

“Our House is on Fire”ⁱ

Self and Nature in the Anthropocene - Denial and Care in relation to the Natural Environment and Climate Change.

The Victorian Faculty of Psychotherapy, RANZCP - David Ingamells Memorial Lecture 2019

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I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians over deep time of the land on which we meet today, the Wurundjeri people and pay my respects to Elders past and present and emerging.

Here we are close to the Yarra, the Birrarung in Woiwurrung. The Wurundjeri are a clan of the Woiwurrung tribe. The first time Woiwurrung language was spoken in the Victorian Parliament was at the beginning of the Yarra River protection act 2017 then translated-in edited form:

We, the Woi-wurrung, the First People, and the Birrarung, belong to this Country. This Country, and the Birrarung are part of us. The Birrarung is alive, has a heart, a spirit and is part of our Dreaming.....Since our beginning it has been known that we have an obligation to keep the Birrarung alive and healthy—for all generations to come.

David Ingamells loved The Yarra and he loved trees. One day he phoned Mary and told her- I've just bought a beautiful big gum tree..... and by the way there's a house that goes with it. This was in Kew near the Yarra. He fought for the natural and cultural heritage of the area. Two days before he died he gave a rousing speech to preserve the Abbotsford convent. He died cycling by the Yarra. Mary told me a story about David's dogs- shortly after David's death she was walking with them near Willsmere and they suddenly started running round in circles. This had never happened before. It was just above the spot where David died.

For David the natural environment was incredibly important. He had a particular connection with Lorne. His grave is in Lorne cemetery cradled by bush and sea. A most beautiful piece of granite with a seat beside it with the inscription designed by his brother Phil. A slide shows a traveller on the seat looking toward the Southern Ocean. His physical memorial is near the Great Ocean Road which itself is the longest memorial in the world- a memorial to all the servicemen who died in the 1st world war.

Introduction-Personal background

I was interested in psychotherapy from early adulthood and I was deeply influenced by the ideas of R.D. Laing as many young people and psychiatrists were including David. Laing was a celebrity in the counter culture of the 60s and 70s and called an anti-psychiatrist. His work is I believe still of immense value, particularly his early works. His first book *The Divided Self*ⁱⁱ was his masterwork. He looked at the lived experience of very ontologically insecure people and how they tried to preserve their fragile inner worlds. For me it was both frightening and

exciting. Laing emphasized the importance of bare attention to the other's experience in psychotherapy.

His 2nd book *Self and Others*ⁱⁱⁱ looks at the interpersonal environment, the effect of the other on the experience of the self and how 'others in speech and deed do destroy life'. He references Harold Searles, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst and his paper 'The effort to drive the other person crazy.' And also Gregory Bateson - who Laing describes as revolutionizing what we mean by environment- had a major influence on David. Bateson described the double bind situation where the victim is caught in a tangle of paradoxical injunctions or attributions.

I did a medical student elective living in a Laingian style house in London where disturbed people and helpers lived on an equal basis and no medication was used. It was very interesting but had serious limitations.

I later trained as a psychiatrist. I had got interested in ecopsychology and ecotherapy in the late 80's but trained in psychoanalytic psychotherapy instead.

David had a considerable influence on me. I got involved with the Section of Psychotherapy when he was Chair and there were all the Medicare issues in 1996-7. He was very willing to listen in general and for me personally it was very important as he created an environment where I was inspired to continue involvement with the Section. I would often give him a lift back to Kew after meetings so we got to know each other a bit.

Psychoanalysis and the planet

Psychoanalysis offers a deep listening to what has primarily been the human world. How can it help us to listen to our country and planet and help us deal with the planetary emergency of climate change? This is what the rest of my talk is about.

Psychoanalysis and the natural environment

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint perhaps the best place to start is with Freud and his own relationship to the natural environment. This is recounted by Janine Burke^{iv}. Freud was born in Freiberg now part of the Czech Republic. It is ringed by mountains which he could see from his bedroom window. He was apparently devastated when his family left when he was 3 and grieved for the rest of his life for his 'little paradise'. In 'Screen Memories' where Freud illustrates the significance of childhood recollections by drawing on his own he recalls the 'beautiful woods near our home, in which (as one of my memories from those days tell me) I used to run off from my father, almost before I had learned to walk'. Freud, when 75, wrote to Freiberg's mayor saying that deep within him remained the happy child from Freiberg' who 'received the first indelible impressions from this air, from this soil'. His first memory was of picking dandelions in a 'steeply sloping piece of meadowland green and thickly grown'." He always had fresh flowers in his study offering 'the illusion of splendour and glowing sunshine"-a quote from a letter to Fliess.

Freud loved walking in the mountains. Going to the mountains with his own children was 'the greatest fun' for Freud. On one of his trips, however, he was "sitting deep in

contemplation of the charm of the distant prospect”^{vi} at the top of a mountain when he was approached by a young woman.’ Are you a doctor, sir?’ She told him about her anxiety attacks and he promptly analyzed her difficulties in terms of sexual trauma. She became Katharina in *Studies in Hysteria* and Freud became the first therapist to see a patient in a wilderness setting!

It would appear that Freud never wrote systematically about the significance of the natural environment. In *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud states that “the ego is originally all-inclusive, but later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present sense of self is thus only a shrunken residue of a far more comprehensive indeed all-embracing feeling, which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world around it.” Perhaps he is alluding to his own experiences in the environment around Freiberg and may connect to what has subsequently been called the ecological self.

Freud was well aware of Man’s position in the animal world^{vii}. He “acquired a dominating position over his fellow creatures.--- not content with this supremacy, however, he began to place a gulf between his nature and theirs—he made claims to a divine descent which permitted him to annihilate the bond of community between him and the animal kingdom. It is noteworthy that this piece of arrogance is still as foreign to the child as it is to the savage or primitive man.” Freud had a very close relationship with his dogs – he was able to use their emotional response to patients. The dogs tended to get restless after almost 50 minutes. When Freud was dying and his cheekbone was gangrenous his devoted dog Lun kept away from him, which upset him terribly, and soon after he was euthanased by his physician^{viii}.

Freud’s way of thinking however reflected the anthropocentric thinking of the time- seeing humans as separate from and dominating the natural world. Psychoanalytic thinking has tended to minimize if not turn a blind eye to the psychological significance of the natural world.

One notable exception was Harold Searles, previously mentioned, with his book from 1960^{ix}, *The Nonhuman Environment in Normal Development and Schizophrenia* .

He believed that relatedness to the nonhuman environment is ‘one of the transcendently important facts of human living’ (p. 6) and that while for ‘hundreds of thousands of years men felt themselves in mutually interchangeable kinship with the rest of their environment’ (p. 7) this had changed.

In his book he discusses the importance of the non human environment from infancy to maturity.

Searles writes that ‘the nonhuman environment provides, in the life of the normal infant and child, a significant contribution to his emotional security, his sense of stability and continuity of experience, and his developing sense of personal identity’ (p. 78). ‘The child can use his nonhuman environment through finding it to be relatively simple and relatively stable, rather than overwhelmingly complex and ever shifting’ (p. 82) as the human environment may be.

It is my observation that for those with major attachment and trauma issues in particular that use of/attachment to the nonhuman environment is particularly important. A patient with significant relational trauma found much solace and support in trees as a child and still does.

Separation from the non human environment is very significant and particularly so in the indigenous relationship to country where removal from country is devastating.

Of contemporary analysts Christopher Bollas's ideas are of relevance^x – the evocative and transformational object- where the object be that natural or cultural has power in its own right. He writes ' I have found it rather surprising that in object relations theory very little thought is really given to the distinct structure of the object which is usually seen as a container of the individual's projections.'

Two years ago the Faculty conference was at Uluru. Uluru can be seen as an incredibly powerful object and many objects and places are accorded great spiritual power within Indigenous Australia. Nearly every feature of the rock has mythic meaning.

I had the good fortune to go to the rock with Ken an Aboriginal man. As we walked right up to the rock - he said you had to get close at sunrise or sunset to feel the energy- he spoke to the rock in language- he asked us if we felt anything at that moment. I felt a hot wind feeling on my lower body for a few seconds. Others had the same experience - ' it was the rock speaking ' Ken said!

Other perspectives on the psychological importance of the natural environment

A number of other ways of thinking about the natural environment-mind connection may be helpful in developing an ecopsychanalysis^{xi} (a psychoanalysis that incorporates the psychological significance of the natural environment). I would mention deep ecology, ecofeminism, ecopsychology and the beautiful and now elegiac works of some nature writers^{xii} and novelists^{xiii}. I will also mention the very relevant work of Gregory Bateson.

I have already mentioned him in relation to the double bind theory of schizophrenia. He was an anthropologist interested in complex systems. Writing shortly after Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring*, which exposed the problem of pesticides, he argued in his book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*^{xiv} that the environmental crisis was primarily a philosophical one. He believed that we suffered from a fallacy; that mind and nature operated independently of each other. He writes:

When you narrow down your epistemology and act on the premise 'what interests me is me or my organization or my species', you chop off consideration of other loops of the loop structure. You decide that you want to get rid of the byproducts of human life and that Lake Erie will be a good place to put them. You forget that the ecomental system called Lake Erie is a part of your wider ecomental system - and that if Lake Erie is driven insane, its insanity is incorporated in the larger system of your thought and experience (Bateson, 1973, p. 460).

It reminds me of our current waste and recycling crisis.

Bateson speaks of the philosophical history of the West and its dualism. This has led to a view of nature as subservient to man and to our current exploitation and destruction of the planet.

Bateson says 'When you separate mind from the structure in which it is immanent, such as human relationship, human society or the ecosystem you thereby embark I believe on fundamental error which in the end will surely hurt you.' This hurt is now happening and climate change is a major component of this as is the whole ecological disaster.

What is the climate reality?

Ok now it's time to get really serious and look at climate change reality. We are in climate change right now. We are in an emergency situation which is increasingly being recognized, in part as we see it or hear about evidence for it.

If you haven't seen it I would recommend the new David Attenborough film- Climate change the facts- it's frightening but essential viewing^{xv}.

The science is clear and if anything has underestimated the risks eg for the Great Barrier reef to be in such a critical state at this point was not predicted 10 years ago. In Australia there have been a number of weather events which bear the footprint of climate change- increasing frequency and severity of bushfires, a longer bushfire season; drought conditions and other extreme weather events. It's the same the world over- fires in the Arctic, loss of Arctic ice.

The threats and damage to the natural world has effects on humans beyond the immediate effect of weather events- of death and illness including mental illness, loss of home with migration- such as Pacific islands and the Ganges delta, food and water issues (a factor in the Murray Darling crisis) and more geopolitical tensions- climate change related drought is seen as a background factor in the Syrian conflict.

I think the current situation is well described when thinking about the Anthropocene- the idea of this is that we humans have created and entered a new geological epoch. The Holocene has been a very stable period- 10,000 years- in terms of temperature, which has allowed for the development of what we call human civilization but this has been rapidly changing since the industrial revolution but particularly since the end of the 2nd World War, what has been called the great acceleration. We have gone beyond altering ecosystems we are changing Earth systems- terrestrial, oceanic and atmospheric^{xvi}. We need to mourn for the loss of the Holocene- perhaps this memorial talk can also be a memorial for that loss. We have become masters of the planet but also defiant earth has put us back in our place. However barring a natural miracle it is only we humans who can prevent social and civilization collapse and human and nonhuman extinction.

Climate scientists amongst others are truly scared and depressed about the situation. Politicians fiddle while the Earth burns, and much of the media too. It remains an Inconvenient truth. As Clive Hamilton says 'The greatest tragedy is the absence of a sense of the tragedy.

What about the future?

Even if we stopped emitting greenhouse gases today the effects would continue and indeed grow. There will not be a new normal-well the new normal will be increasing climate disruption. The longer we wait the worse the situation will get. For those who focus on economics the cost of delaying action far outweighs the cost of taking action now.

Future scenarios

We are not often told about future scenarios- the official and much media view refers to what we need to do. We are manifestly not doing what needs to be done, nowhere more than in our own country. Emissions are still rising and we will have locked in 1.5 degrees in about 10 years if we don't take emergency action. Last year's IPCC report^{xvii} stressed the dangers of 1.5 degrees which anyway is not a good outcome- coral systems largely destroyed, multimetre sea level rise, Pacific nations disappearing for example. The IPCC said we have 12 years to limit catastrophe. However the IPCC and scientists tend to be conservative.

There are a number of other future scenarios, a highly credible one developed in Australia by David Spratt and Ian Dunlop^{xviii}, a former Chair of the Australian Coal Association. While people talk about 1.5 and 2 degrees on our current trajectory they write that we are heading to 3 degrees or more. Such a scenario would lead to some areas of the planet being uninhabitable and millions, perhaps a billion being displaced. Prof Hans Schellnhuber, climate scientist said if we continue down the present path 'There is a very big risk that we will just end our civilization. The human species will survive somehow but we will destroy almost everything we have built up over the last 2000 years.'

Jem Bendell^{xix}, an English academic, in a paper last year 'Deep Adaptation' goes further- he thinks social collapse is inevitable, catastrophe probable and human extinction possible. There is already evidence of social collapse- the conflicts in Syria and Yemen are connected to climate change related drought. Local collapse could occur in the drought affected areas in Australia which are running out of water. Climate change has been a significant factor in causing migration and asylum seeking. Our own social systems are polarizing as our civilization overreaches its ecological limits. It is no surprise that Trump and Bolsanaro have power. They thrive on denial and projection and a vicious circle of climate change, asylum seekers and right wing demagogues is very dangerous. And Trump is the ultimate manifestation of power over nature. He wanted to nuke a recent cyclone!

I wonder how you are feeling right now. A sense of despair, panic, grief....

Processing climate change emotionally

Ok let's look a bit further at how we process the situation. Because the situation is so frightening we tend to defend against it. If not we can become depressed or anxious. Clive Hamilton after writing the book 'Requiem for a Species'^{xx} ie us, about why we resist the truth about climate change became depressed for a year. I will talk further about the mental health aspects of climate change later.

For now I will talk about denial. Of course at times denial is largely conscious as in vested interests such as the fossil fuel lobby and its role in spreading doubt about climate change.

Denial can be seen through different psychoanalytic lenses. John Steiner^{xxi}, a British analyst used the Oedipus story to draw a distinction between disavowal- half knowing or turning a blind eye Oedipus rex, and a more omnipotent denial where there is blindness to the truth, Oedipus at Colonnus. A more omnipotent denial is seen in perpetrators of abuse and in climate change it often occurs in those who completely deny climate change.

More often climate change denial is turning a blind eye. This is similar to what Hanna Segal^{xxii}, in relation to the nuclear threat, described as a particular form of splitting- we could call it dissociation- in which we retain intellectual knowledge of the reality but divest it of emotional meaning. There are many other defence mechanisms at work- projection, rationalization.

However rather than enlarge on these further I want to move on to the work of Stanley Cohen who is aware of analytic approaches but offers a typology which I think is very relevant in his book States of Denial^{xxiii}.

He looks at the organization of denial (personal, cultural or official), the type of denial and the agent involved. He describes three types of denial: literal, interpretive and implicatory. Though Cohen's book is largely about atrocities it is relevant to apply the same typology to climate change denial. The agent involved may be victim, perpetrator or bystander. In cc we are all victims, perpetrators and bystanders.

In literal denial anthropogenic climate change per se is denied.

In interpretive denial it is accepted but minimized as suggested by George Marshall who in his book " Don't even think about it- why our brains are wired to ignore climate change"^{xxiv} looks at the ways we can keep climate change out of our minds. Most of us are in this position- we can deny in subtle ways.. For example it has been argued that our brains respond to 4 key types of risk- personal, abrupt, immoral and now- and climate change may not fit these. It can be seen as them, there, then, though this is now becoming less tenable. It has become more now and us.

In implicatory denial anthropogenic climate change is accepted but its 'psychological, political and moral' (Cohen, 2001, p. 8) implications are not. This is a very serious problem. There is a Confucian saying ' Those who know and don't act don't know'.

Such forms of denial are also cultural and official. Interpretive and implicatory denial are rife culturally and officially, though culturally it would appear there has been a shift. Climate scientists and IPCC tend to interpret data conservatively though recent reports have been less so. Politicians have denied the implications. It is only now that some agencies are declaring a climate emergency- recently the AMA. It is difficult for many people to accept the implications of climate reality when it does not occur officially and they experience other anxieties as closer to their lived experience. Some organizations offer strategic denial

believing if people know the reality they will be fearful, lose hope and not take action. Much of our media does not emphasize the catastrophic implications of climate change.

What are the moral and political implications of our house being on fire? Who is taking the right action- Individually and politically? What are the psychological implications- panic, fear, despair and grief. We will discuss this later.

Donna Orange, psychoanalyst, believes that climate change denial and denial of indigenous people are not just linked but in the US context that the denial of abuse of indigenous Americans is part of an ethical backdrop which makes it difficult to accept other realities brought about by our exploitative and greedy culture such as climate change^{xxv}. The same could be said of Australia.

There has also been denial of the incredible richness of traditional and modern Indigenous culture and the vital connection to and knowledge of the natural world going back at least 65000 years.

There are 2 ways of looking at the climate crisis. One is looking at the problem as a technical problem which we have to accept and which then has in theory material answers eg eliminate fossil fuels and become 100% renewable. On the other hand the problem may be viewed as part of a wider environmental and cultural crisis. Both perspectives are valid but a broader perspective which I take of looking at our dependence on nature requires us to look at our denial of that dependence , what I have called the Syndrome of Independence from Nature or the acronym SIN.

Why does climate change need to be denied?

A way of looking at this is to describe what emotional states, induced by climate change, need to be defended against. This is well outlined by Norgaard (2011)^{xxvi}, based on her interviews in a rural community in Norway. She argues that failure to respond to global warming is not due to lack of information or lack of concern for the world but rather, as one of her interviewees describes it, 'people want to protect themselves a bit'. She mentions a number of threats including fear of loss of ontological security, helplessness and guilt.

Ontological security, (the sense of continuity of self identity and the environment) is deeply threatened by climate change. Helplessness can arise from the sense that the problem is so large and can lead to feelings of despair. Guilt can occur from feeling that one's actions are causing the problem.

A psychodynamic approach goes beyond the descriptive approach to look at the underlying anxieties. A paper by Harold Searles from 1972^{xxvii}, *Unconscious processes in relation to the environmental crisis*, is prescient in this regard.

He states: 'Even beyond the threat of nuclear warfare, I think the ecological crisis is the greatest threat that mankind collectively has ever faced' (p. 361). His hypothesis is that: 'Man is hampered in his meeting of the environmental crisis by a severe and pervasive apathy which is based largely upon feelings and attitudes of which he is unconscious' (p. 361) and that 'the world's current state of ecological deterioration is such as to evoke in us

largely unconscious anxieties' (p. 363) which he relates to different Freudian and Kleinian developmental positions^{xxviii}. I won't enlarge on this here.

Sally Weintrobe^{xxix} (writing in the excellent book *Engaging with climate change- Psychoanalytic and interdisciplinary perspectives*) has adopted a helpful approach by dividing the self into the healthier reality based part of the self and the more narcissistic aspect. In that view the reality based side can be aware of the losses involved though may defend against them whereas the narcissistic side feels threatened because it fears the loss of what it feels entitled to.

Like it or not we completely rely on the natural world and climate change creates realistic anxieties about the loss of this. The Earth is no longer the stable 'bedrock' in the Anthropocene, no longer the mother who can be relied on. Weintrobe states 'we truly hate to fully register our dependence on nature and our attachment to it.' This is particularly the case in our anthropocentric neoliberal technological narcissistic society, what I have called SIN. If we are able to register the dependence it leads to grief and to guilt at damaging the Earth mother in a Kleinian view. This emotional depression connects with the despair that Joanna Macy discusses: 'Confronted with widespread suffering and threats of global disaster, responses of anguish-of fear, anger, grief and even guilt are normal' (Macy, 1995)^{xxx}. I will discuss this more later.

We depend on our leaders to engage with climate reality. However we know they are only taking limited action. As Weintrobe says: 'To feel this uncared for is deeply traumatic and can also lead to unbearable anxiety, born of a feeling of helplessness and aloneness in the face of survival threats.'

From a psychological aspect the SIN syndrome very much equates with an omnipotent narcissistic attitude. Such attitudes have many causes. In Winnicott's way of looking at the situation, the omnipotent baby gradually has to be disillusioned by the parents to accept the frustrating demands of reality. Sally Weintrobe puts this in another way "The biggest conflict we face in life is between the concerned part of us that loves reality and the more narcissistic vain part of us that hates reality when it thwarts our wishes or deflates our view of ourselves". The writer Naomi Klein has called this side "The inner Trump."^{xxxi}

Our capacity to depend on other humans and be concerned about them may generalize to the natural environment or not. There may be those who accept their dependence on humans but when it comes to the non-human world they are still omnipotent babies.

As Searles said, technological culture promotes identification with powerful machines and devices. Many people have limited connection with the natural world and also are very removed from their dependence on nature. eg water is seen as something out of a tap or increasingly a consumer product to be bought in a plastic bottle.

The narcissistic part of the self 'dreads giving up our sense of entitlement to whatever we want' which is inherent in many of our unsustainable consumer lifestyles. We may want to fly whenever and wherever we want to, but should we?

In many ways climate change denial may thus be seen as a defence against feelings of vulnerability and dependence. Accepting the reality of climate change means accepting dependence on the natural environment. This is a difficult thing to accept when we have had so much experience of power over nature and may not feel a close relationship with it. If we are able to accept this dependence we can become ecocentric rather than egocentric.

The mental health issues connected to climate change

Climate change impacts on people's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in a number of ways^{xxxii}. There is a significant risk of mental health problems following extreme weather events and there will be increased psychiatric morbidity as these events become more frequent and intense with climate change (e.g. increased risk of bushfires, drought, floods, extreme temperatures). Such morbidity includes posttraumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety, and substance use problems and of course suicide. Farming communities experiencing drought deserve particular mention

Additionally, climate change has an impact on people's mental health as they become aware of the threat of climate change now and increasingly dramatically in the future and as the impacts of climate change become more obvious and ubiquitous.

I have seen the reality of what have become labelled ecoanxiety and ecological grief. I have witnessed those who grieve over loss of land to drought and those who grieve over the loss of the Arctic ice. I have listened to those who fear rising sea levels and those who fear human extinction. I have seen those who are uncertain about having children and those more certain they do not want to bring children into the Anthropocene.

Ecological grief is defined in a recent Nature Climate Change article^{xxxiii} as "The grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species ecosystems, and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change." It will increase as we move deeper into the Anthropocene. At times it is an ongoing grief as the environment changes. It can often be a disenfranchised grief- a grief that isn't publicly or openly acknowledged.

The American Psychological Association produced a 2017 report^{xxxiv} detailing the impacts of climate change on mental health which made reference to ecoanxiety. The APA report describes it as a source of stress caused by "watching the slow and seemingly irrevocable impacts of climate change unfold, and worrying about the future for oneself, children, and later generations".

I think that if one does not feel fear about the situation there must be some level of denial.

The vital importance of Country to our indigenous nations make them particularly vulnerable to grief and fear and likewise all others directly impacted by climate change. This is also the case for others who are very concerned about their natural environments and/or the climate and environmental crisis.

Many children and young people are very concerned about climate change Not only are young people more likely to be prone to ecoanxiety and ecological grief but also to other climate change related mental health issues^{xxxv}.

How do we respond to ecoanxiety and grief? The most important thing is to acknowledge peoples' concerns. To offer reassurance for "needless" anxiety as our PM suggested only exacerbates suffering. The sufferer feels invalidated, angry and more anxious and helpless. The only needless anxiety has been caused by the government's failure to take serious action and leadership on climate change.

My own climate change journey

I was influenced like many by the 2006 Al Gore film *The Inconvenient Truth* and around the same time got interested in psychoanalytic aspects of the natural environment and climate change. Summer 2009 was scary- nature in Melbourne was dying and the horrific Black Saturday bushfires had a climate change stamp, though it was not admitted at the time. I got involved with Psychology for a Safe Climate at the time and gave a number of papers and helped with some workshops.

On Christmas day 2015 I watched on TV as a bushfire spread to Wye River, a small town just beyond Lorne on the Great Ocean Road. My interests and ideas suddenly collided with frightening reality because I owned a small property there. It was our spiritual home surrounded by nature - gum trees, koalas, parrots, whales and albatrosses. The TV images were shocking. On boxing day morning we received a brutal text. 'Sorry your house has gone'. We were in a state of shock and grief. On our return to Wye the blackened landscape was hard to recognize. Our house was completely destroyed apart from a statue of Venus. Fortunately no lives were lost.

After the fire there were many community meetings with the authorities - they were very helpful to allow expression of feeling and thoughts and catching up with others in the same situation. Rob Gordon, psychologist, came to a number of meetings. He helped by normalizing feelings and recommending people not make decisions while still in a state of trauma.

Retraumatization and ecological grief occurred when further trees were removed without adequate explanation or consultation.

Visiting Wye became a trauma rather than a relief, though it was good to be with others and sharing feelings of grief. It was good to see new life sprouting.

The fire bore the print of climate change but this was not acknowledged at the time. Culturally we like to feel as though we have power over nature. A bushfire shows that we cannot. We are vulnerable and dependent on the whims of nature. It is easy to romanticize nature in a place like Wye- a bushfire however shows the destructive side of nature.

Climate change is now more tangible than it was then. The Earth is teaching us the hard way that we are not separate from nature - but even now can we listen? It seems that now with the IPCC report, the evidence in front of our eyes and more visible signs of protest such as Greta Thunberg, the school strikes and extinction rebellion, are allowing more to wake to the reality.

Facing the Reality of Climate Change.

As individual citizens

Climate change is a reality that is very confronting for all of us emotionally. Feelings such as grief, fear, despair, guilt and helplessness may need to be acknowledged and discussed otherwise denial is more likely. Of course, it takes time for people to accept the climate reality- coming to terms with the feelings involved. To acknowledge such feelings it is important to have relationships where such things can be discussed. There is evidence that activism is good for mental health.

Of course individuals can only do a limited amount, though that is important e.g. air travel, what we eat and consume, our use of energy etc

People can take political action- even small things - in their workplace Collective action however is needed. There are many groups to support or join - Doctors for the Environment, Psychology for a Safe Climate, Climate for Change. You may want to be more active and join a local climate action group or Extinction Rebellion.

PSC^{xxxvi}

I have been involved with a group called PSC - Psychology for a safe climate for 9 years. We are a Melbourne based largely volunteer group working to foster engagement with climate change and supporting those who are engaged.

In the last few years our core focus has been on offering emotional support to those who are engaged with climate change - as scientists, researchers, policy makers, climate and environmental activists such as Environment Victoria, and the Australian Youth climate Coalition. We have had involvement with farmers- Farmers for Climate Action.

We have developed a series of workshops to create space for expression of the emotional impact of climate change and of their work in the area- often called grief workshops. We tend to use art/drawing as a way in to discussing feelings which are often about ecological grief or fear. The workshops always include a segment to foster more capacity for self-care and prevent burnout. The workshops are conducted for groups of 20-30 people, working in small groups, each led by one of our team of psychologists, psychiatrists or trained counsellors and last about 3 hrs.

It is very important that we as a group can work together and share feelings and try out workshop ideas ourselves.

I have just returned from a weekend workshop in Tathra, on the NSW coast north of Merimbula which suffered a bush fire about 18 months ago losing 70 houses. We offered a grief workshop which was about feelings about the fire and also for many about climate change. It was the first time that many had shared their feelings about the fire in a large group. We also used 2 models one called transformational resilience^{xxxvii} which offers mindful self care and using adversity as a way to find new purpose and personal and social wellbeing -and the other 'The Work that reconnects' by Joanna Macy^{xxxviii} - reconnecting us with ourselves and the Earth. And we saw many humpback whales on their way to Antarctica!

A linked approach is Deep Adaptation which calls not only for resilience but also for relinquishing, restoration and reconciliation. Such practices have their own merit but in the future may become essential.

Jem Bendell talks about these 4R's- Resilience- as mentioned above. As well as dealing with grief- ecological and personal- there will be a loss of the sense of progress. How do we plan our lives now? Relinquishing- we may need to relinquish certain expectations and certain types of consumption. We may need to relinquish where we can be or live- further from the coast or bushfire affected areas. Restoration. We may need to restore things that have been lost e.g. more community connection and activities. Reconciliation- to reconcile ourselves with ourselves, with death and with others. We need to memorialize- we need to keep in memory what is truly important- to not take for granted but keep the preciousness in life that we re-member.

In his chapter in the Extinction Rebellion handbook^{xxxix} 'Doom and Bloom' he says: 'I honestly cannot hope for a better future, so instead I'm hoping for a better present'. Which brings us to the question of ...

Hope

The climate situation evokes much despair. Despair is sometimes necessary. In abandoning hope that one way of life will continue, we open up a space for alternative hopes.' How can we find hope? False optimism is no good. Nietzsche said 'he who has a why to live can bear almost any how'. This is the basis of Joanna Macey's active hope/ finding purpose in transformational resilience.

Radical hope is another step again- it is imagining hope for the future. Chief Plenty Coups knew that the Crow Indian way of life would end but he had a vision for the future as described in Jonathan Lear's book Radical Hope^{xl}.

Perhaps we can relate to our patients- some patients have or can find some purpose. Others are so devastated in their lives they have no idea of a way forward and we have to carry this radical hope for them.

Talking of hope I wanted to briefly mention ...

Greta Thunberg who straddles the personal and political. She is a remarkable person. When she was about 8 she got very depressed part of which was ecoanxiety and grief. By going on school strike and getting immersed in the climate and ecological crisis her life has become meaningful. She influenced both her parents - her mother was an international opera singer but Greta persuaded her to stop flying and both parents to become vegan. She has been an incredible role model and her speeches have been both emotional yet highly rational.

Her recent UN speech ended: 'You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you. We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up. And change is coming, whether you like it or not.'

Political Action

Of course government action is needed but so far Climate change has been a massive failure of political imagination. Though the Paris agreement may have appeared to do that it only created a structure which many see as being far less than the emergency response required.

Unfortunately most of our leaders seem to have limited interest in good leadership. George Monbiot suggests that all those going into politics should receive psychotherapy! Unfortunately I suspect assessment would show that many of them would not be good candidates for psychotherapy or politics.

In Australia there continues to be Government denial. Our leaders could be seen psychiatrically as deluded and a danger to others and if so certifiable. At worst they can be seen as guilty of crimes against humanity and nature- homicide and ecocide- and indeed in the future they may be found to be. On a kinder note perhaps they are trapped in personal and political values that cannot deal with the new reality. What is the nature of Scott Morrison's denial?

True leadership needs to be able to contain the anxieties evoked and offer a vision for the future. Strong, realistic yet compassionate leadership as shown by Pope Francis in 'Laudato si' (his encyclical on climate change and inequality) can allow space for uncomfortable feelings yet also provide a sense of hope and moral direction in the face of uncertainty and insecurity. The pope invites us to 'dare to turn what is happening to the world into our personal suffering.'^{xii}

We need to be responding as if to a war. I wondered about a reworking of Churchill - 'We will fight for the oceans, we will fight for the air. We will defend our planet whatever the cost may be. We will fight for the beaches. We will never surrender'.

However as Greta says we need a new politics and a new economics. Ecology and economy come from Greek roots. Ecology means 'study of the house' and economy means 'managing the house'. Ecology logically should take precedence, particularly if our house is burning. As Greta said 'People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of economic growth. How dare you!'^{xiii}

It is also important not to see climate change as an isolated issue. It is very much linked to social justice such as poverty and indigenous issues.

It is vital to see climate change as very linked to ecological extinction or as George Monbiot calls it - 'extermination'.

It is understandable that there is now mass political action- the school strikes and now the rise of Extinction Rebellion.

Cultural shift

Our whole underlying Western philosophy with its dualistic core has led to particular ways of seeing the world^{xliii} - an underlying anthropocentrism and a view of nature that I have

called SIN. Our science, our politics and economics are infused with this. It has now reached its apotheosis in our narcissistic neoliberal society and Trump embodies this perfectly. I hope that SIN is eliminated from our thought patterns- I believe this is our only hope in the Anthropocene – for our leaders and the community. In fact I believe if we do not choose a more ecological civilization it will be forced on us by civilizational collapse. Such a need for a shift of fundamental values has been called the great turning/ transformation.

We need to listen deeply to Indigenous peoples from around the world. Practically they can help us to care for and protect our planet e.g. by using indigenous fire management knowledge. Indigenous Australians have needed to be very attuned to nature. Furthermore they have cultural memories of previous climatic changes and they have knowledge of the Australian environment of over 65000 years. Clive Hamilton states that ‘the absence of separation of the traditional Indigenous self from its natural world may hold a powerful message for how to live in the Anthropocene’.^{xliv}

What is our role as psychotherapists?

As psychotherapists in the consulting room we will I believe increasingly have to deal with issues to do with the natural environment/ climate change. It is already the case. We will have to look beyond the intrapsychic and interpersonal. As mentioned we will increasingly be faced with ecogrief and anxiety and concerns about bringing children into the world.

After 9/11 virtually all my patients talked about it- if they didn’t I wondered what was going on. The climate/ ecological emergency is a more serious but slowly evolving mental health emergency. It will enter more into clinical practice and in my experience it has done in the last year or 2 with increasing evidence that it is happening now, increasingly gloomy forecasts for the future and since the federal election.

It is important that we understand the reality to be able to validate others’ concerns. If we do not fully acknowledge the situation how can we fully empathize with our patients. I have heard too many stories of therapists not validating environmental concerns.

We need to be aware of our reactions and our patients depending on age and life situation. We older people have to separate out our feelings about ecological and personal extinction. For younger people the issue is and will become more pressing and for their children - good reason to care but also to deny particularly as there are so many other anxieties.

To what extent is it our moral duty as psychotherapists to be listening to the pain of the planet- the human and nonhuman world.

Our college needs to take action. We need to divest from fossil fuels, declare a climate emergency and /or a climate mental health emergency and take more care with our carbon emissions- of particular concern is conferences where there is air travel involved. These should be minimized and more use made of other ways of meeting.

The inner and outer worlds are fragile linked ecosystems. They both need more care. The aggressive forces of the amygdala can be abused by the PFC(prefrontal cortex) but the PFC

can tame the amygdala. Our precious prefrontal cortices and planet are both under threat. Care for the planet and each other requires all our love and understanding.

Towards a conclusion

Harold Searles said in 1972:

And this is not my concluding remark!

The environmental crisis embraces, and with rapidly increasing intensity, threatens our whole planet. If so staggering a problem is to be met, the efforts of scientists of all clearly relevant disciplines will surely be required. It seems to me that we psychoanalysts, with our interest in the unconscious processes which so powerfully influence man's behaviour, should provide our fellow men with some enlightenment in this common struggle (1972, p. 361).

Conclusion

Searles was prescient- psychoanalysts however did not provide much enlightenment until recently and tragically politicians have taken little notice of what scientists have said. Climate change is a worsening crisis and needs engagement from every discipline.

There needs to be an underlying change of consciousness in relation to the natural environment in general and climate change in particular. Within psychoanalysis there needs to be a shift to an ecopsychanalysis, made more urgent by climate change.

We all need to be aware of our relationship to nature and climate change. We need to listen to Indigenous Australia and to the Earth's messages about our climate. The syndrome of independence from nature is potentially fatal and needs to be treated urgently.

Political action is needed immediately as we are already in Climate Change. It truly is an emergency. Perhaps the greatest that homo sapiens has faced. I can really understand why people are beginning to take mass political action, such as the school strike and Extinction Rebellion.

End

I'll leave Freud with the last words. He wrote a beautiful paper On Transience in 1915^{xlv}. . He describes a conversation, probably with the poet Rilke- Rilke believed that the beauty of the world is diminished 'shorn of its worth' by transience whereas Freud believed the contrary—transience increases value but we have to be able to mourn to appreciate this.

A year after the conversation war broke out and' robbed the world of its beauties'. Freud wrote with some editing 'It destroyed not only the beauties of the countrysides through which it passed... it shattered our pride in the achievements of our civilization. It robbed us of very much that we had loved and showed us how ephemeral were many things that we had regarded as changeless. Mourning as we know, however painful it may be , comes to a spontaneous end. .. Then we are once more free to replace the lost objects by fresh ones equally or still more precious. It is to be hoped that the same will be true of the losses caused by this war. We shall build up again, and perhaps on firmer ground and more lastingly than before.'

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