Editorial

Ecological activists struggle with the question: 'Why do so many people ignore or deny information about climate change and general environmental collapse?' If we are ourselves active around these issues, it is terribly easy to feel anger or contempt towards those who aren't, to see them as stupid and/or bad. But if we are going to address this disengagement effectively, we need to ask ourselves whether people might have very good reasons for adopting it. Ecopsychology – the study of human beings' psychological relationship with the other-than-human, and of what disturbs that relationship – has a great deal to contribute to understanding these reasons.

The one-word explanation for denial or avoidance is 'Overwhelm'. Overwhelm operates on three levels. Firstly there is overwhelm about the scale and complexity of the crisis: not only are the suggested outcome scenarios ghastly beyond belief (literally so for some), but the problems are all interlinked, and for every apparent solution someone points out new problems: just as ecosystemic elements themselves are profoundly interwoven, the same with ecosystemic damage. It is clear to anyone who looks that environmentalists are fire-fighting, running endlessly from emergency to emergency; after all, if aliens landed today and handed us a source of abundant non-polluting energy, we would still wake up tomorrow facing environmental disaster from a whole array of other causes.

But there is also overwhelm in each person's personal life. In advanced capitalist culture, nearly all of us are on the edge of being unable to cope, to do what we have to do and process what we have to process while also handling our internal emotional states. And a further level of this is cultural overwhelm, the result of many generations of trauma through war, famine, disease, and abuse. We are all deeply distressed and struggling to cope; and we bring this distress to environmental issues just as we do to everything else.

Individuals seek to protect a fragile bubble of personal reality, which makes their life bearable. Some key elements of this are fun, freedom, status-based identity and, most fundamentally, relaxation. Environmental activists seem to threaten all of these elements, which in many of their most common forms (consumption, travel, entertainment) involve high carbon levels. In particular, they threaten *relaxation*: the human need for downtime, empty mental space, periods when we are not anxious and planning for survival. Even if we can only get relaxation through getting drunk and watching TV, it is still deeply precious and we will protect it at all costs.

Hence for large numbers of people it is not climate change itself that appears as a threat, but *news* of climate change, which threatens to break into their fragile bubble of emotional survival. They respond to this news as mammals respond to threat to survival: with the well-known triad of fight/flight/freeze. In particular, many people freeze: they use the response reserved for desperate situations where we are completely helpless, and our best option is to turn off, go into trance and hope to be overlooked.

This is what is also called *dissociation*. It is an important part of the mammalian reper-toire, but one which gets drastically overused in modern urban environments, where we need it just to get through the morning rush hour. In some contexts, then, it is a healthy, pro-survival talent; but unfortunately not one which helps with the situation we are cur-rently facing. In some ways climate change *deniers* are a better prospect for environmental-ists that climate change *ignorers*: at least they are mobilized enough around the issue to fight the information rather than freeze or run away. (Activists, of course, are also using a 'fight' strategy to cope with overwhelm – which makes them vulnerable to collapse and burnout.)

Until people are willing and able to tolerate the feelings which environmental information sets off in them – feelings like fear, grief, rage, despair – it will be very difficult for them to absorb that information, and therefore to act on it. So how can we help them (and our-selves) to come out of overwhelm? The first thing to do when faced with overwhelm in a therapeutic situation is to point out to the person that this is what is going on: 'It's all a bit much, isn't it?' 'It's hard for you to take things in just now.' Just on its own, this helps people find some solid ground. Then we need to establish a sense of safety in which they can access their embodied emotions.

I would suggest that environmental activists need to think about ways in which they can use these same strategies: helping people become aware that they have, for very good psy-chological reasons, become overwhelmed and cut off; and then supporting the sense that it is safe and OK to feel what we feel. Only after that will anyone be ready to think and act.

This issue of PPI has five long articles, each very different from the others. PPI has not published as much material on sexual politics as we would like, and Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar's paper helps to make up for this: it is a challenging account of work with a male client on a 'journey into manhood'. Rolef Ben-Shahar explicitly and courageously identifies the issue here as being about love between two men; and helps us to think about the dif-ference between sexual and erotic love, in and out of therapy. One can deeply appreciate this rich paper without necessarily agreeing with everything in it.

This and the next paper both happen to come from Israel; but Ariel Katz's and Rokaya Marzouk Abu Rekayek's paper specifically addresses the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a fascinating description of sandplay work by pairs of mixed Arab and Jewish ethnicity. As the paper points out, the sand tray effectively constitutes a piece of 'territory' which the pair of participants was being invited to find a way to share. Three strategies are identified from the work observed: these are, perhaps unsurprisingly, conflict, domination, and co-existence. But observing how these strategies work in this new and symbolic context may possibly generate some new approaches to the much larger 'sand tray' of Israel/Palestine.

On a very different note, Babak Fozooni looks at cognitive analytic therapy from a sym-pathetic but uncompromisingly radical perspective, asking 'if CAT is a genuine gain for the contemporary worker who has to deal with greater psychic tension than before under a crisis-ridden capitalist regime'. His answer is in many ways positive, especially in relation to what he identifies as the recent beneficial influence on CAT of Vygotsky and Bakunin.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone and Mick Collins et al. both take a Jungian approach to crucial issues for the twenty-first century; Sheets-Johnstone emphasizing the embodied aspects of Jungian theory, and Collins et al. focusing on the spiritual aspects as well. Sheets-

Johnstone's paper develops the concept of the Enemy as a Jungian archetype, anchoring this closely in the physical and instinctual, in keeping with her pioneering work on embodiment as the foundation for both psyche and culture. Collins and his co-authors discuss what is known as 'spiritual emergency', a psychological crisis with transformative potential, suggesting that such events constitute a 'wake-up call' for a rebalancing of both the individual and society.

All in all, a rich and multi-perspectival issue, which offers a set of truly radical approaches to our current situation – something which I have also tried to carry forward in this editorial.