



## PLURALISTIC PRACTICE

### BOOK REVIEW

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Bednarek, S. (2024). *Climate, Psychology, and Change – New Perspectives on Psychotherapy in an Era of Global Disruption and Climate Anxiety*. North Atlantic Books.

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What would life be like for therapists if society was our client? What if the skills that psychotherapists and counsellors have historically used in one-to-one or small group work, were in fact essential skills for helping society as a whole come to terms with the seismic shifts that the climate crisis is bringing to our door? This is one of the arresting propositions of this prescient book edited by psychotherapist and climate psychology consultant, Steffi Bednarek. Bringing together a plurality of psychologists' and therapists' voices from around the globe, Bednarek presents a range of thoughtful and challenging responses to the existential provocation of climate change. The result is an invitation to therapists of all modalities to face the reality of the climate crisis, and to prepare our profession to work with the increasingly unignorable realities of climate-driven loss, uncertainty and change. For pluralistic practitioners, already committed to valuing diversity, this invitation might encourage us to listen increasingly to non-Western voices but also to expand our plurality of truth sources even wider to include Nature and the non-human.

*Climate, Psychology and Change* begins with a transcript of a free-flowing conversation between five of the authors responding to the prompt: *the role of psychotherapy in a time when the familiar is dying*, and goes on to explore emergent themes of disconnection, uncertainty and decolonisation.

**Disconnection.** Humanity's disconnection with nature and the non-human is framed as a collective trauma. Geo-scientist, Glen Albrecht, and psychologist, Matthew Adams, write powerfully about dissociative anthropocentrism—the insistent centring of humans and human stories—which creates a toxic separation

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between people and nature and overwrites other-than-human narratives. Re-associating with nature and the non-human means going beyond our individual psychologies and requires a radical unlearning of humanity's conception of ourselves as central to the planet's story.

**Uncertainty.** This moment in history is defined as a time of radical uncertainty. Psychotherapists and counsellors currently exist alongside our clients in what American psychotherapist, Francis Weller, calls an ambient field of global-level anxiety which we need to face and process if we are to adequately help clients. However, research by therapist and educator Trudi Macagnino, finds that therapists and clients, whilst able to name the supportive impact of nature, are less likely to name an existential fear of that very resource being under threat. The book's authors propose the existence of a defensive disavowal resulting in the entire therapy community collectively defending itself against the overwhelming existential reality of the climate crisis. Developing the theme of uncertainty, a section of the book is given over to writing emerging from the Ukrainian context in which disavowal of things falling apart is impossible. Ukrainian psychotherapist, Inna Didkovska, writes movingly about the process of self-deconstruction and self-transformation which comes about in the face of the literal loss of home, land and solid ground in a time of war.

**Decolonisation.** Human-driven climate change is inextricably linked to the process of colonisation. *Climate, Psychology and Change* identifies nature as the first object of colonisation, and proposes the therapeutic community re-engage with indigenous and pre-colonial perspectives on humanity's place within the wider global system to both mitigate climate damage and to find psychological healing and support as events unfold. Hāweatea Holly Bryson writes powerfully about the Aboriginal sense that healing is never an individual process but that wellness can only be achieved if it includes the whole community. Indigenous perspectives on health and healing have, she argues, been written out of the psychotherapeutic eco-system. Therapist-activist, Shelot Masithi, reflects on the South African concept of 'ubuntu' which might allow us to rewrite our therapeutic scripts by recognising the intersectionality of humanity and nature, and the need for collective solutions to collective problems.

So what can we do? This is probably the wrong question. The diverse therapeutic responses offered in *Climate, Psychology and Change* are less about 'doing' anything and more about facing the existential reality of change, being with our wounded planet, and coming together in community to grieve and to heal. There are chapters on 'attending to place' practices, grief tending, and running Climate Cafes to provide therapeutic space for local communities. But beyond all these, the book asks us to slow down; to pause; to stop running from the storm. As psychotherapists and counsellors, this could be our greatest gift to our clients and to our communities. We are trained to sit with, to hold and contain. As pluralistic practitioners we know how to attend to alternative voices that emerge in this space. But to offer this leadership we will need to support ourselves and each other. *Climate, Psychology and Change* ends with an offer to its readership to join an ongoing programme of events and experiential workshops to allow collaborative space to face the climate crisis together. This reviewer has signed up.

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*Pluralistic Practice* is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

Additional information: website for ongoing events and training: [www.climatepsychologyandchange.com](http://www.climatepsychologyandchange.com).



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