tree guided me. When I wanted to expand to the heights of spirit, the tree carried me upwards. When I needed to grieve, the tree held me. When I wanted to experience my love and gratitude for the great bounty of being alive, the tree exchanged our shared breath in a blissful reciprocity.

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A decade later, my relationship with redwoods had become such a resource for me, it felt imperative to share it with my daughter. It took me years to unlearn a lifetime of indoctrination into a culture that denies the sentience of non-human beings, and to grant myself permission to trust the connection I felt unfolding. My daughter had no such burden. Children arrive with an innate capacity for intimacy with every manifestation of the lifeforce. We, the colonised, call this imagination. We indulge it when they are very little and whittle it out of them as they age. All I had to do, instead, was step back and let her relationship unfold naturally. I have always spoken frankly and genuinely to her of my connection with redwoods, so she accepts it as a given. It is a form of spiritual teaching.

My daughter climbs trees every chance she gets. As she balances and explores, she talks to them, tells them stories and sings to them. I try to commit her songs to memory, for each one is a breath of magic, passing through on the wind.

She is my great Great Great Grandmama Tree
She always looks out for me
She is so tall, her branches are so wide
I know I feel her calm, even an hour away by car ride
She knows when life is hard
She knows when life is fun
She is my Great Great Grandmama Tree
When I am in her, nothing can happen to me

When my daughter feels overwhelmed by emotions that she cannot contain, she goes outside and hugs the nearest tree. During distance learning, we would take her homework into the nooks of trees and complete it together. When school reopened, and the social scene on the playground was too much for her, she would spend recess sitting under a tree. Her connection flows freely and easily, and in that she is my teacher. This is how it could be for all of us; how it is, I suspect, for many raised with indigenous ways. Trees – our dear friends, loving mentors, and indulgent ancestors – stand patiently all around us, waiting for us to be still long enough to notice. I am so grateful I have found a way to help her see.

And yet, I often wonder, have I done right in nurturing her capacity to love redwoods as deeply, purely and completely as she now does? Or, have I set her up for a lifetime of grief as profound and enormous as her love, as she witnesses the suffering her dear relations are sure to endure?

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On the dampest of cold summer days in Humboldt County, I would reassure myself, as I sat amongst the redwoods, that this dreary gray mist was a necessity of life. If you love redwoods, you must love fog. The trees thrive in it, and they create it. Redwoods can actually condense moisture from the air into fog that cools the forest, and they can condense the fog into drops of rain that dampen the forest floor. But with the exception of the far northern

reaches of their territory, the remaining old growth is too sporadic, the groves too small, the second growth too young, to do the work of maintaining a habitat. Climate change in the redwood forests began 150 years ago, when we started dissecting them into mere shreds of their former selves.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, where I now live, the atmosphere has long felt too warm and dry to fully sustain our redwoods. The fluorescent green groundcover, towering ferns and dripping needles of the north country are replaced here by dry brown duff, spotted with knee-high ferns and trails lined with forbidding patches of poison oak. I've come to love these forests too, in their fragility and resiliency. But I was unprepared for the rate of change that I have seen over the last few years.

Each summer seems longer and hotter than the last; the minimal winter rains are not enough to help the forest recover. Baby redwoods sprout with an urgent abundance at the base of stressed mama trees, only to dry into brown husks by summer's end. Last summer, along roadsides and suburban lawns, I watched dozens of decade-old redwoods succumb to the heat. And, even within the protected forests, the elder trees are showing signs of suffering: dust-covered branches droop towards the ground, sacrificing their outermost needles even as they force forth new growth.

I often feel alone in my attention to this unfolding destruction. Few of the people walking in the redwood parks seem to notice the illness intensifying around them. But my daughter does. Climbing amidst a small local grove one early summer day, she called down from the tree above me: "Mom, redwoods can withstand fire. Can they also withstand heat and drought?"

"No honey," I replied, "redwoods need dampness".

I could not think of anything more to say to her in that moment, so she went about playing while I meditated on inadequacy, overcome by numbness. I commanded myself to look closely, to give these much-loved beings the honour they deserved by witnessing them. But the exercise felt forced. I could not bring myself to try my favourite pastime of exchanging loving breaths with them. And my tears would not come.

We have not been back to that grove since. In fact, I avoided all redwood forests for the duration of the summer, not daring to return until the rains fell.

Redwoods, in their millennia occupying our coast, have surely experienced their share of severe weather events. But it is hard to imagine that they ever withstood such an intensely inhospitable climate as they now endure every summer. Recently, I have been studying how trees migrate to new climates over time. Redwoods certainly have done so, during their 240 million years of existence. But mounting evidence suggests most tree species cannot migrate rapidly enough to withstand human-induced climate change. Especially as the large animals charged with dispersing their seeds also sustain an unprecedented loss in numbers.

My thoughts turn frequently these days to the forest defenders I admired so much in the '90s. All that work, all that dedication and commitment and sacrifice – and it seems that they may have saved the remaining redwoods for only a few short decades. A blip in the redwood lifetime. A gift for the final generations of humans to live among them.

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It took a visit to nearby Mendocino County to remember that my daughter and I are not alone in our loving awareness. And to discover that the story of the forest defenders is not over yet.

Nestled in rugged Anderson Valley, Jackson Demonstration Forest is neither private nor fully protected. The small patches of remaining old growth are preserved. But most of the forest is newer growth that has spent the better part of the past century under a unique designation: a place to study 'sustainable logging practices'. The state reports that they've been harvesting 27% of the growth in Jackson each year. This level of logging, they argue, maintains viability in the grove, while creating a study site for restorative forest management and fire resilience techniques.

In many ways the state has done well with Jackson. Swaths of land that were once clear cut have been restored into a healthy second growth ecosystem. Though the Mendocino coast is not far from my home, the ocean air keeps it considerably cooler and wetter. Even as the drought dries up wells in nearby towns, enough rain and fog remains at Jackson to keep it much more robust than its neighbours to the south. During our visit, we were delighted by the abundance of banana slugs and mushrooms, and the vibrant green of healthy trees.

A few years ago, state forest management marked one out of every 10 of the biggest trees for logging, including second-growth behemoths that are over 200 years old, and over 200 feet tall. Locals took to the forest in protest. Some of their methods are

throwbacks to the forest defender days of old – they spent months sitting on platforms high in the canopy of the two largest trees. Others are distinct to this moment – the youth-led Coalition to Save Jackson is working closely with the Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians. The Tribe is declaring sovereignty over sacred ancestral lands, and actively negotiating with state government while members protest on the ground.

Also unique to this moment – the demands of the protestors are rooted in climate activism. These trees, they argue, must remain in the ground sequestering carbon. Second-growth redwoods are renowned carbon capturers, and any management that involves removing them can no longer be considered sustainable. And for once, many in power – from the local state legislator to the Natural Resources Secretary – agree. They have not yet placed a moratorium on logging, but they have repeatedly extended the pause for negotiations. And the activists will not let up until negotiations go our way.

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Is it even reasonable to plant baby redwoods in the southern reaches of their territory anymore? When I ask this of the organisers of our recent redwood planting. They are dismissive. As long as the trees can survive the first few years and become established, they argue, they should do fine. I do not debate them. I am grateful for their efforts in creating the opportunity, and their commitment to carry water to nurture these babies. And despite the despair that dances perpetually at the edges of my mind, I am thrilled to be there with them, midwifing redwood saplings. As with any birth, their planting symbolises hope and regeneration. I will carry that hope within me as the ground begins to dry.

Meanwhile, my daughter finishes a planting and runs to climb a nearby tree. I feel blessed for each moment she spends among them. I pray that the communion I have nurtured between her and the redwoods will sustain her. May it instill within her the desire to take action for all living beings. May she be inspired and buoyed by collective action on their behalf. Next time I take her to volunteer for the redwoods, it will be with the Coalition to Save Jackson.

Jenni Silverstein is a climate-aware therapist and licensed clinical social worker, with over 20 years' experience in supporting young children and their parents, and pregnant and postpartum women. She lives in Sonoma County California and works with clients outdoors as much as possible. Find Jenni at: https://www.jennisilverstein.com

Young people and the climate emergency

Caroline Hickman in conversation with Paul Hoggett

Introduction

CPA member Caroline Hickman has been closely involved in working with young people in relation to the climate emergency, through her roles as researcher, activist, therapist and consultant. Most recently, she initiated a major piece of international research funded by Avaaz, which surveyed young peoples' experiences and attitudes towards the climate emergency. The first output from the research, 'Climate anxiety in children and young people, and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey', was published in *The Lancet Planetary Health* in December 2021.[1] Here, Caroline is engaged in some reflections on this experience with CPA co-founder Paul Hoggett.

Paul: I wonder if we could begin this conversation by focusing on your recent research. I'm interested in knowing how the idea for it emerged.

Caroline: It's a great story. In January 2021, I got two emails which arrived independently of each other. One was from Avaaz saying there was this big Portuguese court case in which a group of young people were suing 33 European governments. Avaaz mentioned that it was possible to supply additional information to the court (permission to intervene as a third party) and could they talk to me about it.

The second message was from GLAN, the Global Legal Action Network, saying they were the legal team working with the group of young people and could they talk to me about that. So, I met with both of these teams separately and what they were both looking for was to explore how eco-anxiety could be framed in a way that could be used legally. GLAN wanted an expert witness report on the Portuguese children, which would involve meeting with them to get under the surface to see what eco-anxiety does to young people. The case was going to the European Court of Human Rights, and they wanted to see if they could mount an argument that failure to act on climate change was equivalent to torture. So, this attracted me because it was not just about a clinical perspective but also a human rights one.

Though Avaaz were not granted permission to intervene as a third party in the case (supplying research data, case studies and other evidence on the impact of eco-anxiety from quantitative research), by that stage we were having weekly Zoom calls and they were very enthused about the arguments. They could see that this wasn't just about distress, but a failure of human rights and child protection. Governments were failing in their duty of care and this was a global injustice.

Avaaz said to me: "What's missing? What do you need to get people to pay attention to this?" I said we need numbers. I said that my research was qualitative, I had interviewed children around the world and this had helped me formulate that eco-anxiety had very little to do with environmental problems and a hell of a lot to do with adults' failure to take action; something which was tantamount to a break in attachment, to betrayal and abandonment, a relational fracturing of trust. They decided to go ahead and fund the poll through which we collected the data for *The Lancet* paper. Despite not being able to submit this evidence to the court, they believed that the research was needed and wanted to support us in completing this work. The hope was that by publishing the results, we could reference this in reports for GLAN.

My background was originally in child protection and mental health social work, so I was strongly embedded in a social justice perspective, and I was also teaching attachment theory at the University of Bath. The point is that I kept hearing from children in my research the same narrative as I had been hearing from traumatised children, often in care. It's the same hurt. The dominant narrative out there, which really frustrates me, says the cure for eco-anxiety is eco-activism, but if it was that bad government would do something; meanwhile, go back to school. Simultaneously, you've got all these attacks on young climate strikers, which were abusive as far as I was concerned and what I was hearing from children was despair, that adults didn't get it. I was very open to them hurling that pain and anger at me but I kept framing it through an adult lens. We've got mature defences to survive in a world that doesn't always care. We've lived through disappointments, learnt to live with pain (or suppress it). We often also have wonderful memories to go alongside the despair… and many children don't have them. Most of their life is lived in front of them about who they are going to be and what they are going to do, but their dreams are being dismantled when it comes to climate change. They don't dare dream those futures – where am I going to live,

1. Hickman, C., Marks, E., Pihkala, P., Clayton, S., Lewandowski, R.E., Mayall, E.E., Wray, B., Mellor, C., and van Susteren, L. (2021). Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey. *The Lancet: Planetary Health, Vol. 5, no. 12, December 2021*, e863.

who am I going to fall in love with? And the loss of those dreams is excruciatingly painful. We're failing to understand the depths of pain that they're encountering.

Paul: This came through strongly in *The Lancet* research paper – that you've got these two, what you call 'stressors'; one was the ecological destruction, but the second was the experience of betrayal by 'grown ups'

Caroline: By anyone over the age of 26, I would say as shorthand, who has known what's going on; collectively that knowledge has been there. We've woken up at various stages in our adult lives. We have had the trauma and despair and the grief of waking up. A lot of children wake up at the age of five, six, seven now, and how do you process that when at the same time as you're being scared, you're being told not to be scared. That causes a different kind of pain, which I think can be framed as 'criminal'.

Paul: So, let me take you right back to where we began then, back to Avaaz.

Caroline: We formed a research team from a range of countries and backgrounds who were prepared to work for free. We worked our socks off, designing the online survey in March 2021, running a pilot study with 30 young people, including the group of young people in Portugal, getting their feedback about their experience of doing the survey, all with an aim to get results published before COP26 in November. Avaaz funded the poll, which was conducted by an independent polling company, but cost limited this to 10 countries; a mix from the global north and south, and 1,000 interviews per country. We worked throughout the summer and then we wondered, where would be the most challenging place to get it published? Well, *The Lancet* of course, so we tried. This is how the team worked by throwing itself at every obstacle. The peer review process of *The Lancet* wasn't as painful as I expected. Two reviews were very affirming. One was critical of the methodology, which was to be expected given how fast we'd worked – this was a two/three-year research project which we did in four months!

Paul: So, it sounds to me as if it was a piece of politics as much as research.

Caroline: Yes, it was a piece of political research. Avaaz offered to launch the findings for us. They knew it would have impact. Concurrent with this, I was meeting the young people in Portugal and writing the expert witness report, and the research was feeding into this.

Paul: What surprised you most about the results?

Caroline: Not that much. It tended to affirm what I knew from my qualitative research and clinical work with young people, but some of us lacked that face-to-face experience and so were more surprised and moved by the findings. I felt some validation and I hoped young people around the world might also feel 'heard' by these findings and this could be reparative and healing. Over half (56% worldwide) of the young respondents thought that humanity is doomed – 51% in the UK, compared to 73% in the Philippines, despite the fact that only a small per cent in UK reported being directly impacted by climate change, compared with over 70% in the Philippines and India. The Philippines figures made me sob. I was horrified. I was invited to present at a webinar with young people there in the Philippines in December, and I just said sorry, after every slide. It illustrated that global injustice, that cruelty, and the indifference.

But some of the similarities between countries far outweighed the differences, and this has come up in my qualitative research – children in India are echoing children in the UK, who are echoing children in the Maldives. That hurt, that what they are feeling is the same. It's not about gender or where you live, primarily it's about your age and about power. It's about "the grown-ups, doing this to us". The children in the UK, unlike the children in the Philippines, are not frightened of drowning in their beds at night, but psychologically their anxieties resonate far more with these other children than with adults in the UK.

Paul: I was surprised. I thought that if you were poor and lived in either the north or south, you'd be so preoccupied with everyday survival that you wouldn't have time to think about climate change. But the results for the Philippines, India and Nigeria showed that not to be the case. Did any gender differences show up? I ask this because my impression is that at the forefront of the environmental movement we find young women, so I expected young women to be more affected. And finally, there's class, and I wondered if it came up in the methodological criticisms. Those that participated had to have some access to online resources and there must be billions in the global south who have no access to such resources at all. I'm interested to hear your reflections.

Caroline: These questions are being explored in a second research paper we are writing. There are small but consistent gender differences; females showing greater concern, whereas males are more indifferent and optimistic and show greater faith in government. You've got those differences, but you've got those areas of similarity; particularly shared experiences of distress and betrayal. But I'm hypothesising that the object of the betrayal and anger varies. For UK children, it's their government and adults and oil companies, but for Filipino children there is no criticism of their parents, for whom they have great sympathy, and in some countries like Nigeria there's a cultural taboo about attributing blame to your parents. Finally, and this came up in my qualitative research, in some countries like Brazil young people are frightened to talk about climate change and the environment, because they've seen what happens to people that do speak out. The personal threat is very real.

I used to share more of your views about those already engaged in a struggle for survival because of poverty; but those young people in Portugal, they're not wealthy. Finally, the issue about access to the online world. We found that access was becoming increasingly similar, especially using mobile phones.

Paul: I was actually wondering about this, about the amount of time young people spend in the online world. Does the online world become a barrier to actual engagement with nature?

Caroline: Before the Avaaz research, in my *Journal of Social Work Practice* article,[2] I had been trying to distinguish between degrees of eco-anxiety. When young people experience mild eco-anxiety, then connection with nature is important. But as the eco-anxiety gets more severe, the opposite relation often occurs. Being with nature becomes unbearable, because all young people could see was what was being destroyed by the adult world. Some young people were telling me that they couldn't even go camping. In my clinical work, I've worked with young people who are at that point, the critical end: they're suicidal; they don't know how to cope with the world; they can't spend time in nature nor with their friends…. all the things that might soothe the distress. But as the therapy progresses, they can often begin to reconnect to these sources of relief. They can recognise their devastated feelings and begin to spend time in nature. It is as if they're saying, "This is breaking my heart *and* I can go back to it", so it's both/and. The simple 'go into nature' message can be unhelpful. When parents say, "It will do you good to go camping with your friends", this can indicate that their parents simply don't get their distress. Some 48% of the young people in our sample experienced being dismissed by parents/others when they tried to talk about climate change. This is a relational wounding. That's us adults not staying with their trouble.

I hoped our research would be an opportunity to say to young people of the world, we adults are listening. I was hoping they would feel validated. One of the key elements in being able to stay with the troubling feelings is being heard and listened to, but not through the adult lens – so we adults have to empathically and imaginally understand the experience of the 10-year-old. How can you, the adult, understand, when you have not grown up with this expectation of extinction about loved animals such as polar bears. Because that expectation is personal for the child. They have not learnt to numb themselves to tragedy and injustice. Children don't have the sharp differentiation between self and others that we adults have, and they often have a powerful identification with the non-human; a much more empathic connection to trees and dogs and bears than adults. It's like "me and the koala bears against the grown ups"; that's why in my qualitative research I get children to personify climate change as an animal.

When *The Lancet* paper came out I started getting letters from children all over the world. There was this moving letter from a young person in Germany, saying how the research made her feel she was not alone in her distress. I cited from this letter at the launch. She said, and I quote here, that it "makes me feel for the first time ever that I am not alone in the future, in my climate anxiety".

Paul: So, in terms of 'staying with the trouble', one of the key elements is being heard and listened to.

Caroline: Understood, not through the adult lens, but through the child's experience. We think we do this as therapists, but I think we still fall short. There was this 10-year-old who was shouting at me. He said: "You don't get it. You think you do, but you don't. You

grew up thinking polar bears would be there for ever. I'm growing up knowing they will go extinct." He was right. He was so cross with me. Animals and children are both innocent. There's a wounding of the naïve going on and a refusal or inability of us adults to bear that pain. It's us not staying with their trouble.

We hear about children seeing things too simplistically. People talk about Greta Thunberg in this light. Eloise Mayall, who is one of the researchers in our team, is a 23-year-old activist with the UK Youth Climate Council. She has spent years processing this stuff, but she rang me. She'd just been to the UN Climate Change Conference in Bonn and for the first time she had got into the central discussions. She had been face to face with politicians… and, on the phone, she was in despair. She said that even though she was in there with the power, the politicians didn't listen. She said: "They dismissed us with their long sentences."… So, it's that betrayal. If this was us, we might find a way to reconcile ourselves with this disappointment, so we were not howling, but Eloise couldn't, she was full of pain and rage and despair. She said it feels like a murderous betrayal and they do it so nicely... I've got to put this pain somewhere. We've got to stop asking young people to be reasonable.

Paul: To rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Caroline: In my clinical work, I've really noticed the extent to which climate distress is entering peoples' dreams. There's no respite. You're living throughout the day terrified and then you go to bed at night, and there's no respite, there's no escape, it's in your psyche. Children are dreaming of having to kill their much-loved pets because they can't feed them, or that their parents will murder them to save them from starving… This is children dreaming of the apocalypse.

The way to genuinely protect children is to tolerate their pain, listen to their pain... tell them the truth, admit that we're failing to deal with this, say sorry, then take action together. The adult instinct to protect children has been damaged; that is, to stay with them in the heat and say sorry. To give a parallel example, Jacinda Adern recently apologised to Pacific people for racist policing and punitive immigration practices conducted over many decades. She didn't defend herself, but said sorry. She owned it. It's like the reparative release of being understood. Like, in therapy, saying to someone: "I'm so sorry that this happened to you. This was wrong." – particularly to adults who've experienced childhood abuse.

Paul: You have a powerful perspective. I'm sure not all of the research team would have been in agreement with you. How did you manage this?

2. Hickman, C., (2020). We need to (find a way to) talk about… eco-anxiety. *Journal of Social Work Practice, Vol. 34, Issue 4, pp-411-424.*

Caroline: We all cared so much about what we were doing that this helped overcome differences. In taking the leadership role, I drove the children's narrative, almost acting as their advocate – sometimes having to say things like: "Let me tell you about what this child said to me yesterday." We did have to fight things out sometimes. Ultimately, the results spoke for themselves.

Where next? I think the focus must be on the impact of the moral injury. The kind of injury Eloise experienced in Bonn is where we need to go next in research, as well as taking the research findings into the area of professional practice. Just in the last few months, I have been to a school counsellors conference and presented at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. They really need to understand eco-anxiety and not simplify or pathologise it. And see that it can be very different for children.

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Reflections on *Weather*, by Jenny Offill

By Maggie Turp

Introduction

Many of us have noted a qualitative shift in defences against the reality of encroaching climate catastrophe. Where once the primary defence on display was denial ("Nothing different is happening. There have always been climate fluctuations."), the more prevalent defence now is disavowal ("Climate change is real, but it's not a crisis. We still have time. Technological solutions will be found."). Where denial was argumentative and antagonistic, disavowal involves quiet but determined acts of looking away. The energy and aggression tied up in the defence are only revealed when it is challenged – whether by other people or by the climate itself. As an example, during the recent UK heatwave, at a time when the meteorological office was advising people to stay indoors, Conservative MP, John Hayes, lashed out at those taking precautions as "heatwave snowflakes", "cowards" and "everything that is wrong with modern Britain".[1]

Psychoanalysis has long concerned itself with the question of defences, their function and the price we pay when they take over and run the show. In her book, *Sent before my time*,[2] psychoanalyst and moral philosopher, Margaret Cohen, offers an eloquent account of disavowal, as she reflects on her work as a psychotherapist in a neonatal intensive care unit. The NICU context is, of course, very different from that of the climate crisis. However, the two are linked by experiences of pain, fear, guilt and loss, and doubt with regard to survival. Cohen pays close attention to the defences that are activated by existential threat, reflecting on her own responses alongside those of others. She describes her efforts to observe a very premature baby, 'Ewan', who develops meningitis and starts fitting. "I observed for a few more minutes, then could not bear it any more. I looked around the unit, taking time off." Ewan's parents are told he will probably be blind, at which point his mother says that she "cannot bear to look at him". As everyone succumbs to the overwhelming urge to look away, Ewan is left to struggle alone in his pain and helplessness.

Cohen discusses how the effort not to look away, to try and imagine and articulate Ewan's experience, militates against our natural desire to protect ourselves from mental pain. It is easier by far to become busy and distract oneself with some other activity. And yet, to look away, to cease to bear witness is to lose integrity, to move into a "rubbery, indifferent or cruel state of mind where these things do not matter – they simply have no meaning".[3]

Sally Weintrobe takes the discussion into the political arena, offering examples of the ways in which neoliberal politics promulgate "cultures of uncare". On the one hand, neoliberalism models a shameless disregard for the needs of others. On the other, the system actively encourages us to harden our hearts and look after number one, turning away from the suffering of those less fortunate than ourselves.[5] Sally also references resilient "cultures of care" such as the culture of the UK National Health Service. Psychoanalyst Melanie Klein placed the conflict between creative and destructive parts of the self at the centre of her work.[5] There is ample evidence of destructiveness but it is not the whole story. The survival of cultures of care in the unpromising context of neoliberalism is evidence of the resilience of the lively, compassionate, life-oriented part of the self.

Weather, by Jenny Offill

Weather[6] is a novel narrated in the first person in a series of anecdotal passages by 'Lizzie', whose character is established by way of her interactions with customers at the university library where she works, with her husband Ben, her son Eli, and her troubled brother Henry. The 'weather' in question is not for the most part the literal kind – sunshine, wind and rain – but the weather of everyday life, of work and relationships. Lizzie emerges as tolerant, patient and compassionate. We get to know her as she lends an ear to the troubled and sometimes bizarre stories told by library users and responds with advice, often accompanied by a joke. We follow her as she lets people off library fines, pretending that there are none to be paid, or as she rescues a wasp with a glass. The library emerges as a small but important example of a culture of care.

The story develops when Lizzie begins to work for Sylvia, a climate and environmental campaigner who was previously her doctorate tutor. Sylvia produces a podcast, 'Hell and high water', and is much in demand as a conference speaker. The climate crisis becomes the book's dominant theme; explored by way of comments and questions emerging at conferences, Lizzie's silent reflections, and her conversations with her husband Ben, and Sylvia.

What does, and what does not, constitute moral behaviour is a strong theme threading through the book. A particularly powerful passage calls to mind Maggie Cohen's writing on the loss of integrity involved in looking away from damage and distress. It articulates the hope that we will at times of crisis find the courage to bear witness to suffering, that we will retain our humanity by resisting the urge to look away. It is addressed by Sylvia to a conference audience:

> *What it means to be a good person, a moral person, is calculated differently in times of crisis than in ordinary circumstances", she says. She pulls up a slide of people having a picnic by a lake…*

1. *The Independent*, 15 July 2021.

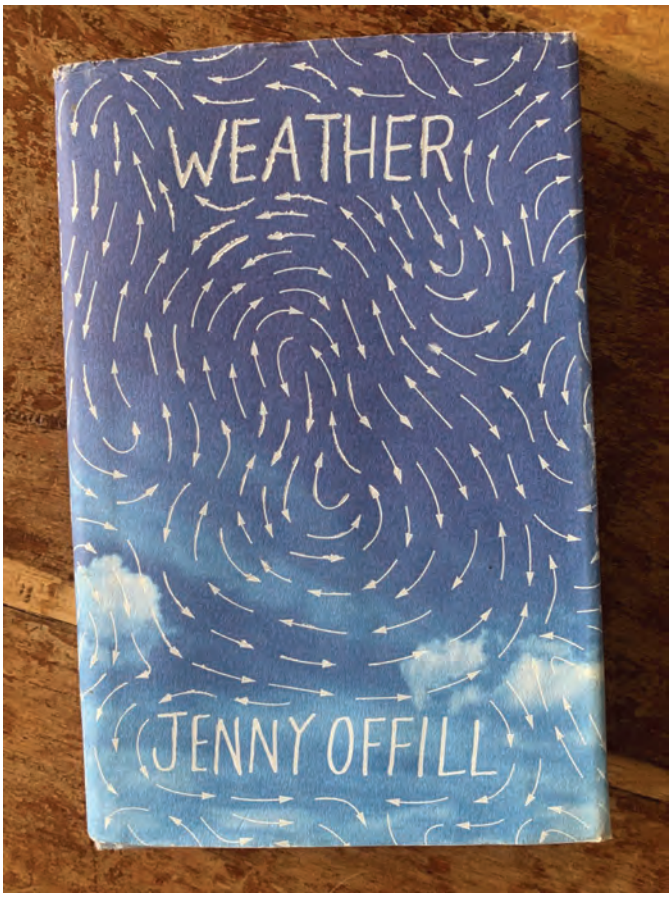
2. Cohen, M. (2003). *Sent before my time*. London: Karnac.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Weintrobe, S. (2021). *Psychological roots of the climate crisis: neoliberal exceptionalism and the culture of uncare*. London: Bloomsbury.

5. Klein, M. (1952). *Envy and gratitude*. London: Hogarth.

6. Offill, J. (2020). *Weather*. London: Granta Books.



> *Suppose you go with some friends to the park to have a picnic. This act is, of course, morally neutral, but if you witness a group of children drowning in a lake and you continue to eat and chat, you have become monstrous (p.21).*

Many of us who take to the streets to demonstrate with Extinction Rebellion do so primarily in the spirit of not becoming 'monstrous', of not standing quietly by while children – as in the recent floods in South Africa and the present floods in Pakistan – are already drowning.

There are many examples in both life and literature of humour – particularly black humour – helping people to survive dark and distressing situations, and yet humour is in notably short supply in most climate fiction. Weather is a welcome exception. We see how humour bonds Lizzie and Sylvia, and helps them retain their positive energy and humanity. Lizzie has a strong sense of the absurd and finds the things people say at conferences a rich source for ironic comments:

> *One thing I'll say about it: lots of people who are not Native Americans are talking about Native Americans (p.51).*

> *One thing that's becoming clear on our travels: people are really sick of being lectured to about the glaciers. "Listen, I've heard all about that", says this red-faced man. "But what's going to happen to the American weather?" (p.72-73).*

Sylvia turns to irony to help herself manage the stresses and strains associated with her role as a public figure commenting on the climate crisis:

> *"I have to call you back", Sylvia tells me. "I'm about to send off this article, but I have to come up with the obligatory note of hope." (p.67).*

This latter example calls to mind a time when I ran a support group for climate scientists at a leading London research institute. The group members spoke of the burden of knowing how bad things really are and at the same time having to inject a note of hope into their public messaging. Behind the strictures imposed upon these scientists, and indeed upon many of us, is the view that hope – the kind of hope that relates to things working out in the external world – is always a positive. According to this narrative, anxiety and dread push people in on themselves and into retreat. Hope on the other hand is an altogether good thing, associated with courage and positive action. In order not to spread despair, we are enjoined to keep the knowledge of the likelihood of collapse to ourselves. The enforced double-speak threatens to leave us feeling isolated and in bad faith. This, then, is the shadow side of hope, the tyranny of the message to remain positive at all times and the toll it takes upon our fragile hearts.

The election of Donald Trump halfway through *Weather* significantly darkens the mood.

> *"It's going to be too much", Sylvia said. "People who do this kind of work will break down, people will get sick and die." (p.115).*

Lizzie begins to fantasise about escaping from the ominous threats on the horizon. She talks to Ben about buying a gun, buying land somewhere cooler and developing survival skills. Sylvia responds with a stringent reality check.

> *"Do you really think you can protect them? In 2047?", Sylvia asks. I look at her. Because until this moment I did, I did somehow think this. She orders another drink. "Then become rich, very, very rich", she says in a tight voice (p.127).*

Disillusioned and yet unable to fully take Sylvia's words to heart, Lizzie becomes unsure of how to be or what to do: "*I distract myself by staying up late, googling prepper things*." (p.147). She takes a break from inner turmoil by watching mindless TV – including a so-called 'reality' show, 'Extreme couponing'. It is her self-deprecating brand of humour that signals a return to actual reality:

Then one day I have to run to catch a bus. I am so out of breath when I get there that I know in a flash all my preparations for the apocalypse are doomed. I will die early and ignobly (p.187).

Over time, Lizzie's brother's mental health worsens and his partner throws him out. He moves in with Lizzie and Ben, sleeping on their couch. Lizzie's tolerance of her brother's frailties, her refusal to judge, her loyalty and lightness of touch are among the elements of the book that express the beauty and poetry present in everyday life. Holding on to the thread of living, regardless of what the future holds, is shown to be inherently meaningful; a stance of hope of a particular kind.

As the book draws to an end, there is a sense of growing disarray. The narrative becomes more fragmented. The talk of prepping fizzles out. Lizzie and Ben focus on getting dental work done and their moles checked, as the only kind of preparation that comes to mind.

Reflections

Weather is a novel that has helped me to think about my own intermittent 'looking away' from the stark facts of climate and ecological crisis. I recognise the sense of mentally moving to and fro, now putting climate issues centre stage, now exiling them to a parking place somewhere on the periphery of my mind. This is not a comfortable place to be, but perhaps 'staying with the trouble' is only possible insofar as we are able to take breaks, to go somewhere else in our minds, away from the trouble.

I think about Sylvia's period of quasi-breakdown, when she turns off her phone and retreats to a quiet place to restore herself. It has, as she feared, become 'too much'. The busy round of conferences and campaigns that she and Lizzie have been involved in grinds to a halt. As she becomes more isolated, Lizzie's state of mind deteriorates. There is a sense of her falling apart, of lurching from one state of mind to another, unable to find a coherent narrative or course of action. During the Covid pandemic, opportunities for campaigning and meeting like-minded others were much curtailed. Much of the energy and sense of forward movement that had built within Extinction Rebellion seemed to dissipate.

Weather ends with a single line coda in the form of a website address – www.obligatorynoteofhope.com – The website material speaks to the psychological need for shared action, to the value of making common cause, not so much in the hope of turning things around as in the spirit of doing what is right for its own sake, and finding sustenance in the resolve of others.

> *Slowly, I began to see collective action as the antidote to my dithering and despair.*
>
> *There's a way in for everyone. Aren't you tired of all this fear and dread?*

Maggie Turp is a psychotherapist somewhere on an arc between psychoanalytic and narrative approaches. She is a member of the *Explorations* Editorial Team and is also working on a chapter for a forthcoming book, *Holding the hope*, which will be published by PCCS Books.

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