

BOOK REVIEWS

***Climate, Psychology, and Change: Reimagining Psychotherapy in an Era of Global Disruption and Climate Anxiety* (2024) Edited by Steffi Bednarek. North Atlantic Books. ISBN: 9798889840824**

Maria Monastiriotis^a

Keywords: psychotherapy, psychology, climate, decolonisation, modernity, culture, disruption, individualism, anthropocentrism, crises

<https://doi.org/10.59158/001c.145260>

Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia

Vol. 13, Issue 2, 2025

The collection of essays in *Climate, Psychology, and Change: Reimagining Psychotherapy in an Era of Global Disruption and Climate Anxiety* (2024) invites us to examine our culture and its impact on humanity, each other, and our Earth. The book illustrates the degree to which psychotherapy is embedded within destructive cultural forces. It addresses the effects of liquid modernity, individualism, and anthropocentrism on the state of our world and critiques the reductionist medical view of mental health that locates illness within the individual rather than society. Finally, it proposes a profound cultural shift that supports a connection with the more-than-human world.

Edited by Steffi Bednarek, the collection of essays presented in *Climate, Psychology, and Change: Reimagining Psychotherapy in an Era of Global Disruption and Climate Anxiety* (2024) invites us to confront the impact of occidental culture on our planet, the more-than-human world, and each other. It invites us to widen our focus, acknowledge our anxiety, and adopt a position of response-ability. The impacts of individualism, anthropocentrism, and colonialism are explored from individualistic and collectivist perspectives. The underlying premise of the collection is that our souls have been wounded by a culture that promotes illusory dichotomies between individual human beings and humanity, and humanity and our Earth: a collective trauma. This is the wound that often enters the therapy room, the underlying chasm that needs to be traversed. Thus, themes of disruption, grief, creativity, humility, and uncertainty also emerge.

This book had its genesis in a climate edition of the *British Gestalt Journal*. Some of the essays contained in the book were published in the journal's 2021 edition. However, the book contains additional essays, and in total comprises the thoughts of 32 authors, including Indigenous healers, therapists, philosophers, climate activists, educators, and scientists, who present divergent cultural, theoretical, and professional perspectives. As Bednarek states, all perspectives are needed to address the crises.

^a Maria Monastiriotis has a Master of Gestalt Therapy from Gestalt Therapy Brisbane. Her interest in psychotherapy emerged from her therapeutic journey. She is also a practising lawyer and has worked with families and children for over 30 years.

The journey begins with a dialogue between Bayo Akomolafe, Mary-Jayne Rust, Sally Weintrobe, Francis Weller, and Stefi Bednarek on the role of psychotherapy when the familiar is dying. The dialogue explores the climate crisis and its inequitable consequences within a fractured culture. The authors raise questions about the evolution of psychotherapy, its colonial underpinnings, the degree to which it contributes to a problematic culture, and the responsibility of the therapist. They also reflect on the trauma caused by a culture that prioritises the human and the widening field of anxiety concerning war, climate, and the economy. This dialogue outlines the layered complexity of a vast problem and sets the tone for the essays that follow.

Essays by Steven Thorp and Chris Robertson comprise the first chapter. These essays deal with the cultural underpinnings of psychotherapy, urging a move away from a reductionist, internal view of suffering and healing to a collective view. Thorp and Robertson question the degree to which psychotherapy is complicit with a culture that locates suffering within the individual as something to be “fixed”. Thorp addresses the commodification and medicalisation of psychotherapy, challenging the paradigm within which it is entwined. Robertson opines that psychotherapists need to face their own fears of the climate crisis. Change occurs by facing the unbearable, the multifaceted crises of an ailing culture. Humility is born of an awareness that humanity is not at the centre of our ecological framework. Both authors offer a reframe. Healing requires imagination, creativity, and a willingness to face our fears.

Chapter 2 conveys the complexity of addressing the state of the world in the therapy room. Trudi Macagnino’s research queries why climate is not discussed within therapy. She echoes the need for therapists to face their overwhelming feelings regarding the climate crisis and acknowledge their ecological self, because only then can they hold the overwhelming feelings of their clients. Macagnino believes that the enormity of the overwhelmedness may be too great to be contained between the therapist and client. Rather, it may require the shared space that group work offers. Macagnino’s underlying message is that therapists need to do their own therapeutic work. Wendy Greenspun provides a clinical example of a client experiencing climate anxiety, highlighting the grief present on entering the therapy room. Greenspun discusses her own journey with climate distress and how it supported her to support her client.

The long shadow of colonialism is the paramount theme of the authors featured in Chapter 3. Shelot Masithi, Nontokozo Sabic, Malika Virah-Sawmy, and Haweatea Holly Bryson all address the impact of colonialism on our planet. Masithi shares her story of thirst resulting from water shortage, reminding us of the disparate experiences in response to the effects of climate. Her story of her mind being constantly preoccupied by water is impactful. Sabic and Virah-Sawmy address how the current state of our world is a product of power imbalances. The degradation of our ecological system is attributable to a racial process, itself caused by historical colonialism and

a culture suffused with violence, slavery, and dispossession of land. Bryson addresses two lineages—the lineage of psychotherapy and the lineage of Indigenous healing practices—the latter of which has been excluded, disparaged, and minimised by mainstream mental health systems. She proposes a widening of the notion of healing to include Indigenous practices and traditions.

Chapter 4 highlights the effect of anthropocentrism and the need to decentre the human in psychology. Matthew Adams proposes that healing relies on recognising that psychological wellbeing depends on relational reciprocity between humans and the more-than-human world. He exemplifies how human health is inextricably entwined with the wellbeing of the more-than-human world. Rhys Price-Robertson, Mark Skelding, and Keith Tudor address the need to conceptualise the self as an ecological self, one intricately connected and dependent on nature. This expanded view of self supports a move away from anthropocentrism and fosters responsibility and a sense of belonging to a larger family of beings. Skelding discusses his shift in perspective, which occurred when he felt himself held to the Earth and experienced a voice telling him that “the planet has your back”. Glenn Albrecht proposes a journey from the Anthropocene to the Symbiocene, a journey from dissociation to association with nature.

What follows in Chapter 5 are essays on trauma, fragmentation, and social collapse. Peter Philippon was invited to present seminars at the Kyiv Gestalt University before the invasion of Ukraine. He presented the seminars online and addressed his feelings about lecturing psychotherapists on how to be in a war from a safe place. The seminar is presented in the book. He addresses themes of resilience, self-support, trauma, and hate, drawing from his own experience as a child of refugees from Germany, Austria, and Poland in the 1930s. Inna Didkovska provides an account of her experiences of both living and practising as a psychotherapist in Ukraine during the conflict. When other familiar supports have disintegrated, small moments of joy are a source of support when faced with the unbearable. Bednarek discusses the trauma caused by our separation from nature and the need for a cultural transformation to address the climate crisis. She situates the fragmentation from the perspective of brain hemisphere balance and suggests that unprocessed collective trauma influences our ability to respond effectively to the climate crisis.

In Chapter 6, Sally Gillespie and Rosemary Randall share their personal journeys of facing the climate crisis—the move from the therapy room to working within the community. We are reminded that when the global crisis affects people daily, creative solutions are needed. Gillespie discusses thwarted attempts at trying to distance herself from the climate crisis and how she became immersed in climate science and politics. Her interest was in the field of psychology from a systemic lens. Randall addresses how a facilitated small group model was used to address the needs of clients experiencing climate distress and discusses the project “Living with the Climate Crisis”.

Chapter 7 explores practical approaches to supporting awareness, breaking the silence, and facilitating cultural change from an individualistic to a communal perspective. Vanessa Andreotti, Rene Susa, Cash Ahenakew, Sharon Stein, and Chief Ninawa Inu Huni Kui discuss Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures, an arts and research collective aimed at facilitating awareness of the complex layers constituting how modernity has affected our being and how these layers determine our responses in times of crises. Rebecca Nestor and Gillian Ruch describe how climate cafés offer a communal space to share our anxieties, thoughts, experiences, and responses to climate change. Meanwhile, Julian Manley introduces the concept of *social dreaming*, a process whereby participants share their dreams. Manley highlights that social dreaming is an apt methodology for holding complexity, and it allows movement from the individual to the collective that borders on the spiritual.

The chapter continues with an explanation by Bednarek and Bec Davison of *warm data labs*, facilitated group processes that aim to collect stories from numerous perspectives which highlight complexity and interdependence. The approach supports the unravelling of complex self-perpetuating systems and explores a multifaceted response to climate change. Following this is an essay by Harriet Sams on connection to places that bear the scars of trauma and the need to turn towards these wounded places. Similarly, Sophie Banks addresses the theme of grief that arises when people are confronted by scarred places. She deems that healing requires the grief to be expressed and shared at a communal level. Pain that is witnessed can be transformed.

Climate, Psychology, and Change: Reimagining Psychotherapy in an Era of Global Disruption and Climate Anxiety (2024) is a book that challenges our understanding of psychotherapy and how it contributes to destructive cultural forces. It encourages the reader to view the climate crises from a different perspective. It highlights multifaceted approaches, rebuffing simplicity. It is a book dedicated to “all of us” with a cry for hope:

May we weave back together
what has been torn apart

and create the conditions that
allow life to thrive

Everywhere

As I read this book, I cried along the way. It touched that part of me longing for change and offered me a chance to stop, breathe, and engage in a topic of great complexity that has overwhelmed me. It also left me wanting further dialogue on the impact of liquid modernity on our society, how our psyche has been affected, and how this awareness can, in turn, support change.



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CCBY-4.0). View this license's legal deed at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0> and legal code at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode> for more information.

References

Bednarek, S. (Ed.). (2024). *Climate, psychology, and change: Reimagining psychotherapy in an era of global disruption and climate anxiety*. North Atlantic Books.