



# The New World Order: Anthropocene Anxiety, Climate Grief, Solastalgia



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## Perspective

WE contend that it is valuable to consider solastalgia, climate grief and Anthropocene anxiety as new emotional practices that impact upon the nature, development, and stability of international order. These practices interface with the ways in which pro-environmental behaviour and our notion of what might constitute climate justice equally draw from our endogenous sense of being human and caring for others, which extends to the more-than-human world. In this context, we expect anthropologists and human geographers to seek out continuities and discontinuities in practices of mourning and the anticipation of loss, scaled up from the personal and taken to other species in our era of great extinctions. With a view to understanding how imagined communities of bioregions are 'homelands' not 'nations', we suggest that we inflect current trends in global political theory to articulate how bodies of individuals are grouped and mobilized. Furthermore, we contend that it is vital that we understand the many nuanced ways that feelings are part of the mobilization effort: not only produced from the social, political and economic spheres, but as cultural practices and linguistic terms-mobilization techniques that reach back to political culture in the late medieval world-they represent particular social formations and conjunctures that embody emotional practices.

Scholarly literature to date makes clear that twenty-first century climate reckoning includes the awareness of the emotions around climate change and that these emotions require reflexive monitoring. In the first analysis, governance of emotions-whether drawing from an individualised impulse or the socio-cultural necessity for self-revision-points to the question of necessary obligation to manage that which has been

incited by the affective rhetoric of climate change discourse. Within this discourse there is a new model of human action (Anthropocene), a new mode of feeling (solastalgia), and a new context for action (climate grief). These are global phenomena that press upon individuals highlighting a socio-political terrain of emotional responsibility betokening the limits of both environmental crises mediation and the privatization of environmental responsibility.

With interdisciplinary emotions scholarship we can clarify how our keystone species' emotional makeup might not only point to co-dependency relevant for climate change discourse; it can underline the need to draw emotions theory away from anthropocentric models of feeling, with potential impact across the social sciences.

This new front for emotions theory, while shifting our sense of what constitutes health for the individual to the scale of species wellbeing, might ultimately realize the representation of affect as required for climate change discourse: one relationally produced through assemblages, and active at different scales, producing new and emergent embodied connections and relationships. Networks can be conceived as human infrastructure, wherein they can adapt to pressure from outside forces, but crucially, they can be thought to exert some pressure of their own, operating within a larger spatial structure than their immediate environment. The use of Social Network Analysis (SNA) and visualisation software can provide a potential platform to find and understand the common properties of networks that aid in mobilization. Political theorists understand the importance of how networks adapt and then exert their own pressure; it is, after all, the very reason why we need to understand these

networks in any situation. Affects delineate, navigate and articulate temporary, fragile and porous circuits and networks. The ontological dimensions articulated here, disrupt the desire for control that models of post-enlightenment selfhood has cemented deep in our psyches.

Today, new models of agency and new metaphors for human behaviour seriously ask us to consider local, national and geopolitical contexts for whether macro-reflexively managed emotions can link environmental crisis and the governance of self and transpersonal affect. This question is particularly acute in the context of western cultural representations of climate change- a phenomenon that is anticipated and present but not always seen and felt. Is our modern international order, in part, either driven by or responsive to individual and collective emotions? What of our geopolitical and international theories; do they consider environmental crises as sociogenic and a cause of disorder, or do they contend that anxiety and grief are emotional practices that can only be viewed psychologically, as if the body politic can be disaggregated for disciplinary specialism?

### Three metaphors: Carbon Footprint; Anthropocene; Keystone Species

The metaphor 'carbon footprint' attempts to bring to mind planetary injustice dispersed over great distances and time while bringing its effects back to the body, which has the potential to trigger a higher affective dimension to the metaphor than 'pure' knowledge alone. While the concept behind this image remains alive, overuse without emotion in news media has transformed this once-exciting visual and bodily meme into a dead metaphor that might only remain affective in its current cultural economy (i.e. indicating the difficulty of representing dynamic relations between the environment and human dwellers that society is so desperate for)[1].

It is interesting that as we reflect on our species' capacity for change, the orientation of Earth System Science is engaging with the use of the term 'Anthropocene', which as Jeremy Baskin notes, encourages slippage: "from descriptive claims about the past and present into ascriptive claims about how things will be" (2015: 21)[2]. The concern for discourses determining life should intrigue theorists and researchers trying to understand the key challenges to the international order. In light of the environmental crises as a sociogenic crisis that manifests globally[3], this anxiety itself underlines what is at stake in the ways that we measure the impact of our species. The anxiety also brings into relief how we might best register this culturally in the hope that such disclosure inspires two things: greater emotional literacy to move us beyond the problem of our own making; more support for international governance mechanisms seeking to address the inequality of the distribution of these feelings.

Right now, the difficulty of dealing with difference within unity (individual agents in the face of the need for collective action on global crises) might be addressed by an ecological perception of life; such a view might yield the reframing of life

within a restricted field of immanence to help us organise our responses to the ways materiality exhibits affectivity. And that issue, we intuit, is key to reorganising our thoughts around affective commitments to climate change, especially if it were mobilised to articulate what we might term 'keystone feelings' – emotional dispositions upon which other affects depend, potentially viewed as survival mechanisms upon which our culture at large rests precariously. From here we could attend to the difficulty of situating our self-reflective practices as generative of other practices (including national and global governance, and the creation of local and global social networks), not merely descriptions of our state.

The dichotomy between nature and culture has been removed in the humanities owing to the recent collapse between human history and environmental history in theoretical models that witness the collision of human and non-human temporalities, drawing from emotions theory, multi-species ethnography, environmental activism and the cultural politics of climate change. What seems to be on the agenda next is the disclosure of symbioses and discordant harmonies of climate change and politico-cultural change, which articulate the affects of the interpenetration of human history and natural history. Systematic unequal ecological exchange between dominating countries and exploited countries through colonization and the great Acceleration gave and continue to give rise to dispossession for some human species while forcing the planet into new or exaggerated modes of operation. Three dimensions to this symbiosis (listed above) have radically new implications for our worldviews and could be included within peace and conflict studies, international relations scholarship, and governance and public policy research.

How do we organize ourselves to relate to the planet that sustains us? How will our studies of the environment, geopolitics, and culture come together to consider how people deal with life and how life forms relate to each other through the medium of the environment? Poverty, race, education and the economy are impinged upon by these questions, which international relations and human rights scholars and activists have begun to address but are yet to provide a satisfactory theory or model for reckoning with the various political, social and economic causes and effects of ecological problems and crises.

At this point in history, the metaphor 'keystone species' reminds us of the value of taking the focus away from humans as the dominant force of the Anthropocene. It challenges us to seek out ways to frame human agency within a co-dependent system. The metaphor for a species' effect on its environment, relative to its abundance, speaks clearly to the structure of an ecological community; can Anthropologists, Sociologists and Human Geographers discover whether this sense of community might invoke a sense of global climate affect if mobilized within environmental communications and practices? The term has the capacity to assist in the psychological attunement to keystone emotions identified above, but can it assist in the development of

more sustainable forms of political organization? Analogous to the role of a keystone in an arch, the abundant species is under the least pressure of any of the components in the structure, but the community/arch collapses without it. A broader affective and political understanding of 'keystone species' --already popular in both conservation discourse and the science of ecology-- could help with an imaginary struggling to accumulate our local actions within a vision of emergent, spatially-broad transactions of our continents' ecosystems over the Earth's 4.5-billion-year history. Ultimately, should we rethink the affects of modernity and the modern international order in a new epoch? If so, how?



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