THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND BEYOND IN THE CONSULTING ROOM

Edited by

Rita Teusch and Delia Kostner



"This volume of essays focuses on climate change from diverse authorial perspectives and presentations. The collection intends to inspire clinicians to field and respond to the range of emotional reactions evoked in coming to know our current state of environmental disruption, and to the defensive protections raised against such a recognition of interdependence, otherness, and vulnerability. Unusual in a psychoanalytic volume is the emphasis (in both clinicians and patients) on the connection between a more integrated understanding of self in continuous relation to the environment with the liveliness of a movement to climate action and increased engagement with the natural world."

Lindsay L. Clarkson, MD, Training and Supervising Analyst Emerita, Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis

"How do we experience the climate emergency in our personal and professional lives? How can we find ways to speak about this experience that allow us to share and deepen it? This compelling book moves between stark experience and process, between struggling realization and the hard work of coming to terms. Through riveting encounters in the consulting room, vivid conversations among colleagues and students, and parents struggling to hold fear and hope for their children, we are brought close to the climate emergency as it is actually lived—and to the possibilities for transformation that can emerge when we face it together."

Jack Foehl, PhD, Past President and Training and Supervising Analyst, Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute; Associate Professor, New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis

"This book is an outstanding example of what psychoanalysis can be on our planet *in extremis*. Rita Teusch and Delia Kostner have assembled a powerful group of climate-aware therapists, thought leaders, and activists who are also very gifted writers. Together, they guide, challenge, hold, struggle, act, and endure. And they listen—for the unconscious in their patients, their institutes, their communities, and in themselves. Accept their invitation to join them on these clinical, theoretical, and civic journeys."

Susan Kassouf, PhD, LP, Member, National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis, American Psychoanalytic Association, and International Psychoanalytical Association

"This is the kind of book I hand to colleagues who ask why I keep insisting on psychoanalytic thinking in climate work. Rita Teusch and Delia Kostner have edited a collection that treats the unconscious as central to the eco-logical crisis, not incidental to it: the defenses that let us look away, the disavowal that keeps us functioning, and the losses too large to metabolize through the usual channels. What sets this book apart from most climate psychology is its clinical grounding. These contributors have spent years learning to work with what people cannot yet say to themselves, and they bring that training to a crisis that has, so far, mostly been addressed through behavior change models and communication campaigns. The chapters here ask a harder question: What does it actually mean to come to terms with how we got here, and how do we move forward without inflicting more disruption than the crisis already has? The answers offered are rooted in care, in repair, and in the relational intelligence that clinical work teaches and climate discourse badly needs. This is a strong addition to an already valuable series and lineage of thinkers—and it belongs on the shelf of anyone doing this work."

Renée Lertzman, PhD, Founder, Project InsideOut, author of *Environmental Melancholia: Psychoanalytic Dimensions of Engagement*

"The climate crisis is so vast that every discipline—economics, political science, physics, theology—comes into play, and psychiatry is of course no exception; indeed, it's central to making progress. This fascinating volume helps distill current understanding and point in new directions for research and inquiry."

Bill McKibben, Schumann Distinguished Scholar in Environmental Studies at Middlebury College, author of *Here Comes the Sun*

"*The Climate Crisis and Beyond in the Consulting Room* offers us an invaluable resource that arrives not a moment too soon. This collected volume of papers represents a crucial intervention and resource for thinking about the climate crisis—and how climate anxieties, denial, and fear surface in the room with patients. This book gives clinicians both a language and a framework for thinking with our patients about the most fundamental issue of our time."

Lynne Zeavin, PsyD, Training and Supervising Analyst, coeditor of *With Climate in Mind*

First published in 2027 by
Karnac Books Limited
62 Bucknell Road
Bicester
Oxfordshire OX26 2DS

Copyright © 2027 Rita Teusch and Delia Kostner for the edited collection, and the individual authors for their contributions.

The rights of the contributors to be identified as the authors of this work have been asserted in accordance with §§ 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Cover art by Maud Taber-Thomas, *Maine XVII*, 2022, Oil on Panel, 9 x 12 inches.
Website: MaudTaber-Thomas.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80013-482-9 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-80013-484-3 (e-book)
ISBN: 978-1-80013-483-6 (PDF)

Typeset by vPrompt eServices Pvt Ltd, India



www.firingthemind.com

I postulate that an ecologically healthy relatedness in our nonhuman environment is essential to the development and maintenance of our sense of being human and that such a relatedness has become so undermined, disrupted, and distorted, concomitant with the ecological deterioration, that it is inordinately difficult for us to integrate the feeling experiences, including the losses, inescapable to any full-fledged human life.

Harold F. Searles*

* Searles, H. F. (1979). *Countertransference and Related Subjects: Selected Papers* (p. 236). New York: International Universities Press.

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

About the editors and contributors xi

Foreword *by Elizabeth Allured* xv

Introduction *by Rita Teusch* xix

CHAPTER 1
What students think, what students want: Results and discussion of a climate survey of students at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute 1
Rita Teusch

CHAPTER 2
Engaging with climate distress: We're in it together 19
Wendy Greenspun

CHAPTER 3
Firestorm, flood, and shattered futures: On climate trauma and temporality 33
Penelope Starr-Karlin

CHAPTER 4
Climate on the couch: Voices from a burning world 57
Delia Kostner

CHAPTER 5
Representing the climate crisis in the consulting room: Challenges and opportunities 85
Rita Teusch

CHAPTER 6
Living with the crisis: My work in the climate movement 109
Daniel Sherrell

CHAPTER 7
BPSI speaks: Contemplating the climate crisis in clinical work 117
A Zoom meeting in 2023 transcribed and edited by Delia Kostner and introduced by Daniel Jacobs

CHAPTER 8
Saving wonderland: Notes from the field 141
Teresa Cochran

CHAPTER 9
Our kinship with the natural world: Environmental ethics, complexity theory, and psychoanalysis 155
John Turtz

CHAPTER 10
"I owe it to my daughter": How parents deal with the climate crisis. Psychodynamic interviews with parents committed to climate protection 175
Ines Schelhas and Martina Gast

CHAPTER 11
Reflections on hope and despair in the Anthropocene 193
Delia Kostner

Appendix: Resources: Organizations 211

Index 215

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the many people who have helped us in the creation of this book.

In the initial stages, the support and encouragement from members of the Library Committee at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute (BPSI), in particular feedback from Daniel Jacobs, MD and John Martin-Joy, MD, motivated us to keep going with our research. BPSI librarian Veronica Davis helped with technical advice in the creation of a BPSI climate questionnaire and the organization of a BPSI climate roundtable discussion. We are also grateful to our current librarian Nina Rabkina who has assisted us with subsequent research. Our many conversations with each other and interested BPSI psychoanalysts and psychodynamic psychotherapists, including the participants in the roundtable discussion (Chapter 7) about ways to engage with the climate crisis deepened our thinking and understanding of how clinicians might work with the environmental crises in the professional sphere. These conversations ultimately led to the formation of a climate conversation group at BPSI. These meetings have been taking place monthly for two years and have contributed to raising awareness of environmental concerns in our psychoanalytic community. We are deeply grateful to our contributing authors who highlight various

ways of engagement. Their clinical sensitivity and knowledge greatly enhanced our understanding of how the various environmental crises can be thought about and worked with in the consulting room. A special thank you goes to all the respondents to our climate questionnaire who openly discussed their climate distress; furthermore to all patients who shared their emotions regarding the environment with their therapists and thus helped sharpen our understanding of how to address climate distress in our consulting rooms. We are honored that Elizabeth Allured graciously agreed to write the Foreword to our book: Her engagement, wisdom and understanding of the field of psychoanalysis and its future are invaluable. We are also grateful for our families who have supported us unfailingly in our endeavor to get this book to press.

About the editors and contributors

Elizabeth Allured, PsyD, is a licensed psychologist and psychoanalyst who has published articles on the environmental crisis and mental health. She has been presenting her ideas at international and national conferences since 2007. She has been interviewed by numerous media outlets and has organized trainings in climate psychology for clinicians and climate activists. Dr Allured is co-founder of the Climate Psychology Alliance North America (www.climatepsychology.us), an organization that addresses the psychological aspects of the climate crisis and focuses on personal and community resilience, and climate justice. She has a private practice on Long Island, New York. Email: eallured@outlook.com.

Teresa Cochran, PhD, having retired from active practice, is now a Citizen Psychoanalyst who co-founded a local Climate Action Planning Group. As a member of the Planning Group and the Faith Communities Environmental Network, she organizes efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change and build a resilient community facing environmental devastation. She is a member of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute (BPSI) and the American Psychoanalytic Association. She was active on BPSI's Social Awareness Committee and taught and supervised in the China American Psychotherapy Training Program for many years. Email: tcochran635@gmail.com.

Martina Gast, Dipl-Psych, and psychoanalyst for adults in private practice in Munich, Germany. Prior to becoming a psychoanalyst, she was a journalist and author on developmental psychology topics. She is a trained TFP therapist and especially enjoys working with borderline patients. She is a lecturer at the MAP (Münchner Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Psychoanalyse [Munich psychoanalytic studygroup]). She is a member of Germany's Green Party and writes about environmental topics. Email: martina.gast@arcor.de

Wendy Greenspun, PhD, is on the faculty at the Manhattan Institute for Psychoanalysis in New York, where she teaches a course on Climate and Psychoanalysis. She has published and presented papers and workshops nationally and internationally on climate psychology, teaches courses on climate and mental health to clinical practitioners, and was conference co-chair for the Manhattan Institute's December 2020 conference on Psychoanalysis and Climate Change. She is on the leadership team of the Climate Psychology Alliance North America and trained in Al Gore's Climate Reality Leadership program. She provides workshops on building emotional resilience for climate activists, artists, educators, and students, and trains facilitators of climate cafes. She is in private practice in New York City, the unceded territory of the Lenape people. Email: wendygreenspunphd@gmail.com

Daniel Jacobs, MD, is a Training and Supervising Analyst at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute. He is also Director of the Center for Advanced Psychoanalytic Studies in Princeton. He is the author of over forty psychoanalytic publications as well as a novel, *The Distance from Home* (2019). Email: Danielhjacobs1@gmail.com.

Delia Kostner, PhD, is a psychologist and psychoanalyst in private practice in Mont Vernon and Amherst, New Hampshire, where she works with patients across the developmental spectrum. She is a faculty member of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute (BPSI). She has written and taught widely on many topics relevant to the practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, including on the interface of psychoanalysis and Buddhist theory and practice. She has also studied the ways in which the more-than-human world shapes the human psyche. She is co-leader,

together with Rita Teusch, of Climate Conversations, a monthly discussion group at BPSI. Dr Kostner has completed the three year, low residency writing program, New Directions: Writing with a Psychoanalytic Edge where she also occasionally teaches. She is an amateur naturalist and avid outdoors person who spends her free time hiking and exploring the hills and mountains near her home and abroad. Delia is a University of New Hampshire Natural Resources Steward (NRS) and a volunteer with the NH Coverts Program: Volunteers Working for Wildlife. Email: deliakostner@gmail.com

Ines Schelhas, Dipl-Psych, Dipl-Sozialpäd, is a psychoanalyst for adults in private practice and a parent–infant therapist. She is the director of the psychotherapeutic ambulance for parents, infants, and babies, and a lecturer at the Münchner Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Psychoanalyse (Munich Psychoanalytic Study group). She is a member of ParentsForFuture (P4F), has been involved in the climate-justice movement, and is now a member of Germany's Green Party. She has worked as a social worker with low-income families and mentally ill mothers. As a psychologist, she supported mothers and their babies in their homes. In her office, she mainly helps patients who are pregnant or have small children, according to specifications as a SKEPT therapist (Säuglings-Kleinkind-Eltern-Psychotherapy (infant–child–parent psychotherapy)). Email: schelhasines@gmail.com.

Daniel Sherrell is a climate and union movement organizer and strategist. He has helped lead campaigns to win a Green New Deal bill for New York State, create good union jobs in renewable energy, and pass America's first federal climate legislation, the Inflation Reduction Act. His first book, *Warmth: Coming of Age at the End of Our World* (Penguin, 2021), was named a Best Book of the Year by the *New Yorker* and *Publishers' Weekly*, and shortlisted for the Brooklyn Public Library Book Prize. His writing has appeared in the *Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, the *Nation*, and the *Drift*, among other outlets. Email: daneliotsherrell@gmail.com.

Penelope Starr-Karlin, MArch, MA, PsyD, is a contemporary relational psychoanalyst and a supervising and training analyst at the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis, Los Angeles, where she

teaches intersubjective-systems theory. Penelope brings a background in architecture and analytical psychology and is an independent scholar of continental philosophy and climate psychology. As a member of the Climate Psychology Alliance North America, she participates in a psychoanalytic peer consultation group for climate distress, chairs a psychodynamic climate writers' group, and organized, chaired, and co-facilitated national "linking conversations" meetings for the membership. Penelope regularly presents at international contemporary relational psychoanalytic conferences where she, with others, is working to bring the significance of global warming into greater prominence. She has written and published widely on various psychoanalytic topics. Penelope has a private practice in West Los Angeles, California, working with individuals seeking relational psychoanalysis, general, and climate-distress-related therapy or case consultation. Email: DrPenelopestarrkarlin@gmail.com

Rita Teusch, PhD, is a training and supervising psychoanalyst at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, where she regularly teaches courses on Freud and Melanie Klein. She is a lecturer in psychiatry (psychology) part-time at Harvard Medical School, Cambridge Health Alliance. She is interested in the history and socio-cultural surround of psychoanalysis and has written on substance abuse, eating disorders, trauma, and gender in psychoanalytic journals and book chapters. She has a private practice in Harvard Square, Cambridge, MA. Email: rita-teusch@verizon.net

John Turtz, PhD, is faculty, supervisor, and co-director of the Psychoanalytic Program at the Westchester Center for the Study of Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy, as well as former director of the Couples Therapy Training Program. He is supervisor, former teaching faculty, and former co-director at the Manhattan Institute for Psychoanalysis. Dr Turtz is faculty at the New York Medical College and is in private practice in Rye Brook, New York. He is co-editor of the book, *Enriching Psychoanalysis: Integrating Concepts from Contemporary Science and Philosophy* (Routledge, 2023). In addition, Dr Turtz serves on the Outreach and Advocacy Committee—a joint project of the Climate Psychiatry Alliance and the Climate Psychology Alliance of North America. Email: turtzjohn@gmail.com

FOREWORD

The climate crisis and beyond in the consulting room

Elizabeth Allured

We are at a turning point in the development of psychoanalytic theory: there is a need to acknowledge the ecosystemic environment as a crucial, dynamic, relational element in our lives and our clinical work. If we do not move into this new way of thinking and being, we risk becoming like the orchestra members on the deck of the Titanic: playing beautiful music from time-honored compositions, while ensuring our irrelevance and eventual demise.

The field of psychoanalysis has been behind the times in incorporating feminism, homosexuality, and community psychology into our work. This is despite the fact that Sigmund Freud and his contemporaries braved pathways for women analysts and writers, and instituted community mental health clinics in Europe. The world is now deeply into, not the first, but the second environmental movement—the first being inaugurated by early environmental authors and activists such as Rachel Carson and Bill McKibben in the 1960s and 1980s (Carson, 1962; McKibben, 1989). Harold Searles was writing about psychoanalysis and this first environmental movement, but tragically, as he predicted, his analytic colleagues at the time ignored his pioneering work (Searles, 1972). There were no other psychoanalytic papers published about this crisis in the ensuing thirty years.

The field of psychoanalysis at the time was, however, immersed in a revolution of its own: expanding theory beyond one-person and two-person models, developing analytic field theory and concepts of multiple self-states, mutual co-regulation, and trauma-informed treatment models. This productive period enlarged the scope and depth of analytic work, and allowed for less hierarchy and greater flexibility in the frame, when useful. It also revealed the ongoing somatopsychic experience of the working analyst as a rich source of crucial and informative data to be incorporated into the treatment.

We now have psychoanalysts with this enlarged scope of theory and practice working to widen the analytic lens even further. Recently, movements to decolonize psychoanalysis and bring the voices of BIPOC and underserved communities to the forefront have pushed into uncomfortable realizations about our own complicity in this dissociation of traumatic impacts. The prospect of working to widen the analytic lens more broadly into the dissociated trauma and unequal impacts of the now multi-focal environmental crisis is not for the faint-hearted.

Fortunately, we have in this text courageous authors who have risked not only being loners in their institutes, but who now risk being seen as "Cassandras" who have overblown the crisis as well as its psychic reverberations. While there is a growing realization that our very lives are at stake—including dire warnings from world leaders of an existential threat to humanity and our ecosystemic home—the mental health risks of this crisis are not understood by the majority of clinicians. Nor is the path for the clinician's personal and professional journey often described. The pioneering analytic authors in this text, working to widen the field, engage in this endeavor, each in their own way.

The climate crisis presents us with an ethical challenge, much as the development of nuclear weapons did. What is the role of psychoanalysts in a time when governments and institutions holding power are, through their actions or inactions, risking the lives and health of humanity and our ecosystems? Robert J. Lifton developed the term "witnessing professional" to describe the responsibility of mental health clinicians to "speak truth to power" about the tragic impacts and very real future risks of nuclear weapons. The rest of the analytic community has been largely silent on this current and very salient issue. However, there is a growing movement around the world of mental health clinicians who

are speaking out about the climate crisis and its physical and mental health impacts. We do so not only for the sake of our lives and the health and ecosystems of our communities, but because our profession will be meaningless if our planet cannot support human life. Both the crisis of nuclear proliferation and the climate crisis are exceedingly difficult to hold in mind, due to the tragic physical and mental health impacts that already occurred (and the responsibility that American culture in general holds), and the apocalyptic imagery that they can generate regarding our future.

The Climate Psychology Alliance of North America (CPA-NA) was developed in response to the challenge of facing the difficult environmental truths of our times. It addresses the need for clinicians and others to have a community of "witnessing professionals" to continue to hold in mind the current and likely future impacts of the crisis while we work and live in this moment. We help each other "co-regulate" our psychoemotional responses to this crisis, to use Stephen Porges' eloquent term (Porges, 2011). This includes grieving for the many losses which have already occurred, a containment that psychoanalysts are very familiar with providing for other types of losses. In this way, there is less need for defensive posturing and dissociative tendencies to dominate our lives. It is easier to hear our patients' traumatic experiences and thoughts around the climate crisis when we ourselves have a community of others to lean into.

We at CPA-NA also work to develop ethical ways to live within these times, including speaking out in public arenas when it is helpful to do so. I have provided testimony for the Connecticut State Legislature on the mental health impacts of the climate crisis and the need for strong and immediate legislation for community mitigation and adaptation to climate crisis impacts. We at CPA-NA and at the Climate Psychiatry Alliance typically work as state teams in developing our approach based on local needs and conditions. Mental health professionals can not only provide strong research data regarding mental impacts, but can also be living examples of holding this crisis in mind while moving toward a very uncertain future.

Holding our current crisis in mind is particularly difficult when we, as clinicians, sit with young people who have learned in science classes or otherwise understand the depth of our current crisis and its likely

unfolding. Our attempts to stand in these dark spaces and be influenced by adolescents' admixture of grief, rage, anxiety, and betrayal can be very challenging. But if we do not feel the vulnerability of this unsettled ground, and instead suggest they take some environmental action, we may be, for these young people, living proof that the older generations do not care, do not understand, and will not help. My work with adolescents on this issue has been very rewarding and has broadened my understanding of the world crisis they are growing up within.

All of the authors in this text are working with different facets of the poly-crisis. Whether they are focusing on parenting through this crisis, developing a working model of individual psychotherapy, re-conceptualizing time when it can feel foreshortened as well as infinitely tragic in the moment, or finding the intersection of philosophy and psychoanalysis to meet the times, each is working to widen our working field and provide new working models. They encourage us to "stay with the trouble" and expand what we can tolerate knowing. They help us look where the data is, and sometimes this involves looking within the younger generations at our institutes.

We all use psychological defenses that impair us from engaging with the climate crisis at times. Teusch proposes additional emotional support, as well as further education and training for analysts and for analysts-in-training, in order to move through and beyond our defenses and our history of avoidance of the topic. The adage "Know Thyself" is the initial step to transforming our practices, our institutes, and our communities from avoidance of the topic to informed engagement.

References

Carson, R. (1962). *Silent Spring*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books Classics.

McKibben, B. (1989). *The End of Nature*. New York: Random.

Porges, S. (2011). *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation*. Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology. New York: W. W. Norton.

Searles, H. (1972). Unconscious processes in relation to the environmental crisis. *The Psychoanalytic Review*, *59*(3): 361–374.

Introduction

Rita Teusch

> *The evolution of civilization may therefore be simply described as the struggle for life of the human species.*
> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

We are living in a time of unprecedented human-caused global warming, environmental degradation, and ecological crisis. Severe climate disruptions are predicted for later this decade with an estimated 1 trillion dollars in climate damages in the US by 2030 (Hansen et al., 2025; Peltz, 2026; World Meteorological Organization, 2025). In 2019 the *Oxford English Dictionary* chose the term "climate emergency" as the word of the year, choosing it from an all-environmental shortlist that also included "climate action," "climate denial," "eco-anxiety," "extinction," and "flight shame." The word of the year citation reflects the ethos, mood, and preoccupation of the passing year and tends to be a term of lasting cultural significance. As the editors of this book, we were initially uncertain which language to use to describe the environmental destruction humans have inflicted on the Earth. Our planet is at an inflection point, and the word "emergency" reflects the enormity and severity of the problems we face. "With warming set to pass the critical 1.5 degrees limit … the world is on course to trigger

tipping points that would lead to cascading consequences—from the melting of ice sheets to the death of the Amazon rainforest—that could not be reversed" (Pearce, 2026). We settled on the word "climate crisis" as it is most commonly employed in the scientific and psychology literature. Psychoanalytic communities have been largely silent in the face of the climate threat in spite of dire warnings by leading climate scientists, United Nations bodies, and environmental researchers increasingly warning of impending climate chaos and urging a paradigm shift in how we live our lives and think about our relationship with the more-than-human world (UN environment programme report, 2018; Hood, 2018). Clinicians, if they are engaging with the climate crisis, are primarily doing so outside their professional organizations.

We wrote this book to encourage conversations about the climate and environmental crises in psychoanalytic institutes and in our consulting rooms because, at this critical time in human history, it is important that we allow ourselves to be touched by their urgency and become more informed about how to listen for and address climate emotions with our patients. While many patients, especially younger ones, are already expressing distress about the precarious state of our planet in their sessions, their numbers are likely to increase as the environmental crises accelerate in the next few years.

The climate crisis has been described as a hyperobject (Morton, 2013), a vast object or event whose dimensions in space and time are massive in relation to a human life. A hyperobject exceeds human apprehension, but we constantly notice its local manifestations. The climate crisis has many factors that play a role in the exacerbation of the environment and human suffering: increased greenhouse gas emissions are causing global heating, stronger and more devastating storms, unprecedented wildfires and smoke pollution, rising sea levels, and ocean acidification. Interrelated environmental crises in urgent need of attention (see earth.org) are: deforestation (every hour forests the size of 300 football fields are cut down—by 2030 the Earth may have only ten percent of its forests left, if this practice continues), plastic pollution (14 million tons of plastic enter the ocean every year), air pollution (4–7 million people die from air pollution every year), biodiversity loss (the population sizes of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians declined by sixty-eight percent between 1970

and 2016), unsustainable agricultural practices (causing soil degradation and erosion), and food and textile waste.

It has been suggested that there is a gap between what people understand cognitively about the climate crisis and how they relate to it on an emotional level (Huntley, 2021; Solnit & Lutunatabua, 2023). Psychic numbing (Lifton, 2017), the lack of a culture of care and responsibility (Orange, 2017; Weintrobe, 2013), and an unwillingness on the part of the Western World to give up a status of privilege (Weintrobe, 2021), have been evoked to explain why many people continue to exhibit unconsciousness about our serious environmental problems. Donna Orange (2017) focuses on human limitations and blind spots which prevent many from showing a "capacity for concern" (Winnicott, 1965). She wrote

> … beyond the forms of unconsciousness that every psychoanalyst studies every day, each of us suffers from specific limitations on our capacity for concern shaped not only by the limitations of the parents to whom we were born, but by those of the culture—including schools, religious groups, media, politics—that have formed us. (Orange, 2017, p. 49)

Our hope is that this book will increase awareness of the climate crisis and help psychotherapists realize that, in the face of serious destruction already happening, everyone's engagement is needed to address the problems, if not for our own sake, then for the sake of our children and grandchildren. Fighting the environmental crises and being responsive to their threats is an intergenerational and moral issue also because those who suffer most from climate effects are least responsible for the crisis. We are hoping that all who read our book will become sensitized to the urgency of these problems and that some will feel motivated to become engaged, because the attitudes and actions of every individual and every institution make a difference as we work to achieve greenhouse gas reductions, conservation, sustainable lifestyles, environmental consciousness, and adaptation. Lise van Susteren (2018, p. 25), a prominent psychiatrist and climate advocate on the national and international level, suggests that "broad public support is needed to achieve the changes needed to phase out fossil fuel emissions, as well as public recognition of the moral dimensions of human-made climate change to stir the public's conscience to the point of action."

Clinically, it is incumbent upon all psychotherapists to become informed about how to best help their patients, especially those of the younger generations, as they learn to live in a world that holds an uncertain future for them. There have been some prescient voices within the psychoanalytic community that have laid the foundations for our field to engage with the climate crisis. Orange (2017), Weintrobe (2013, 2021, 2022), Schinaia (2022), Kassouf (2022), and Lifton (2017), to name just a few. They have described our climate reality and pointed out common conscious and unconscious defenses that people use to protect themselves from becoming fully aware of the climate crisis, which presents a traumatic background perception for all. Anxiety, insatiable greed, unconscious guilt and destructiveness, denial, disavowal, splitting, lack of caring, and doomism have been evoked. We recommend that you read these books also and take in their message. Psychoanalysis is also at an inflection point: it is now more important than ever that we open our minds to the social and environmental realities around us. After Freud's death, psychoanalysis began to sideline the reality of traumatic experiences such as childhood physical and sexual abuse, which disrupted the recognition of defensive adjustments that are specific to trauma. Orange (2017), Weintrobe (2021), and Karbelnig (2024) have called on psychoanalysts to use their clinical skills and their knowledge of conscious and unconscious defenses to step outside their consulting rooms to effect positive climate action and for psychoanalytic institutes and national and international psychoanalytic associations to change how they conduct their professional activities and work toward reducing their carbon footprint.

Psychotherapists, first and foremost, have an obligation to stay a step ahead of their patients. With regard to the climate crisis, this means that clinicians begin to work toward allowing themselves to face its reality, educate themselves about ways to adapt, and develop emotional resiliency. Importantly, clinicians need to work to become aware of their own feelings and attitudes so that their countertransference does not prevent them from hearing their patients' climate distress. Continued lack of awareness in the therapist/analyst may result in an unconscious collusion with the patient's wish to dissociate from our frightening environmental reality.

In its latest report, Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has given its final warning. Rather than drastically reducing carbon emissions, between 2010 and 2019 we experienced *the highest levels of emissions in human history* (IPCC, 2023). If we stopped emitting greenhouse gases today, the rise in global temperatures would begin to flatten within a few years. While the effects of human activities on Earth's climate to date are irreversible on the timescale of humans alive today, every little bit of avoided future temperature increases results in less warming that would otherwise persist for essentially forever. Limiting global warming to 1.5°C required a peak before 2025 (a goal that was not met), reducing emissions by forty-three percent by 2030, sixty percent by 2035, and reaching net-zero in early 2050. Without limiting warming to 1.5°C, key risks to North America are expected to intensify rapidly by 2050. These risks will result in irreversible changes to ecosystems, mounting damages to infrastructure and housing, stress on economic sectors, disruption of livelihoods, and issues with mental and physical health, leisure and safety. Without major action to reduce emissions, global temperature is on track to rise by 2 degrees in the 2030s, crossing major tipping points and causing the loss of most coral reefs and Arctic Ice sheets. Warming by 2.5°C to 4.5°C (4.5°F to 8°F) would happen by 2100, which would be catastrophic for all life on earth (NASA, n.d.).

Becoming climate and environmentally aware and feeling a responsibility to engage with these crises is a highly individual process; it is influenced by our social surround, especially by attitudes, beliefs, and actions present in the community we identify with. We wrote this book to help break the silence around the climate and environmental emergencies inside and outside of our consulting rooms because talking about an unsettling reality increases our ability to accurately represent it and respond to it. Much has been written that analysts need to widen their perspectives to include external reality and go beyond the dichotomy of inside vs. outside, psychic vs. social (Gaztambide, 2019; Layton, 2019; Schinaia, 2022).

We began the research on this book by distributing a climate questionnaire to all ninety-two students at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute. We learned that many felt a need for personal support around the climate crisis and wanted help with how to deal with their patients'

climate feelings. We hope to provide information, inspiration, support, and resources to clinicians to become ready to meet the climate challenges ahead. People vary with regard to the strength of their defenses, and some may feel that since they themselves will not be affected too seriously by the climate crisis, also because of privilege, they do not need to concern themself with it. However, younger generations are asking us to use our capacity to find words for and tolerate their most difficult feelings about our decaying environment, including annihilation anxiety. They deserve not to have to suffer in silence but meet with a therapist/analyst who is able to face the frightening reality without climate doomism or avoidance, and who knows how to effectively help their patient. Robert J. Lifton, writing on the climate crisis (2017), suggests that we might call upon the human mind ("our greatest evolutionary asset") to translate a growing species awareness (or "climate swerve") into action that will yet sustain our habitat and civilization. He wrote:

> Whatever our age, we are part of a bond much greater than ourselves, part of a flow of endless generations that include forbears as well as children and grandchildren. The bond is not only biological but is related to all we do and experience in the world … The human chain has never been more vulnerable. Nor have we ever been more aware of the mind's capacity for attending to our species by renewing and enhancing our habitat. Of course, it is very late in the game, but at the same time far from too late. (2017, p. 155/156)

Overview of chapters

Reading this book, you will hear the voices of ten psychoanalysts at various stages of climate awareness and how they think and feel about, and engage with the climate crisis. In her foreword, Elizabeth Allured (New York), co-president of the Climate Psychology Alliance North America, urges psychoanalysts and psychodynamic psychotherapists to become climate-informed and engaged inside and outside the consulting room. She posits that, to stay relevant as a discipline, psychoanalysis must further widen its scope to include the climate crisis so that patients' clinical needs are met, and our communities are helped to manage the accelerating environmental threat.

The main chapters are written by psychoanalysts from the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute—Delia Kostner, Teresa Cochran, and Rita Teusch. Daniel Jacobs wrote the introduction to a Climate Roundtable Discussion of a group of senior BPSI psychoanalysts; further contributors are: Wendy Greenspun and John Turtz from New York; Penelope Starr-Karlin from California; Ines Schelhas and Martina Gast from Munich, Germany. Also contributing is Daniel Sherrell, a young climate activist, and the author of *Warmth—Coming of Age at the End of our World*.

Chapter 1, "What students think, what students want: Results and discussion of a climate survey of students at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute" by Rita Teusch discusses the results of a climate questionnaire that was circulated among all ninety-two students of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute in the spring of 2023. The results revealed that an overwhelming majority of respondents experienced significant climate distress and climate doomism. Students felt alone with their climate feelings and at a loss of how to effectively address climate anxiety with their patients. They asked for education and support from the institute. Quotes from respondents are included to provide a vivid picture of how BPSI students are thinking and feeling about the climate crisis. The editors of this book initiated a monthly Climate Conversation Drop-in Group at BPSI in the spring of 2024. The group is a space to discuss climate readings, listen to invited experts on climate change, process personal climate feelings, and receive support with clinical dilemmas involving patients' climate distress and clinicians' countertransference.

Chapter 2, "Engaging with climate distress: We're in it together" is written by Wendy Greenspun, who now also educates clinicians and other professionals to manage climate emotions and bring a climate-informed approach to their work. She shares her process of becoming climate-aware and emphasizes the importance of seeking support from like-minded others to guard against climate despair. Her climate activism increased her awareness of social, racial, and economic injustice. Greenspun presents a patient with climate distress whom she helped tolerate, accept, and channel her feelings into climate action. She demonstrates the value of a careful psychoanalytic approach and the importance of the personality of the psychoanalyst as a new object

of conscious and unconscious identification. Because Greenspun has worked through her own climate emotions, she is able to "dwell" in the difficulties of the climate crisis, rather than deny it. The intersection of climate anxiety with unrepresented trauma is discussed, including transference–countertransference implications.

Chapter 3 is titled: "Firestorm, flood, and shattered futures: On climate trauma and temporality," written by Penelope Starr-Karlin, a climate activist, teacher, and independent scholar of philosophy. Starr-Karlin discusses the concept of time not solely as an objective property of the universe but as an aspect of human phenomenology. The climate emergency creates uncertain futures, uncanny presents, and dissociated pasts. She proposes the concept of "subjective temporality," which can provide the analyst with a temporal model that helps patients with a narrative of self-in-time to restore emotional cohesion and create new meanings to a devastated world. Her clinical case presentation illustrates how the past reaches into the present, which is characterized by climate trauma and a collapse of identity and future. Working with the concept of subjective temporality enabled the patient to grieve his past, present, and future losses and find new meaning by engaging in positive climate action.

Chapter 4, written by Delia Kostner, is titled: "Climate and the couch: Voices from a burning world." This chapter leaves behind the structure of traditional psychoanalytic writing and embraces techniques of creative non-fiction to tell the tale of a psychoanalytic treatment of a scientist beset with severe climate anxiety. It is a braided essay with a patient's experiences of climate anxiety, the author's own musings about and experience of the natural world, and psychoanalytic theory. These three strands are woven across the course of a calendar year in which the climate emergency became increasingly unavoidable. Kostner encourages us to be open to recognizing the essential importance of the natural world in our psyches.

Chapter 5, written by Rita Teusch, is titled: "Representing the climate crisis in the consulting room: Challenges and opportunities." Teusch discusses the historical psychoanalytic practice to prioritize the examination of fantasy, often at the exclusion of the psychological impact of reality, when, in fact, both are interwoven with each other and each is important in its own right. The analyst's conscious and unconscious anxiety about the climate crisis can prevent hearing patients' climate distress and its derivatives, and prevent their analysis. Teusch suggests

that all clinicians develop some familiarity with the climate literature and ways to help patients with climate distress so that a more accurate representation of the climate crisis becomes possible in the consulting room. Analysts need to be careful not to collude with patients' defenses against acknowledging the climate crisis and know that, if a patient does not refer to the climate crisis in a longer treatment, strong narcissistic defenses are likely in place against the frightening climate reality.

Chapter 6 is written by Daniel Sherrell, a young climate activist and organizer who describes his journey of becoming climate aware as a child and working through loneliness, confusion, and anxieties as an adult to arrive at a point where he can become engaged in fighting for climate mitigation. He reflects on what it is like to inherit from previous generations a world with an uncertain future. In college, Sherrell became part of a campaign to convince his college to divest its endowment holdings from the coal industry. He describes the emotional vacillation between hope and despair that led to his stepping away from climate activism to pen his memoir *Warmth: Coming of Age at the End of the World* (2021) published by Penguin Press. He reflects on how therapists might think about and work with climate anxiety, that is, to help the patient bear witness to the almost intolerable, rather than wanting to cure them of difficult emotions. Sherrell applies the concepts of ego, id, and superego to explain how we as a species have not been able to reverse the climate emergency. This chapter is an important exploration of personal and societal dynamics at work both in the creation and amelioration of the climate crisis.

Chapter 7, "BPSI speaks: Contemplating the climate crisis in clinical work" contains Delia Kostner's transcription of a Roundtable Conversation among senior BPSI analysts at various stages of climate awareness and engagement. Daniel Jacobs suggests in his introduction an extension of Freud's dictum that mental health is characterized by the ability to love and to work. Jacobs proposes that being mentally healthy also includes one's ability to show concern "for the preservation of self and others, or self with others," because a lack of such concern reveals "a form of maladaptive narcissism and dissociation that isolates us from our environment." Jacobs reflects on his own process of becoming climate aware, which will resonate with many readers.

Chapter 8, by Teresa Cochran, is titled "Saving wonderland: Notes from the field." Cochran explores her new identity as Citizen Psychoanalyst

and how she uses her analytic skills to help support and maintain positive climate action. Cochran co-founded a Climate Action Network in her town on Cape Cod, MA. She describes a town meeting in which local citizens wrestle with a complex decision to reduce climate risks, and reflects on the role a psychoanalyst can play to help citizen groups manage and contain the strong emotions that arise during climate work.

> As analysts, we are encouraged to take a neutral stance, which becomes complicated because of the impact of climate change on the lives of the next generations. More than the general public, psychoanalysts recognize the deep-seated anxieties that are shaping people's behaviors and lack of action. As psychoanalysts, we can and need to help contain these emotions, however shakily, and foster networks of support. (p. 153)

Chapter 9, by John Turtz, is titled "Our kinship with the natural world: Environmental ethics, complexity theory, and psychoanalysis." Turtz highlights several ways in which the fields of psychoanalysis, philosophy, and complexity theory can foster constructive cross-fertilization. He elaborates on the role of psychoanalysis to embrace environmental ethics and understand our kinship with the nonhuman environment. He suggests that in the consulting room, analysts can help patients to question values and norms that have been socially constructed, address self-protective mechanisms that are used to disavow the climate crisis, mourn its losses, and move from a place of unconscious anxiety to a path of taking action, which can be empowering and lead to greater resilience.

Chapter 10, written by Ines Schelhas and Martina Gast, "'I owe it to my daughter': How parents deal with the climate crisis. Psychodynamic interviews with parents committed to climate protection." The interviews elicit the complex emotional struggles these parents face with regard to containing their own feelings in the face of the climate emergency, as well as communicating with their children without inducing fear and hopelessness. The analysts use the work of Bion to explain some of their findings, that is, the parent needs to function as a container of the child's unbearable climate feelings. These parents strive to use age-appropriate language and instill hope stemming from the realization that many people, including them, are working on the problem of the climate emergency. The authors describe the reality that broad sections

of society are still not acknowledging the climate crisis and propose that this is due to the fact that the environmental crisis makes us aware of our vulnerability and finiteness.

In Chapter 11, Delia Kostner offers "Reflections on hope and despair in the Anthropocene." Kostner includes a clinical case that highlights the conscious and unconscious intersection of despair and hope.

In the Appendix, we offer references and resources that therapists and psychoanalysts may use to educate themselves and pass on to their patients.

References

Freud, S. (1930a). *Civilization and its Discontents. S. E., 21*: 57–146. London: Hogarth.

Gaztambide, D. J. (2019). *A People's History of Psychoanalysis: From Freud to Liberation Psychology*. London: Lexington.

Hansen, J. E., Kharecha, P., Sato, M., Tselioudis, G., Kelly, J., Bauer, S. E., … Pokela, A. (2025). Global warming has accelerated: Are the United Nations and the public well-informed? *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, *67*(1): 6–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/00139157.2025.2434494

Hood, M. (2018, October 8). UN warns paradigm shift needed to avoid global climate chaos. *Phys.org*.

Huntley, R. (2021). *How to Talk About Climate Change in a Way That Makes a Difference*. London: Murdoch.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2023). Summary for policymakers. In: *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report*. Contribution of Working Groups I, II, III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Core Writing Team. H. Lee and J. Romero (Eds). Geneva, Switzerland: IPCC, pp. 1–34. https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001

Karbelnig, A. M. (2024). Beyond climate defensiveness: The role of psychoanalysis in creating a sustainable future. *The American Psychoanalyst (TAP)*, *58*(1): 32–46.

Kassouf, S. (2022). Thinking catastrophic thoughts: A traumatized sensibility on a hotter planet. *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, *82*: 60–79. Retrieved from: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s11231-022-09340-3

Layton, L. (2019). Transgenerational hauntings: Toward a social psychoanalysis and an ethics of dis-illusionment. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, *29*: 105–121.

Lifton, R. J. (2017). *The Climate Swerve. Reflections on Mind, Hope and Survival*. New York: The New Press.