Explorations in Climate Psychology Journal

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Heavy weather: Exploring reactionary states of mind

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Climate Psychology Alliance

Explorations in Climate Psychology Journal

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Heavy weather: exploring reactionary states of mind

By the Editorial Team

The societies we are living in feel more polarised than ever. As we publish this issue, Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado gifted her Nobel peace prize for greater democracy to US President Donald Trump.[1] In the same week, Trump threatened to deploy troops to the state of Minnesota in support of the violent tactics of his immigration officers[2] and a US takeover of Greenland.

Many working across climate science, communication, psychology, activism and other concerned citizens know we deeply need to address the climate and ecological crises and outgrow belief systems that focus on extraction and pollution; whilst populist leaders employ disinformation to incite climate denial and distrust of climate policy.

This Issue aims to shed a light on the reactionary mind and how we find ourselves at this juncture. Our exploration on the theme began with a fundraising event (October 2025) where **Suzi Moser**, **Chris Shaw** and **George Marshall** and members of our Editorial Team investigated the rise of the nationalist right in the West and what this means in the context of climate communication, class, diversity and alienation of each other. Ultimately our speakers agreed in the face of existential threat, such as the climate crisis, we can all shift to psychologically defensive modes and the failure to engage people independent of their political inclinations on climate has, in part, led us to the rise of nationalist and authoritarian governments.

The issue itself begins with a reflection from co-editor **Toby Chown** on the post-truth world. It asks the question: whose reactionary mind are we talking about when coming to this theme and how the reality of one group is no less real than those of others. He explores the hatred and polarisation we are bearing witness to for the postmodern left and how we can connect across difference to ideas that will turn people away from resentment towards more harmonious cultures.

Dr Sandra Lee writes about the failure of climate advocates to connect with psychological and emotional drivers of many citizens and how the story can be told so it is more inclusive to those across the political spectrum. She explores why populist psychology has been so successful recently and advocates for less virtue signalling and more values-based communication.

To understand the reactionary state of mind psychologically, **Pushpa Misra** and **Paul Hoggett** explore the rise of racism and ethnocentrism (forces that are intolerant of diversity) and take a deep dive into the unconscious processes of projection, introjection and group narcissism. They present how healthy developmental processes have become distorted and the need to evolve healthier psychological relationships towards belonging and care.

1. https://edition.cnn.com/2026/01/15/americas/venezuela-machado-trump-meeting-nobel-intl-hnk

2. https://edition.cnn.com/2026/01/18/us/ice-agent-shooting-video-minneapolis

Distraction, by Toby Chown

Our first interview is with **Glen Slater** exploring how reactionary and far-right psychology and the permeation of artificial intelligence have created societies in a state of information overload without the skill and wisdom to process this information into knowledge. He speaks to his optimism that by contrast, genuine and authentic forms of social and cultural transformation are possible to meet the pressing challenges of our time that can rise from less reactionary states of mind.

Aleksandra Wruk reflects on her personal journey of living in a reactionary state to one of embodied hope through somatic healing and eco-therapeutics. She explores the role of self and co-regulation in our ability to tend to difficulty and trauma and that, with practice, we can stay open in the presence of difference.

Rembrandt Zegers speaks with **Susan Long** on her latest book *The evolution of the unconscious* and how the reactionary state of mind is linked to our unconscious grounding and ethics, interrogating the question of choice and being open to curiosity and self-reflection.

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They explore the human as nature and how our culture has evolved into more tribalism (us vs. them) and rationalisation to the detriment of social cohesion.

Our second reflection is from **Matt Chapman** on his theory that inequality and coercive power are intrinsically unsustainable. He looks to nature in which entropy encourages self-regulation and argues that sustainability depends upon transitioning to egalitarian, self-regulating communities.

An important strand of *Explorations* has been the inclusion of works of imagination, including images, poetry and a 'Cli-Fi Corner' section dedicated to the presentation and discussion of climate and ecofiction. In this issue, *New genres for a new climate*, by **Asli Sonceley** tracks the shift from the original 'disaster genre' to works informed by 'near-future realism, defined not by spectacle or clear-cut resolution but by an uncanny proximity to our lived world.' **Maggie Turp's** review of the popular television series 'Families like Ours' follows on and is an example of one of the new genres identified by Sonceley, namely narratives of intimacy at the end of the world. Poems from **John Woods**, **Wieke Vink**, **Jeevan Bhagwat** and **Adrian Tait** add their own depth and insight to the issue and feature with images from all our contributors throughout the journal.

We close with a reflection from co-editor **Rachel Cakebread** on a social dreaming session she held with **Julian Manley** (November 2025) on the theme of this issue. We aimed to approach the theme from the realm of feeling, dreaming and flow; taking a non-linear process gave insights into the collective unconscious of the group. In dropping their defences, the group allowed in what is often difficult to bear individually.

Overall, we have found the reactionary mindset a complex and dynamic subject to investigate. The pieces may even elicit something reactionary in you as you read them. We do not present answers, but hope the exploration allows you to examine and reflect upon the living systems we are part of.

Thank you to all our contributors. We hope you enjoy this issue. We welcome feedback on the issue or your own reflections. If you feel you have something to contribute for our next issue, do write to us.

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The return of the regressed

Reaction, regression and reality in a post-truth world

Text and images by Toby Chown

"We're all looking from the point of view of our own reality tunnels. And when we begin to realize that we're all looking from the point of view of our own reality tunnels, we find that it is much easier to understand where other people are coming from. All the ones who don't have the same reality tunnel as us do not seem ignorant, or deliberately perverse, or lying, or hypnotised by some mad ideology, they just have a different reality tunnel. And every reality tunnel might tell us something interesting about our world, if we're willing to listen." Robert Anton Wilson[1]

Whose reactionary mind?

The English word "reactionary" originates from a moment when all negotiations had broken down. The French revolution opened an unbridgeable gulf between those for liberal democracy and those for the divine rights of Kings. Mark Lila[2] argues that reactionary psychology is defined by a fixation on an apparent golden age and a blinkered desire to return society to this age, no matter what. The reactionary reacts violently to the revolutionary. What is it in our current moment that sees such a rapid and virulent rise in reactionary states of mind?

The twentieth century saw the reactionary mind give birth to fascism, the spectre of which haunts twenty-first century politics so much that the word is now used as an insult, or a way to evoke the worst of Nazi horrors. Yet fascism has a history that originated in Italy, not Germany, and was named there. Fascism is hard to define as a coherent political theory. It's cult of a strong leader is unbound by the need to be coherent, because the leader's will is taken to embody the will and soul of a people, no matter how contradictory.

Fascism offers certainty about who is right and wrong, which is seen as more important that what is right or wrong. It offers a seductive transference of shame through the scapegoating of (and violence against) minorities.

Dunt and Lynskey,[3] write about the origins of fascism:

> *"At heart what fascism became was both a substitute religion and a conspiracy theory founded on an apocalyptic myth of a decisive battle between good and evil."*

As fascism operates more as a reactive psychological defence than a coherent political strategy it's very susceptible to being used as an insult to project authoritarianism onto others. To

differentiate fascism from other far-right political strategies, Dunt and Lynskey argue that a Pinochet or Franco were not really fascists but authoritarians. Authoritarian dictators may be as brutal, tyrannical or murderous as fascists. However, we can differentiate by recognising the way fascism offers a signature pattern that aims to possess the soul of a nation and not simply control it through military force.

The ingredients are familiar. Fascism, which offers a powerful sense of belonging to a nation state, is based on:

- Aggressive policing of membership to the tribe according to ethnic and racial lines.
- A charismatic strongman; someone to act as Father of the tribe.
- A secret love of violence as a substitute for coherent political thought.
- Populism, a strategy to blame the "enemy within" especially middle-class liberals and intellectuals.

At the heart of reactionary fascism, lies paranoia and anxiety, a sense of being besieged by an enemy at once very powerful yet shamefully weak.

This paranoia and embrace of the pseudo-mythological patterning of conspiracy highlights the religious dimensions of fascism. Although racism seems to be the objective of fascism, its primary

1. Wilson, R. (1991). *Cosmic trigger 2: down to earth.* LA: New Falcon Press.

2. Lilla, M. (2016). *The shipwrecked mind: on political reaction.* New York: New York Review Books.

3. Dunt, I., and Lynskey, D. (2024). *Fascism: the story of an idea (an origin story book).* W&N/Orion Publishing Group.

enemy are the liberal (mostly middle) classes who would defend pluralism and democracy. It is this group that the nation needs saving from, and they who are hated the most.

Considering reactionary or fascist styles of thought as regressive, invites further questions about how we understand both regression and development. Is it regression to a childlike or childish state? Or an earlier stage of psycho-evolutionary development? The reactionary and fascist state of mind venerates and desires a return to the past, characterised by a tribal sense of belonging. Psychotherapists know that regression is often a search for something new. The regression here operates as a way of dissolving anxiety and of offering an immediate sense of belonging based on who you are.

We can see fascism as a virulent return of the regressed and consider that its popular appeal fluctuates according to the political climate. So, if fascism is a return of the regressed, the repetition of an unprocessed cultural trauma, or a developmental stage that needs to be revisited, where has our culture gone wrong? The answer to this question involves understanding and recognising our own "reality tunnels" and their limitations.

Clashing reality tunnels

Anton Wilson's message (in the opening quote) that every reality tunnel might tell us something interesting about our world appears thoroughly tested by our digital world, with its utter overwhelm of information and opinion. It might be objected that listening to the views of climate change deniers, conspiracy theorists, and the far right will neither be interesting nor fruitful. Except we are not told to listen to every person, but every reality tunnel. We are told not that it will be pleasant but interesting.

There are far fewer reality tunnels than people. There are an enormous amount of people on the internet but a limited number of different reality tunnels, even without considering the quantity of bots. Many people are having variations of the same argument with each other, be it about gender, race or Russia. People rarely meet on the internet. Instead, different reality tunnels collide frequently and violently leading to individuals taking shelter in black and white views of reality.

The idea that there are as many truths as people in the world, and that each holds a personal truth is a relatively recent perspective, one that holds within it the seeds of the post-truth world. It is this world that has given birth to Trump.

Trump and a post-truth world

Wilber[4] argues that this post-truth world has been born out of the counter-cultural revolutions from the 1960s to today. This new "reality tunnel" has reached a critical mass of people. Its views have become a powerful cultural force. At the same time, as it's become more mainstream, it's once energising values and perspectives have experienced a "slippage" which have revealed deep shadows.

This "postmodern perspective" Wilber calls pluralism or postmodernism to distinguish it from "modernism" which includes enlightenment rationality and from "traditionalism" which values hierarchy, obedience, rules, nation and law.

Postmodern pluralism arose out of a people who, despite the immense gains and institutionalisation of scientific progress, had been born into a world that had suffered two world wars, the atom bomb, the holocaust, eugenics and totalitarianism. As a response, the counterculture gave birth to a "postmodern" style of consciousness, that emphasised the value of personal truth and institutional bias. It called for greater inclusivity for minority groups in a wave of movements – black people's civil rights, women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, children's rights. Fundamental to this was the idea that something was missing in the scientific account of truth; that someone's identity gives them access to a unique personal truth.

According to this view, unique personal truths get crushed into socially constructed "grand narratives" that subjugate people's uniqueness and right to self-determination. In this view, social constructions that protect special interests of an elite few are forced on people through hierarchical and institutional power structures, then normalised through social relations. Truth is relative to the teller. Objectivity is a myth forced upon us, because, as Zigmont Bauman writes, in a postmodern age "the idea of truth belongs to the rhetoric of power" (p112).[5]

Growth hierarchies

Postmodernism's insight that "all truth is contextual" gave way to "there is no objective truth, only structures of power." However, this is only partially true. Dominator hierarchies oppress. Growth hierarchies can promote growth and actualisation rather than oppression. Psychotherapy is a growth hierarchy, where the power

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4. Wilber, K. (2017). *Trump and a post-truth world.* Integral Life.

5. Bauman, Z. (1997). *Postmodernity and its discontents.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

imbalance is constrained by ethical obligations to benefit the client. A driving instructor is in a hierarchical position to a learner driver, and no one wants that power to be shared equally. So too for parents, teachers, artists, engineers and any area that takes forward the development of skills in others. Not all power is destructive. And not all mastery is visible.

In *The way of the Sufi*,[6] Idris Shah tells a story of 'The master under the tree.' A young man goes off to seek the perfect master. Just outside his own village, he finds an old man sitting peacefully under a tree and asks him if he has met any great masters. The old man nods and gives him the addresses of masters in far-off countries. The young man seeks them out, learns much but is left unsatisfied. Many years later, old and jaded, he decides to return home. As he approaches the village, he sees the old man sitting under the tree and a wave of recognition rushes over him. "Why did you not tell me you were the master?" he cries. "You could not recognise me then. You were utterly blind; you needed the experience of wandering the earth to gain the maturity and understanding required to actually see me."

Without any means to recognise a hierarchy of values, the door opens to narcissism – "no one interferes with my truth". If that's combined with a suspicion of all types of leadership, we can't effect change. As historian Rutger Bregman[7] says perhaps we have spent too long checking our privilege and not enough time using our privilege to help others. We have forgotten that in a power vacuum other people will use that power overtly to help themselves at the expense of us and those we care about. There are older and more vindictive, regressed styles of power that operate in the world. Progressive postmodernism, in attacking the structural power of modernism has missed the reality that there are people operating from older reality tunnels. These resonate at

regressive traditional or tribal frequencies, and are seen through the lens of belonging, defence of the tribe, or egocentric survival. Through these reality tunnels, the concerns of postmodern progressives seem unreal and threatening to the social order that constitute these tunnels. The anti-structural elements of postmodern progressivism – the emphasis on "owning your truth", bolstered by an accelerating online culture, has activated a deeply narcissistic cultural field.

When the inner self becomes the locus of the real, emotions begin to matter more than developing a deeper truth. The culture of therapy has also played its part here. Many psychotherapists believe it is not their job to question the truth of what their clients say, but to validate how they feel. If the feelings are true, the client's truth must be supported.

Trump can easily be shown to lie, yet his supporters regard him as more honest than other politicians. Trump's truth resonates because it's "true" within its own level of developmental consciousness. The groundwork for this view has been laid by the same retreat into relativism, narcissism and emotion that energised leading-edge postmodernism. Trump's truth resonates at a more basic developmental level. However, the slippage in postmodern culture to "there is no objective truth" set the field.

Peter Pomerantsev[8] compares the popular slogan from radical feminist student demonstrations in 1968 saying "objectivity is male subjectivity" and Putin's favourite TV host in 2014 telling us that "objectivity is a myth that is proposed and forced upon us" (Pomerantsev, 2019, p.156). If the BBC or CNN tell not facts but opinions, then why can't Fox News and Russia Today? Between 1968 and 2014 something in the collective consciousness shifted. In a world where expression of feelings is emancipatory, the one with the most intense emotions is crowned, no matter what is released. If no perspective is better than another, and each perspective must be treated equally, the crown will eventually go to the person most secure in their narcissism. As narcissism is a wound, this opens the door for victimisation to become central to political and cultural life.

Hatred of the postmodern left

Corporations have taken advantage of the latest moral trends. It doesn't cost too much to have more transgendered or black actors in adverts, to make more films that have plucky young girls as the ass kicking hero instead of rugged men or roll out mandatory DEI programmes. Corporate capitalism is always happy to discover new demographics to market products to, if it doesn't affect the bottom line.

The postmodern left in embracing inclusion as a moral and cultural campaign, without paying attention to the material and class effects of inequality, now seems utterly disastrous. The period that saw the rise of postmodern consciousness of pluralism, inclusion, and

6. Shah, I. (1991). *The way of the Sufi.* (Compass ed.). Penguin Books.

7. Bregman, R. (November 2025). 'A time of monsters (No. 1)' [Audio podcast episode]. In *The Reith Lectures.* BBC Radio 4. https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/brand/b00729d9

8. Pomerantsev, P. (2019). *This is not propaganda: adventures in the war against reality.* PublicAffairs.

personal truth, has also seen a huge spike in wealth inequality, a destruction of traditional working-class employment, outsourcing to China, rise of Big Tech leaving post-industrial areas outside of the liberal metropolises gutted of wealth and social capital. The dream of a stable job and house are long gone for many in post-industrial Britain.

Yet the moral focus from postmodern progressives has been on a group who are certain that oppression is coming from "the single redneck, oafish, uneducated, gigantic oppressor of all minorities" (Wilber, 2017, p.57)[4]; whom Hillary Clinton called a "basket of deplorables."[9]

The consequences are, according to Wilber, that "everywhere you are told that you are fully equal and deserve full and immediate empowerment, yet everywhere you are denied the means to achieve it. You suffocate, you suffer and you get very, very mad" (Wilber, 2017, p.42).

Social media has facilitated psychological contact between groups of people morally committed to hating each other and operating from utterly different levels of awareness. Here is a quote from "Bev"[10] who posted online to explain why people in the Ozarks support Trump.

"You all don't even realize they truly don't give a fuck about whatever the conversation is about.

"That's all just trivial details – the economy, health care, whatever.

"Fuck liberals…

"You've got to understand the one core value that they hold above all others is hatred for what they consider weakness because that's what they believe strength is, hatred of weakness.

"Sadistic, passionate hatred, and that's what proves they're strong, their passionate hatred for weakness."

This is a window into the strength of resentment some people feel in the face of powerlessness, economic uncertainty and being lectured at.

Almost all of Trump's success lies in lashing out at "liberals" (actually postmodern progressives) and in weaponising the resentments felt by the people blamed for being deplorable, when they had lost their place in the world. California wildfires being blamed on rare fish protection schemes, banning paper straws, ending foreign aid programmes, sacking civil servants, punishing diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) programmes, sacking environment agencies all have one thing in common – they involve the humiliation and backlash against liberal postmodern values and the people that hold them.

At the same time the postmodern left has ignored class and wealth and focused on moral purity. Jon Ronson's, *So you've been publicly shamed*[11] or Kate Razall's *Anatomy of a cancellation*[12] tell stories of a new moral puritanism in which not saying the right thing in the right way leads to traumatic psychic attack. Meanwhile tech savvy reactionaries recruit by appealing to simple ideas that combine a promise of belonging to a nation, with the reactionary promise to blame foreigners and liberals for all its problems.

Conclusion

When Wilson invites us to look down different reality tunnels, it can seem as though there are as many as people – perhaps more if we include animals, or angels. Yet nature shows us that distinct-seeming things have secret, organic connections. That the individual animals, plants and weather patterns synergise into ecosystems that are more than the sum of their parts. The apparently more basic parts support the more subtle and complex.

This gives us clues as to how to respond to the regressive reactionary mind. We can recognise and then differentiate the currents of the collective consciousness and come to know their structure. We can read the symptoms with a psychological eye to re-integrate the regressed. Collective consciousness is the water in which we swim. It's not until things fall apart that we can "differentiate" that we are all in a reality tunnel (a partial truth) rather than naive reality. If fascism is a regressive psychological defence, a lashing out against humiliation and a desire to inflict it on others then it will not be strange to us. The regressed parts of us may be those from which new shoots grow. However, for them to grow we need to not only visit different reality tunnels but also learn how to "differentiate and integrate" them. That means speaking their language without regressing ourselves. It means not just the ability to shift between multiple perspectives, but to integrate them.

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9. Speaking to journalists at the New York Historical Society Library in New York City on September 9, 2016. https://www.npr.org/2016/09/10/493427601/hillary-clintons-basket-of-deplorables-in-full-context-of-this-ugly-campaign

10. Bev. (2020, September). That's why they just laugh at it all because you all don't even realize they truly don't give a [Facebook post].

11. Ronson, J. (2015). *So you've been publicly shamed.* Riverhead Books.

12. Razzall, K. (Presenter). (12 November 2025). 'Kate's story (No. 1)' [Audio podcast episode]. In *Shadow world: anatomy of a cancellation.* BBC Radio 4. https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m002m0bl

Populism works, so let's use it

What climate psychology can learn from the rise of easy answers (and how to change the story)

### Text and images by Dr Sandra Lee

Abstract

Recent rises in climate denial and anti-climate rhetoric have mirrored a broader political shift to the right. I argue the problem is not only misinformation, but miscommunication – particularly from climate advocates who have failed to connect with mainstream psychological and emotional drivers. Drawing lessons from successful populist narratives, it proposes a values-first, benefit-led, visually-driven communication strategy: one that begins with shared human needs (security, prosperity, belonging) and reframes climate action as a way to protect them. Through real-world examples and visual storytelling, I explore how to reach across ideological divides. In an era of political suspicion and media fragmentation, the environmental movement must move from virtue-signalling to value-bridging if it is to regain trust and relevance.

The algorithm is lying

Remember when authorities and large organisations were declaring climate emergencies and competing over who could set the earliest net zero target? That was only 2021. Today, net zero is 'woke', Councils are cutting funding for energy (and cost) saving initiatives and climate deniers are crawling out from under all sorts of rocks.

Support for climate action in the UK remains strong. Most people – across demographics and political identities – want cheaper bills, cleaner air, energy security and protection from floods, fires and fuel price chaos. They're just not shouting about it online.

The algorithm doesn't reward consensus or complexity. It rewards simplicity, emotion and conflict; it feeds us stories that feel good to believe. Media outlets don't need oil money to skew the narrative (although they have plenty of it), our brains do it for them.[2] Negativity sells, fear lingers and good news about better diets and cleaner
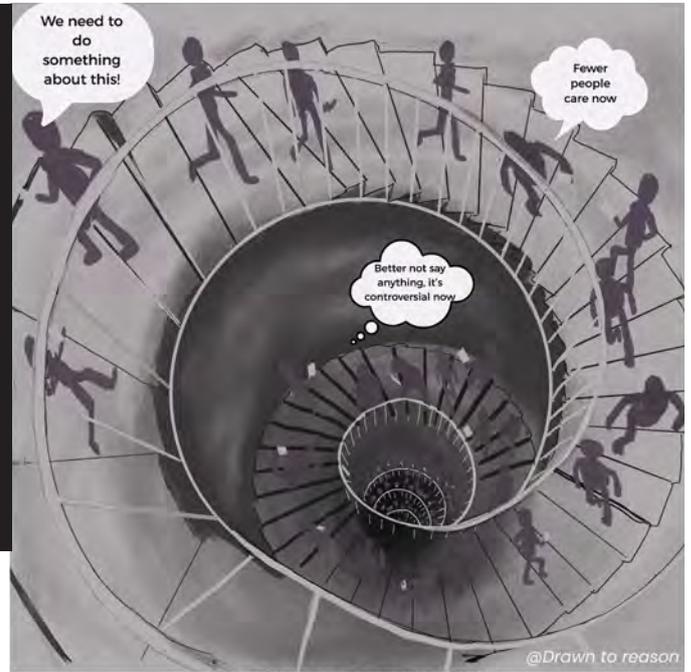
SPIRAL OF SILENCE

A Theory of Public Opinion, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann June 1974 - still relevant!

Pictured above: The longer the loud minority talks, the quieter the majority gets[1]

air rarely gets clicks,[3,4] so we get scare stories about wind farms, not the real costs of dirty air. That's why newsrooms, chasing attention in a saturated digital market, lean heavily on headlines that evoke fear, outrage or conflict.[5]

People are drawn to stories that are emotionally satisfying, that offer clear villains so, if we're serious about climate progress, we need to stop dismissing this and start understanding why it works so well.

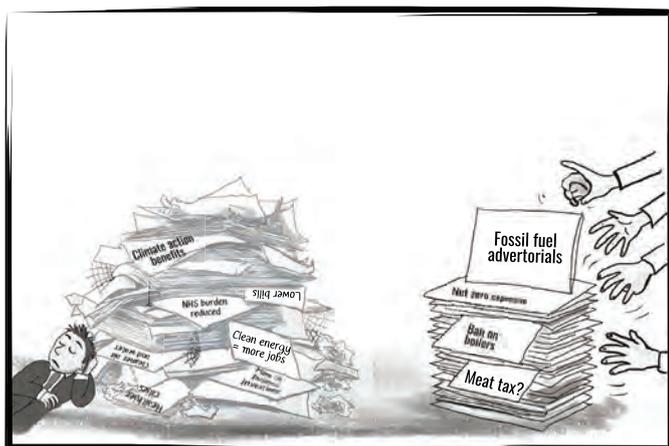## TURNING VIOLET VIOLENT: WHEN SOCIAL MEDIA MESSES WITH SOCIAL NORMS

Wait, what?

Maybe I'll wear beige

Just my feed then?

(and his)

Good news doesn't click

Why climate communication hasn't worked (yet)

We've been trying to talk about climate change for decades. We've had charts, tears, polar bears, melting clocks, ranting teens and terrifying IPCC[6] acronyms and still… here we are. We meant well: we had facts, we had urgency, but the climate movement spoke in a language only other climate people understood (spend-based scope 3 supply chain emission calculation issues anyone?). Meanwhile, the 'other side' was slick. They didn't just reject climate action, it was reframed as an elite conspiracy to take away your car, your cooker and your Sunday roast.

Climate action has become politicised. Fisher (2022)[7] reported that, while concern is high across ideologies, climate policy is seen as "left-wing." This makes it harder for people on the right to publicly support climate solutions, even if they care.

The problem isn't just content – it's tone and tribe. Kraus et al (2025)[8] show how online media ecosystems feed "identity-protective reasoning", where people reject facts that contradict their group norms. Climate psychologist Kris De Meyer (2020)[9] calls this "motivated disbelief". When messages are moralistic, technocratic or scolding, they don't just fall flat—they push people further away.

The fossil fuellers and their lobbyists didn't need to be right, they just needed to sound like they were on your side. We forgot the oldest rule of communication: no one wants to be lectured at or made to feel guilty. While we were drawing graphs, they were storytelling; while we were explaining systemic system change requirements, they were shouting, "It's all a scam!" Tragically, that message landed.

Populist psychology: why it works

Let's look at where we've gone wrong:

Populism offers…	Traditional climate comms offers…
Clear villains	Complex systems
Emotional storytelling	Data and targets
Familiar language	Technical jargon
Identity alignment	Behavioural guilt
National pride	Global responsibility

A better story: values not virtue

We do not need to abandon the truth; we need to tell it in ways that do not leave people feeling overwhelmed or helpless. Climate emotions have become more complex over the past decade, moving from worry and sadness towards an understandable defensive form of disengagement. Eco-anxiety is no longer only about fear of the future - for many it has become a sense of "it's all too late so why bother?", a pattern highlighted in recent analyses of climate silence and denial-adjacent responses.[10] Hickman's (2024) work on eco-anxiety[11] shows how these emotions often reflect care rather than apathy, yet they can harden into withdrawal when people feel blamed or shamed.

For years, much of climate communication has leaned on virtue: we have moralised people's choices, scolded them for flights, cow milk lattes and framed everyday behaviour as a test of integrity. When this failed to motivate, we responded with more instruction, more judgement and more graphs. It was an understandable impulse, but it rarely met audiences where they actually are. A values-based story makes room for complexity, acknowledges emotional defences and helps people stay in the conversation rather than shutting down.

1. Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The spiral of silence: a theory of public opinion. *Journal of Communication*, 24(2), pp. 43–51.

2. Rozin, P. and Royzman, E.B. (2001). Negativity bias, negativity dominance and contagion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5(4), pp. 296–320.

3. Soroka, S.N. and McAdams, S. (2019). Cross-national evidence of a negativity bias in psychophysiological reactions to news. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(38), pp. 18888–18892.

4. Trussler, M. and Soroka, S. (2014). Consumer demand for cynical and negative news frames. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 19(3), pp. 360–379.

5. Vaish, A., Grossmann, T. and Woodward, A. (2008). Not all emotions are created equal: the negativity bias in social-emotional development, *Psychological Bulletin*. 134(3), pp. 383–403.

6. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

7. Fisher, D. R. (2022). *American resistance: from the women's march to the blue wave.* New York: Columbia University Press.

8. Krause, N., Freiling, I., Scheufele, D. (2025). Our changing information ecosystem for science and why it matters for effective science communication. *Social Sciences.* 122 (27).

9. De Meyer, K., Coren, E., McCaffrey, M. and Slean, C. (2020). Transforming the stories we tell about climate change: from "issue" to "action". *Environmental Research Letters*, 15(12), 123005.

10. Centre for Countering Digital Hate (2024). *The new climate denial.* Available at: https://counterhate.com/research/the-new-climate-denial/.

11. Hickman, C. (2024). Eco-Anxiety in children and young people – a rational response, irreconcilable despair, or both? *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child,* 77(1), pp. 356–368.

Meanwhile, populist narratives skipped the moral high ground and headed straight for the emotional basement and won hearts by offering three things we've often ignored:

- Simple language
- Shared villains
- Stories that centre the audience, not the expert.

Let's learn from them. We can use the same approach, without sacrificing rigour, without dumbing down and without pretending climate change is a vibe rather than a 'meta-crisis' (just don't use that term).

As Hanel et al (2021)[12] confirm, values provide the foundation for attitudes and motivate behaviour, especially when actions align with a person's sense of self. If the language of climate action doesn't match someone's moral priorities, it won't resonate – no matter how urgent or accurate it is.

Don't look left

exercise in cleaner air). What if we led with that and 'saving the planet / human race' became the co-benefit instead?

Populists match the story to the issues their audience care most about. Pick one issue, tell one story, make it land. We don't need to out-argue the opposition – we need to out-connect them. This isn't about abandoning ambition – it's about building bridges to it. That starts by swapping virtue signalling for values alignment.

Right-wing reasons for climate action

All political ideologies have a reason to care about the climate crisis, they've just been given every excuse not to. When we talk about degrowth, plant-based diets and systemic change, many hear that as:

"You're the problem and the solution is to give up everything you value."

However, the outcomes of climate action are broadly popular across ideologies. The problem isn't what we're offering, it's how we're wrapping it. Let's rewrite the pitch:

- You want **security**? Try energy independence and flood defences.
- You want **economic strength**? Try stable bills and new industries.
- You want **controlled borders**? Try considering how we can support the millions of current and future refugees facing extreme climate impacts (some closer to home than you realise)
- You want to **back British** (insert country of choice) business? Try investing in homegrown renewables instead of importing fossil fuels and risk.

This approach offers the same reality, but through a lens that they

Don't start with emissions targets, but with values. Not our values – theirs

Facts don't move people – stories do. The stories that resonate are the ones that connect with what people value. Values-based communication is critical if we want to cut through noise and polarisation.

Security. Stability. Pride. Family are all typical core values. If those don't sound like "climate" values, that's our failure, not theirs.

- Instead of talking about tipping points, we tell a story about the school that can afford more books since installing solar panels and cutting their energy bill.
- Instead of "decarbonising the economy", we talk about local jobs being created in heat pump installation and British-made renewables.
- Instead of "dismantling fossil fuel infrastructure", we talk about no longer depending on volatile imports from regimes that don't care about us.

Co-benefits

When we teach Carbon Literacy training[13] (or similar), we talk about 'co-benefits' – the additional benefits of climate action (like improved health benefits of active commuting as people take more

12. Hanel, P.H.P., Foad, C. and Maio, G.R. (2021). Attitudes and values. In Matsumoto, D. and Hwang, H.C. (eds.) *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

13 Carbon Literacy Project (n.d.) *What is carbon literacy?* Available at: https://carbonliteracy.com/what-is-carbon-literacy/

might just look through. Let's reframe climate action to sound like something anyone would back:

If they care about…	Say this
Security & stability	Clean, local energy means we're less dependent on foreign gas
Economic growth	This is the next industrial revolution – let's not get left behind
National pride	We led the last energy revolution – we can lead this one too
Immigration concerns	Climate action reduces global instability and forced migration
Fairness	Why should families pay more while oil companies profit?
Freedom & autonomy	Own your own energy – no more price shocks from global markets
Law & order / control	Storms, floods and blackouts aren't freedom – resilience is
Local jobs & skills	From trades to tech – local jobs in every region

Conclusion

The real trick of populism isn't ideology, it's emotional clarity. It tells people who they are, who to trust and what to do in three pithy words (e.g. 'stop the boats').

Behaviour change 101: Start where people are, not where you want them to be.

Note: All images drawn by author (n.d.) Drawings. Available at: https://drawntoreason.com/drawings/

Dr Sandra Lee is a climate researcher and practitioner at the University of Leicester. Her work explores how values, identity and knowledge shape climate responses, leading her into climate communication and visual storytelling. She focuses on building agency, reducing polarisation and helping people stay engaged with complexity rather than shutting down.

Am I so far right?

By John Woods

A child sees their parents going downhill
Mother becomes not just sad
But now very ill.
Turn to father, but where's he at?

He's out there giving voice
To what he says the family needs.
Give us food and wine;
It's our due, and mine.

What happened to our life,
That it no longer makes sense.
To work for what?
I imagined to have a place,

Where we all belonged in a universe
And I was no longer wronged.

Image by John Woods

John Woods is a psychotherapist working with victims and perpetrators of child abuse. He is fascinated by the use of poetry in the containment and transformation of trauma.

Collective narcissism, social identity and reactionary attitude

By Pusha Misra and Paul Hoggett

Introduction

As the climate crisis deepens many countries, have been moving towards more nationalist and authoritarian modes of government. The crisis of neoliberalism (manifest in the 2008 financial crash, economic stagnation and the turn towards authoritarianism) also corresponds to the crisis of fossil capitalism, a three hundred year old mode of production which is now (literally) drowning in its own 'externalities'.[1] Far from engaging with the climate crisis the new regimes seem hell bent on attacking the diverse human and non-human ecosystems upon which our future depends.

Attack on diversity

Diversity is defined as: 1. The condition of being different: variety; 2. an instance or a point of difference.[2]

In nature diversity manifests in the form of different traits, genes, ecosystems, etc. At the societal level it manifests in the form of diversity of culture, race, religion, gender, attitudes, languages, belief systems, etc. Many reactionary nationalists dispute that diversity in society enriches our language and literature, broadens our mind and liberates us from the narrow, rigid boundaries of a stagnant thinking process. Conservationists advise that a forest should have multiple species of trees because diseases spread faster within the same species. The same is true of human society. A society which does not allow diversity to flourish becomes stagnant and stagnation ultimately leads to death.

In what follows we will offer two complimentary ways of thinking psychologically about the reactionary state of mind, the first focuses on processes of projection/introjection, the second on group narcissism. Projection is a process of attributing one's undesirable qualities onto others unconsciously while introjection is just the opposite. It involves unconsciously internalizing the ideas, thoughts, and attitudes of others.

Racism, projection and introjection

Racism and ethnocentrism are becoming increasingly powerful forces in the world, and these forces are intolerant of diversity. Race is a social construction like gender. When a group becomes racialised, a particular feature – skin colour, shape of nose, lips, etc. – is highlighted as a supposed marker of their racial character. According to Neil Altman it is necessary for human beings to create a separate self – a not-me, an 'other' – which is part of a collective entity, a group.[3] Negative aspects of the psyche such as greed are projected onto the 'out group' whilst good aspects such as generosity are identified with me and my 'in group'.

White on Black racism is one of many forms that racism can take. When white on Black racism occurs, an 'other' is created so that the undesirable and unwanted impulses, desires and tendencies can be projected on the other so that the self, the white self, remains unpolluted, pure and noble. The Black other is needed so

Photo by DJ Paine on Unsplash

that the disowned qualities can be projected onto them. The other is sufficiently different from self so that self can disidentify from them and all their imagined undesirable qualities, yet similar enough to oneself so that some sort of negative link can be maintained, even though the link could be a link of hatred.

"To the extent that we wish to believe that our violence, our greed, our exploitiveness, our passivity, and our dependence are "out there" and not "in here", then the "other" group, the group that is both similar and different can easily come to represent …. the "not me"… the 'not me' is, of course, me – the disowned me." (Altman, 2010, p.106)

Continuing with this example, Blacks, on the other hand, are the recipient of these undesirable qualities and, to the extent they introject these qualities, it determines their identity. Lack of opportunity, poverty, and poor education create anger and rage. Individuals react with aggression, thus making the preconceptions of the whites about Blacks true. Altman says:

"Blacks may introject the aggressive image projected on them by whites and establish a projective-introjective vicious circle. Whites are enabled to feel comfortably benign and virtuous despite evidence of white police brutality, wars in the Caucasian world and so on." (Altman, 2010, pp.65-66)

The danger is that the racialised other comes to identify with the negative qualities that have been projected into him, a process

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1. The externalization of social, health and environmental costs onto society. For example, Boyd, D. (2024). *Business, planetary boundaries, and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.* UN Human Rights Council.

2. *Webster's Ninth Dictionary*, p.369

3 Altman, N. (2010). *The analyst in the inner city: race, class and culture through a psychoanalytic lens.* London: Routledge.

known as introjection. Altman claims that this model of projection/introjection can help explain the psychic mechanism behind all societal conceptions like social class and gender. Gender discrimination, class distinctions, rivalry among religious groups, conflicts between language groups, including wars between and within nations can all be influenced by the psychic mechanism of projection and introjection. In every case there is a recipient of the undesirable projected qualities, the 'other' who is repository of everything bad that the opponent wants to disown so that the actual owner of these qualities remain pure, guilt free, noble and is appreciated for his high ego ideal.

But when we pass from individual to group, complications occur. Groups have dynamics of their own. There seem to be other considerations that need to be taken into account. As Melanie Suchet points out:

> "Children have to be trained to be white to develop a white racial consciousness. Despite what seems so natural we are not simply white, but become so."[4]

This shows that the child through natural process of development narcissistically identifies with the values of her group, acquires her identity as a white person with all its advantages, disadvantages, prejudices and bias. Suchet points out that whiteness is "more about a hierarchical position of power in relation to another than colour" (Suchet, 2007, p.869-870).[4]

The Indian caste system is a hierarchical system with the Brahmins (the class of priests and teachers who are supposed to be the creator and reservoir of knowledge and wisdom) at the top and Kshatriya (the class of administrators and warriors) next, Vaisya (the trader class) after that and Sudras (various artisans) at the lowest ring of the ladder. As per the projective/introjective model each caste projects its own undesirable tendencies and desires on to the lower caste. Thus, the Sudras become the container of all the undesirable disowned qualities of the upper castes. They are perceived to be dirty, impure, unclean, unrestrained in their impulses, drunkards, quarrelsome and so on.

But this seems to be a very simplistic explanation of an extremely complicated system. The hierarchical structure of the caste system of India points to a very strong power equilibrium rather than simply a projection-introjection model. Even in ancient times, the lower classes were not allowed to acquire knowledge from teachers, not because they were dirty or unclean but because of a rigid classification of professional categories aimed at maintaining the power structure in the society.

The story of Eklavya[5] indicates the social prohibition related to the acquisition of knowledge by people of lower caste. Eklavya was the son of a tribal chief and turned out to be better in archery than

Image bottom left: *Eklavya practicing in front of the statue of Dronacharya: The Story of Eklavya – A Story from Indian Mythology https://www.tell-a-tale.com/author/ribbonworks/*

Image above: *Eklsvya cut his right thumb and offered it to Dronacharya: Eklavya's dakshina of his right hand thumb to his guru (source: Wikipedia–B.K.Mitra– https://archive.org/details/mahabharata01ramauoft/page/n451/mode/1up)*

the princes of the state. He had mentally accepted Dronacharya, the teacher of the princes, as his own teacher and used to practice on his own in front of the statue of the teacher. When Dronacahrya saw that he was better than the princes, he asked Eklavya's right thumb as his fee which he willingly offered him.

Even the sub-grouping of the Brahmin caste is based on a hierarchical system. This strict hierarchy highlights the narcissistic sense of superiority of the group one belongs to.

Group narcissism

The emotional intensity of love, say for one's country, the fierceness of rage that one feels when their country/nation/group is felt to be belittled, the fervour with which people come forward to sacrifice their lives to save their country from foreign aggression, speaks of a deep emotional bonding and a feeling of belongingness that somehow remains uncaptured in the projective-introjective model. This feature cannot be explained without taking account of narcissistic identification with the community we belong to.

4. Suchet, M. (2007). Unravelling whiteness. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 17(6),869.

5. A character from the Indian epic, The Mahabharata. Krishnamacharya, N.V.R. (1983). *The Mahabharata.* Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams.

Sociologists call this emotional attachment 'community sentiment.' An analysis of this sentiment reveals three components: (i) We-feeling; (ii) Role-feeling; and (iii) Dependency-feeling.

We-feeling is a sense of togetherness where people feel integrated with the group and the groups becomes part of their identity, like our class, our club, our village and our nation. Regarding role-feeling, every community offers its members specific roles which provide them with a sense of purpose, responsibility and stability in life. For example, a teacher performs a role of teaching, providing mentorship, care, and guidance to her pupils. Each member fulfilling her role brings harmony, stability and greater co-operation in the community. Finally, living in a community also enables its members to realise the value of mutual dependence or dependency-feeling.

This community sentiment develops spontaneously in the process of socialization of the child and clearly provides the strong narcissistic element present in our emotional bonding with various groups we belong to, with community as a whole or a larger community that we call nation. Such positive group sentiment is an inevitable phenomenon in human life and part of the normal developmental process. However, group narcissism often does not assume this healthy form.

Researchers[6] have noted two other forms of group narcissism: grandiose and vulnerable. The former is characterized by feelings of greatness, strength and energy while the latter, more common form, has the characteristics of being unappreciated, suffering from feelings of inferiority and frustration. In those cases where narcissism conceals an underlying vulnerability, "an excessive self-love or inflated, grandiose view of oneself that requires continual external validation"[7] can be found. In such instances collective narcissism "…is a belief that one's own group is exceptional but not sufficiently recognized by others."[8]

This kind of collective narcissism is typically associated with out-group rivalry, hatred and aggressiveness. It is a case of intense love for one's own in-group characterized by a 'robust' hatred for the out-groups. The cliché expression "My country right or wrong" (Stephen Decatur) expresses this narcissistic element very well. Evidence suggests that "collective narcissism is uniquely related to vulnerable narcissism, that is, antagonistic self-entitlement manifesting as resentment for the lack of individual recognition."[9] If one believes that one's unique group is great, it follows logically that war is justified to preserve the glory of the nation, or to give the group the unique and supreme place it deserves. Intergroup hostility is essential so that out-groups may not harm the uniqueness and glory of the ingroup. Prejudice, bias and conspiracy theories abound and constant vigil is needed to maintain the territorial integrity and the superiority of the group. This blind and intense love for the supremacy of one's group is also related with intense feelings of nationalism, patriotism and conservative attitude – characteristics of a reactionary political attitude.

Grandiosity and exceptionalism

We have considered the connection between vulnerability, narcissism and the group but we also noted the existence of another form of narcissism, grandiose rather than vulnerable in form. This connects to the concept of exceptionalism. Exceptions imagine themselves to be special and superior. This can assume

Protest, by Paul Hoggett

the belief that one is exempt from the rules that apply to others, or that one is especially deserving or entitled in some way. The idea also figures prominently in political science; for example the concept of American Exceptionalism has been in use for many decades.[10] Here a whole nation or people imagines itself to be exceptional in some way, and sometimes this is connected to the idea that one's group has been specially chosen by God to do his work on the earth.[11]

The crucial element of collective narcissism is the unrecognised greatness of the in-group. Every religion considers itself to be the greatest and members of every religious group hold the belief that their religion alone has the knowledge of the ultimate truth.

6. Miller, J.D., Lynam, D.R., Hyatt, C.S., and Campbell, W.K. (2017). Controversies in narcissism. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 8. 291–315. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032816-045244

7. Golec de Zavala, A. (2024). *The psychology of collective narcissism: insights from social identity theory*. London: Routledge. p.20.

8. Golec de Zavala, A. et.al. (2024). Authoritarians and "revolutionaries in reverse": why collective narcissism threatens democracy. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, https://research.gold.ac.uk/36342/1/golec-de-zavala-2024-authoritarians-and-revolutionaries-in-reverse-why-collective-narcissism-threatens-democracy.pdf

9. Golec de Zavala, A. et.al. (2019). *Collective narcissism: political consequences of investing self-worth in the ingroup's image*. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12569

10. McCrisken, T. (2001). Exceptionalism. In DeConde, A., Burns, R. and Longevall, F. (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of American foreign policy*, 2nd Ed. pp.63-80. New York: Scribner.

11. Smith, A. (2003). *Chosen peoples: sacred sources of national identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Influenced by the Ancient Greeks both Judaism and Christianity believed in the existence of a single God rather than a plurality of many different Gods. But if there is one God then 'we', the believers, are the favourite children, special in the eyes of God. Thus, the foundation of 'species exceptionalism' was laid with the idea that we were an exceptional species and the rest of the earth and all non-human species existed to serve 'our' purpose, which was ultimately God's purpose. Centuries ago, believing themselves to be special in the eyes of God, Europeans appropriated the term 'civilization' for themselves as they embarked upon the colonisation of much of the rest of the world. As they set about destroying other cultures, from the Aztecs of central America to the aboriginals of Tasmania (the Palawa), they believed this 'civilizing process' was the 'white man's burden'.

Crisis and reaction

As Sally Weintrobe recently explored, the exception which lurks inside the modern self is supported and encouraged by neoliberal economic and cultural policies.[12] Competitive individualism fosters a culture of uncare in which society, beyond the immediate family, is seen only negatively as something intrusive and controlling. Neoliberalism is the last throw of the dice of fossil fuel capitalism, a mode of production which has now entered a permanent state of crisis, which is ecological, economic and cultural (a polycrisis). In crisis conditions groups become both frightened and frightening. Such conditions can bring out the worst in us, conditions which enable the reactionary state of mind to flourish.

We can therefore see there are strong socio-economic and political factors which, along with collective narcissism, play an important role in creating, as well as perpetuating, division. Psychoanalysis can try to find out the dynamic factors behind these conflicts but the help of the state, communities and families are necessary factors in improving the situation.

Healthy narcissism

Altman[3] has suggested two measures to control our unconscious aggressive tendencies related to group narcissism. One is making people aware of their unconscious aggressive and undesirable tendencies – awareness and acknowledgement of aggressive tendencies will help us to control them better. Acceptance of our aggression and other undesirable tendencies will remove the necessity of 'creating an other' who will be the recipient of our undesirable tendencies.

The second, suggested by Bell Hooks (as quoted by Altman), is that the recipients of projected tendencies should avoiding feeling a sense of victimization and they should not disavow rage. Accepting rage empowers one and strengthens our will to oppose aggression. This kind of empowerment can prevent an inner sense of low self-worth that is consequent upon internalization of the undesirable projected qualities. If we are grounded in healthy narcissism, vulnerable and grandiose narcissism will lose their power to lead us to adopt measures like reactionary politics. We then do not need to enhance our self-worth by falsely glorifying our groups, country or nation.

The word 'narcissism' has an unpalatable tone about it. But not all forms of narcissism are bad or evil as Kohut has so painstakingly shown.[13] There is healthy narcissism and pathological narcissism. And whether we like it or not, some degree of narcissism is

Lambing, by Rachel Cakebread

essential for our survival. However, it is possible to have intense attachment with one's group and not be swept away by the irrational need of enhancing the uniqueness of the group, which is a way of enhancing our sense of low self-esteem. It is important to accept one's group with rational, constructive criticism which will create a 'sustained realistic self-regard and mature aspirations and ideals'.[14] These qualities among many others will help in propagating connectedness, harmony, open-mindedness, flexibility of opinion and love of others. It seems to us that the task of a country is not merely to have a diverse culture and population, but to ensure that all those living and working there feel a sense of belongingness, feel cared for, feel the country is a safe place to vent their anger, frustrations, violence and rage as well as their joys and happiness.

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Paul Hoggett, co-founder of CPA, retired psychotherapist, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy (UWE, Bristol), United Kingdom.

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

13. Multiple sources including Kohut, H. (1977). *The restoration of the self.* New York: International Universities Press.

14. Moore, B. and Fine, B. (Eds.) (1990). *Psychoanalytic terms and concepts.* New Haven: Yale University Press. p.18.

Embodied hope in heavy weather

An eco-somatic therapist's reflection on healing

By Aleksandra Wruk

My mother often raged. Working beyond her capacity as a nurse, doing night shifts, and raising three lively children, she lived in a constant state of depletion. Her body was weary, her moods like weather fronts moving through the house. She lived in a reactionary state, her nervous system braced against the next demand. Here in Scotland, I also witness storms, just of a different kind: the ones of dysregulated weather systems. We give them names like Katrina or Alice and sometimes I wonder: is Mother Earth burned out too?

When we look at the world through the lens of the nervous system, it becomes clear why we live in an era of widespread reactivity, polarisation, and disconnection – from ourselves, each other and nature. According to Polyvagal Theory,[1] we can only truly connect and engage when our bodies are in a state of safety and rest, guided by the parasympathetic system.

Yet many of us live suspended in chronic fight-or-flight states, propelled by trauma, productivity culture, and the relentless demands of capitalism. We cannot regulate our nervous systems while living inside economic structures built on perpetual extraction, of resources, labour, and life force itself. This is not only a personal

crisis but a planetary one. The same systems that drain our energy also exhaust the Earth's body. When we extract beyond capacity, ecosystems both human and planetary begin to fray.

The good news is that understanding the nervous system also gives us some remedies – a roadmap towards recovery if you will. As an eco-somatic therapist, I frequently guide people towards regulation. I see first hand the healing effects of grounding practices that reconnect us with the body and nature. Tears that well up when trauma releases. The slowing of breath as the nervous system settles. The expansion, the glimmers of hope – that something else might be possible. It requires patience and dedication, but change does come. Internal shifts become new behaviours, clearer boundaries, confidence, joy, and a restructuring of everyday habits.

What if this is the work to do with reactionary states, both in ourselves and the world at large?

You might say that self-regulating as an individual won't lead to

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1. Porges, S.W. (2022). Polyvagal theory: a science of safety. *Frontiers in integrative neuroscience*, 16, 871227.

Clouds over mountain, by Rachel Cakebread

systemic change, but by understanding the nervous system, we know that nothing happens in isolation. In fact, co-regulation is a key tool in a somatic therapist's practice: as social beings, our bodies are geared towards synchronisation. When I hold therapeutic workshops, my job is to stay centred so that others might settle in my calm presence.

A while ago, in deep meditation, I asked my friendly stone to offer me some guidance. It told me that I too should become like a stone: unmoving, dense with gravity and so steady that everyone around me is able to become grounded too. Recently, I found myself surprised that well over a thousand people have attended my workshops in a few short years. People who, for a brief moment, settled. Who experienced regulation and rest. I like to imagine that those people went into the world and, through their own force, settled other nervous systems, spreading calm like a ripple.

You might say I'm naïve, an idealist or dreamer. Perhaps. But I have witnessed real change in the people I work with. What if a thousand therapists like me went out and touched a thousand people through their work? Could it create a wave?

Trauma and dysregulation make us cynical, hopeless, and helpless. They create a reactionary world of division, disconnection, and polarity. It is because I did the work myself, the grieving and raging, and letting my storms weather out, that I'm able to see the world through new eyes.[2]

My hope is embodied, not blind hope. It is not the kind that closes its eyes and wishes for better weather. It has its foundation in the small, repeated acts that make regulation and connection possible. We cannot bridge political, cultural, or relational divides from a place of survival physiology. When our systems are braced, everything feels like a threat, every difference becomes a fracture.

When we practice nervous system regulation and let the body settle, something extraordinary becomes possible: we can stay open in the presence of difference. We can listen without collapsing, disagree without disconnecting, and feel the humanity of the person in front of us, even if we do not share their worldview.

Embodied hope, then, becomes a practice. It teaches us the courage to remain present, and the steadiness needed to choose connection over defensiveness. A small ripple that moves outward into families, communities, ecosystems. And if you read this and choose, even briefly, to feel your feet on the earth, then that is already a beginning.

Stones, by Rachel Cakebread

Aleksandra Wruk is an eco-somatic facilitator and regenerative well-being advocate. They help people move from burnout and survival mode into grounded, confident, and embodied living. With a PhD in Digital Mental Well-being, they blend science and somatic work to help people reconnect with their body's wisdom and feel alive, fulfilled and nourished.

https://www.aleksandra-wruk.online/

2. This is in reference to the work that reconnects, developed by Joanna Macy. https://workthatreconnects.org/
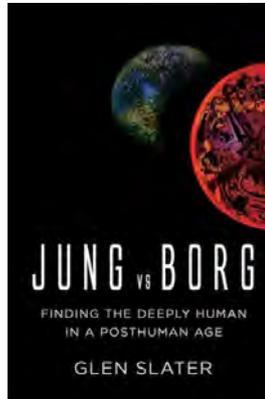
Becoming deeply human in a post-human world
An interview with Glen Slater
Interviewed and with images by Toby Chown

Toby (TC): In Jung vs Borg,[1] you set out the challenges facing human beings in the immediate future, which we could say is the challenge of becoming deeply human, rather than posthuman. In this issue we are looking at the rise in reactionary and far-right psychology, which often draws from the idea of a past golden age. Can you tell us about how your work helps us to understand connections between a rise in a nostalgic authoritarian right-wing populism and the permeation of artificial intelligence (AI) into our everyday lives? Does this connect to denial of climate and ecological crises?

Glen (GS): To begin, although AI appears to have entered the picture as something radically new, it's really an outgrowth of general advances in computer technology. Its social impact is entwined with the widespread adaptation of computing and the online world. This adaptation has been groomed by various reductive understandings that involve thinking that computers and minds work in similar, if not identical ways. AI then comes along and starts doing a pretty good job of imitating human thought and expression. We start saying to ourselves, "well, AI seems very capable, and minds and computers are essentially the same, why not give ourselves over to this new technology too". This is where we are now: facing the outsourcing of our own thought processes. From here, it's a short step to accepting the idea of merging human and artificial intelligence. We get the whole posthuman outlook, with human-machine hybrids and AI leaving the purely human behind. AI represents the leading edge of a general acquiescence to digital technology, which present some very troubling possibilities.

The problem is that the main assumptions feeding this stream of thought are not just reductionistic but wrong. Yet these worldviews are highly influential. We may be engineering an entirely new way of life based on a very distorted, technophilic understanding of what earthly existence is all about.

On one side of the picture, minds are not just brains, brains are not just computers. What ever happened to this thing we call the psyche? We are squeezing out the fullness of being earth-dwelling creatures, discarding what I call the "deeply human" which also connects us to the more-than-human. On the other side, we've been co-opted by a naive and flawed fantasy about the nature of computation and the online world that emanates from it. We think of the direction of computation – if not technology in general – as the inevitable outcome of scientific discovery. The online world represents a vast, open, creative space where people are free to be who and what they want. But modern technology is inherently exploitative and, after commodifying everything around us, it is now setting its sights on everything within us – exploiting personal information, usurping attention, placing corporate profit ahead of sorting fact from fiction.

In short, information technologies are narrowing our sense of what it means to be fully and deeply human and are making us less knowledgeable and less wise. Assuming homo sapiens (wise human) is indeed the right term for our species, we may have stopped evolving. We spent the twentieth century convincing ourselves that industrial technologies were reshaping the world in conducive ways, all the while undermining the world's ecology. In the twenty-first century, we're convincing ourselves that post-industrial technologies are reshaping our thoughts in conducive ways, while undermining our ecology of mind. If we've become better at anything, it's the compartmentalization of our perceptions and atomization of experience.

So where does the rise of right-wing authoritarianism fit in? I see this as an early symptom of this collapsing ecology of mind. There are at least two aspects I can underscore in this regard. First, the main driver of this political phenomenon is the way the internet fosters the spread of disinformation. For some time now, far-right

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1. Slater, G. (2024). *Jung vs Borg: finding the deeply human in a posthuman age*. Winter Press. Available to purchase at: https://extension.pacifica.edu/jung-vs-borg-finding-the-deeply-human-in-a-posthuman-age/

podcasters and social media presences have been methodically promoting a distrust of so-called "mainstream media" and regular sources of knowledge we find in scientific research and academic work. The result is an erosion of what Jonathan Rauch has called *The constitution of knowledge*[2] – a process of checks and balances that occurs when responsible journalists, writers and investigators interact to understand what's going on in the world. As distrust has deepened, a fertile field for disinformation and propaganda has been created. Algorithms favoring sensationalism and polarization, knowingly enabled by tech corporations,[3] have effectively tilted the infosphere in the direction of those most willing to mislead.

Second, the "nostalgia" you mentioned often comes wrapped in a nationalistic, anti-global sentiment, fueled by a yearning for a simpler way of life, and a search for meaning that often reverts to traditionalism. Whereas a relationship with the past is vital, and counters the futurism that is part of technology's grip on us, traditionalism is defensive and regressive. People look at the interconnected and complex ways of understanding reality that have emerged in the last half century and fear loss of identity. So while communication and information sharing abounds, a compensatory reaction is to revert to more rigid points of view. This is the age-old search for authority and clarity in the face of multiplicity and confusion. It's a dynamic Robert J. Lifton described.[4] When you add in the feeling of alienation that often accompanies a rapidly changing world, you have all the ingredients of today's sociopolitical climate.

Think of it this way: the outer ecological crisis is an "inconvenient truth"[5] for all, but is beyond inconvenient for those who cannot think ecologically because it challenges their entire worldview and system of values This is the way I link outer and inner ecologies. When our "ecology of mind" is compromised, our perceptions and understandings are too. Disconnected from the deeply human and unable to sort fact from fiction, we can't think or feel our way into what's happening in and to the world. All the usual sociopolitical contrasts between right-wing values and environmental concerns still apply, but the whole perception of the problem and surrounding discourse is thwarted by the way the technosphere is disrupting psyche.

TC: The section of *Jung vs Borg* on the connection between Hermes and Hestia really stuck with me. Hestia goddess of the home and hearth and Hermes god of communication, travel and stories. You argue that we are living through an era of "Hermes intoxication" – an overwhelm of stories, communication and connectedness. This to leads to an increase in a "Hestian" energy: a devotion to home and hearth that in its shadow aspect becomes a fanatical purity to defend the home, "a retreat into nations and tribes, as if to defend against the diffusion of identity that comes with having a psychic presence in many places and many ways".[1]

Tell us more about this apparent paradox of an excess of interconnectedness and an increase in nationalism and tribalism? How does this dynamic affect those who oppose ethno-nationalism? How can we develop a climate-informed psychology to understand and work with this dynamic?

GS: I take this essential idea from James Hillman, who used the term "Hermetic Intoxication" in an essay of the same name.[6] I expand on this, relating it to more recent trends. Hillman presented the theme in 1996 at a time when most people were just discovering the internet, so his description was prescient. He observed both the mercurial character of information technology as well as its propensity to intoxicate us with instant connectivity and a far reach. But he could also see the way it pulled us away from our capacity to come home to critical values, the way it damaged the Hestian capacity for being centered and reflective. The phrase "indiscriminate messenger" is used to describe the way Hermes-Mercury rules the online world. We're left with the problem of sorting out what's necessary and relevant.

I think we all appreciate the level of distraction and lack of focus that characterizes today's constant connection. The counterpoint is the Hestian propensity to be still – to attend to the hearth, and all this metaphor implies. In Ancient Greek iconography, Hermes and Hestia were often paired because archetypally each needs the other. Whenever there's a battle over stepping away from the computer or putting aside the smart phone to be present at the dinner table, we are experiencing a Hermes-Hestia tension. The struggle between taking time at the start of the day to sit quietly, journal, or meditate rather than check emails or texts is the same essential dynamic.

Hillman also works from Jung's notion that ignoring a god/archetypal value leads to its symptomatic return. So, at the collective level, he observed that when the Hestian value of being at home in the soul and having a satisfying sense of community is neglected, this

2. Rauch, J. (2021). *The constitution of knowledge: a defense of truth.* Brookings Institution Press.

3. For example, see paper Metzler, H., and Garcia, D. (2023). Social drivers and algorithmic mechanisms on digital media. *Perspect Psychol Sci.* 2024 Sep;19(5):735-748. doi: 10.1177/17456916231185057. Epub 2023 Jul 19. PMID: 37466493; PMCID: PMC11373151.

4. Lifton, R.J. (1999). *The protean self: human resilience in an age of fragmentation.* University of Chicago Press.

5. Terminology from the film *An inconvenient truth* (2006). Directed by Guggenheim, D. Paramount Classics.

6. Hillman, J. (1996). *Hermetic intoxication essay, mythic figures collection.* Spring Publications.

value returns in distorted, overwrought forms like tribalism, obsessing about borders and defending narrowly defined national interests and regional identities. Feeling tied to a stable hub or centre is an archetypal need; it's part of the human condition. If this feeling isn't met in a conscious, mature way, it will be met in an unconscious, reactionary one.

Authoritarian leaders intuitively know how to manipulate this pattern. They offer a reactionary version of a stable hub and, simultaneously, create a sense of enmity towards whatever is construed as a threat to this idealized, nostalgic centre. Global cooperation and concerns with climate change, which require thinking in terms of earth-wide systems (ecological thinking), become easy targets. Any kind of immanent rather than transcendent spirituality, rooted in the mind-body-earth connection is also regarded with suspicion. There's no room for the complexity of systems (eco or otherwise) or the idea we're all in the same boat and need an ethos of international problem-solving. It's "us vs. them", "winners and losers", and "might is right". It's regressive, appealing to simplistic, highly defensive thinking.

Instead of cultivating a genuine sense of hearth and home; nurturing a bond with Earth-processes that can be carried in the heart, there arises a compensatory focus on homeland security, nationalistic fervor and old-time religion. Instead of an online world that furthers genuine understanding, we get platforms spreading paranoid conspiracy theories. The internet (Hermes) keeps us on a horizontal plane of ever-expanding data and information but fails to facilitate his archetypal function as a divine messenger or inspire the kind of hermeneutic acumen that lead to critical insights and understandings of what's going on in the world. Our hermetic intoxication takes us every which way but down and in. We become more prone to hive-mind and cultish ideologies because there's an absence of vertical ways of knowing. Knowing which sources to trust and how to evaluate information is a capacity in decline. Information and understanding are quite different things: increasing data isn't generating wisdom about how to proceed.

Without an overall increase in self-knowledge we are unlikely to use technology in responsible or conducive ways, locking us into a vicious circle. Our increasing adaptation to AI is unlikely to solve the climate crisis because it is unlikely to return our awareness to the mind-body-earth configurations that promote ecopsychological integrity. AI is more likely to serve the technocratic programme of increasing our attachment to the "non-things"[7] of cyberspace – further removing us from an ensouled sense of the world.

To develop a "climate-informed psychology" would involve further insight into the way these technocratic trends are gripping the

collective psyche in order to suggest effective paths of resistance. Whether via nature-at-large or nature within, the Earth-process, which many hold at the center of their awareness, is not-so-patiently waiting for many more to see through the escapism and entrancement that pervades the technosphere. Sadly, it may take further collapse of both outer and inner ecosystems to move us in this direction.

TC: Toward's the end of your book you talk about the need for a new counterculture – "a slower, more enduring fire… more illuminations and less immolations". You write about how the increasing turn towards what I might call aspects of reactionary states of mind — "religious fundamentalism, economic conservatism, and a rise of right wing extremism" are "symptoms of failed cultural transformation" – or, as you say, "the post-industrial puer has been possessed by their senex shadow".[8] These Jungian terms speak of the way a desire for change and rebellion can bring about their opposite – social engineering.

Your book sets up a mythical battle for the soul, Jung against the robots. Can you say a few words about the Jung side of the equation – how can we avoid the pitfalls of the institutionalizations of the original counterculture? How might Jung counteract the might of the robots that seem to threaten both the fabric of society and of our world?

GS: In the book, I frequently contrast horizontal and vertical modes of perception and thought, as in relation to collision between the expanse of online connections and the absence of being with oneself. It's not viable for most people to escape the digital flow of information or to live outside the technosphere. The question is whether these prevailing conditions can become anchored in personal authenticity and attend to soul-centered ways of knowing.

When I'm speaking with groups about these ideas, I invoke the image of a tree and suggest we consider the outreach of the branches in contrast to the stabilizing structures of the trunk and root system. I ask people to consider how much the digital lifestyle is distracting them from the things that promote stabilization. Essentially, I'm attempting to demonstrate how we are in danger of growing trees that eventually topple over. For the way of the world keeps loading up the branches and eroding the root system.

Neglecting the root system has a great deal to do with overlooking the presence of the past within us. Before the modern era people would turn to the ancestral realm for guidance and inspiration. Our futurism and confidence in scientific discoveries and technical applications have resulted in a diminishment of the past – a discounting of what Jung called the collective unconscious. This is the idea that our experience of the world is shaped by universal and timeless patterns, which the ancients called gods and we have come to call archetypes. The connection to the archetypal level of life instills a sense of the sacred as well as an awareness of existential limits. It checks excessive confidence in will and the constant need to control nature, within or without.

What Jung offers to "counteract the might of the robots" is a greater awareness of enduring and defining archetypal patterns.

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7. Han, B-C. (2022). *Non-things: upheaval in the lifeworld.* Cambridge: Polity Press, English Edition.

8. Synonymous with childhood (*puer*) and mature (*senex*) archetypal energy.

He shows how spirit and nature come together in the psyche, and that connection to the archetypal world is also a connection to Earth. His psychology helps us see the way the anthropocentric problem of outer ecology mirrors the egocentric problem of inner ecology. A great deal of archetypal imagery comes from the character of the natural world: oceans and rivers, mountains and caves, deserts and forests, as well as the plants and animals that inhabit these places. Jung offers a sense of the sacred tied to matter and to ordinary, everyday experience.

The counterculture of the sixties and seventies was also concerned with a sense of the sacred that could be part of an ecology of mind. There was a longing to make whole what the modern world had torn apart. For example, there was a tremendous interest in how spirituality could overlap with the instinctual side of life – sexuality, ecology, and communal living tied to land. There was a turn to Eastern philosophy and transpersonal experiences produced by altered states of consciousness. At the core of this movement was a deep concern with holistic awareness.

All of these proclivities made the movement appear to be a radical rejection of the past and everything traditional, manifesting as a turn against anything conventional or "square." However, this was mostly a rejection of what modern life had become – seemingly sterile and lifeless. It was a rejection of the senex structures of the industrialized world, especially as they gave rise to the automation and urbanization of 1950s America. Ted Roszak, who coined the term "ecopsychology" also coined the term "counterculture."[9] He argued that the tap root of the counterculture, with its animating spirit of puer-possibility, was a rejection of the prevailing technocracy.

Many threads of this first counterculture – especially music and the interest in the East – have stayed with us. We're also seeing a revival of its spirit in the new psychedelic movement. However, for the most part, the thrust of the movement which attempted to shift the whole orientation of Western consciousness failed. The push for the new was too reactionary, and, in many ways, excessive. There were a lot of bad trips; "free-love" and "world peace" were too idealistic. But it mostly failed because it lacked a strong enough philosophical frame: the holistic thinking, spiritual need, and ecological concern lacked intellectual and institutional foundations. But this has changed.

We look at what's going on in today's world and it sometimes appears overtly hopeless. But beneath the surface are indications of a different story. It's now the old guard that's unrooted and reactionary, presenting a fabricated caricature of conservative, traditional values. Nationalism and authoritarianism may have time left to run and may cause considerable damage, but they will eventually collapse because of their essentially defensive character and lack of authenticity; they are fuelled by fear and reliant on artifice. Climate change denial is one telling example of a wider pattern; the claims of far-right politicians frequently lack any grounding in reality. Perhaps this is the deeper reason there's a bond being forged between the technocrats and the far right, particularly in America. Both are in the business of expedience, profit, and the proliferation of alternative facts; both benefit from the so-called "post-truth" world.[10] The technocrats engaged in social engineering need a lot of smoke and mirrors to hide their tracks.

On the other side, there are signs of a new counterculture, that has an interdisciplinary basis and a much stronger philosophical foundation than the first counterculture. Many fields now embrace integrative and holistic paradigms across the world and across generations. There's a more widely accepted ethos of international cooperation and ecological thinking. Perhaps the most hopeful sign is that we're starting to see some pushback against the post-industrial technocracy. With the disastrous proliferation of disinformation, the psychosocial shadow of the Digital Age has been brought to light. There are also clear concerns about AI, both in terms of its possible malevolent use and its culture-eroding potential. For the first time, perhaps, there is serious debate about equating technological advance with human progress. There is deep concern about the effect of AI on our ecology of mind: many are turning away from social media and questioning the amount of time they spend online.

Writing in the late sixties, Hillman provided us with an archetypal litmus test for large socio-political movements, posing the question of whether they express a union or a polarization of the senex and puer – the old and the new. Hyper-nationalism, religious fundamentalism, right-wing extremism are all contemporary roadblocks to solving the major challenges of our time. They split and polarize the old and the new. They wrap regressive forms of control and domination in ethereal promises of renewal and freedom. You end up with a crusty old man handing out sweets. By contrast, genuine and authentic forms of social and cultural transformation recast the wisdom of the past into thought-forms necessary to meet the pressing challenges of our time, giving rise to the youthful innovator with the old soul. Of course, we also need well-seasoned elders— the veterans of the first counterculture who've seen a few things but never lost touch with the vital vision of their youth. I think these septuagenarians and their kin still have another chapter to write.

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9. Roszak, T. (1969). *The making of a counter culture*. Doubleday & Co.

10. For example, see article here: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37995600 [Accessed January 2026].

Two poems

By Wieke Vink

You don't argue

You don't argue with a populist, because
they turn and twist
their words and say they were doing it
for the people.

What people, you could ask, but it doesn't matter
because there is always some group of people
aligned to their chatter.

Their words hurt, because they unleash power, but
in the end, I agree. You don't argue with a populist,
because it is about people and we get to define
who we are – not in policy, not in narrative, but in real life.

Adverse weather announcement

I need to find words for this weather
As the air presses down
on our bodies and our brains
Children are restless
The nights are relentless
And humidity humbles us into creatures of nature
I need to find words for this weather
As we come together
Sharing in the kindness of the shade.

Wieke Vink is a London-based poet, from the Netherlands. Common themes in her work include nature, climate, community, and children's rights. Wieke is the host of the Parents for Future (PFF) UK Book Circle and Poetry Night. More of her work can be found on Substack (@nooksofwonder).

The evolution of the unconscious, exploring persons, groups, nature and spirit[1]

An interview with Professor Susan Long on her book and understanding the reactionary state of mind

By Rembrandt Zegers, with photos by Rachel Cakebread

In this piece I first explain my interest in the reactionary state of mind (the theme of this issue) and the unconscious. Next, I include parts of my interview with Susan on her book. I end with a comment on how I see the unconscious connected to the notion of the reactionary state of mind.

Introduction

During the interview Susan posed back my question 'What is a reactionary state of mind?' After all her book is not about the reactionary state of mind, but the evolution of the idea of the unconscious. I admit that I did not have a clear definition of the reactionary state of mind and still don't. Several books have been written about it, for instance the one by Corey Robin which focuses on the US.[2] According to Wikipedia, reactionaries were a coalition of nobles and the church who opposed both the French Revolution and Enlightenment ideas. Later, those promoting a milder versions of the reactionary response called themselves Conservatives.[3] Today, identifying as conservative is a political stance.

Long's first chapter is about Shelling, who stated that despite the conscious being grounded in the unconscious, people have a choice in matters of good and bad. Susan Long wonders 'How far our thoughts, feelings and actions are determined by unconscious, systemic, physical and contextual forces and how much we are free to make decisions and act?' (Long, 2025, p.3.)

Regarding politics, I notice how quickly large groups of people get scapegoated, or how quickly a reactionary state of mind in its aggressive and punishing version can get embraced. I observe a vindictive, narcissistic and gendered kind of reactionary state of mind causing uproar in Western society. I support holding politicians to account, but what if these politicians frustrate choice, represent obsolete ethics and deliberately celebrate power to deliver an agenda of very dubious benefit for society? What if these politicians are not curious about their own choices, their own unconscious? I am becoming very interested in Susan Long's book to explore these thoughts further.

1. Long, S. (2025). *The evolution of the unconscious, exploring persons, groups, nature and spirit.* Routeledge.

2. Robin, C. (2017). *The reactionary mind. Conservatism from Edmund Burk to Donald Trump.* Oxford University Press, 2nd edition.

3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reactionary [Accessed 27 December 2025]

Mushroom over outflow

Interview

Rembrant Zegers (RZ): What is your book about?

Susan Long (SL): I've been fascinated by the way different people have thought about unconscious processes. I thought to write this book for myself and my students, by tracing what has been influential in my own development. Those influences became the choice of the theories I describe and reflect on. The influences on me and my own development were decisive. When I was a clinician in a hospital, I had neurotic and psychotic patients. Then I followed a course in group relations in social systems. My first Group Relations conference was in 1979. Wilfred Bion became a big influence regarding thinking about groups. Lacan and Bion dealt with psychosis in a way that other analysts hadn't. This deepened my understanding. Bion's notions of spirit are close to what Shelling was saying. So, the book starts with Shelling. I saw that he started to talk about the idea of the unconscious in a systematic way.

RZ: You talk about Freud, Lacan, Bion and nature. Why nature?

SL: I've always been interested in biology. I loved living near the bush and I've always had animals. There was a time in history when animals could be brought to court and they could be convicted. People must have thought animals had a mind. They thought that they could tell the pig or the horse what they've done wrong. I found that quite weird but was curious. How had that come about? Was it simply projection? What else had been observed?

I also always thought my horses have minds. I know from experience

that to work with them, I have to go into their world. Language in their world is through movement. They learn a few words; can understand things like 'whoa!' and 'stay.' But that's not their language. If you're going to work with horses, you've got to learn their body language, and whether you're walking with them or riding them, you've got to get in sync with them. It's a mind different from the human mind. I thought they problem solve so I wanted to research many animals' ways of problem solving, like birds, sharks, or fish as well as apes and monkeys. They're all linked to their own environment in a particular way; as we humans are. I thought, well, is there an unconscious with animals, with nature and what would it mean? I struggled to have a look at that; I only touched the surface. But it's interesting thinking about the whole world consciousness and the whole world unconsciousness. Of course, there is unconsciousness in animals. But I don't know if their unconscious is also a repressed unconscious, like with people. Maybe that is the case. We know that a dog can be traumatised, while probably going through a repressive process.
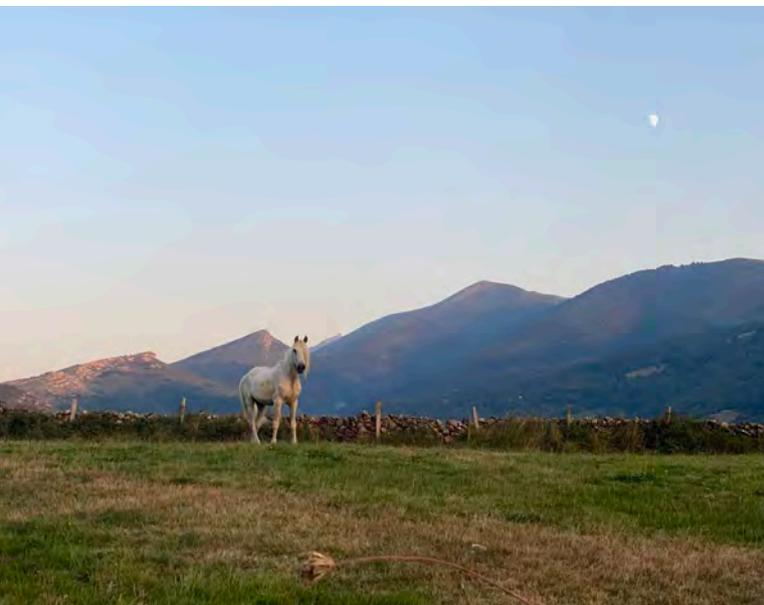
RZ: You also talk about neuroscience and spirit.

SL: I started to see that the Freudian repressed unconscious isn't the only way to think of the unconscious. I got interested in Mark Solms's work with his attempt to bring neuroscience and psychoanalysis together.[4] I thought that should be in the book. I try near the end of each chapter to reflect on how free will is seen. Do we have free will? Or are we determined? That is such an important question through the history of the idea of the unconscious. It moves toward the idea of spirit.

RZ: That's the conundrum that Shelling already poses.

SL: Exactly. The answer, of course, is always 'maybe.' We are both determined and we have some choice. The whole Freudian oeuvre is about our capacity to make decisions about ourselves if we recognise what's driving us. But then the social scientists came in saying, well, it's not as simple as that. What drives us is what comes out of culture and gets deeply embedded in us. How can you have free will in a world that's dominated by consumerism? How can we have democracies in countries, real democracy, in a world producing dictators? The social unconscious gets embedded in language. My PhD supervisor was interested in how society is shaping us, and

how it gets into language. A recent PhD student of mine looked at language. A cow has big brown eyes and goes 'moo' and solves problems in its own environmental niche. But on your plate, you call it meat or beef. Or a pig on your plate is pork. The language takes you away from the living sentient creature. And so, culture gets into language and drives you along. So how can one have real choice?

RZ: If you think of fully embracing the essence and including nature, what does that mean? Does that mean a different practice in terms of being a therapist or a coach?

SL: I think in terms of everyday living. How can you influence your government to move towards an understanding of climate change? How it affects coaching is to help people become aware of their place in their organisation and of the organisation's place in context. And finally in an inter-organisational context. I had a client who works for a very large multinational in a senior position. She said, "I've had coaches before, but nobody has brought this awareness to me before." It's about helping find unconscious patterns, trying to see how that pattern is driving things and whether it needs to continue.

I like the work that's being done in relation to indigenous cultures. Our research with the fire services shows that how we look after the land and the forests is starting to be informed by some indigenous ways of doing that. I like that, although I don't want to romanticise it, so that we knock back all Western science and so on.

RZ: I always get into a split when natural science comes around. Because then it seems as if validation of knowing can only happen in one way, and in our culture, validation is not acknowledged or appreciated if you can't do the statistical analysis and prove your hypothesis.

SL: I'm not willing to go into a them and us. Quantitative and qualitative data both have their place, and both have, in the long run, to be interpreted and that always involves subjective judgements. In nature we're all connected, but each individual and the different groupings and species have their own way of being able to respond to whatever is reverberating. Some parts of nature can pick up things, obviously, that I can't, like horses. You've got to have a certain amount of assertiveness to be the leader. But if you're aggressive, you'll lose them (the horses) and if you're too nervous, you'll lose them. You've got to find the right place in yourself and how you find it is through a feeling and a deep knowledge inside of yourself when you've got it right. I'd say, well, that's where you've got to be and maybe for a manager it is not that different. You've got to find that place with the people you're working with. And it's not by just observing out there. A lot of it is observing in here, in yourself.

RZ: Every person or every group has to discover it for themselves, as if there is no evolution.

SL: Well, that is like life, growing from young to old. Each child must learn mostly for themselves. You can't tell your children how everything is. They must learn for themselves who they are. It is the same for cultures. Cultures grow over such long periods of time; evolution is a very slow process.

4. Solms, M. (2018). The neurobiological underpinnings of psychoanalytic theory and therapy. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience, Pathological Conditions*, vol. 12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2018.00294

RZ: This issue of the journal has as a theme the 'reactionary state of mind'. We want to give attention to the phenomenon of the reactionary state of mind, that seems to become a stronger voice day by day and that is out to repress democracy as we know it.

SL: I think it is true that the divide between the haves and the have nots, has grown in many areas and changes that come to benefit some, don't benefit others. I'm not a politician. I think in terms of the unconscious. I think that we've become, at least in some parts of the West, too rational, so that more intuitive ways of thinking become dismissed. But it's not really rational, it's rationalisation. It's still the unconscious. I'm not against rational, real rationality and clear thinking is good. Rationalisation, putting a supposedly rational explanation to cover unconscious personal desire, is not that helpful. It is still an unconscious process. People putting rational reasons for where there is no real rational reason, demonstrate putting personal interest, or small group interest, to the centre 'as if' that is rational. Rationalising is how these personal interests get expressed.

I think that unless we can see ways to prevent this, these divides become bigger and bigger and they will destroy what is there. It is a defence mechanism. If anybody reads my book, I say, look at how many ways we can think about the way in which we're driven by forces we can't easily comprehend. We don't usually understand what we're being driven by, and we need to look at that. I dealt with this perhaps more in my book on the perverse organisation,[5] where I hypothesize that our societies are becoming increasingly perverse following the increase in narcissism. This is evidenced through, for example, abuse and cover-up (turning a blind eye). Take the sexual abuses uncovered in the churches and abuses in domestic systems, covered up by the family or consumerism and capitalism driving the instrumentality seen in many organisations, or creation of conspiracy theories in social media where denials and delusions abound.

Comment: the reactionary state of mind, the unconscious and choice

I think using the phrase the 'reactionary state of mind' does not refer to a clinical diagnosis with a treatment. However, when one looks up the 'reactionary state of mind', one comes across descriptions of narcissistic and fascist personality types. References to male gender can also be found.[6] It seems that "the reactionary state of mind" mostly refers to fixed beliefs about the world, that it was 'better' the way it used to be, while certain others are to blame for having changed that. Reactionary says something about the state of being fixated in one's beliefs as if one knows for sure how the world should be, without the need to try to understand oneself or the wider complexity of the world to make that accurate. Here lies a reference to the unconscious as a repressed mind or as an unconscious social set of assumptions, a social identity, that is steering cultural life. However, reactionary should not be confused with reacting. Reacting as such is not good or bad as we exist through engaging and being in relationships with our environment, other people, as well as non-human species and the planet.

Looking into the unconscious and what we know and understand about it through Susan Long, I would say goes into two directions; one is from the individual unconscious to the social unconscious and the other is from the mind to the body. Usually, the word mind is reserved for an individual, as in individuals having minds. I think the reactionary state of mind can be seen as a reference to past cultural identities and beliefs, as well as a defence against a collectively felt wrongdoing, attack or crisis of some sort. A crisis that is mental as well as real, such as, for example, current economic thinking and doing versus climate collapse, pollution, biodiversity loss and chaotic information overload. It seems politics in the West is directed towards a sense of entitlement, towards blaming others because they are in the way of what certain politicians think should rightfully come to us. It is putting loss and burdens on others, that one is not willing to share or collectively handle. Shelling's view that the choice between good and bad lies with the will seems relevant here. Susan Long shows us the history of the unconscious as a history of our drives and of making unaccounted for rationalisations (which is not the same as being rational).

Unfortunately, the unconscious doesn't explain itself. If we are sloppy about the unconscious, as well as arrogant and manipulative, claiming a truth or a knowing about the world that in fact is nothing like it, can have catastrophic consequences if this sloppiness wields power. Science brought us an opportunity to find out what is true and what is not. However, finding out what is true or even real for oneself, or finding it out as a collective, are different from

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5. Long, S. (2008). T*he perverse organisation and its deadly sins.* Karnac Books. In this book, Susan Long identifies the five primary indicators of systemic perversity:

1. **Narcissism**. There are indications in our culture where individual (primary) narcissistic pleasure is pursued at the expense of the general good.
2. **Denial of reality**. Destructivity, denial of truth, destruction of boundaries, and creation of illusion.
3. **Instrumental use of others as accomplices**; including an exploitative attitude.
4. In an instrumental culture of use and abuse, people try to **take advantage of opportunities** and always pursue their desires.
5. There is a **seductiveness to the perverse state**. This seductiveness spreads in society.

6. Adorno, T.W. et al. (1950). *The authoritarian personality.* New York: Harper and Bros.

organised science. Such finding out is a finding out beyond dogma, beyond assumptions. It is a finding out that we can ask for help with but must keep making an effort towards individually and collectively. This requires the willingness to be curious about the unconscious and deep dive into it. The reactionary state of mind will break down such willingness and conditions and is not interested in asking such questions.

The unconscious as a condition of our life is a hurdle as well as a quality and capacity. It is our being. We can embrace I and, be curious about it, as it can tell us so much about ourselves. We can embrace I and be curious about it. It can tell us so much about ourselves.

When the reactionary state of mind ignores the unconscious, we may call on psychology to find ways of helping us to come to our senses, come back to our will power. The unconscious is a gateway to understanding who we are, and how to work with ourselves and others, within a living reality that we are part of.

Susan Long is Professor Emeritas at the National Institute of Organisation Dynamics Australia, Editor-in-chief of the journal *Socioanalysis* and an organisational consultant and coach in private practice.

Rembrandt Zegers offers psycho-social consultancy and research with an emphasis on including our relation to nature and its governance. He holds a PhD on this topic from the University of the West of England.
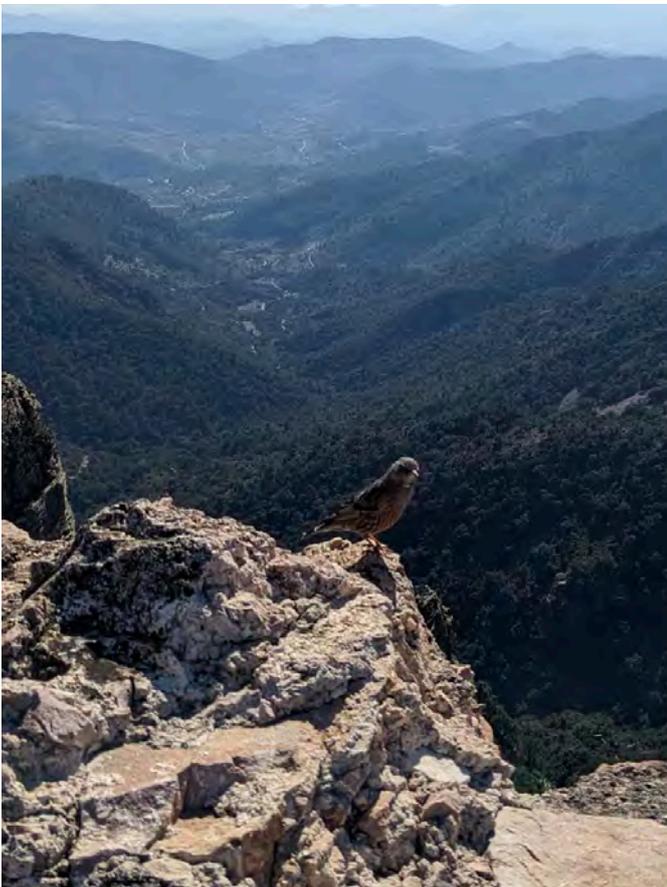
Indifference

By Jeevan Bhagwat

We turn on the tv
watch the 6 o'clock news,
forest fires raging up north,
smoke rising from burnt boreal
jet streamed all the way
to Europe.
Don't give it much thought either,
after all, it's a world away
from the city surrounding us.

We make plans and get dressed
for a night out on the town,
pretend like nothing's wrong
while scientists urge
a recalibration
of the moral compass
in our hearts.

When the taxi horn hollas
from concrete curb,
we step outside and breathe the air
lungs choking with the smell
of acrid smoke,
as an orange haze
hugs the horizon,

refusing to be ignored.
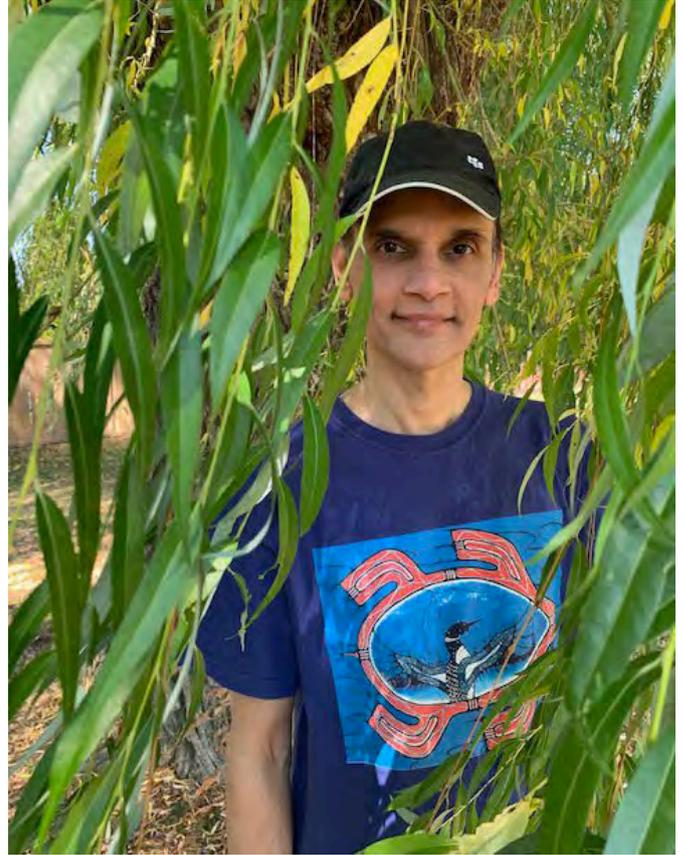
Jeevan Bhagwat lives in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He is an award-winning poet and the author of *The Radha poems* (Silver Bow Publishing, 2025), Luminescence (IN Publications, 2020), and *The weight of dreams* (IN Publications, 2012). Jeevan is a member of the League of Canadian Poets.

Power, coercion and the reactionary mindset

Text and photos by Matt Chapman

Introduction

I've struggled for two decades to understand why our environmental crises seem so intractable, and thinking about how we could do things better. This article explores some recent published thinking about human nature, and how we're not as bad as we often make ourselves out to be. It also contains a theory about inequality and coercive power and how entropy might predict that these are intrinsically unsustainable.

This article aims to:

1. Explore parallels between the reactionary and the conservation mindsets concerned with climate change and ecological destruction with the aim of showing that there is more in common than dividing these sometimes seemingly opposing paradigms.

2. Highlight growing evidence that dispels notions that our human nature condemns us to solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short[1] lives in the absence of an overbearing government.[2,3,4]

3. Consider power – the power of institutions that govern our lives and power in the physical or scientific sense of energy/time measured in Watts. These two meanings of the word power are seldom intertwined; my thesis is these different definitions of power are based on the same premise.

I'll deal with the science first because that is fundamental to understanding the rest.
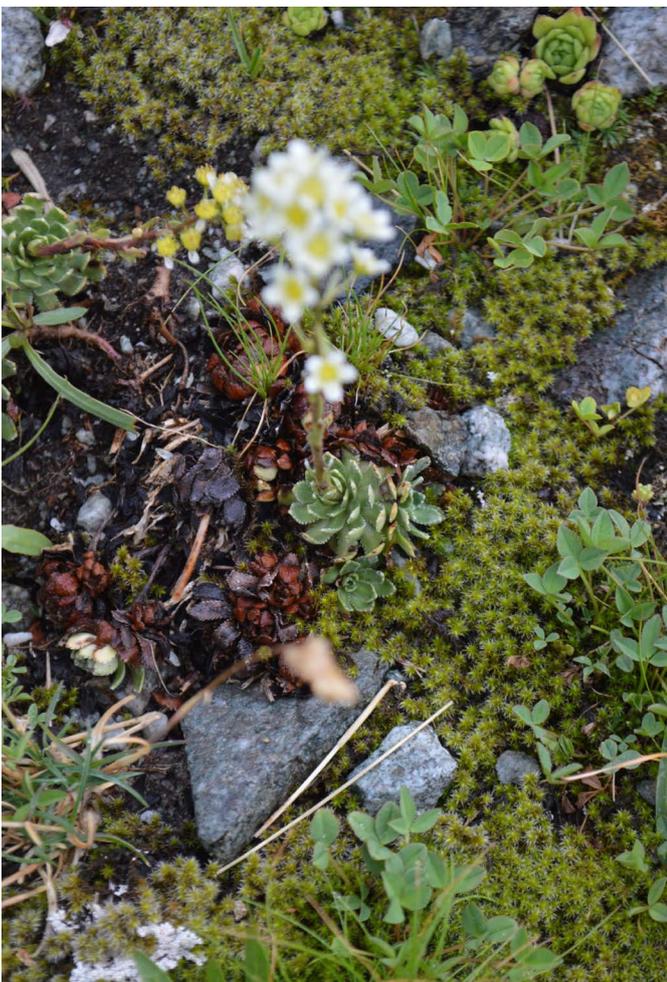
Energy, entropy and the resource demands of inequality and coercive power

The problems we face are systemic. The roots of the problems stem from institutions, including nations and corporations. Corporations can't exist without national laws and nations would soon collapse without corporations to generate their wealth, so they are, in effect, the same institution.

Governing institutions exist through their ability to wield power. Power (to fuel a tank, energise mass surveillance, propel a bullet or feed an army) can only come from the environment (fossil fuels, mineral extraction, intensive agriculture, etc.). For an institution to sustain itself against internal or external opposition, it must be able to mobilise more power than those internal opponents and external threats.

The institutional voracity for power will always outstrip the environment's sustainable capacity to supply it. Institutional power (to subjugate and defend itself) and physical power (Watts – extracted from the environment) are therefore effectively the same thing as the former cannot exist without the latter.

Coercive power structures first came into being ~10,000 years ago,[2,3] out of dispersed, largely nomadic communities when technological advances enabled the extraction of energy from their environment at a faster (unsustainable) rate to fuel them. Many of these early power-hungry proto-institutions (exerting power over land, knowledge or religion) were necessarily short-lived and collapsed when their demand for resources outstripped the capacity of their environments to supply them. For example, depleting soil by intensive and unsustainable crop production or by depleting wood fuel following the development of early metal tools.

Coercive institutions were only able to power themselves for longer by plundering resources from across a wider area, or more latterly by exploiting fossil fuels or smashing atoms.

Recent demonstrations of the coercive power/fuel power relationship include Trump and his powerbrokers seizing control of Venezuelan oilfields,[5] Putin's invasion of Ukraine was necessary to

1. Hobbes, T. (1651). *Leviathan.* Printed for A. Crooke, London.

2. Kemp, L. (2025). *Goliath's curse: the history and future of societal collapse.* Penguin Books.

3. Graeber, D. and Wengrow, D. (2022). *The dawn of everything: a new history of humanity.* Penguin Books.

4. Bregman, R. (2021). *Humankind: a hopeful history.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

5. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/jan/12/us-plan-to-exploit-venezuelas-oil-could-eat-up-13-of-carbon-budget-to-keep-15c-limit

Left: Building life

Out of disorder

open the door to Trump securing their mineral reserves,[6] and at the time of writing, Greenland looks to be next in line. The power of the British institution showed itself when Starmer and Reeves turned a landslide victory into becoming widely despised as the bond markets crushed their aspirations for social and environmental reform. Representative democracy is not democracy, particularly when politicians are on such a tight leash from those who wield real power. Coercive power needs fuel power.

The second scientific point is entropy. Entropy describes the tendency of everything to disperse from high concentrations (high energy, low entropy) to low concentrations (low energy, high entropy). Entropy has been used to understand systems as diverse as steam and internal combustion engines, to economics, cosmology and information systems. The thesis I'm exploring is that entropy, as defined in the second law of thermodynamics, also applies to wealth and institutional power.

Entropy explains why a hot cup of tea cools down to the temperature of the surrounding room, and why all the oxygen molecules don't suddenly jump into one corner of the room. Entropy predicts that wealth and resources should similarly tend towards equal distribution. It takes a terrific amount of energy to concentrate oxygen molecules into one place. Similarly, energy is required to create material advantage, and it requires an immense amount of physical power to sustain it.

Entropy encourages self-regulation. In nature, there is ebb and flow but not sustained excess. Enough is just right. An overindulgent fat wildebeest makes for an easy hunt and tasty meals. The lion's share of the wildebeest is quite small because it is far too risky to defend a valuable carcass from the hungry hyaenas. The hyaenas give way to the vultures, flies and beetles and a multitude of micro-organisms to efficiently recycle the remainder of the carcass. The concentration of energy and nutrients in the wildebeest tends towards distribution throughout a thriving ecosystem. Life alone builds structure out of the distributed mush of entropy. In nature, self-regulation is essential for survival.

By contrast – coercive, controlling institutions depend upon excess. Excess firepower to deter dissent and territorial aspirations of neighbouring institutions. Excessive rewards for their most loyal and useful servants. Finally, a lumbering juggernaut of bureaucrats, administrators, accountants, lawyers and agencies to ensure the excess enjoyed by the institution's most loyal and valuable subjects

is not stolen and redistributed amongst the wider community – Robin-Hood style.

Institutional power and environmental destruction are therefore necessary bedfellows. It is incredibly difficult to exert coercive control over a population who could just wander off into the forest and live quite happily without a would-be ruler's megalomaniacal tendencies. Unfortunately, we can't just wander into the forest, because it's been cut down. Our ancestors had free access to clean water, whereas the institution pollutes freely available water in our rivers and sells us "clean" drinking water. Whilst this may not be deliberate, a dependent population is certainly convenient in guaranteeing investor profits. The chemical industry processes food into substances our bodies can't tolerate; it produces a plethora of environmental toxins; it manufactures drugs. You can't sell drugs to well people. Toxicity in our environment and ultra-processed food produce a market of opportunity full of unwell people to sell drugs to.

Democracy is government by the people for the people. Representative democracy is simply an abdication of the responsibility each of us holds for our community. Representative democracy, monarchy, oligarchy and dictatorship are all just different flavours of institutional control. People don't pollute rivers; institutions do. People care for each other; institutions rarely care. People discover amazing things like how to split an atom; institutions have used that knowledge to ensure destruction.

People who wield institutional power don't behave like normal people. Acquired sociopathy,[7] is a condition first diagnosed in the 19th century in patients with head injuries. It transpires that people in power display the same tendencies, being more rude, impulsive, impatient, self-centred, reckless and arrogant. They are less attentive to other people and dismissive of other perspectives. Many powerful people don't blush, which we humans do uniquely as a display of shame. Power can corrupt the nicest people into ruthless Machiavellians.[4]

Before the advent of Power, neighbouring communities were more self-regulating in their dealings. Malanowski, an early anthropologist, records exchanges between neighbouring fishing and farming communities. If a community was unable to deliver in an exchange due to a poor hunting season or bad harvest, they would be met with compassion, understanding and offers of help. If they over delivered, they would be ridiculed. Successful hunters within a community would similarly be ridiculed as a necessary check on their egos. It seems our predecessors were more aware of the necessity of keeping the dark triad of narcissistic, Machiavellian, psychopathic character traits in check.[8,9]

It took a community to raise a child, but the community also took responsibility for the developing adult. If one of their own killed

6. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/05/donald-trump-rare-earths-ukraine-us-trade-deal-aid-russia

7. Keltner, D. (2017). *The power paradox: how we gain and lose influence.* Penguin Books.

8. Xygalatas, D. (2022). *Ritual: how seemingly senseless acts make life worth living.* Profile Books.

9. Malinowski, B. (1926). *Crime and custom in savage society.* 1989 edition published by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

someone, it would be a slight on the whole community for which they would offer reparations at huge and ongoing cost. In a humane society there was no demand for compensation as compensation can never compensate for a taken life. If the dark triad was insurmountable in an individual, there may be a solemn and humane duty to ensure that individual couldn't cause more harm.

Survival of the friendliest

The power and entropy model also calls into question our established view of evolution just as the survival of the fittest model is now being usurped by survival of the friendliest[4] and the thriving of those best able to collaborate. The pre-civilisation archaeological record shows vanishingly few examples of human remains with war or combat like injuries but far more examples of remains with healed injuries.

The prevailing view from Darwin is of a competitive world in which randomness caused new evolutionary lines and competition for constrained environmental resources lead to extinction of uncompetitive traits. I've struggled to square this theory with the beauty, playfulness and flamboyance I observe in the birds in my garden. Their life is not evidently one of constant threat and scarcity.

The entropy model is premised on balancing opportunity with self-regulation. As with the wildebeest, enough is just right and essential for flourishing, flamboyance, exuberance and play which are difficult to envisage in a world of constant threat from predation and starvation. Nature has produced terrific diversity of organisms occupying unique evolutionary niches from the finite amount of power reaching us from the sun. From the plants that photosynthesise it to the food chains they support, increasing biodiversity can only happen with increasing efficiency at each trophic level.

It isn't just the body that evolved to be highly efficient; behaviour does too. Every species presents opportunities for further sub-species of other organisms. Each new plant creates opportunities for grazing, nuts, seeds or berries, new nest materials, cover for hunting or to hide from predators. Each new animal presents a source of nutrient rich dung and a dispersal mechanism for seeds. The process is one of gradual refinement – creating beauty, elegance and opportunity, all depending upon self-regulation and efficiency.

Evolved organisms can achieve phenomenal feats on few resources. We can run a marathon, climb mountains, write plays and create

In the cracks

abstract art on the resources contained in a few slices of toast and a bit of fruit. We have created amazing machines, but even with roads and tracks, their movement efficiency can't come close to that of a dog. We now have artificial intelligence that may have greater computational power than the human brain, but its demand for mineral and energy resources are incompatible with a flourishing future.

Sustainability depends upon our transition back to an egalitarian, society of self-regulating, reciprocal individuals in strong, supportive communities.

Reactionary mindset

The reactionary mindset is arguably responsible for driving many towards far-right, ultra-conservative politics. However, I see a lot of parallels between the reactionary mindset and the conservation mindset of many environmentalists.

"Reactionary" describes a mindset longing to return to a previous era with positive characteristics that may be missing, diminished or under threat in the current world. For many marching behind St George's flag, I suspect the flag is a mere proxy for other, more local concerns. As humans, we are wired for close communities of about 150, and a wider network of 1,000 individuals over our lifetime. Soldiers are much more concerned with their immediate family of brothers in arms than they are with a flag or supposed just cause.[2] A country of ten million individuals or an abstract ideology are not things we feel natural affinity for.

Where environmentalists are largely concerned with the preservation of local ecological distinctiveness, diversity is natural in people too. Local customs, folklore, ecology, soil and climate means that neighbouring communities ought to have distinct characters. Diversity and distinctiveness have been the norm for 90% of human history. But multiculturalism, white-collar professional migration, slavery, deportation and global immigration have eroded the distinctiveness of many generally settled communities.

The other similarity between environmentalists and reactionaries is that – if the power/entropy thesis is correct – both are looking the wrong way for solutions to the problems they perceive. Just as those concerned with local cultural distinctiveness can be drawn to right wing, nationalist politics, those concerned with local environmental distinctiveness are often drawn to the institutions of the political left. It is the misplaced trust that both groups place in their ability to influence institutional power that sets an unnatural dichotomy and antagonism between them.

The solutions to the global environmental crises aren't going to come from international treaties, but from the dismantling of the nation states. The solutions to rediscovering a distinctive local identity doesn't come from stronger national borders, it comes from dismantling the colonial institutions that exploit environments and people across the world, resulting in vulnerable people seeking refuge from institutional economic exploitation, environmental destruction and warfare.

Instead, we need a mindset shift. This is not our land. We are of this land. If we are all to be free, we also need to be free to travel and resettle. Travel is premised on respect – including for the land you are visiting and the people of that land. The other side of travel freedom is the anticipation that you will be welcomed and sustain the places you visit. This is why many cultures will feed strangers

before themselves. Mass migration for economic and other purposes is less easily catered for because it wouldn't normally happen in nature. Mass migration usually occurs because of institutional coercion, war, torture or destruction.

In a world without global trade, the urgent imperative would be to relearn how to feed your local community and keep people well. Many who consider themselves true Brits have long lost this ability so will it become a blessing that our communities include people closer to their traditional roots? If we can survive the next few decades, relearning how to live in reciprocity with the land, getting our inflated population back down to sustainable levels, learning to live in communities without the institutional artefacts of property, money and law, then local cultural diversity and biodiversity might start to grow once more.

Conclusion

This is an early exploration of the power/entropy model and its implications regarding sustainability, which might offer new solutions to our social problems too. Life without the predominant paradigms from the last five millennia of property, power, and law, to being governed by our intrinsic humanity guided by local culture and ecology may be difficult to envisage, but it may be the only change possible to match the scale and urgency of our looming crises.

From chaos

When I've needed help, CPA volunteers answered my call.
Matt Chapman is a park keeper in Crewe, UK.
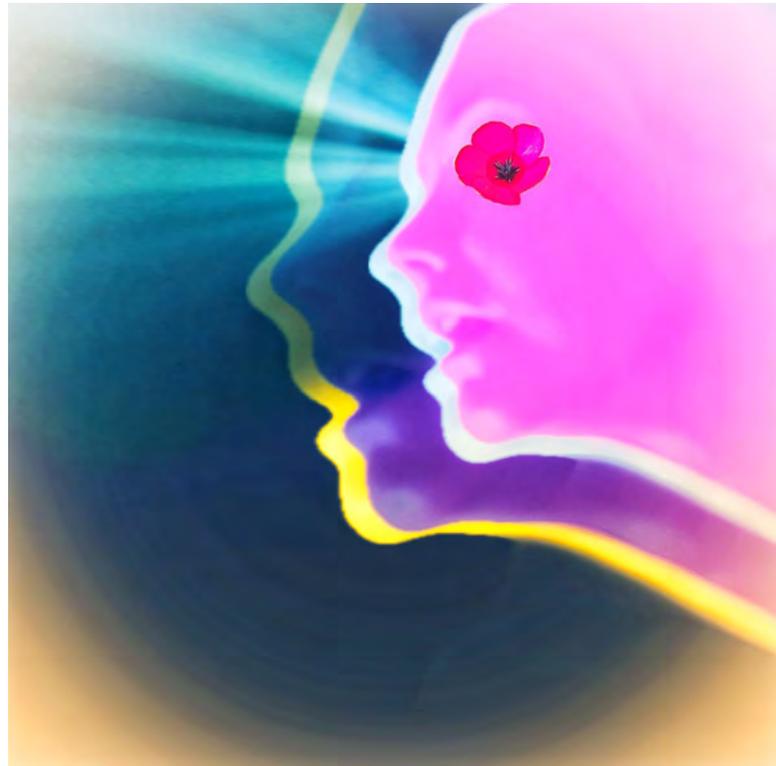
New genres for a new climate

Text and images by Asli Sonceley

In the face of accelerating ecological decline, writers and filmmakers are intuitively reaching for ways to make meaning of our time. Climate fiction (or cli-fi) immerses us in futures that have unevenly arrived: catastrophic in some regions, maintaining hope in others. Instead of offering the classic arc of adversity overcome by a chosen hero, cli-fi orients us toward a different emotional register: loss, grief and the destabilizing recognition that the "end of the world as we know it" is a never-ending event.

New narrative styles are emerging in stark contrast to the disaster genre at the turn of the millennium. *Twister* (1994),[1] *Volcano* (1997),[2] *Dante's peak* (1997),[3] *Armageddon* (1998),[4] *The day after tomorrow* (2004),[5] *2012* (2009),[6] *Knowing* (2009)[7] are all structured around an explosive, or "extinction-level" event. Each leads to a climactic ending, with the possibility of our protagonist saving the day. Audiences are well-accustomed to a clear, explosive event resolved by heroic action. But the very nature of a climactic end allows the metaphor to be forgotten the minute viewers walk away from the screen. A three-act structure built for ninety-minutes cannot capture the slow-burn effects of climate change.

This gap weakens the potential influence of fiction on real-world action. The urgency to respond does not click when a disaster spans generations. Genre conventions designed for escapism are not suited to depict climate realities. To inspire real responses to ongoing problems, narratives need to aim not for a dopamine kick, but for a lingering effect.

Working title 4

To portray the climate crisis honestly, creators are nudging beyond familiar genre conventions. The hero's journey – with its promise of triumph and restoration – can no longer hold the moral and temporal complexity of the climate story. In its place, new hybrid genres –solarpunk,[8] hopepunk and cli-fi are sprouting from near-future realism. They are defined not by spectacle or clear-cut resolution but by an uncanny proximity to our lived world. Narratives feel both ordinary and visionary, fictional yet magically grounded in reality.

Across this terrain, three notable trends stand out as profound shifts in narrative form and in depicting people's response to slow-moving yet existential crises:

1. The end of the exceptional (white male) hero, and the rise of the unapologetically ordinary and international ensemble

These works fragment the narrative across an ensemble cast, dispersing responsibility among many characters. This addresses one of the root causes of climate change: the myth of individual exceptionalism. Instead, these stories draw power from collectivism.

Strong examples appear in literature:

The overstory, by Richard Powers[9]

The deluge, by Stephen Markley[10]

The ministry for the future, by Kim Stanley Robinson[11]

1. *Twister* (1996). Directed by de Bont, J. [Film]. USA: Warner Bros.

2. *Volcano* (1997). Directed by Jackson, M. [Film]. USA: 20th Century Fox.

3. *Dante's peak* (1997). Directed by Donaldson, R. [Film]. USA: Universal Pictures.

4. *Armageddon* (1998). Directed by Bay, M. [Film]. USA: Buena Vista Pictures.

5. *The day after tomorrow* (2004). Directed by Emmerich, R. [Film]. USA: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment.

6. *2012* (2009). Directed by Emmerich, R. [Film]. USA: Columbia Pictures.

7. *Knowing* (2009). Directed by Proyas, A. [Film]. USA: Summit Entertainment.

8. *Solarpunk, a subgenre of speculative fiction.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solarpunk [Accessed December 2025].

9. Powers, R. (2018). *The overstory: a novel.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

10. Markley, S. (2023). *The deluge.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

11. Robinson, K.S. (2020). *The ministry for the future.* London: Orbit.

A politician, an actress, a climate activist, a finance executive, a software engineer, a botanist, a mother, an imposter, a farmer – no single figure is "the one". Rather, plots tessellate across people situated differently in systems of power and powerlessness. Their small, uneven contributions form a mosaic of impact. The result is both humbling and honest: no one saves the world, but many attempt to keep it livable.

2. Intimacy at the end of the world

These narratives center romance, family tensions, friendships, and interpersonal drama. The stakes of survival are immense, yet the story leads with the small and human rather than explosions and spectacle. This turn toward intimacy reflects a deeper psychological truth: when confronting planetary-scale crises, we seek grounding in the close, the local, the relational. These stories insist that what matters most in collapse is connection, not mythical heroism.

Each episode of *Extrapolations* (2023)[12] is set against climate realities that have transformed families, careers, and relationships, zooming into imagined intricacies of living at the edge of the end of the world. Similarly, films adapted from novels like *Leave the world behind* (2023)[13] and *White noise* (2022),[14] lead with the personal while a background catastrophe hovers like a cloud rather than erupting in spectacle.

3. Time stretches and fractures; there are no starry-eyed endings

Many climate narratives abandon tight three-act structure. Characters may be dropped as stories leap across decades or centuries (*The overstory, The deluge, The ministry for the future, Extrapolations*). Some works nest time within time (*Event factory*, by Renee Gladman)[15] or dissolve it altogether (*Sea of tranquility*, by Emily St. John Mandel).[16]

This refusal of neat beginnings, middles, and ends mirrors the crisis itself: climate change has no tidy narrative arc. It is slow, recursive, and unresolved. The form becomes an act of truth-telling. These stories rarely offer catharsis – only hard-earned hope, a continued struggle, and the possibility of partial progress.

If we are ever going to make meaning other than accepting total annihilation, the way we tell stories must collapse before our world does. New genres, archetypes beyond the hero, and new kinds of endings must model emotional resilience, better decision-making, and long-term thinking to inspire real-world shifts.

Emerging genre conventions are not only invitations to more inventive, less-formulaic storytelling; they signal a cultural turn.

They ground climate narratives in emotional realism, relationality, and collective struggle. They allow viewers and readers to imagine new possibilities. Our potential futures are stitched from everyday acts, shared burdens, and imperfect hope.

In doing so, they help us grieve the world we are losing, while quietly cultivating the courage to shape the world still possible.

Asli Sonceley is a Turkish-American artist, and creative producer focusing on climate change, mental health, storytelling, and technology. She also has extensive experience in marketing. You can follow her analysis of popular media through a "Hidden Climate Story" https://hiddenclimatestory.substack.com/

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12. *Extrapolations* (2023). [TV Series]. Created by Burns, S.Z. Apple TV+.

13. *Leave the world behind* (2023). Directed by Esmail, S. [Film]. Netflix.

14. *White noise* (2022). Directed by Baumbach, N. [Film]. Netflix.

15. Gladman, R. (2010). *Event factory.* Dorothy, a publishing project.

16. Mandel, E. St. J. (2022) *Sea of tranquility*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Families like ours

By Maggie Turp

Families like ours[1] is a drama in six parts, set in the near future in Denmark. We learn in the first episode that the Danish government is planning to close the country down and organise the relocation all of its citizens to other European countries. The rationale for this decision – important in lending plausibility to the premise – is the unmanageably high cost of keeping the rising sea level at bay, which has led in the Netherlands to the collapse of the economy and an unplanned and chaotic exodus of Dutch citizens. Denmark – another low-lying country with high rainfall – will likewise be unable to bear the costs of flood prevention. With Dutch refugees adding to the already enormous number of climate refugees arriving from the Global South, many European countries have closed or are planning to close their borders.

The Danish government decides to pre-empt the situation by organising an orderly evacuation, securing a place in another European country for each citizen. When the process is complete and Denmark empty of people, the country will be allowed to flood and turned into a gigantic wind farm. (As I was writing this, I saw news that a small English town, Tenbury Wells, has become the first place in the UK where it is impossible to secure flood insurance, the town having been flooded seven times in the last four years. There is speculation over whether it will become a 'ghost town' – the first UK town to be abandoned in the face of the climate crisis.)[2]

Hazard at sea front, by Rachel Cakebread

The family at the centre of the drama is, indeed, like many of ours. Denmark has a divorce rate very similar to that of the UK – a little above 40% – and relatively amicable shared parenting between divorced couples is common. In both countries, life expectancy is high, so there are many older people who are dependent – whether emotionally or financially – upon their children. Then there are siblings, stepsiblings and the adult siblings' own families. There is no painless place to draw a line around a family.

Another similarity between the two countries is the high level of home ownership. More than 60% of people own their homes in both countries and for most of them it is their only significant financial asset. The crisis in Denmark elicits the emergence of reactionary states of mind in people previously shown to be socially minded and sensitive. We see people who get advance wind of the government announcement using their advantage at the expense of others, rushing to sell off their soon-to-be-worthless

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1. *Familier som vores* (2024). Director, Vinterberg, T. Acquired for the UK by the BBC in 2025 and shown as *Families like ours*. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p0jrtk16/families-like-ours [Accessed January 2026].

2. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/oct/14/tenbury-wells-flood-prone-worcestershire-town-abandoned-by-insurers

homes and businesses. They are in a state of denial: others may lose out but they will be OK. There are violent repercussions as people begin to identify those who knew in advance and took unfair advantage of their privilege. These are just some of the examples in the series of reactionary states of mind coming to the fore in the face of crisis.

Nevertheless – and in stark contrast to 'climate disaster' movies with which we have become familiar – the overriding mood of the series is one of sadness and regret. Even those who have sought to outrun events are compelled, over time, to accept the inevitability of loss and the need to mourn. It is impossible to keep the extended and reconstructed families that are a feature of 'families like ours' together. Children are faced with impossibly difficult decisions: to go with Dad and a much-loved stepsister or with Mum, whom you love just as much and who maybe needs you more? People hug and cry. While the buses and boats line up and people struggle to come to terms with the options available to them, church services are held to mourn the passing of Denmark into non-existence. The sombre mood is amplified by falling rain, puddles that accumulate into shallow lakes on the roadways and water quietly bubbling up from drains.

Another significant theme in the series is the change of status associated with becoming a refugee. People lose not only their economic capital but their social and cultural capital. A Danish psychologist considers herself lucky to get a job cleaning hotel rooms in France. A benign character who falls through the cracks in the system is physically attacked, simply on account of being a refugee. Such experiences are only too familiar to refugees from the global South. It is unusual – and one would hope salutary – to depict a situation where they are also part of the experience of white middle-class Europeans.

Sally Weintrobe (2021)[3] sees the human mind as the site of a ceaseless power struggle between the forces of care and uncare, a familiar Kleinian point of view. What is not familiar is the way in which she links this theoretical perspective to the values and politics of those who govern. She argues persuasively that neoliberal politics and economics and the associated value systems constitute a perverse attack on cultures of care, leaving us all prey to reactionary states of mind. In this series set in of Denmark, a country with a much longer history of social democracy than the UK, cultures of care eventually carry the day, notwithstanding the intermittent eruption of reactionary states of mind. One wonders whether the same would be true if a similar situation were to arise in my own home country, which is England.

Maggie Turp, PhD, is a climate aware clinical psychologist (HCPC), Cli-fi lead, CPA member, United Kingdom.

3. Weintrobe, S. (2021). *The psychological roots of the climate crisis.* Bloomsbury.

Something to Chew on

By Adrian Tait

Standing… Still

In the beautiful Chew Valley
south of Bristol
the timeless cattle graze
and poop and stare
around the stones of Stanton Drew

What was "Neolithic" like?
How did these people
Four thousand five hundred
Years ago
Find the energy and strength and will
To create this?

A group of worshippers
Surround and press their hands
Against a massive stone

the silence is broken by the drone of planes
heading for Bristol airport
a growth we couldn't stop
beckoning the end
of a shorter age.

Stanton Drew, by Adrian Tait

Adrian Tait trained as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist in the 1980s and practised privately, also in the NHS, teaching, supervising and organising conferences. He was co-founder of CPA, where his activities included facilitating the launch of CPA North America. Since retiring from clinical practice, he has been involved in agroecological and tree-planting projects in Somerset.

The seeds we are sowing are corrupted

## A social dreaming exploration

By Rachel Cakebread

Julian Manley and I hosted a social dreaming matrix on the theme of this issue: reactionary states of mind and how to bridge the divide. I wanted to approach this often-polarising topic from the realm of feeling, dreaming and flow. I feel that when we try to 'intellectually understand' we rely on logic and our own frame(s) of reference. Even when we aim to explore reactionary states with curiosity, we bring with us our own morals and beliefs. We can easily become defensive or unable to resolve difference, casting ourselves and others into roles rather than acknowledging our shared humanity. We lose sight of difference being something potentially generative.

Social dreaming is a process developed by Gordon Lawrence at the Tavistock Centre in the 1980s. The setting in which social dreaming takes place is called a 'matrix' in which individuals in the group release dreams into the container. The dream is then no longer related to a person or ego but becomes a shared social dream. Participants share associations to the dreams, images or feelings and so a web of connections is made between contributions. Each contribution becomes collectively shared, rather than owned by each person. Shared thoughts and emotions are present in every social relationship but for the most part are left unattended to and unacknowledged. The 'matrix' as a form is a configuration that provides a unique space, to consider and discover collectively the hidden, unthought and often elusive meanings of dreams and associations. The unthought known is given space to surface.

As Julian noted before we held the matrix, once the container is created it cannot be poked our prodded (for fear of it breaking). The theme of the reactionary state of mind was offered before the matrix began and then any dreams, associations and feelings welcomed into the container. When engaged in a non-linear process the container created doesn't always answer the question that you have to begin with. After the matrix and sense making session, this felt true for the unconscious group narrative that evolved: direct associations with the reactionary state of mind were absent. I wrote the poem (shared at the end of this piece) to capture some of the shared images and unthought knowns that felt most vivid to me.

What emerged was the centrality of communication and the need to talk, collaborate and communicate. Also, the difficulty in modern societies to healthily face our shame and our collective ability to care. A sense of loss was woven throughout: both ecological and social, including intergenerational knowledge. At a felt level, a collective knowing that the 'seeds we are sowing are corrupted' and that in acknowledging this loss of future security we need to learn new ways of communicating and being present to our own reactions and those of others. For me, this speaks to our own complicity in creating polarisation and othering those who are different to us and therefore engaging in reactionary states of mind. The need to accept that the seeds for the future are altered by our collective industrial and modern world and that we cannot escape this but must learn to build bridges towards different ways of relating.

In opening this space, we allowed in what we already know but may
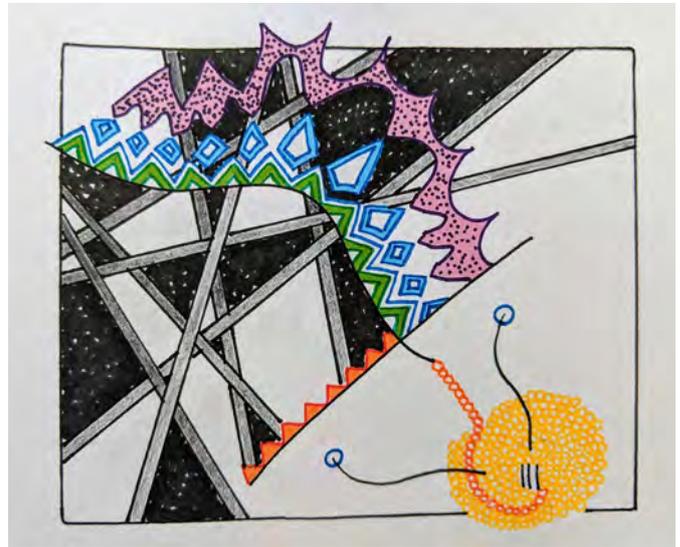
Dreaming across the divide, by Seamusin

not have fully considered (the unthought known). We find ourselves in times that can be too difficult to bear. Rather than pushing people to care about the climate and ecological crises, when they probably already do (even unconsciously),[1] perhaps we need to examine what makes the cost of caring too high? In our sense making session, the group also surfaced the desire to move to what is comfortable or comforting, and the invitation offered was to recognise the matrix makes the complex and unthought knowns that are often difficult to face present; and we must collectively guard against fantasising with false hope.

I think social dreaming helps to engage with a reactionary world and our own reactionary states by providing a space to share our unconscious dreams, feelings and associations without defending against these as held positions or core values. We can be more curious and collaborative as the dreams become shared and morph into something new. Of course, individuals need to feel a level of openness towards joining such a space and unconscious connections are not always made. It is hard to say we will be less reactionary; the aim is not to force or resolve difference; instead, the invitation is to explore mutual connections.

The poem I wrote is a personal reflection from the social dreaming matrix and discussions I had with Julian Manley. It starts with a question, that feels like a guide into the reactionary state of mind. I share this as a bridge between this piece and my experience from the matrix. It is hard to explain a collective experience; I feel poetry captures it somewhat better, although any (mis)interpretations are my own.

1. The myth of apathy and the work of Renee Lerzman was mentioned during the sense-making session. For example, see here: https://theecologist.org/2008/jun/19/myth-apathy

The seeds we are sowing are corrupted

Can we communicate in these fraught times?

Hay bales float on water, inverted skies,
caves illuminate shrines to the absurd,
starlings lose their way; we seek the human.

Something long forgotten is rising up –
we strive to control and feel powerless.

Muddy shoes bring us back to childhood homes,
close-to-impossible tasks get us stuck,
wishing for magic words, no translation,
*constricted by our nervous connections.*

Death is painful and inevitable –
even our unconscious wants salvation.

All that floats up, we pull back down, wretched
and a wreck, our seeds have been corrupted
we try to escape ourselves, scapegoat others.

Can we move beyond our known languages?
Relational at their root.

We struggle towards what is lost
to know how we feel.

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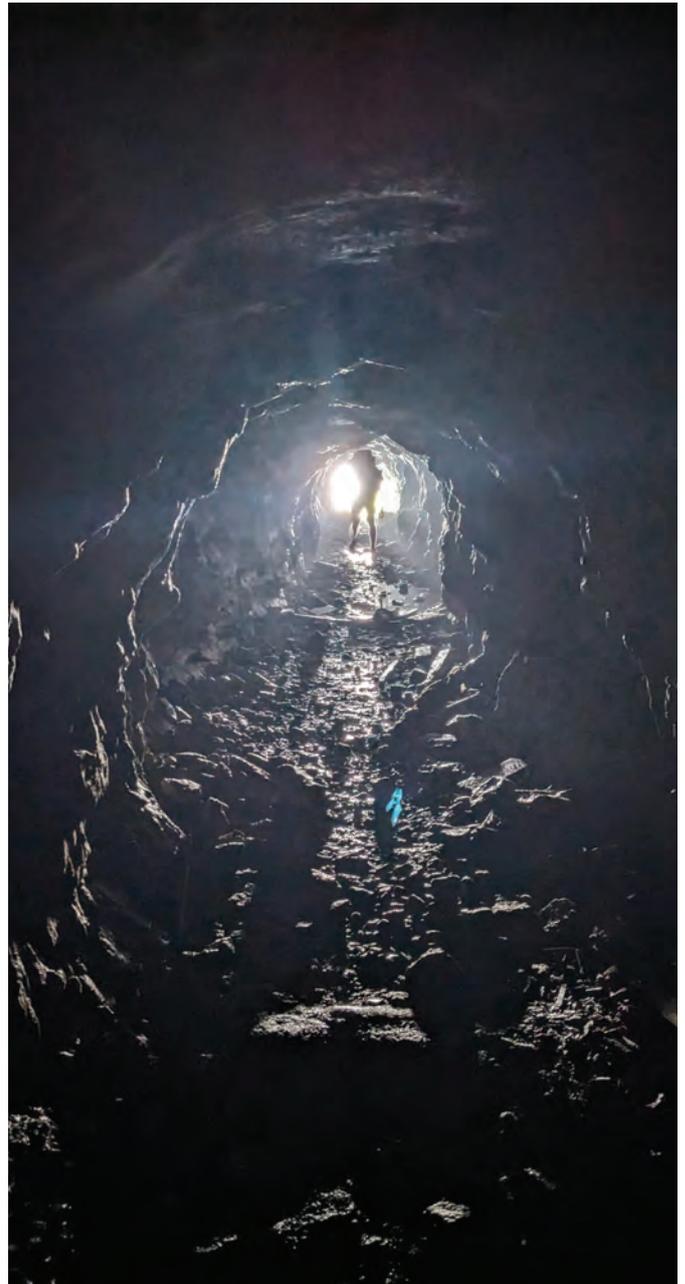
Light in the tunnel by Tom Reeves

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