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Notes d'un stratège et d'un éducateur sur le changement social et organisationnel, maintenant axé sur #Adaptation en profondeur

[Après le désespoir climatique - Un récit de ce qui peut émerger](#)

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La semaine dernière, j'ai été interviewé par le co-fondateur du [projet Dark Mountain](#). Dougal Hine a encouragé une réflexion créative sur l'avenir de la culture pendant le déclin et l'effondrement ultime de cette civilisation en raison de la dégradation de l'environnement et du chaos climatique.

Funzies.

En fait, ça m'a plu, car c'était la première fois qu'on me demandait de donner un sens à ma propre réaction à la réalisation de cet effondrement probable. Avant l'entrevue, j'ai commencé à écrire des idées pour me faire comprendre. Je ne tiens pas de journal, alors ce fut un moment de réflexion utile. C'est ce que certains de mes étudiants de troisième cycle font dans le cadre d'une méthode appelée « [Théorie vivante](#) », où ils réfléchissent à toute « contradiction vivante » dans leur travail qui provoque un malaise émotionnel. Étant donné que la climatologie a émergé au cours des dernières années, il était temps que je les rejoigne pour explorer mon propre malaise!

Comme je réfléchissais avant l'entretien, je me suis rendu compte que la communication de mon expérience pourrait être utile pour d'autres, qui tentent d'intégrer les dernières données scientifiques sur le climat déprimant dans leurs perspectives et leurs projets. J'ai aussi réalisé que certaines des décisions que j'avais prises étaient peut-être dues au fait de ne pas avoir une communauté de compagnons de voyage... et si je le souhaite maintenant, je devrais commencer par être plus honnête quant à ce qui se passe pour moi en ce moment.

Alors bonjour. Ce qui suit est une histoire personnelle de mon parcours de presque 4 ans depuis que j'ai commencé à accepter l'ampleur de la tragédie climatique et ce que cela

pourrait signifier pour ma vie. Ce blog ne présente pas la dernière science qui constitue mon point de départ. Pour quelques informations à ce sujet, [voir ici](#). Pour résumer, je suis parvenu à la conclusion que, lorsque les progrès en matière d'action pour le climat contrastent avec les dernières sciences du climat, il est probable que notre civilisation s'effondrera au cours de la vie des personnes vivantes aujourd'hui, et il est possible que l'humanité disparaisse d'ici la fin du siècle. Certains scientifiques concluent à une disparition plus rapide que celle-là! Je n'aime pas les points d'exclamation, mais celui-ci semblait approprié. La raison principale de cette vision de l'effondrement et de l'extinction possible tient au fait que les cycles de rétroaction chauffent si rapidement l'Arctique, ce qui libérera d'énormes quantités de méthane, ce qui déclenchera plus de rétroactions et entraînera l'effondrement de l'écosystème, la famine de masse et les conflits connexes. Parler d'effondrement à court terme et d'une possible extinction humaine est considéré par certaines personnes comme ridicule, alarmiste, défaitiste, irresponsable ou confus. Ou tout ça. Beaucoup de mots sont lancés contre les personnes qui concluent que c'est une bonne nuit pour l'humanité. Généralement, de telles critiques proviennent de personnes qui n'ont pas étudié les choses de près. Ou de ceux qui censurent ce point de vue en affirmant qu'il ne nous aidera pas à changer. Mon expérience a été le contraire. Considérer sérieusement l'effondrement à court terme et son éventuelle extinction a provoqué chez moi et chez d'autres des changements majeurs qui n'ont pas conduit à la paralysie. Mais j'y reviendrai plus tard.

Avant de plonger dans l'histoire, sachant que certains d'entre vous seront des personnes occupées et désireuses de mener à bien leurs poursuites, je commencerai par certaines recommandations sur la manière d'aborder la possibilité que nous fassions face à une tragédie climatique inévitable. Je les ai conçues comme une première tentative de partage de leçons, après la réflexion déclenchée par l'entretien avec Dougald. Je suis très conscient que je ne suis pas psychologue et ma base sur laquelle je peux m'analyser et tirer des leçons est un peu fragile. Mais si les choses sont aussi mauvaises que suggéré, il est temps de commencer. Mes recommandations s'adressent aux personnes professionnellement engagées dans des carrières sociales, environnementales ou éthiques, plutôt qu'au grand public.

Recommandations face à l'éventualité d'une tragédie climatique

Voici quatorze recommandations basées sur ce qui m'a aidé ou ce qui, avec le recul, aurait pu m'aider!

Revenez ou explorez à nouveau l'idée d'un divin ou d'un esprit ou d'une conscience ou d'un dieu antérieur à la Terre et se déplaçant dans l'Univers maintenant et pour toujours. Faites-le sans chercher une histoire simple d'explication mais un sentiment de foi qu'il existe une existence et une signification au-delà de notre culture, de notre espèce et de notre planète. Une telle «foi» aide quiconque à faire l'expérience et à gérer les inévitables difficultés et traumatismes de la vie.

Écoutez ces histoires de gens, passés et présents, qui nous disent que le désespoir n'est pas la fin, il ne doit donc pas être évité. Reconnaissez combien de traditions spirituelles voient le désespoir comme une passerelle vers notre croissance.

Méfiez-vous des personnes qui défendent leurs points de vue sur les implications de l'information plutôt que sur celles-ci. Les impacts de certaines informations sur le climat sur les motivations des autres ne sont pas certains et les analyses les plus sombres ont souvent déclenché un nouveau niveau de créativité et d'audace. Au lieu de cela, regardez les informations et les analyses directement pour vous-même, sans avoir à deviner ce que certaines interprétations pourraient entraîner.

Reconnaissez que toute résistance émotionnelle ou intellectuelle que vous pouvez rencontrer à des informations impliquant une catastrophe peut provenir de ce que vous vous êtes consciemment ou inconsciemment raconté à propos de votre estime de soi, de son but et de sa signification. Alors rappelez-vous comment votre vision de vous-même et du monde a évolué au cours de votre vie et le peut encore.

Ne paniquez pas. Donnez-vous le temps d'évoluer personnellement et professionnellement en fonction de votre prise de conscience émergente, mais assurez-vous de rester connecté à un groupe ou à une activité qui vous rappelle constamment la base de votre prise de conscience émergente.

Reconnaissez qu'il reste encore beaucoup à faire pour reconstituer les concepts de signification et de ce qui est bon et pour aligner votre vie sur celles-ci. Cela ne se fera pas du jour au lendemain, mais cela n'arrivera pas si vous ne donnez pas le temps à ce travail. Il vous faudra peut-être un peu de temps pour concilier votre vie actuelle avec la façon dont vous voudrez vivre à l'avenir.

Prévoyez plus de temps et de ressources pour vous permettre de faire des choses qui inspirent la vie à merveille. Cela pourrait être plus de temps dans de beaux environnements, ou avec de la musique édifiante, ou dans la contemplation, ou à travers une écriture créative, ou être avec des êtres chers et des amis proches. Cela signifie libérer du temps d'autres activités telles que la télévision, les médias sociaux et les nouvelles grand public. Cela peut également signifier une réduction de votre charge de travail.

Cherchez des occasions d'auto-réflexion et d'acquisition de sens. En effet, votre vision du monde et votre identité personnelle vont sans aucun doute transformer les heures supplémentaires au fur et à mesure que vous traitez les nouvelles informations et analyses. Attendez-vous à une catharsis, à la fois personnelle et professionnelle. Cela se produira parce que les limites subconscientes ou conscientes que vous vous êtes imposées jusqu'à présent seront levées. Allez avec cette énergie et cette créativité, mais veillez à ce que ces nouvelles activités ne deviennent pas si dévorantes, elles vous distraient du travail personnel que vous devez encore accomplir.

Si vous êtes un professionnel axé sur la mission dans les domaines liés à l'environnement ou à la justice sociale, attendez-vous à ce que vous soyez amené à reconstruire votre estime de

soi et que ce besoin de l'ego, bien que naturel et potentiellement utile, puisse devenir une distraction frénétique.

Attendez-vous à un changement de vos relations personnelles et de la manière dont vous passez votre temps libre. Certaines formes de conversation et d'interactions sociales légères avec des connaissances peuvent sembler inutiles, alors que vous voudrez peut-être passer plus de temps avec vos amis proches et votre famille. Pour certains, cela pourrait constituer un rééquilibrage bienvenu, mais pour d'autres, cela pourrait devenir un vecteur de solitude et de solitude. Par conséquent, il est important de trouver de nouveaux moyens de nouer des relations avec des personnes à de nouveaux niveaux qui vous semblent significatifs.

Créez une vision positive de personnes partageant compassion, amour et jouant. Il peut sembler qu'une perspective éco-tragique signifie que vous ne pouvez avoir aucune vision significative d'un avenir meilleur pour vous-même, votre communauté ou l'humanité. L'absence de quelque chose de positif sur lequel travailler peut être déstabilisante et contraignante. Certaines personnes penseront que vous êtes déprimé - ou déprimant - et ont besoin d'une «pensée positive». Pour une vision personnelle, la solution peut être de développer une vision de la façon dont vous allez aborder la vie, plutôt que d'imaginer les attributs d'un style de vie. Cela peut être parallèle aux dimensions d'une vision collective. Un avenir rempli d'amour et d'apprentissage, plutôt que de voitures volantes et de robots sophistiqués, pourrait être un moyen d'imaginer un monde plus beau. Et rappelez-vous, l'avenir sera toujours beau à sa manière,

Ne soyez pas dogmatique et évitez ceux qui le font. Cela vient de reconnaître que nos termes relatifs aux phénomènes ne sont pas les mêmes que les phénomènes eux-mêmes. Les mots que nous utilisons impliquent des choses qui peuvent avoir des effets sur nous mais ne le sont pas nécessairement. Des mots comme quasi-terme, civilisation, effondrement et tragédie sont nos mots et peuvent déclencher des idées, des images et des émotions qui ne sont pas des conséquences inévitables du phénomène décrit (plus sur le «constructionnisme social» plus tard).

Ne donnez pas la priorité au maintien de votre propre situation mentale et physique au détriment de la nécessité d'agir en solidarité avec les générations futures qui vivront avec l'avenir que nous leur créons. Les enfants de demain ne nous remercieront pas beaucoup d'avoir rejoint un groupe de soutien sur Facebook ou de pratiquer le yoga!

OK, that ends my summary of recommendations which I have identified based on my experience over the past four years since I woke up to the scale and dimensions of our climate tragedy. The rest of this piece (after the picture) recaps some of that journey that made me conclude with those recommendations. It's a long read, so now would be a good time to make a cuppa as you appreciate the sunrise over the Aegean from, Kalikalos Retreat.



Climate Fever and Revelation

My journey with climate change really took a turn in March 2014. I had just finished delivering [my inaugural lecture as a Professor](#) at Cumbria University. I gave the lecture at a Literary Festival and the topic I chose was “the adventure of sustainability”. In preparation for the talk I sought to identify the common theme across my previous 20 years of research, teaching, advocacy and practice. A key theme was how we need to tell new stories about ourselves and society. I described how corporations are the most influential storytellers of our time. That is probably obvious to you, given the role of marketing and advertising. I explained how the influence of corporate storytelling went deeper than that into how we think about what is real or true in fields we might not consider corporate at all. I gave the example of diamond engagement rings, which is a corporate-produced tradition. And I also described how the banking system tells society a story of what is wealth, what life is like and the decisions we have to make in order to get by or succeed. It does that through its creation of our money as credit with interest to those it decides to empower with that new spending power. The speech was offering a “critical social constructionist” viewpoint. I suggested we needed to free ourselves from a dominant worldview to escape to sustainability. By that, I meant that unsustainability is not the result of a lack of ideas and effort, but the result of us being cajoled into certain ideas and efforts that are contrary to the original wealth around us. I framed the challenge as an adventure towards sustainability, because I already realized that the presumed pragmatism of an incremental approach to change, by engaging business and investors, was no longer a credible view. I also used the idea of adventure to reflect how uncertain our future path has become and to reframe the daunting challenge as something to inspire rather than discourage.

I didn't practice my speech much because I was losing my voice with the onset of a flu. And what an awful flu it was, putting me in bed for a week from the day after the lecture. I was to discover just how emotionally powerful giving a speech that summarized and concluded a part

of my life would be. In preparing for the speech I had thought it important to remind myself of the bigger context within which I had been working over the previous 20 years. I looked at the latest data on environmental degradation and poverty reduction, amongst other aspects of what we term “sustainable development”. So I knew that despite progress in changing some organizations and attitudes, the data on the big picture was really bad. I wanted my speech to summarize a key theme and truth from my range of professional activities over the previous 20 years. But it also needed to be somewhat relatable – and therefore somewhat acceptable – to my colleagues, wider academia, and the general public who would be paying to be in the audience. So although I had this grave fear I was coming to doubt the very possibility of sustainability I didn’t let myself explore that ahead of my inaugural.

Now in bed with a fever, I went back to some of the worrying stuff I had skimmed over during the past weeks. I read about methane. I read blogs, watched videos and then accessed the scientific papers that were being referred to. I learned about the amount of methane in the permafrost and the current rate of release. I learned about the amount of methane frozen in solid form on the Arctic sea floor. I learned about how geologists had concluded that the last mass extinction event which wiped out about 95% of life on Earth was most likely caused by methane release from the Arctic sea floor triggering a rapid warming of the Earth’s atmosphere. The quivering voice and slightly moist eyes of one of the Russian scientists when she was pushed to comment on the implications of ice shrinkage and temperature measurements was a memorable moment for me as I slumped feverish in bed.

Perhaps because of an experience of validation and conclusion from my inaugural, as I lay in bed, I was more able to let myself accept not only the probability of a near-term collapse of civilization, but even the possibility of the near-term extinction of the human race. That led me into a multi-dimensional experience of loss and of grief. There is the sadness about the suffering of all people, and of the people you know who are alive today. There is the fear of what will happen, and when, to your own life and to your loved ones. “How much time have we got?” one asks. There is sadness with the suffering and death of all other life forms. There is the trauma of having in one’s mind an imagined future so disturbed from how things look and feel today. I could no longer look at the beautiful landscapes in the Lake District and appreciate them for what they were without imagining what it might look like in 50 to 100 years. Would it be scorched, flooded, uninhabited, polluted?

Then there was a sadness, grief and confusion about a loss of my own self worth. Because a key part of my identity was regarding myself as an informed, dedicated and sensible agent of good who sought sustainability. Over the previous decades I had made conscious sacrifices to give my life to that work. Or at least, I had justified a lack of balance in my life and an absence of diverse forms of joy, as a necessary side effect of my commitment to a cause. So suddenly I experienced a wave of regret. This personal loss of self-identity and feelings of regret are something that I now see shaped some of my actions over the 4 years that were to come, in ways I was not fully aware of at the time. I’ll have to come back to that. Another form of loss

and grief was of the cultural frame of reference for helping me determine what, from now on, might be right to think and to do. That is because I sensed our contemporary culture was no longer a solid framework from which to develop my ideas. I had difficulty finding people with whom to talk to about what I might think and do next. Related to that was a sense that nothing I could create or contribute to, at any level of physical, intellectual or cultural form, would last for much more than a few decades. As someone who was so focused on communicating ideas, at-scale, this was particularly difficult.

Looking back, I realize that I had some kind of faith or insight that there is an ultimate meaning to existence in general, and therefore to mine in particular, and therefore a meaning to my relationships with others. That has become more clear to me as I see how many people appear too fearful of despair to let themselves even consider possibilities that would trigger such despair. In my case, it might be a philosophical hangover from when I was a teenage Christian, who believed that God's love for us transcends our understanding of it. It could also be because since I had become post-Christian (no, not an official designation), I had read Vedic, Jain and Buddhist philosophies about the nature of reality and the idea that consciousness precedes matter and energy. I had studied some of the latest insights from the Natural Sciences that seriously undermine the view of nature as an unthinking machine of separate parts. In physics we have quantum mechanics which suggests that matter is connected to a universal field no matter where it is. In biology we now not only have epigenetics to show environmental influences on gene expression, and more evidence of group selection. We also have evidence of mutations not being entirely random as they sometimes correlate with parents' perception of their changing environment. This, coupled with knowledge that there were at least a dozen hominids that evolved from apes but which went extinct rather than evolving into homo sapiens, also made me see how our planet is constantly evolving life forms towards species like our own, as well as all others. I suppose this perspective that there is a divine or spiritual dimension to existence which gives rise to the flow and patterns of life on Earth meant I knew that the end of our culture and the end of our species would not be the end of meaning itself. I describe this worldview with an emphasis on concepts but what has been as key to me is that I have experienced this perspective in states of altered consciousness. The memory of those experiences gave me a life jacket as I slipped into despair.

That did not mean I was going to swim through despair that well. Since that time in bed with the flu, I have recognised it as a moment of change for me. But only when Dougald from Dark Mountain asked to interview me did I reflect on what I have been doing over almost 4 years since that moment. I think there is value in analyzing what happened to me and sharing it with others, which is why I am writing it down now. The value has become apparent to me as I've witnessed more and more people express their fear that despair leads nowhere. Not so. I have seen despair is not the end. It led to a range of new perspectives and activities for myself and then those I engaged with as a result. Some good, some not so good, some conscious and

some not so conscious. Sharing this may help you reflect on what you are going through, or might experience if you ever come to despair. I say that while fully recognizing I am not a trained psychoanalyst or psychotherapist nor am I steeped in any one particular spiritual tradition or methods for its instruction. I still have much to learn.

A Climate Catharsis

Looking back now I realize that my past few years have been characterized in part by a professional catharsis. By which I mean an effort to express myself professionally in areas and ways that I restrained myself from in the past due to old stories which no longer made sense to me. My previous focus had been on having the most expertise and experience in a particular niche that was concerned with persuading and enabling large organizations to change. In effect, I was offering myself to existing power structures. In the name of being professional in the field of management studies and management consulting I was therefore very careful about how I presented ideas such as transforming capitalism. Now with the idea that this system is dying, the lid came off.

My first professional shift was to rework the leadership course I was about to teach into one that was explicitly focused on intellectual and emotional emancipation. The idea was already in [the course outline](#), just as so many leadership courses offer self discovery. But I took it a step further in explicitly exploring the ways that our consciousness is held back by dominant ideas in our society. My idea was that if we arrive at a position of suspicion towards social norms, and connect to timeless wisdom, we will be more robust in taking a new approach to social and environmental issues, on the one hand, and professional development on the other. On the final day of the course I explained how I felt about the latest climate science and how it was currently destroying my sense of self-worth and leading to something else... which I wasn't sure of, but which the course was part of. The course was one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional life, and some of the students who participated in it became co-travellers in this post-sustainability exploration.

I had worked on currency innovation since 2011, and suddenly felt ambivalent about the long term resilience of technologically-dependent local currency systems. But I realised that rather than these systems being important to help complement the mainstream money systems, that they would help communities shift back to more local community reliance. I also felt that our delusions about money and wealth have been at the heart of the destructive path humanity embarked on to produce the climate tragedy, and so better understanding the history and nature of this phenomenon made sense. I immersed myself in this and produced a [free online course on the history and future of money](#), which has been taken by thousands of students around the world. Key to this process was the ability to step outside my comfort zone and use insights from disciplines that I had not worked with before. Without my newfound boldness that would not have happened. It began a whole new dimension to my intellectual life, which is reflected by this book on my desk today "Money and the Ancient Greek Mind."

A key step for me was to resign as Director of the [Institute](#) I had established, and go part time so I could free up some time and space to explore how I would integrate the new awareness into my life and work. I am still grateful for my University for supporting that move, which made the next phase of my life less scary. With that freedom, I joined the board of a multimillion-dollar social and environmental impact investing fund, specialising in technology and financial services. Sound a bit odd for an existential crisis? I liked the idea of being involved in the governance and funding start-ups that were using technology to try and unseat major incumbent businesses. It contrasted nicely to the past decades of seeking to make the large firms nicer from the edges. But, yes, it was still a bit corporate. And by 2016 I was beginning to let out a bit of a roar...

Suddenly I felt compelled to write in mainstream publications about mainstream politics. Trimming the edges of capitalism wasn't enough. I was not going to be silent anymore about politics, and [published on topics](#) ranging from issues of security through to economy. Suddenly I was debating the former Lord Admiral of the fleet about Trident renewal and writing columns on Corbynism. This new line of work eventually led me to providing strategic communications advice to the Office of the Leader of the Opposition in the United Kingdom during the [first 6 months of 2017](#). During the General Election campaign I ended up co-writing speeches and other documents. What was the connection to climate tragedy? For me it was clear. To avoid making matters worse as we experience the impacts of climate chaos on the UK directly and through supply chains and financial systems, we need to turn away from the neoliberal value set that leaves everything to market forces and disparages social solidarity through political action. I think we need some emergency socialism. For the first time in my life I was hearing a leader of a political party in the UK speak about how we are proud of our systematic compassion, that we are great because we care for each other. Jeremy Corbyn was bringing these ideas back into the mainstream of public life.

Looking back over the few years since my flu-bound revelations I can see how extremely busy I became during a time when I really needed to reflect. The rush of energy from this professional catharsis was also, in retrospect, fueled by the reaction of my ego to my new awareness. I had lost my previous identity and sense of self-worth. Part of my busy-ness may have been a felt need to reconstruct a sense of self-worth. It may also have been a desire for meaningful and consuming distractions from climate tragedy, as I did not know how to live day-to-day with that at the front of my mind.

The Personal Impacts

I have focused most of my reflections on professional matters. That is because my sharing on this topic is primarily about how we "work" in relation to it. But the distinction with personal life is not so solid, especially for something so profound as this. Looking at what has changed, I see that my social circle shrank. That can be normal for someone entering their 40s. But in my case, as a single guy with no children, that might not be so normal. I spent more time with closer friends and family. I found it more tiring and pointless to have small talk and thus more

difficult to meet new people. Dating apps seemed torture. Instead, I felt drawn to spend more time in nature. I organised my life so I could take time out and live for some months in Bali, Indonesia, finding the beauty of the nature and the culture a balm for my concerns and a suitable backdrop to more philosophical explorations. I realise that I have not shed desires for wealth, status, fun and security, though I now aspire to. The fear of not progressing as I thought I might, or in comparison to others, as I age, still lingers in the background. Looking at that now, I think such factors have influenced my decisions and I feel disappointed about that. Things may change, but for the past few years it hasn't been easy to discuss this topic casually with either family, friends or colleagues. And as it is such an encompassing issue, this inability to communicate one's reality can be isolating and diminishing. I limited my explicit exploration of climate tragedy to conversations and correspondence with a handful of people who had come to the same realisation. By mid 2016 I was not happy with myself for keeping this matter to that small group. I had been invited to [keynote at a conference](#) of climate academics and policy makers, in Australia. It was a long way to go and I don't like to fly without a rationale. Another speech about corporate steps towards environmental sustainability felt a depressing idea to me. I was worried about how I would come across, but decided to go for it. I described climate change as a tragedy not a problem that would be fixed, and how we now need to spend as much time on what adaptation would involve, including adaptation to a collapse of civilisation as a result. It does not mean stopping efforts to curb emissions or capture more carbon, but means accepting that immense suffering and loss is going to happen – and soon. It means actively working on how to not make matters worse. I realised that people, like me, might be able to consider this if they had a map or a framework to help them navigate it, and so I offered one as a “deep adaptation agenda”. I was surprised and delighted at the response, with people coming up to me afterwards thanking me for my courage and sharing their reflections and metaphors on the same subject. Then a year later I discovered that the concept had been used by funders in the UK for their [grantmaking](#). Discovering that I wasn't speaking into a void, that in fact there was resonance and people could amplify these ideas, helped me conclude the catharsis. It seems I had roared enough. The last four years were professionally transformative. I am now a political communications trainer and advisor and a leadership trainer and researcher with a consciously emancipatory approach to both. I am a currency innovation consultant with an overt attention to the social and environment implications. I have also now published academic papers in these areas as an academic, so have transitioned that aspect of my work into this new phase. But there has been a professional cost, as I disengaged with a community of research where I had status, expertise and networks, so might have been included in funding bids and special issues of top journals. To help those who respect my past work to consider a more radical approach today, I [published a reflection](#) on some of the implications of the useful but limited impact of existing partnerships. I have not yet published anything academic on the “deep adaptation agenda,” in part due to the cathartic rush I have been on with other work. Fortunately, I have begun to find

academics in related fields who are explicitly addressing aspects of this agenda, such as Professor Jonathan Gosling in his recent [papers on leadership](#) during periods of cultural collapse. He will be keynoting at our next [conference on leadership in September](#) in the Lake District.

Interbeing

Where to now? Come the summer of '17 I knew I had not given myself space to explore the “deep adaptation” agenda as much as I had wanted to. Within that, I had not developed the kind of equanimity – or peace of mind – about climate chaos that would mean I could work on it directly. I realise many other people must be in this situation. If you have read this far, then I guess that includes you. I see equanimity as important if we are to respond to changing realities without fear, anger or sadness clouding our judgement. I see equanimity as a means of usefulness rather than simply coping emotionally. Where might that equanimity come from? In the past few months I have been in discussions and correspondence with people as I explore the spiritual or metaphysical perspectives that might make some sense in the face of our climate tragedy. I was fortunate enough that my University agreed for me to take a year unpaid leave from September 2017, and this has allowed me time to reflect, read, discuss, as well as participate in various meditative practices. In particular, I have been exploring the idea of “interbeing”, a term from Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hahn and popularised by author [Charles Eisenstein](#). Being asked by Charles for feedback on a first draft of his forthcoming book on climate change also prompted me to clarify some thoughts. So here goes... (and this is a good moment to make another cuppa)...

Interbeing is a word describing a conscious experience of being more than our physical body and separate mind. It is another way of describing higher consciousness, so as to emphasise its more embodied form. The idea is fairly well established in non-Abrahamic spiritual traditions, as well as within the more gnostic threads of Abrahamic religions. The idea is that although we experience ourselves as separate due to our senses, consciousness is not limited to our brains or bodies. Rather, it is like a field of magnetism or gravity. Moreover, it may be like a field that is not limited in time and space as magnetism or gravity are, instead encompassing all of existence. From this perspective it can be said that consciousness is having an experience of itself through us.

How might interbeing raise you from the threat of depression if you sense the end of everything one can contribute to due to near-term extinction of the human race and the majority of species? Not by making us feel more as one with all humans who will be born to die young. Or more as one with all dogs and cats who will starve to death. Nor by feeling more as one with all the birds in the trees who will die of heat exhaustion. Or more as one with those landscapes we most enjoy seeing and experiencing which will transform out of recognition. Or more as one with the wonderful culture of ideas that we have enjoyed learning and contributing to, but that will vanish into ruins like other lost civilisations. The more we experience interbeing with all these deeply important things, the more we may suffer. An

answer may lie in our sense of what there “is” to inter-be with. There are no half measures with interbeing. All is one, as that great phrase explains.

OK, you might say, “We are at one with everything. And if we are lucky we might experience states of consciousness where that feels real to us. But how does that help us deal emotionally with the loss of civilisation, the mass extinction of other species and potentially even human extinction?”

I think the answer lies in whether we see that greater consciousness as a source. In particular, does consciousness exist as an original phenomenon that gave rise to matter (and so lies within it, finding new forms through it), or does consciousness arise out of matter (which logically would imply randomly). There is a lot of support in the history of human thought for the former view of consciousness giving rise to matter. Now there is a lot of new scientific evidence for that view, including the latest in evolutionary biology and in quantum physics (which I will summarise elsewhere). If we have the view that consciousness gave rise to and works through matter, then we see how it gave rise to species, all humans and all civilisations. Therefore we are one with the potential for all things.

Thich Nhat Hahn has suggested we take time to reflect on the number of civilizations that have collapsed in the past. We could walk around the ruins, or watch a video of someone doing so. Imagine the thousands of lives, with the joys, heartaches, intense discussions, hopes for the future and stories of the past. All so intense at the time and all now gone. Then consider how these civilisations have kept arising again and again in different places and times. There appears to be an underlying impulse towards them. Or let’s go a step further. Take a moment to reflect on the way our planetary ecosystem has kept producing hominids, most of which never evolved into humans but went extinct. They were bipedal large brained animals with opposable thumbs and in many cases the desires to draw and to burn. Therefore, some scientists are beginning to consider whether evolution is entirely random. That doesn’t imply an anthropomorphic God that designs species, but a field of consciousness that gives rise to similar patterns of life. In one ancient tradition this is called the Akashic Record. It means that who we are and what we do now is both influenced by and will influence an eternal record that pervades all time and space. If a collective consciousness is understood and experienced in this way, the pain of the passing of life as-we-know-it may be lessened. Because we are one with the source consciousness that gives rise to all life and will do so again and again.

Many people who are troubled by climate change are “environmentalists” and many such people are interested in reconnecting with non human “nature”, as a means of sensing our interbeing. While this can be a useful first step, it may extend the awareness of self only partially in both time and space and could lead to new waves of pain, anger, sadness, distraction, and therefore distorted thinking on what to do now. Therefore, the climate tragedy invites us to see interbeing as all or nothing. You might rightly point out that I am at risk of proposing a worldview because it makes one feel better. This subjective distortion is the root of

confirmation bias as well as the flaw of so many religions. “It must be right because it feels wonderful.” I currently have no answer to that problem, apart from that I know in my own life I have not arrived at this perspective quickly as a means of tranquility. Indeed, I think the more I embrace it and bring it into my daily consciousness, the implications may not be so easy after all.

The pain associated with an awareness of climate tragedy may be deadened with this perspective on total interbeing, but there remains a question of meaning for our individual lives. Given that our previous ideas of purpose and meaning have been shaken with the awareness of impending collapse, most people would seek a new basis for the meaning of their lives. That is something I will need to spend more time on this year, perhaps always. But I am already wondering whether our meaning can be found within a purpose of approaching this moment with as much awakened connection to universal source consciousness as possible. In that way, contributing to the akashic memory of that source consciousness at an unusual time in existence. I have a feeling that such an approach would involve heightened compassion and wonder. I also sense that the positive “vision” for what we can work towards while accepting a coming collapse will be about communities that nurture that compassion and wonder. But it is something I need to reflect on and discuss some more.

The perspective I have just expressed assumes some “free will” within us. Or to put it another way, some ability for original phenomena to be created by us, within us, to then add back to the source consciousness. How is it possible for there to be any agency in a part of a whole if all is one? How would we know if our view that we have free will isn’t actually determined for us? We don’t. But if we didn’t have free will to exist in ways that create novel input into the akashic record, then what is the consciousness within individual organic lifeforms for? Perhaps nothing. Or perhaps simply to express the intention of the whole. And that is what I have to conclude at this time: I do not know if there is any individual agency. Nevertheless, the implication is that to approach life from from a heightened connection to source consciousness will more likely align with the purpose of source consciousness, if there is one. Now is when we begin to speculate. It appears that source consciousness tends to diversify the complexity of matter. It appears it creates sentient beings who wish to avoid pain and experience pleasure. It appears that the process of unfolding complexity leads to new forms of reflective consciousness. Therefore, I could choose a purpose to reduce suffering, promote joy, enable reflection, and unleash emergence. This does not sound so different from the great wisdom traditions, as well as the common sense knowledge of most people I know, if not deluded by obsessions over race, nation, politics, status, wealth or religious correctness.

I am currently in Ubud, Bali, which attracts many spiritual seekers from around the world. It is a Hindu island, with an animist flavour, and many religiously observant families. Many of the foreigners participate in what some would call “new age” spiritual practices, such as shamanic breathwork or cacao ceremonies. Despite that, I have not yet discussed any of what I have written above with the people I meet here. Because I have often felt lonelier with people who

are overtly on a spiritual path. When I hear of their focus on positive thinking, visioning, and being in touch with one's body and emotions, I wonder if this is naive and self-serving. Yet the effect is nice enough and I don't want to upset them. It is a cliché that some of the people with the most needs and fears gravitate to either religious devotion or new age spirituality. I do not think the worldview I have described in my writing today is an immediately self-serving one. It would be far easier to dismiss climate tragedy as hype and block it out as one does a warrior pose while breathing incense. I am discovering, therefore, that I may need to be proactive if I want to be part of a community of "spiritual" people, approaching life in full awareness of the climate tragedy.

Spiritual Critical Social Constructionism

From the amount I write, you may have noticed that I'm an academic. Though you also may have noticed I am not limited to one discipline or a narrow concept of validity for knowledge claims. I see logical positivism as a tool not a totality. Mostly I'm a sociologist, and before wrapping up these reflections, I'd like to share a realisation that critical social theory could be essential for developing equanimity in the face of the climate tragedy.

Social constructionism is a philosophy that recognizes that the words we use to describe phenomena are not synonymous with the phenomena themselves. Because the phenomena themselves are simply phenomena and our experience of them is simply experience. We label phenomena with words in order to communicate about them, but that does not mean that they exist only in the way that our words describe them. Social constructionism helps us to be aware of how we are applying the lens of our language to reality, in ways emphasise certain patterns and not others. Social constructionism does not deny that there is a reality but that such reality is prior to our interpretation of it. Critical social constructionism goes a step further in questioning how certain terms or "constructions" sustain certain power relations in human society, and are themselves the result of such power relations. So by "critical" we do not mean negativity or questioning. Instead, it reflects an emancipatory interest in the application of social constructionism. "Spiritual critical social constructionism" is a label I wish to offer for the importance of our exploration of how concepts used for the "spiritual" or the "ineffable" or the "divine" or the "metaphysical" or the "Godly", are not synonymous with the phenomena being described. That also goes for any terms that relate to such matters – whether in religious or somewhat "new age" communities of discourse. The astute reader will see how this begins to sound very similar to the central teaching of Lao Tzu, who opened his book with "the truth that can be told is not the truth". You might think he would pack up with his book writing ruse there and then. But with that caveat he then delivers a massive book. Because although words are limited tools, they are darn useful. As I hope you are finding right now.

The social constructionist perspective reminds us that when we speak of "probable near-term collapse of civilization" that each of those words mean different things to different people and, more importantly, are not synonymous with the realities they are helping us to consider. Words like nearterm, civilisation, collapse, and tragedy, are our words, and may trigger ideas, images

and emotions which aren't inevitable. In this field, like in any other, we must be vigilant against any new dogmas emerging.

New Community

Being without a partner or children, it may have been easier for me than most to take the time to explore the issues I've described in this piece. I realise that for many people it is tough to change the focus of one's career or the situation at home in light of new information, simply because modern life is so jam packed with activities, responsibilities and the need to earn a living. So I see the need to support people with the process I went through. Therefore, I am trialling a "[deep adaptation retreat](#)" later this year, where participants who have reached or gone through despair over the climate tragedy will explore together how we reconstitute meaning and sustain ourselves.

The retreat is also a response to my realisation I need a form of philosophical community around the perspectives and processes I've described above. It starts by sharing more. So I have begun writing up my reflections and sharing them. This writing is also going to be key sensemaking so I more consciously choose what to do next. I will stick mostly to personal reflections, rather than extensive academic-style research. At this stage I don't know how my participation in a philosophical community on this topic will develop. To help connect with people exploring what this path means for their professional work, I have created a [Deep Adaptation group on LinkedIn](#). If you aren't on that platform, then please join my mailing list as a way to keep updated. If you are organising activities on these matters, please let me know (or post to the LinkedIn group). And please tell your networks about the retreat.

It is possible that Dark Mountain may grow into the philosophical community I think is needed. Whatever happens, I'll always be grateful that they kept this topic alive over the past decade, and then prompted me to reflect in this way. Dougald's take on the interview with me, as well as an audio, will be appearing on [their site](#) soon.

My thanks to Katie Carr, Cam Webb, Susan Holden, Marc Lopatin, Charles Eisenstein, Jonathan Gosling, Dougald Hine, Georgia Wingfield-Hayes, Chris Erskine and Jonathan Leighton for correspondence and conversations along the way as I've pieced these ideas together, as well the facilitators of spiritual practices at Yogabarn and The Ark, Ubud. Thanks to Matthew Slater for showing me what dedication to one's contrarian truth looks like.

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1. [Alexander Kohl](#) on [January 14, 2018 at 8:09 pm](#)

Thank you for sharing so deeply and openly. I love how you see the collapse and rather than searching for a last frantic dance, look for meaning that transcends that.

I have not researched into the unavoidable collapse, but am reminded that my life ends with death, no matter what. While we often ignore that fact, it brings the same finality. And I agree about enjoying time in nature and connecting with close friends. On top of that, I want to contribute to a positive solution. My journey has taken me to credit clearing (inspired by Thomas Greco's book). Now I am trying to find a compelling story that activates communities to take it up. Would love to hear your thoughts on whether you think climate change and with it the dangers of collapse will help or distract too many who ignore it from taking action and a story that is more closely aligned to mainstream business thinking (e.g. interest free line of credit) might get better results?

[Reply](#)

2. [meansnecessary](#) on [March 21, 2018 at 8:58 pm](#)

Your story, and your vulnerable sincerity, are so warmly appreciated. I love Thich Nhat Hanh, but I hadn't heard of *interbeing* before. I think some of what you say is amplified in Pope Francis' remarkable encyclical *Laudato Si*:

We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.

[Reply](#)

3. JanteSearching on [April 6, 2018 at 5:13 pm](#)

Almost every sentence of your story ticked boxes for me as I have explored this same terrain for many years and arrived at many of the same conclusions, questions, and need for ongoing community to explore, a sense making framework or spirituality that can hold us/me through this intense disruption and tragedy and potential extinction. I have no arguments with these scenarios at all as i have been studying the progression of climate change et al as a grassroots educator and academic for 30 years. However I was so disappointed that for the “latest in climate science” you directed the reader to is Guy McPherson. OMG . That shook me up. There are so many credible sources. In the field, He is not considered one of them. I hope you have done some background reading reviews on his work from people such as Dr. Michael Tobis and Scott Johnson. I think his fear of loss of identity as you described facing as the climate tragedy shake up everything, pushed him into trying to be an expert in something he is not, using sensationalism as his fast ladder to attention. An easy trap.

I hope to keep track of you and will look for more about your honest, ethical , vulnerable search for meaning.

[Reply](#)

4. Pingback: [Five for Friday – Beyond Walking](#)

5. Pingback: [SURVIVING/THRIVING OUR CRISIS-OF-CRISES – Nuets Nodes](#)

6. [Ian Christie](#) on [August 30, 2018 at 8:40 pm](#)

Thank you for a deeply impressive and moving account of a transition and reckoning that many of us have yet to make but suspect we will need to. I also read the climate literature you have charted, but with more emphasis on the uncertainties that remain and the gathering movements at local and regional and city levels for change (I agree that all this is painfully slow and late, and inadequate to the challenge so far). In the space of uncertainties there is hope. And by hope I don't mean any easily won 'optimism', but rather what Vaclav Havel meant, when he said that hope is really about the trust that a course of action and way of living makes ultimate sense, however things work out. That kind of insight is in essence a religious / spiritual one, and as a Christian I think a profound task for the coming decisive decade or two is to deepen and extend the reach of ecologically attuned faith communities and institutions, and to enable as much

cooperation within and between them, and with like-minded secular communities, as possible. In this the touchstone is Pope Francis's great Encyclical – addressed to the whole world, not just the Catholic faithful – on Integral Ecology, 'ecological conversion' and care for our common home. That is now on all my students' reading lists; and I will also be encouraging them to read your reflections on facing up to the risk of collapse. I have three other recommendations for you for reading that can inform your project. First, the late Ronald Higgins's prophetic work of 1978, *The Seventh Enemy: the human factor in the global crisis*. Second, Joseph Tainter's *The Collapse of Complex Societies*. Third, John Burnside's recently published fable of a post-collapse near-Utopia, *Havergey*.

[Reply](#)

7. John Lamont-Black on [November 12, 2018 at 7:42 am](#)

Dear Jem, thank you for writing this piece and for your work and especially the candour and openness with which you have communicated your journey. Nobody ever stipulated that a dark night of the soul should be over and done with in a few hours. Four years – yes I can see that.

I first heard about the arctic methane issue at an evening seminar at the Geol Soc in the early 90's – it was about looking at rapid post glacial release of methane following ice sheet retreat as a mechanism of explaining the very rapid rise or 'kick starting' of global temperature recovery. I recall thinking later 'if that's what happens coming OUT of a glacial period, what might it mean for the global climate during an interglacial!?' It is quite astonishing that it has not been adequately factored into future scenario predictions. Like you (if I understand you correctly) I think that this may turn out to be the strongest, of the feedbacks accelerating the runaway train of climate change.

In your 14 recommendations I can see that many would not look out of place at all in a path of spiritual investigation or enquiry – as in Buddhism, Advaita Vedanta or mystical Christianity. All of which include examinations of self and if done with an open heart precipitate crises. Whatever form the crisis takes, its about truth. In one way you could say 'just pick a spot, any spot and start digging'. I can see why you place recommendation No. 1 at the top of the list: in many ways the others are embedded in or are consequences of that.

Amongst others, the Indian sage Ramana Maharshi said:

"Your own Self-Realization is the greatest service you can render the world."

He did not say the ONLY service – which.

What to do – that is what a lot of us are floundering with. I think the idea is to find meaning and joy in 'service', which is leagues in the opposite direction from accumulation and consumption. These latter seem to be the foundations of our modern system [and oddly in opposition to each other – to have your cake and eat it!].

Thank you for this framework of Deep Adaptation, from which and new language, set of ideas, and being will emerge, it is a great contribution.

I have just a couple of recommendations for you. The work of idealist philosopher Bernardo Kastrup and for a more spiritual bent in the same direction – some of the contemporary exponents of non-duality such as Greg Goode or Rupert Spira. To quote the latter ‘the world as we know it will not survive materialism’

Thank you.

John

[Reply](#)

8. [dance teacher summit](#) on [December 18, 2018 at 1:16 am](#)

Hurrah! In the end I got a website from where I know how to really take helpful facts regarding my study and knowledge.

[Reply](#)

9. Pingback: [Light reading on Climate Change, Extinction, and Mental Health | monkeyonawall](#)
10. Pingback: [Good News! No Need to Have a Mental Breakdown Over ‘Climate Collapse’ | Libertarian Party of Alabama Unofficial](#)
11. Pingback: [Good News! No Need to Have a Mental Breakdown Over ‘Climate Collapse’ – ifttwall](#)
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17. Pingback: [Good News! No Need to Have a Mental Breakdown Over ‘Climate Collapse’ « Financial Survival Network](#)
18. Ollie Für Trees on [April 8, 2019 at 11:41 pm](#)

Quel que soit l'endroit où vous vous trouvez lorsque vous lisez cet article, il était évidemment destiné à vous atteindre à ce moment impératif, de sorte que la discussion sur notre conscience de nous-mêmes, notre conscience auto-réfléchissante, s'ouvre sur ce concept d' "interêtre". un tout plus grand, et comment nous jouons notre rôle, quelle est notre contribution à l'histoire de notre survie? Je pense que la spiritualité jouera un grand rôle dans la conscience de soi nécessaire pour traverser les quelques décennies à venir. C'est un moment d'action, il suffit de jouer un petit rôle, d'explorer comment jouer ce rôle. Le mot «jouer» est très important dans l'appel rebelle rebelle aux armes que

nous devons ne pas poursuivre comme nous l'avons été parce que l'enfant effrayé qui se trouve en nous répond le mieux pour jouer.

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