

**Book Review: *Being a Therapist in a Time of Climate Breakdown*,
edited by Judith Anderson, Tree Staunton,
Jenny O’Gorman and Caroline Hickman**

Saumya Agarwal  & Nagendra Kumar 

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee, India.

saumya_a@hs.iitr.ac.in; nagendra.kumar@hs.iitr.ac.in

Judith Anderson, Tree Staunton, Jenny O’Gorman and Caroline Hickman (eds.)
Being a Therapist in a Time of Climate Breakdown, Routledge, 2024, 282 pp., £ 24.29.
(Paperback), ISBN: 978-1-032-56560-6

Moving from the ‘human-human relationship’ approach in psychotherapy to the ‘human-living world’ paradigm, the anthology bridges the disciplines of therapy, eco-psychology and climate activism, a need arising from the “absence of relationship with the living world in our diagnostic thinking of developmental trauma, attachment patterns, personality adaptations and mental health problems” (62). The book is divided into five sections (twenty-two chapters), where the overarching theme is finding the imperative connection between mental health, its emotional impact and the climate breakdown as perceived and experienced by individuals in the form of ecological distress, eco-anxiety, solastalgia and climate grief. It further records the modes and methods by which therapists engage with clients and process their emotional responses to environmental destruction. The book challenges the Western notions of therapeutic profession while confronting individual trauma and collective planetary grief, urging therapists to move beyond resilience to the realms of responsibility, adaptation and ecological solidarity.



University of Bucharest Review. Literary and Cultural Studies Series
<https://ubr.rev.unibuc.ro/>
Volume 15 | Issue 1 | 2025 |

EDITURA UNIVERSITĂȚII DIN BUCUREȘTI



BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY PRESS

<https://doi.org/10.31178/UBR.15.1.9>

ISSN 2069–8658 (Print) | 2734–5963 (Online)

© The Author(s) 2025



Published by Bucharest University Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

The first section of the book, “The Trouble We’re In,” encompasses three chapters, establishing the psychological clinical ethics into ecological consciousness. It is predicated upon the idea that climate breakdown is not an abstract or distant threat confined to scientific discourse and policy debates; rather, it is a lived emotional reality shaped by systems, ethics, and relational ruptures. The first chapter, “Facing Difficult Climate Truths” by Peter Kalmus, highlights the necessity of reawakening individuals living in the “climate denial” and who are not acting upon it as an ‘emergency’ that needs to be addressed. Kalmus tries to conceptualise “climate denial” as “climate grief,” which will coerce scientists, journalists, and activists to act in emergency mode (22), building an approach of “climate awareness therapy” (23). The second chapter, “The Mental Health and Emotional Impacts of Climate Breakdown: Insights from Climate Psychology” by Judith Anderson and Rebecca Nestor, emphasises how an increase in temperature, repeated droughts, floods, and storms has escalated into displacement, homelessness, damage to infrastructure and loss of land, ultimately increasing vulnerability and affecting one’s psychological and emotional well-being. The authors bring an observation of “pre-oedipal narcissistic rage” and “oedipal depressive guilt,” which one experiences in the form of a love-hate relationship with Mother Earth (30). Thus, the “socially constructed silence” (31) leads to emotions of “eco-distress, eco-anxiety and solastalgia, the homesickness one has while still at home” (32). The third chapter, “Revisiting Ethics in the Context of Climate Breakdown” by Jenny O’Gorman, interrogates the existential ethical frameworks within psychotherapy. Providing a space to explore climate-related distress in clients, the process becomes a powerful act of witnessing and validating the psychological impacts of environmental violence and moral injury. O’Gorman further suggests that the ethical engagement of activists and therapists should be done in collaboration to work upon client and planetary well-being by aligning psychological practice with ecological justice. The illusion of a dichotomy between a “safe therapy room” and an “unsafe world” (50) must be relinquished as therapy exists within and responds to a shifting continuum of uncertainty and transformation.

The second section of the book, “Systemic Understandings,” comprises four chapters that recognise climate distress as a socially produced phenomenon. These chapters illuminate the ‘intersection’ of ecological anxiety with capitalism, social power structures, meaning-making frameworks, democratic ideals and reproductive roles. An ethical re-grounding is proposed where therapists not only engage with the emotional suffering of the clients but also with power structures, cultural narratives, and historical inequalities that shape these emotional landscapes, involving a shift in collective care, ecological accountability, and social justice. Intersectionality remains a core component; the lived experiences of disabled individuals, mothers, racialised groups and working-class communities reveal how environmental degradation exacerbates pre-existing inequalities. The fourth chapter, “How Wide is the Field? Psychotherapy, Capitalism and More Than Human World” by Steffi Bednarek, draws parallel connections between psychotherapy and capitalism, “[P]sychotherapy itself has ‘grown up’ in a capitalist, patriarchal and colonial Western culture that it has inevitably left its imprint on” (61). The chapter traces how psychotherapy is deep-rooted within capitalist market logic – individuation, privatisation, materialism, ownership, consumerism, and efficiency. It

pinpoints how ‘ideas, feelings, dreams or what goes in our psyches are treated like private property’, framing a “hegemonic ideology” between therapist and the client (64). In the fifth chapter, “Climate Distress through the Lens of the Power Threat Meaning Framework,” Gareth Morgan revisits the power-threat-meaning-framework model (PMTF), which reframes climate distress not as a pathology but as a coherent response to systemic threats. Chapter Six, “Deep Democracy: World Out There- World in Here” by Iona Fredenburgh and Sue Milner, assesses how ecological breakdowns are entwined with “structural discrimination,” “internalised oppression,” “internalised supremacy”, and with the concept of “rank and privilege” (87). The hypervigilance, detachment, hopelessness and reactivity in times of ecological crisis create a “soup” (89) of collective trauma spreading unevenly. Thus, the authors propose “deep democracy” as a commitment to inclusive, embodied and justice-centered engagement where therapy confronts psychological dimensions of ecological collapse. Chapter Seven, “Rehearsing Radical Care: Motherhood in a Climate Crisis” by Celia Turley and Jo McAndrews, talks about the collaborative theatre-making project, “Motherhood in Climate Crisis”, initiated in 2022, which examines how ecological uncertainty affects decisions and experiences surrounding motherhood. The project identifies the emotional, societal, and existential weight of reproductive choices upon the intimate effects of climate change on bodies. It demonstrates how the “ethos of radical care” (105) and “artistic creation” (104) through theatre and writing tools can foster honest dialogue about the emotional impact of climate change.

The third section of the book, “Becoming a Climate Aware Therapist,” consists of six chapters; serving as the critical hinge, these chapters transcend from theory to the therapeutic axis. Across the chapters, the authors advocate a therapeutic stance rooted in empathy, somatic attunement and radical honesty. This section further highlights the competency of therapists and clients in dealing with eco-emotions and “climate mania”. Chapter Eight, “Climate Aware Therapy with Children and Young People to Navigate the Climate and Ecological Crisis” by Caroline Hickman, delves into the “emotional and cognitive” (114) impact on mental health of children and young people who are distressed by the climate and biodiversity crisis. Therapeutic strategies include reframing eco-anxiety within the “therapeutic triad- therapist, child and planet” (116) nurtured on eco-compassion and eco-community. Hickman proposes a “climate crisis lens,” a shift from an adult-centric view and records “child’s attachment, resilience and stress responses” (115). Chapter Nine, “Eco-Anxiety in the Therapy Room: Affect, Defences and Implications for Practice” by Trudi Macagnino, conceptualises “climate ecological emotions (CEE)” which often remain unspoken or become “slide mentions” in therapeutic discourse. The CEE emotions include grief, guilt, fear, anger, and powerlessness that subtly surface in one’s dreams, countertransference or in free associations. A transition to the eco-psycho-social model integrates personal, ecological and political realities where nature becomes a co-therapist in ecotherapy and community-based practices. Therapy becomes a transformative space, helping clients to bear the emotional weight of CEE and nurturing the agency for collective action. Chapter Ten, “Climate Silence in the Consulting Room: Waiting for Help to Come” by Paula Conway, critiques the climate silence and reveals how denial, disavowal, cultural conditioning and

unconscious defences shape our inaction. Chapter Eleven, “Climate Mania” by Garret Barnwell, presents a case study of investment banker Lawrence Clarke and his manic-depressive response to the climate crisis. Through a psychoanalytic lens, Barnwell shows how ecological distress can turn into psychosis or affective instability. This melancholia could lead to scarce language, deep guilt and suicidality with feelings of worthlessness, spiritual void and self-punishment. Chapter Twelve, “Climate Sorrow: Discerning Various Forms of Climate Grief and Responding to Them as a Therapist” by Panu Pihkala, discusses ‘ecological and climate grief’ (in response to environmental degradation and climate crisis). It dwells into the range of losses – ecological, cultural, social, personal and existential – becoming a form of “disenfranchised grief” (157), unrecognisable or invalidated by dominant cultural norms. It emerges from past and anticipated losses, orienting into “ambiguous,” “non-finite,” and “frozen” (162) forms of grief that need to be mandated by mind mapping, sadness-affirming, and meaning-making processes. Chapter Thirteen, “Coming to Our Senses: Turning Towards the Body” by Tree Staunton, centres the core argument on the disconnection from our embodied selves – our sensory, intuitive, and emotional life that mirrors and sustains our estrangement from the natural world. The phenomenological approach is needed to comprehend one’s lived experience in order to “come to our senses”. Such approaches in ecopsychology would extend to “body consciousness” (174), catalysing the psyche-soma connection, “psyche meets Gaia (Earth)” (175).

The fourth section of the book, “The Ecological Self,” consists of four chapters that evolve the paradigm of ‘self-care’ to ‘eco-care’ by extending nature as a co-regulator and co-participant in therapeutic practices, bringing restoration, reciprocity, and reconnecting with instinct, natural rhythms, and ecological truths. In Chapter Fourteen, “The Zone of Encounter in Therapy and Why It Matters Now,” Kelvin Hall introduces the concept “Zone of Encounter” (183), a therapeutic and existential space where humans engage meaningfully with the more-than-human world. Through these encounters, Hall reclaims a lost intimacy with the natural world, experienced as “homecoming” (186). Hall weaves mythologies of lost paradises, historical trauma, and present ecological despair, which are addressed with therapy that embraces both sorrow and soulful repair in the spiritual communions. In Chapter Fifteen, “Rewilding Therapy,” Nick Totton reflects upon “wild therapy” (192), a synthesis of therapy and ecopsychology that embraces an “ecosystemic” worldview, along with indigenous and decolonial perspectives. Totton iterates the cultivation of the “wild mind” (193) that honours interdependence, ecological awareness, rationality, undefensive openness, and spontaneity, which have been suppressed by the Western life while shifting from hunter-gatherer societies to agricultural civilisation. Chapter Sixteen, “Transforming Our Inner and Outer Landscapes” by Leslie Davenport, contends that the climate crisis is a crisis of consciousness which requires “interior rewilding.” It is an internal transformation that rekindles dormant capacities, such as creativity, ancestral wisdom, and emotional intelligence. The inside-out approach complements external climate actions by cultivating an ecologically conscious analytical mind through practices like mindfulness, guided imagery, expressive arts and guerrilla therapy. In Chapter Seventeen, “The Spiral of the Work that Reconnects,” Chris Johnstone and Rosie Jones aligned with Joanna Macy’s *The Work that Reconnects*

(TWTR), articulated a four-phase journey spiral model- “Coming from Gratitude; Honouring Our Pain for the World; Seeing with New and Ancient Eyes and Going Forth” (206). The spiral enables individuals to navigate difficult emotions, gain perspective, and find renewed motivation for action, applied in four contexts: personal practice, therapeutic encounters, peer-based support, and transformative group. It purports towards collective healing and communal resilience with the sense, “I can’t, we can” (208).

The fifth section of the book, “Community and Social Approaches”, incorporates five chapters that put their emphasis upon communal and systemic dimensions of climate-psychological distress, underscoring the necessity of collective emotional processing spaces such as “social dreaming” (Chapter Eighteen: “Beyond the Ego and Towards Complexity Through Social Dreaming” by Julian Manley, Wendy Hollway and Halina Pytlasinska) and “climate cafés” (Chapter Nineteen: “‘Ways of Being’ When Facing Difficult Truths: Exploring the Contribution of Climate Cafés to Climate Crisis Awareness” by Gillian Broad). Social dreaming is a process of communal expression with shared meaning-making, where a liminal and judgment-free space is created in which individuals can share their dreams in a group. It is a matrix which implies “the ability to access complex problems” and “temporary retirement” of one’s ego (226). It is a collective imaginative exchange that resists the stigmatisation of eco-emotions by generating emergent “rhizomatic” (220) knowledge that helps in modulating solidarity and interconnectedness. The concept of climate cafés encourages voluntary participation, free-flowing thoughts and non-directive discussions that begin with an individual’s symbolic connection to any natural object (such as a leaf, a stone or a twig) and lead to empathetic engagement with the climate crisis. It functions on the principles of hospitality, mutual respect, and confidentiality, where one’s “ways of being” (229) coexist with participants’ safety, inclusivity, shared ownership, and open engagement. Chapter Twenty, “The ‘Ticking Clock Thing’: Climate Trauma in Organisations” by Rebecca Nestor encourages ‘organisational awareness’ at workplaces, institutions and professional communities to understand how the crisis of climate breakdown is present within systems in the form of denial, burnout, chronic stress, and collective trauma. Chapter Twenty-One, “Turning Towards the Tears of the World: Practices and Processes of Grief and Never-endings” by Jo Hamilton discusses mourning climate-related grief as a social act that acknowledges sorrow, values what is being lost and enables people to remain emotionally responsive rather than numbed. Chapter Twenty-Two, “The Psychological Work of Being with the Climate Crisis” by Chris Robertson explores the psychological impact of climate breakdown on individuals, as humanity transitions from the stable Holocene to the volatile Anthropocene. Robertson, referring to ‘Through the Door Workshop,’ emphasises practices like porousness, negative capability, acceptance and imaginal storytelling, curating a space for sharing responsibility, deep listening and a willingness to inhabit the space of in-betweenness. Thus, the clients are re-envisioned as public catalysts for change, bringing eco-psycho-social integration in the replenishment of individuals’ mental health.

In addition to chapters, the book also records the “voices” in the form of personal testimonies shared by young people, adults, artists, activists, and parents presented as unfiltered expressions of climate anxiety, grief, anger and despair. The voices by Emily

Kelsall (cartoonist), Fehinti Balogun (artist), Shelot Masithi (activist) and Timothy Morton (philosopher and theorist) converge to emotionally grounded, inclusive and community-driven action in response to climate anxiety and climate agony. The voice from Helen Leonard-Williams comments upon how ableism, poverty and systemic neglect amplify the impact of climate crisis on the mental health of disabled people. Chloe Naldrett shares her emotional reawakening of the climate crisis as a mother, driven by the fear of her children's future. Voices from climate activists T.M. Walshe and Elouise M. Mayall define the sources of the climate crisis – society's denial and inaction. This underlines the need for therapeutic intervention. Frankie from UK pinpoints knowledge as a tool to manage eco-anxiety and face the future with clarity, determination and a proactive mindset. Eva Bishop and Will Baxter invite psychological healing through nature and rewilding. They urge immediate action to preserve endangered species, the negligence of which could disrupt eco-practices. Maddie Budd pleads to awaken, unite and respond with integrity, humanity and moral courage in the face of climate breakdown. From reconnecting with nature through beavers and barn owls to acts of resistance and climate-aware therapy, all the voices present their notions of planetary grief and demanding solidarity and regeneration among minds and communities.

The book challenges dominant Western notions of individualism, clinical detachment and anthropocentrism by framing the climate crisis as a psychological, ecological, and socio-cultural trauma. It critiques traditional psychotherapy models that isolate mental health with personal pathology, instead of advocating for a radical, collective, and eco-centric approach to healing. By amplifying the voices of youth activists, ecotherapists, indigenous perspectives and climate-conscious clinicians, the book becomes a polyphonic structure that dismantles the binaries of mind-body, human-nature and therapist-client. However, many therapeutic modules and strategies discussed in the book are still embedded in Euro-American models, overlooking indigenous and non-Western epistemologies. Still, it acts as a potential narrative that repositions therapy as a tool for resilience, resistance, and ecological repair. Notably, the editors do not pedestalise therapists as saviours or problem solvers; instead, they are the companions of uncertainty, witnessing the grief and transformation required in this ecological collapse. The book reimagines therapy not as a neutral, individualistic practice, but as a site of cultural rewilding that centres on relationality, decolonial awareness, and the ethics of care essential to mental and planetary health.

Disclosure Statement

The authors do not share any conflict of interest.

AI Acknowledgement

The authors acknowledge the use of Grammarly (<https://grammarly.com>) for paraphrasing and grammar correction. The prompts used include "Rephrase the paragraph," "Improve sentence clarity," and "Check grammar." The output was used to refine the language and ensure grammatical accuracy.

