



**Notes from a day on**

**Agency in individual and collective change**  
*Climate Psychology Alliance with Living Witness*

at

Friends Meeting House, 43 St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LW  
10.30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2017

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## 1. Overview and aims

(from announcement)

A day for psychological and social practitioners to share our experiences of enabling positive responses to climate change. We'll explore how our different approaches connect and complement each other, hoping to form a stronger community of practitioners. We hope to shed light on questions such as:

- What are the approaches to change in our different practices?
- How do we address our own Shadow – including developing agency for change when our “normal” way of life is part of the problem?
- What are our experiences of the interplay of individual and collective agency?
- How do these themes relate to well-explored aspects of climate psychology – e.g. splitting, denial, loss etc.? What about loss of “normal” ways of life if we respond effectively to climate change?

## 2. Morning plenary and invited presentations

Includes:

- Introduction and Quaker perspective. Laurie Michaelis
- Mindfulness & nature connection. Nadine Andrews
- Systems change/Action Inquiry. Anna Birney
- Carbon conversations. Jane Orton & Tony Wragg
- Psychotherapy, Gestalt. Malcolm Parlett
- Work that Reconnects. Jo Hamilton (L time-keep)
- Inner Transition and Deep Frames. Sophy Banks

After the brief presentations, we split into groups to discuss and reflect, and bring our own experiences. This was summarised on flip charts which were put up around the room (see flip charts in appendix 2), and brought together in a plenary.

### Introduction and Quaker perspective. Laurie Michaelis

(edited transcript)

We've got a great group of people with different practices to open the conversation this morning. We're going to have a quick round, hearing from half a dozen people a little about our practices and what, if you like, our “theory of change in use” is – our approach to change in our different practices. One of the reasons for doing this is that it sometimes feels when you go into any particular approach as if it's the only one, or as if it's meant to be the main one or the best one.

Responding to climate change is huge, complex, and part of multiple complex connected systems including technology, ecosystems, economics, demography, psychology, group dynamics. All kinds of

things are involved. I don't think there is a right way in, and in fact different people at different times need different ways in. Each of us needs different ways in at different times.

As a Quaker I've been working on climate change and sustainable living for about fifteen years now. A lot of the work I do is with local Quaker meetings, or organising workshops or gatherings of one kind or another, from small groups up to 2000 people.

Quakers have a way of engaging with things that I want to summarise in three principles.

The first principle that I think is fundamental for Quakers...and other Quakers in the room may disagree with me but that's fine.

It is essentially about being open to transformation. We have Quaker words that are about standing still in the Light and letting it show you your darkness.

We use God language, and before I use God language I just want to say that I don't believe in a god in any conventional sense, but I tend to interpret that word as being to do with emergent collective consciousness. That's my interpretation and different people will interpret it differently.

But we talk about trusting "the promptings of love and truth in our hearts as the leadings of God whose light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life". So there's this sense of looking at our darkness and being transformed.

So that was a kind of internal, first-person principle.

The second one is about "answering that of God in every one". I would say that's about intersubjectivity. I need to be open to being transformed by my relationship with you. That's the basis of a strong Quaker culture of listening, and it's a very important part of Quaker practice.

The third principle is about unity; seeking unity together. We do that in very practical ways in our decision-making meetings, in the way we come up with a minute, a shared way forward, but we do it in lots of different ways. Sometimes we don't do it very well. A lot of it comes down to letting go of ego, and letting go of personal positions, and uniting with the group.

[laurie@livingwitness.org.uk](mailto:laurie@livingwitness.org.uk)

<http://www.livingwitness.org.uk/hd>

## Mindfulness and nature connection, Nadine Andrews

(speaking notes)

My practice and understanding is informed by systems thinking, Taoist philosophy, social, transpersonal and ecopsychology, ecolinguistics, mindfulness research.

A root cause of ecological crisis is the belief of humans as separate from and superior to nature (external nonhuman world and our inner psyche).

### **Self-regulation**

This separation has led to disorder in our relationship with nature. For a system to self-regulate it needs to follow a cycle of attending to feedback signals, interpreting those signals accurately, and then

responding in an appropriate way. If there is a disconnection somewhere in these processes then the system can't self-regulate.

- Practices for developing our capacity and sensitivity to noticing & interpreting cues, to become more attuned to weak signals – developing sensory acuity and ability to attend to internal-external experience, to our ongoing embodied interactions with the world

### **Shift from subject-object to subject-subject**

The idea of human separation and superiority is associated with a subject-object framing of the natural world. Our disconnection both promotes and is strengthened by this frame, which manifests as a perception of nature as a resource to be controlled and exploited for our own ends, and that denies the living world of its own intents and purposes, and as having intrinsic value.

An example: we say phrases like 'being in nature' – this positions the natural world as an object, a container that we can be inside or outside. The implication is that our default position is outside the container. Objects have boundaries that separate them from other objects, and so in using this phrase we are setting up the possibility for separation, which is precisely what we seek to overcome by 'being in nature'.

- Practices for cultivating a subject-subject frame, for engaging with our kin in the community of life with humility & gratitude, with enhanced awareness of interconnectedness & interdependence, and with an attitude of openness and receptivity to receiving insights, and that is non ego-driven

### **Agency and virtue ethic**

From Taoist perspective, what is good is unknowable. We can't know for sure how our actions will play out in every aspect, and whether all consequences will ultimately be positive or negative. We are simultaneously in control and not in control. So we take a virtue ethic approach that seeks to cultivate an ecological consciousness in the way I have described. We ask ourselves:

- What would a person with this ecological consciousness do in a situation like this?
- What actions fit with the natural pattern of the universe? (A river flowing through the countryside finds its own natural course)

These practices are a discipline. We have to keep exercising these mind-body muscles to overcome the powerful social primes that we are continuously being exposed to and potentially influenced by.

[nadine@cultureprobe.co.uk](mailto:nadine@cultureprobe.co.uk)  
<http://cultureprobe.co.uk>

## **Systemic change and action inquiry, Anna Birney**

(edited transcript)

I'm going to talk to you about the relationship between systemic change and action inquiry. And I think I'm going back to what Nadine said, and the premise of this, it's a Meadows quote: "the world is a complex, interconnected, finite, ecological, social psychological, economic system, but we treat it as

if it were not, as if it were divisible, separable, simple and infinite. Our persistent, intractable global problems such as climate change arise directly from this mismatch”: the idea that we solve and try to look at these problems through linear thinking, through divisional ideas and we do not take a systemic view in how we address changes.

A lot of the work that I’ve been looking at is how you can take a living systems view, because you can take a systemic view that still creates reduction in the world. There are three principles of that living systems perspective:

- One, that we are embedded in nature and that we are subsystems, including our consciousness, through to individual people, to our society, to our environment. We are all part of the living world and we are nested systems.
- The second is that we are self-organising and we are ever-changing and moving.
- And the third is that we are in dynamic relationships with each other. That means that we need to work with people and work together.

The underlying premise is that life is a continuum. It is constantly changing. And if we are seeking to address challenges such as climate change we need to be continually learning, innovating, adapting, and disrupting our environment until new systems emerge. That emergence happens when you either create the conditions for change or start disrupting the system. And a system change is the emergence of a new pattern of organisation or system structure. There are multiple levels at which that can happen. It can happen in structural change: renewable energy, community energy. It can change in organisations of flow of power. It can change in the relationships. It also fundamentally changes in the mindsets or the paradigms of the system. And when we want to look at shifting and changing those, I look at the processes of action inquiry as the way to start addressing this systemic change, predominantly because it encourages us to look at multiple levels. It encourages us to look at both the individual level, the inquiry we have with ourselves, it asks us to look at inquiring together and to explore change as a process together, but it also encourages us to look at the overall narrative and cultural structures that we live within but that also hold us.

So agency in this conversation happens at these multiple levels. At the individual, the social and collective as well as the cultural narrative level. Action inquiry also on a second dimension encourages us to look not only at single loop learning, that is learning that evaluates what we’ve done, but it also asks us to look at the strategies or the way in which we’re approaching change as double loop learning, but importantly it also asks us to question our assumptions, our perspectives, our mindsets behind what we’re doing at these different levels. So we can work at different levels, first person, second person, social collective and then third person, alongside the first loop and second loop and third loop learning. But the key I want to make here is systemic change happens when we address all these different places. We spend a lot of time as change agents either thinking its an individual issue, or thinking that we need to create collaborations together or we look at advocacy and wider influence in the bigger system. We don’t look at it as a whole. We don’t look at how these different actions start working together.

## Carbon Conversations, Tony Wragg

(Speaking notes)

Carbon Conversations is the brainchild of Rosemary Randall, a psychotherapist and Andy Brown, a building engineer.

If we imagine the space in which Carbon Reduction must take place as a triangle with two corners representing Technological and Governmental action, Carbon Conversations falls at the third angle representing Personal and Community action.

Carbon Conversations recognises that the "information deficit" model of encouraging change is rarely helpful because it remains in the cognitive domain. It does not make an emotional connection between a person's actions and their lives. Like many successful change programmes, for example AA, Carbon Conversations relies on group work. The strength of this approach is twofold.

Firstly, telling stories within the group enables participants to engage with their emotions. In a session about Carbon in food the facilitator would start by saying "tell us about a memorable meal." The participant's memories will be diverse and triggered by a wide range of emotions. Sharing the stories helps participants to connect with those emotions and then look at what food means to them. For some, it will just be fuel, for another meal-time talk will be the glue that holds the family together, another might be an Epicurean who derives great pleasure from eating. Enabling people to engage with the meaning of food in their lives enables them to think about what they are and are not prepared to change.

Secondly, in imagining a different future, participants are able to recognise what they will lose and begin to grieve that loss. Again, the group process, the telling of stories together – like in a wake, the playing of games, the reporting back of real-life episodes as they make small changes, help that grief to unfold and the loss to be accepted.

This in turn enables them think and, within the community of the group plan change and make commitments to change. It's our experience that these changes are sustainable.

The standard Conversation consists of six two-hour sessions for 6 to 12 people run by a pair of facilitators on a fortnightly cycle. The first one is an orientation to the problem: "Why do we bother?" There follows one session each on the carbon implications of our home, food, transport and stuff – general consumption. In between each session there is "homework" oriented around measuring and understanding our use of Carbon in each of these categories and making plans for minor and major changes. The sixth session is usually in the format of a celebratory shared meal where participants come together to share their successes and their struggles.

The programme is supported by the Handbook "In time for tomorrow", a series of games (or simulations) and a facilitator's guide.

Until earlier this year the programme was managed, the materials distributed and training provided by The Surefoot Effect. Since then the authors decided to make the materials available online as pdfs through a creative Commons Licence.

Surefoot still provide training and have a stock of handbooks for sale.

To find out more about the Creative Commons materials go to:

[www.carbonconversations.co.uk](http://www.carbonconversations.co.uk)

To buy physical copies of the handbook, "In time for tomorrow" or enquire about physical copies of the games and facilitator training, write to The Surefoot Effect at

[info@surefoot-effect.com](mailto:info@surefoot-effect.com)

If you would like to talk things through more informally, don't hesitate to contact me on 07771820619, [tonywragg.blacup@btinternet.com](mailto:tonywragg.blacup@btinternet.com)

## Future Sense, Malcolm Parlett

(Speaking notes)

Gestalt therapy, in its Paul Goodman version, moved away long ago from intra-psychic models of human functioning in favour of attending equally to the immediate contexts of people's lives, socio-economic, local community, and workplace as well as family. In emergencies and upheavals, we see confirmation of people's versatility, courage, and resilience – evidence of immense human resourcefulness and collective energy that lie untapped most of the time. It's difficult to imagine meeting current global challenges without harnessing these latent strengths. The paramount need is for greater agency, leadership, and collective action at every level: locally, nationally, worldwide. My conviction is that this will only happen if people and organisations manifest higher levels of 'Whole Intelligence', returning to the original meaning of the word: 'sensible, knowing, far-seeing'. Collectively, we need actively to support higher levels of this recognisable competence and human capability in how we manage our affairs, make decisions, and collaborate effectively.

My work is therefore educational and holistic, outer and inner at the same time. I want to help create conditions in which whole intelligence can emerge, grow and be nourished: through workshops, seminars, solidarity movements, and opportunities for emotional support and social healing. I think of each person as a live node in the linked network of same species planet-dwellers. Each has their share of whole intelligence, whether in fragments or integrated, on which to build. Each person and group has potential influence. Each node has effects on others and is affected by them. There's inevitable interdependence, mutual influence, and social contagion. The need to input more whole intelligence is the key task.

Critically important to rebut are ideas-in-currency normalised by mass media and even universities, that downgrade key dimensions of whole intelligence. A principal challenge is to question the absolute supremacy of rational intellect, disabling the importance of embodying. Though necessary, rational explanations and statistics are insufficient – as we saw in the referendum. Drawing on the body as an equally necessary knowledge source changes the discourse. In witnessing forest devastation, experiences of revulsion, grief, heart ache, are not quantifiable yet are powerful enough to change attitudes and life directions. My colleague Giles Hutchins takes people into silence and solitude in the woodland world, opening to encounters with trees, bird calls, seasons. People thrive on freedom to move, listen, and be still – required for human health at the same time as cultivating a Gaian sensibility.

So embodying practice is central to growing whole intelligence. Another dimension, another antidote to Daily Mail levels of understanding, is about interrelating. Collaborations improve through skill training in listening and not interrupting, but most of all from staying with differences to the point of being curious and finding valuing in them, rather than trying to eliminate them. Supportive interrelating practice makes for juicier contact, fewer words, greater impact, more trust.

A third dimension, self-recognising, opens to another range of skills. Mindfulness, reviews, sanity-preserving routes through a mountain of trivia, assessing a group's changing values, noticing stress levels. As we know, stress-free nodes in the human network are invaluable, can change the energy field. Experimenting, the fourth dimension mentioned here (there's no fixed order) is about breaking new ground, releasing creativity, practising when to risk and when to pull back; and handling the shame phenomena that accompany doing something new or different. The fifth dimension is responding to the situation, exploring how each person, project group, community, or whole population habitually chooses to act, handles power, and finds courage for the right and necessary.

Investigate, practise, incorporate. All five dimensions need to be in play. Good interrelating or response-planning or being very embodied are insufficient on their own. Each needs the others – they are interdependent, mutually reinforcing, a set of enabling principles and practices that are necessary to grow and export as new norms. Together they put hope and confidence back on the map. Whole intelligence is not simply adding EQ to IQ. There needs a new overall conception – increased whole intelligence as an all-round fitness for practice in aid of both survival and flourishing today.

[malcolm.parlett@virgin.net](mailto:malcolm.parlett@virgin.net)

[www.fiveexplorations.com](http://www.fiveexplorations.com)

(These ideas are explored in depth in *Future Sense: Five Explorations of Whole Intelligence for a World That's Waking Up*, Malcolm Parlett PhD, 2015, Troubador.)

## The work that reconnects , Jo Hamilton

The Work That Reconnects is a form of group work which has been evolving since the 1970s, by Joanna Macy and together colleagues around the world. It draws on systems science, spiritual traditions and deep ecology, with the aims of bringing people into new relationship with the world; strengthening their capacity to respond to global issues; and take part in the change towards a life sustaining society. It has variously been called 'Despair and empowerment', or deep ecology workshops.. and indeed, how to describe the workshops is an ongoing puzzle!

The work follows a **spiral form**, starting with '*coming from gratitude*': coming into presence, quietness, reflective states, and enabling us to see the inter-connections between ourselves and with the wider world. It then moves to '*owning and honouring pain for the world*': creating a space to 'suffer with', to bring emotions that there might not be space or safety to experience elsewhere, and do it together, not in isolation. In the shift to '*seeing with new eyes*', this is brought into wider relationship with each other, the world, experiencing the insights, skills and experiences we bring, and experiencing 'power with' all this. The last stage is '*going forth*', where these insights and experiences are integrated into the changes we want to bring about in the world.

'Gratitude, when it's real, offers no blinders. ON the contrary, in the face of devastation and tragedy it can ground us. Especially when we're scared, gratitude can hold us steady for the work that must be done.' (from <https://workthatreconnects.org/spiral> ).

The Work that Reconnects is primarily done through group work, with workshops can be done in two hours – half a day – a weekend – a week or longer. Short forms of the work (for example using paired active listening exercises and open- ended sentences) can be done in around 20-30 minutes as part of other workshops, and can be a powerful way to enable participants to reflect on how they feel about the issues they care about. Some exercises (for example the Truth Mandala) are more like rituals, requiring longer time, and to create a strong container for expression of grief, anger, and pain for the world.

In the UK, exercises from The Work that Reconnects are also combined with mindfulness, nature connection and other practices.

There is a book form, Active Hope, written by Jonna Macy and Chris Johnstone, which gives a flavour, but is more of a self-study, although in some places there are facilitated 'Active Hope' groups who meet for one evening over 4-6 weeks, to reflect on the chapters and explore the more experiential exercises together.

I'm currently researching the links between involvement in groupwork practices such as these, and engagement and sustaining action on climate change, as well as facilitating the work that reconnects workshops in Oxfordshire. ([e.j.hamilton@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:e.j.hamilton@pgr.reading.ac.uk))

#### Further resources:

- **The work that reconnects website:** [www.workthatreconnects.org](http://www.workthatreconnects.org)
- **Book:** Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, 2014. *Coming back to life* New Society Publishers: Gabriola Island, Canada. A guidebook for doing 'The Work that Reconnects'
- **Work that Reconnects workshops in the UK:** there are lots happening, the most up to date place to find out about them is the 'Work that Reconnects UK' facebook group
- For an interesting article about 'Active Hope', see here: <http://www.utne.com/mind-and-body/active-hope-ze0z1209zsch?pageid=2#PageContent2>
- **Book:** *Active Hope: How to face the Mess we're in without going crazy*. Janna Macy and Chris Johnstone. New World Library, California, USA.

## Understanding Positive Change, Sophy Banks

I spent 10 years at the heart of the Transition movement, for creating community scale positive change to a sustainable, thriving, just and inclusive future. It was striking meeting hundreds of people from groups doing Transition around the world and seeing how often there was an absence of the basic inner practices that bring about sustainable and healthy culture, for individuals and groups – to consciously create the feelings of being resourced, valued, connected, empowered and safe. Few included the basic tools of change that have been pointed to already by our speakers – space for reflection, for noticing symptoms of dysfunction, for responding to them. Many people and groups ended in states of exhaustion and burnout, and some in conflict.

I learnt that burnout has been endemic in environmental movements for decades. What does it mean that organisations that are all about sustainability were creating exhaustion –depleting the human resources of those involved? I got very interested in this, believing that the dynamics that show up in our movements for change often have meaning, showing us something of our own shadow in relation to our core purpose.

How we perceive the world to which we are responding is determined by our inner state, primarily by our emotions. One major system (of many) which governs our inner state is the unconscious autonomous nervous system – whose two main systems are the sympathetic nervous system, responsible for mobilisation into action and in emergencies reacting into fight / flight, and the parasympathetic, responsible for resting / digesting, and reacting into emergency inhibition and ultimately freeze.

The result of my enquiry was to see that our western culture is largely run by people who are in a kind of enduring fight / flight state, valuing action and strength over reflection and sensitivity, highly

attuned to dynamics of power, and defended against inner process. I see that these are some of the endemic characteristics of “normal organisational culture” in the modern world – and that they show up in our organisations for change, too.

There are two basic states which operate within all of us, and at the core of creating positive and lasting change is the need to understand how these states are evoked. This understanding links psychology, neuroscience and culture to language and frames. We need to understand where our focus on the material world, on carbon and climate, on jobs and the economy evoke an outer dominated frame which supports the status quo, and how to speak about relationship, support and loving holding at the core of meaningful, sustainable human existence.

The last part of my enquiry led me to George Lakoff’s work around frames, finding that the frame he described the right wing neoliberal communications evoking, which he called “strict father” precisely mapped onto the fear based, strength valuing, power over system that is run by a chronically activated sympathetic nervous system I was seeing; and his “nurturing parent” frame was equivalent to the relaxed balance and flow between action and rest that is our healthy, functioning state.

So the nature of the change we need is to move away from cultures which over-value action, strength and outer, and create conflict and burnout, which marginalise love, relationships, stillness, depth and inner; we need to move towards cultures which balance action and reflection, which put relationships before tasks, and which embed these values in their structures and processes.

I will share the model and ideas more in the afternoon workshop.

I believe the neoliberal communications strategists are absolutely aware of these deep frames, and are expert at evoking fear based responses that lead to contraction, conservatism, separation, short termism and so on. I have met few people in progressive organisations who have done the depth work to include this kind of psychological understanding – even those who are working with frames, and are experts in communication often don’t understand the relevance of psychological and neurological states. When we frame our movements around the new economy or job creation, around action and change, we are repeating the frames which value productivity or work above human relationships as if this were the purpose of life, rather than creating the secure loving holding connections that enable life us to feel and live rich and satisfying lives.

### 3. Flip charts from the morning break out groups

#### Common threads 1 |(morning groups)

- Climate change was hardly mentioned
- People were talking about the way we live now
- Intuition and feelings
- Common goals, values, ethics at the centre of things
- Interfaith – climate, people, planet
- But change for individuals is so hard – but it's a drop in the ocean and social pressure to stay the same is very powerful (what's the pointedness)
- Quakers – 'responsibility' to do the best we can
- Negative – depressive / shadow, vs positive hope / change
- Political (hope – or not !!)
  
- Difficult even to raise the topic – fear of being the 'party pooper'

#### Morning group 2

- We need stories and space for relating body – awareness, then more connected to self
- Hard to discuss with activists how they we deal with anxiety, e.g. tension between 'we have to build anew ourselves' and confrontive approach to authorities etc – hard to connect and relate movements /personally (Alternatiba – building alternatives)
- Common themes – but no discussion of how to transfer from individual practices to movement practices, movement literacy in these practices [ticks]
- Practices focused on individual change
- Individual change irrelevant – as if we've imbibed neoliberal ethos.
- Need change in collective soul – (see soil and soul – change in attitude / relation to land).

#### Morning group 3

- Feeling resistance to the talks (to merge with everyone else)
- A sense of being 'stepped back' and wondering how we 'make space' for this in our work
- Listening and looking for the treasure – how you can apply what's been said
- We're all giving each other 'treasure' just by being here from different backgrounds and discussion our ideas
- Working with people in the 'intermediate zone' can be frustrating 0 you want them to realise the importance of the situation.
- Mapping out the landscape we're in

#### Morning group 4

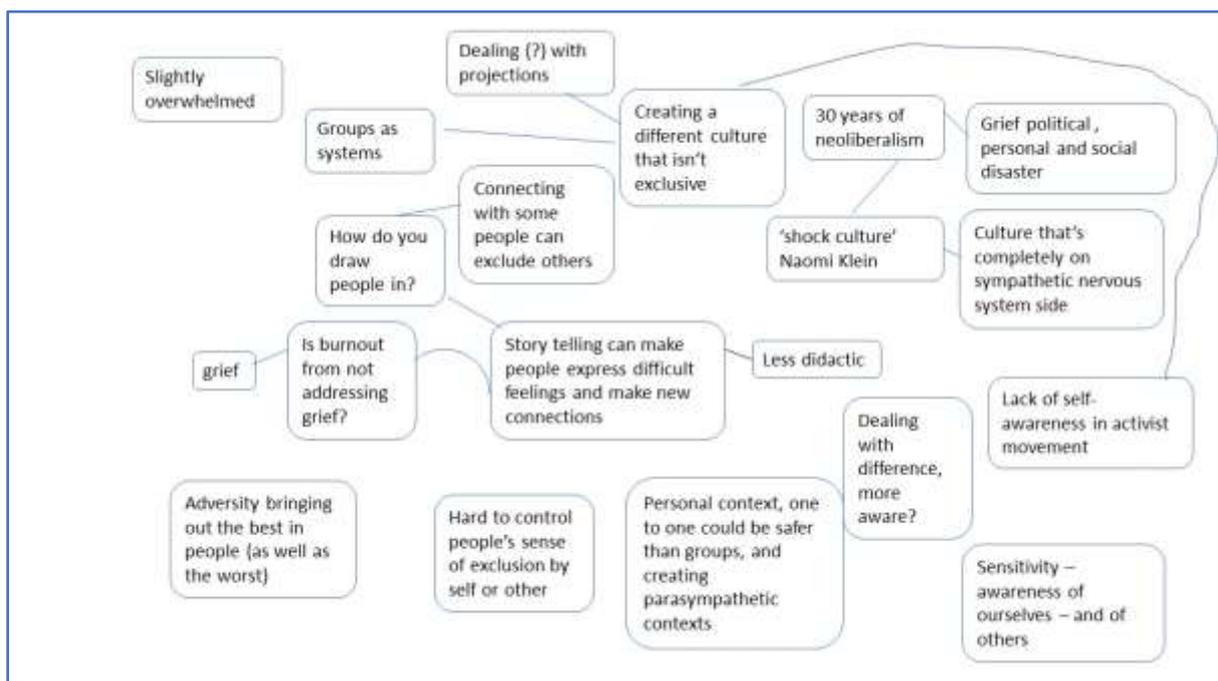
- Loss, pain, grief
- Mourning
- Apocalyptic
- Process – activities in people's lives

- Shifting lens
- Embodiment – interdependence
- Importance of groups
- Sharing vulnerabilities
- Attention to multiple levels
- Threat vs nurturance response
- Go getting mode
- Contemplative, authentic
- Honouring the pain
- Values

### Morning group 5

- Embodying – Excited! Feeling at our best Inter-world as self –
- Sangha
- Head, hands, heart,
- Drama triangle (victim, persecuter, rescuer) – healthy triangle (responsive, powerful, vulnerable)
- Hope! Many conversations happening – emerging and converging approaches – points of interbeing
- The journey back to the body....
- A no machine policy...
- Burnout is here
- Diversity – transforming ourselves, changing our participation in nature
- The great turning underway

### Morning group 6 – in picture below



## 4. Morning plenary and common themes

**Themes which arose included issues of scale – how to go from individual to movement practices, how climate change is framed, and how it intersects with other issues of justice. Polarities of agency and urgency, how these are manifested. There were many different approaches in the room – those presented in the morning talks, and those experiences that participants brought.**

### Notes from the flip chart:

- Scale of intervention vs urgency and scale of 'issue'
- Individual practices – but importance of movement practices (how?) → questioning the 'I' in individual agency
- Task to move people who 'know about it' but not active
- Trust in collective capacity for transformation – let go of control.
  
- Climate change vs climate crisis – issue is divisive for some people – polarising?
- Focus on climate change is unhelpful – peace and social justice? Connect with more 'salient' issues
- Urgency – challenges making space
- Shadow / light polarity, hope and despair
  
- Exclusion / inclusion in groups and movements – finding ways to talk across normal boundaries, personal (one to one) contact
- Making space to notice – a common thread
- Resisting temptation to gloss over differences between approaches
- Commonalities – challenging habitual ways of thinking or being – bringing a different way of seeing, and different ways all valuable
- Holism has worldwide reach

## 5. Afternoon workshops

Parallel workshops and discussions took place in the afternoon.

### Deep Frames and Healthy Human Culture, led by Sophy Banks

*Reflection from Nick Davis*

I found Sophy's introduction looking at the parallel process between planetary conflict and resource depletion and our own tendency to burn-out very engaging.

She offered a neuroscience foundation saying that the healthy person needs to live in a natural flow between sympathetic and parasympathetic states. (Often called the HPA or hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal system)

She asked us do an exercise in pairs and choose one of the following five polarities to work with:

- Outer-Inner
- Action- Stillness
- Doing- Being
- Will-Love
- Yang-Yin

and have one of the pair do/be one of each of the polarities and extend this into exaggerating, distorting and moving into the essence, and ultimately into relating with our partner from it. We then swapped states.

As a group we then wrote down what we felt in each state.

This is the work of inner transition and is particularly necessary to bring us into a place where we are able to observe our defences and trauma in order to heal ourselves rather than remaining in the stress=>burn-out cycle.

With limited time available she said that in our culture there are deep frames, and the economic frame pushes us into the stress=>burn-out cycle. Performance is valued more than nurturing and we live in the world of the authoritarian parent rather than the nurturing parent.

## Mindfulness and Nature Connection, led by Nadine Andrews

*Reflection from Susan Johnson*

I enjoyed a playful session of mindfulness and nature-connection exercises led by Nadine Andrews. We tracked the sensations in our bodies; practiced recognising stones with our eyes closed through touch; connected with trees and plants in the garden after humbly asking their permission; and practiced interdependence and raised awareness as we were led around the garden with our eyes shut. This brought an aliveness to my body that nourished me deeply. For me these exercises supported an ongoing journey into embodied understanding of my place in the world which profoundly deepens my sense of calm and connectedness and my ability to engage with what Joanna Macy calls the “Great Turning” - the waking up of society towards a life sustaining civilization. Experiencing the “unbending arm” was perhaps the most surprising exercise – the simple effect of imagining a flow of water running through my arm into the distance as I held it out in front of me, made it so much harder for a colleague to force it to bend compared to the usual approach of clenching muscles. This simply and compellingly demonstrated the very real power that arises from an embodied connectedness to the world rather than facing a threat with a sense of isolation and aloneness.

## Discussion group: psychosocial literacy for movements

*Reflection from Eva Schonveld*

In this group we were asking how insights from personal therapies, analytic traditions and other inner models can be applied to climate and social justice to strengthen their impact and effectiveness in changing the world.

We agreed that many more or less unconscious issues run through our social activism, from dealing with challenging interpersonal interactions, through the range of social and cultural intolerances, to an understanding of the range of blocks and motivations that allow, or stop people from taking action. On a movement level a lack of understanding of this level can weaken groups' effectiveness. One example we spoke about was Stop Climate Chaos, which doesn't seem to have a sophisticated psychosocial lens, either to develop its own internal workings, or in its framing of issues to its chosen audience and is subsequently much less effective than it could be.

Emotional literacy can be supported through hands-on workshops, by building practical, engaging tools that can be used by communities, by sharing existing knowledge and experience within our movement and seeking out that of others. Unfortunately, even the idea of working at a level that acknowledges our personal inner worlds can feel very threatening to many. So the first task may have to be to persuade our movement that this is important and useful work.

The sense of urgency that we feel around our local and the wider global situation is inherently stressful, which can also lead to a rejection of what can be seen as 'fluffy stuff'. Working with our perception of that sense of urgency may be supportive. It can be re-framed as a sense of present-centredness, where there is nothing else to do but what one is doing, and we become more effective by allowing ourselves to be in the flow of the universe.

## Discussion group: Psychology of change; dealing with anger, denial, disavowal, the Shadow

To be added (would someone who participated like to send some notes on this?)

## 6. Afternoon plenary themes

The afternoon plenary aimed to draw together reflections and threads from the day together, and see what energy there was for an ongoing process.

### **Drawing the threads together [notes from the flipcharts]**

- Embodying as a theme
- Ways of being with urgency (presence, flow, getting beyond loss)
- How do we create a movement? Linking climate, justice.. there is a movement
- Difference / diversity and a collective voice
- Climate change one symptom
- Who do we need to connect with?
- Draw together resources – approaches for settings
- Bringing a focus on process in different organisations
- Our resource list is Google? [point here was that there are many resources...]
- Who has energy for a follow up event? Lots of people stepped forward into the centre – you know who you are, let's see what emerges...

## 7. Reflections

We gathered our reflections on the day on post-it notes:

- Importance of connecting with the physical body and felt sensations → embodied learning. Learning to be open to transformations
- Qualities about today I appreciated: chance to experience practices, particularly mindfulness, what I learnt through very simple exercises, through the body, paying attention. Still energised by the agency – urgency spectrum. Is there a combination, .. or what can't help but happen?
- Useful space to listen, talk and think. Catalyst for good thinking

- A great experience, meeting like-minded people, yet also having the opportunity to discuss the topics we don't agree on and learn more about the challenges we as individuals and a society face with climate change
- You had to be here
- Realising that there is a resistance among the climate change / crisis consciousness constituency represented in the room to taking on the transformation of this expertise to the domain of changing political activity
- The day was a great opportunity to meet people involved (or interested by) climate psychology and climate activism. Great conversations today, and even more to come
- Holding tensions together – unity – diversity, structure – flow, broad – deep, being – doing. A community of approaches, methods, bodies, souls and feelings coming together. Learning through conversations
- Grateful to the organisers, grateful to the attendees, grateful to the wider movements, Appreciating the unknowable power of connecting and its consequences.
- The immensity of the tasks needs every kind of approach and talking shop. I'm not sure if the balance between presentations and discussions of themes arising as quite right. A bit more depth and perhaps less breadth?
- Interesting to see the connections and alignment of ideas and practices in this group, but with some sense of being disconnected from immediate front line involvement experience and communities
- I'd like to hear more stories about people's experience of change initiatives
- Although the climate crisis is serious, practices such as mindfulness and nature connections invited a playfulness which was not only fun but opened powerful insights for all those who participated, e.g. the power of softness, physically and in conversations, bringing non-judgemental curiosity to the tiny plants on the lawn opened up a whole world and was a metaphor for how we pay attention to anything, including people.
- And a practice of respect for one plant allowed a richer communication with plant, self and embodied humility. After this insight came about how to live and what is needed of me, the possibilities I can grow into. Lastly I loved the plurality of the day. SO many approaches and there appeared to be wisdom in all.
- This is my tribe and it's good to spend time in it, even if I don't like or agree with everyone in it
- I'm leaving with a question – how could change movements become more skilled at and literate in, the processes explored during the day?
- Thanks
- The workshop on deep frames and healthy human culture I found very helpful It gave an insight into why humans have got into this mess and a glimpse of how we might work towards getting out of it.
- Reconnecting – live – with like-minded folk. Relaxed structure allowing 'slack linkages'. Relation between frames and defences
- Not addressed: organisational 'egos' and work practices embed or extinguish even having conversations about taking positive action, let alone ambivalence and shame acknowledged and accepted.
- Increased my awareness to the psychological dimensions of building networks and movements

- I felt in the plenary at the end we were enacting the very defences against anxiety that had been discussed. We seemed to be wanting to 'get the message out' as if we didn't know the limitations of that
- I have enjoyed the multi-faceted discussions. If this was three dimensional there would be sparkling light around the room. I came from darkness and this illumination has been helpful at the season of over-consumption!
- Explore how to bring in embodying practices of mindfulness / movement etc into approaches addressing change (social, climate) in order to promote systems, approaches / holisms etc.
- The importance of exploring our own behaviours. These experiences and feelings to inform our conversations with others.
- Sense of connection with others who (??) in complex, sophisticated ways about group and personal defences around climate change. A wish to continue the conversation.
- Encouraged by the emerging collective voice – needs to become mainstream within the green/ environmental movement – both concepts and practices – can 'run' with this to become a more effective collective agent.
- The beginning of perhaps some new thinking about how groups come together and make new connections – not a movement as a monoculture, but something more plural, more diverse with less paperwork.

## 8. Participants

Virginia Allport

Peter Gingold

Malcolm Parlett

Nadine Andrews

Paul Hoggett

Emilie Parry

Sophy Banks

Susan Johnson

Dinah Pryor

Anne Brewer

Jean Le Goff

Eva Schonfeld

Manda Brookman

Peter Lipman

Karen Smith

Nick Davis

Emily Marshall

Matthew Stemp

Kate Evans

Chris Martin

Adrian Tait

Guy Gladstone

Laurie Michaelis

Gill Westcott

Jo Hamilton

Henry Owen

Bob Whitmarsh

Caroline Hickman

Rebecca Nestor

Tony Wragg

## 9. Reflection on the day from Adrian Tait

Since its beginning five years ago, CPA has been involved in two complimentary tasks – assembling and exploring the new discipline of Climate Psychology and (the ‘Alliance’ bit) developing connections with a range of traditions that share a wish to understand the psychological and cultural forces underlying our species’ disordered relationship to the other-than-human world.

The event on 2<sup>nd</sup> December ‘Agency in Individual and Collective Change’ took this path of collaboration to a new level. The gathering, held at the Friends Meeting House in Oxford, drew both on the Quaker tradition, including pauses for silent reflection, and climate psychology with its strong psycho-social leaning. This weave was enriched by contributions from other traditions, including Gestalt Psychology, The Work that Reconnects, Carbon Conversations and a further layer of pluralism, drawing on systems thinking, Taoist philosophy, social, transpersonal and ecopsychology, ecolinguistics and mindfulness research.

Thus was created a forum both of great diversity and a commonality of values and perspectives – ingredients for a lively interaction. There were as many pathways through, and experiences of, this forum as there were people present. Some felt that the only valid or necessary record was the present experience, but it was agreed that the notes of the opening speakers, the flip chart records of the discussion groups and the feedback ‘post-its’ written at the close were worth keeping and sharing. These have been assembled by Jo Hamilton, one of the event’s organisers and are attached herewith. The hope is that these records offer useful reminders to those who were there and a window of sorts for those who are interested but did not attend.

One psycho-social perspective from the morning discussion was that of an ‘intermediate zone’ of collective and individual agency. This refers to interactions that are neither oppositional as when encountering denialism, nor reinforcing, as can happen in a meeting of the like-minded. Between these and occupying the largest part of the spectrum, the intermediate zone covers a large and challenging conversational landscape. In it, a host of factors are in play, touching on the whole field of climate psychology. One of these, a stated axiom underlying the 2<sup>nd</sup> December gathering, is the fact that we are all part of the climate and ecological problem. Awareness of this is a potential antidote to the splitting and projection that kills conversation. It draws deeply on the psychotherapeutic principle of listening carefully, not just to the other but to ourselves. The intermediate zone can be seen as the territory of disavowal or, more positively, the ground on which we look at the gaps between what we know and how we live.