Loss and Climate Change: The Cost of Parallel Narratives

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Abstract

Climate change discourses present two parallel narratives—one about the problems of climate change and the other about the solutions. In narratives about the problem of climate change, loss features dramatically and terrifyingly but is located in the future or in places remote from Western audiences. In narratives about solutions, loss is completely excised. This article suggests that this division into parallel narratives is the result of a defensive process of splitting and projection, which protects the public from the need to truly face and mourn the losses associated with climate change. Its effect is to produce monstrous and terrifying images of the future accompanied by bland and ineffective proposals for change now. A more sophisticated understanding of the processes of loss and mourning, which allowed them to be restored to public narratives, would help to release energy for realistic and lasting programmes of change. Psychoanalytic models of grief and loss may be particularly helpful in achieving this understanding. Drawing on practical work with small groups in Cambridge, UK, the article proposes that William Worden's typology of the tasks of mourning and their negatives provides an appropriate model both for developing a culture of truthfulness, leadership, and appropriate support and for developing practical programs that would help members of the public to work through acceptance of changes that may threaten aspiration, culture, security, and identity.

Introduction

The past 5 years have seen increased sophistication in the ways that climate change is presented to the public. In the United Kingdom the work of sustainability consultancy Futerra (www.futerra.co.uk) and the charity COIN (Climate Outreach Information Network www.coinet.org.uk) have been influential in persuading both activists and government to adopt techniques from social marketing, to examine their image and communication style and to match their message to the concerns and aspirations of their audiences. Despite this, news from the frontline suggests that many of the public nonetheless respond with indifference, apathy, or cynicism and that increased awareness of climate change does not necessarily translate into appropriate concern and action. See for example the UK government's 2008 report "A framework for pro-environmental behaviours" (Defra, 2008) or the UK Department of Transport's 2009 report "Exploring public attitudes to climate change and travel choices: deliberative research" (King et al., 2009).

Can a deeper psychological understanding help us in this dilemma? Renee Lertzman's research reported in The Ecologist (Lertzman, 2008) alerts us to the role anxiety can play in an apparently apathetic response. In this article, I suggest that a more sophisticated understanding of the processes of loss and grief, based on psychotherapeutic practice, might also be useful. This suggestion comes from my work with "Carbon Conversations" (Randall, 2009 and www.carbonconversations.org), a model of small support groups, developed in the United Kingdom, whose goal is to achieve major, personal carbon reductions. The groups' success stems from their emphasis on the emotional significance of making deep changes: of the pain, loss, and grief that may be involved, of threats to identity and status, and of the importance of people coming to feel ownership and find their own way to the changes that we all need to make.

While loss features strongly in predictions about the long-term effects of climate change, it is not fashionable to suggest that loss is inevitably a consequence of mitigation. This is not a message that the public wants to hear, nor is it a message that politicians are enthusiastic to promote. It is possible, however, that beneath the veneer of much public indifference or cynicism, there is an underlying perception of threatened, personal losses, possibly from climate change itself but certainly from attempts at mitigation.

If this is the case then the consequence is that change will be forestalled. When loss remains unspoken, neither grieved nor worked through, then change and adjustment cannot follow. A better understanding of loss might allow it to be brought back into public discourse; to inform our personal communication about climate change; and to suggest alternative support structures that would facilitate both personal and political work. This in turn would allow positive messages and actions to flourish instead of being inhibited or idealized.

Parallel Narratives

Climate change discourses present two parallel and disconnected narratives—one about the problem, the other about the solutions.

In the narrative about the climate change problem, loss is a dominant theme: loss of bio-diversity, loss of habitat, extinction of species; crop failure, water shortage, drought; fuel scarcity, resource wars, illness and famine; loss of livelihood, loss of liberty, mass migration, breakdown of civilization. The losses described are catastrophic but, for audiences in the developed, industrialized nations, they are remote, either far in the future, or geographically distant. They will happen to other people, in other places, or in other times. The consequence is that the loss feels unreal, rather like acknowledging in one's twenties that death is inevitable. It is not a problem for now.

A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Climate Change Narratives

In contrast the narratives about climate solutions largely ignore the question of loss. Although they imply that if we do not act now, then catastrophic losses will occur, they do not raise the possibility that we might already be experiencing losses or that the actions that need to be taken to avert catastrophic loss themselves involve loss. Psychologically, we can understand this as a process of splitting and projection. Psychoanalytic theories argue that the infant only gradually comes to realize that the adored mother who provides, love, milk, comfort, and nurture is the same person as the hated mother, who fails the child, through faulty attunement, meeting needs too late or too little, or through refusal and discipline. Understanding and becoming able to cope with this ambivalence is seen as a major psychological milestone. Melanie Klein (1940/1975) calls this the depressive position: as the child comes to realize that good and bad experiences emanate from the same person and begins to appreciate the personhood of the mother, so he or she starts to experience guilt for both phantasized and real attacks. From guilt, develops the need to offer reparation for the destructiveness felt and the damage done. Klein sees much creative and artistic activity as stemming from the need for reparation. Winnicott (1963) places less emphasis on guilt and reparation and more on what he calls the development of the capacity for concern. He describes a dynamic relation between the infant's ruthless use of the mother and the opportunities that are created in the infant–mother relationship for the infant to contribute to her. One might think of the contrast between the urgent, greedy, demanding, suckling of a hungry baby and the beautific smile with which he then rewards his mother. In Winnicott's view these experiences allow the infant to manage his ambivalent instinctual impulses without too much anxiety and lay the groundwork for the individual to feel concern for others and to engage creatively in personal and social life. Both Klein and Winnicott see the capacity to tolerate and integrate the knowledge of ourselves and others as both good and bad, as essential for mental health and development. Both authors also see the possibility of regressing to the earlier state of splitting, where good and bad in both self and other are deemed to be separate, unrelated experiences. This remains throughout life as a potential, extremely powerful, psychological defense. Unflattering parts of the self, unacceptable desires or unwelcome knowledge can be split off and projected into other people, other times or other places. The consequence is to produce a world of extremes, where what is good is idealized and what is bad becomes monstrous. What we see in the treatment of loss and climate change is a process where fear of loss leads to it being split off and projected into the future. The present continues to feel safe but at the expense of the future becoming terrifying. On the one hand, nightmare, on the other false comfort.

In contrast to the apocalyptic representations of the future, explore the bland, unchallenging, nature of the dominant solution narratives.

Small steps. In this story, we all need to "do our bit": change our light-bulbs, ease off on the accelerator, and top up the loft insulation. Painless, feel-good, easy steps by committed and empowered citizens set the nation on the road to climate-recovery. This is the message of the UK Government's Act on CO_2 campaign (http://campaigns2.direct.gov.uk/actonco2/home/about-us.html) and the promotions of its Energy Saving Trust www.energysavingtrust.org.uk.

Market transformation/green consumerism. In this story, change is attractive and aspirational. Old objects of consumer delight can be swapped for new ones. Just as the Victorian age of cluttered bric-a-brac gave way to the clean lines of modernism, so also our attraction for fast cars and trashy plastic novelties can

be replaced by a desire for solar panels, efficient fridges, and a service economy. In this story, action on climate change becomes part and parcel of ordinary consumer lifestyles.

Technology will save us. In this story the boffins (all those professors in white coats, pebble-glasses, and crazy hair) have the answers—whether it is renewables, nuclear power, or geoengineering. Once they have their hands on the resources they need, they will deliver a world much like the one we know. Most of the solutions presented as part of the recent Manchester Report (Manchester Report, 2009) were from this stable.

Decarbonization. This is the narrative offered by Sir Nicholas Stern (Stern, 2007) and goes hand in hand with the dependence on technology. In this story, economic growth is unaffected. High-carbon forms of energy are exchanged for low-carbon ones and deliver a future very similar to the one we know now in the West. Economic growth continues, individuals' lives change little.

The happiness tale. In this story, life will change but we will find it preferable. We will be happier because the new low-carbon world will bring us a closer sense of community, more meaningful work and more time to spend with our families. Pioneering work on the relationship between economic growth and happiness has been done by the Ecological Footprint movement (Chambers, Simmons, & Wackernagel, 2000) and the New Economics Foundation (www.happyplanetindex.org). A more romantic version of a preferable future is found among Transition Town enthusiasts (Hopkins, 2008). The theme has also been taken up with enthusiasm in a wider context by the economist Richard Layard (2006) and the psychologist Oliver James (2007).

There is certainly truth in all of these narratives. Small steps must be made; some of the new objects may be attractive; decarbonization and technological change will be necessary; some changes will bring social benefits. However, as these narratives are played out, their weaknesses also emerge.

How small steps might lead to large ones is not defined. In fact, it turns out that there is no reliable evidence that they do. How many people will actually embrace the new consumer delights, or find them attractive, is not estimated. How they will move out of a niche market is not addressed. How economic growth can continue in a genuinely decarbonized world is not described. How biodiversity can be protected in the high-tech futures is not discussed. How the proposed version of happiness plays out against the aspirations and identities of diverse social classes, or the realities of entrenched economic interests is not considered. A good critique of the "small steps" approach can be found in Crompton (2008).

From a psychological perspective, we can speculate on what is being defended against through these omissions. Prominent is the fact that loss scarcely features. Yet in conversation with the public, loss creeps in. We encounter suspicion that, in reality, they will be asked to make changes that they find unpalatable, that will cost them money they do not wish to pay, or that they are being asked to make sacrifices that will damage their interests. They perceive threats to relationships, livelihood, aspirations, material wealth, way of life, status, and identity.

They are right to be suspicious. If we do deal with climate change then it is likely that:

- we will spend more of our income on essentials like housing costs and food, less on nonessentials like clothing, holidays, and entertainment;
- cheap flights will disappear;
- ordinary people will travel less;
- some familiar jobs will vanish;
- some of our more individualistic freedoms will be curtailed or become very expensive.

This is not to say that life will be miserable or that people in the West will suffer material hardship. However, the changes are not necessarily easy, welcome, or attractive. They are likely to be experienced as attacks on the aspects of life that people hold dear: family and attachment, aspiration and progress, individuality, identity, and the self.

Take for example a young woman whose car is her cocoon. She has chosen it for its color and style. She fills it with personal comforts—her CDs, a favorite rug, a mascot, water-bottle, and tissues within easy reach, radio tuned to her favorite station. Snug inside, she feels safe. At the start of the day, it helps her make the transition from sleepy, child-like dependence to independent, responsible, working woman. At the end of the day, its privacy and containment comfort her from the bruises of working life. Its outward gleam and shine speak of her success. Its inner warmth and comfort acknowledge her fragility. It both protects and expresses her identity. The suggestion that she might take the bus to work or lift-share with colleagues will not be appealing. Aspiration, lifestyle, security, and identity are all instantly under threat. We should not be surprised at a negative response to the suggestion.

These are issues that psychotherapists would see as inevitably brought into play when a major loss either occurs or is threatened. How can theories and models of loss help us in talking about climate change, helping people face the future, and supporting them to make real carbon reductions?

Typologies and Theories of Loss

The model for all analyses of loss is death. This is where Freud started in his seminal work "Mourning and Melancholia" (Freud, 1917), where he described the relationship between the normal work of mourning, where the ego gradually detaches itself from the lost object, and depression—the prototype for all unfinished grieving. Contributions by Klein (1940/1975) Bowlby (1973), Parkes (1975), Kubler-Ross (1970), Worden (1983), and others have led to a number of models of mourning being developed from Freud's early work and applied to a variety of losses and separations, from the transitions between life stages to the loss of employment, health, friendship, miscarriage, pets, or career. All theories and models of mourning suggest that it is a process in which painful accommodation has to be made to absence and finality; the emotions, attachment, and investment connected to the lost person or lost object have to be withdrawn. Energy has to be directed elsewhere.

Kubler-Ross

One of the best-known models is that derived from Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's work on death and dying (Kubler-Ross, 1970). Kubler-Ross worked with the terminally ill in the 1960s in a period, where the truth of the diagnosis was frequently kept from the patient. She was prominent in developing a culture of greater honesty toward patients. She proposed a five-stage model describing the process that people who have received a terminal diagnosis typically go through in adjusting to the reality and proximity of death.

A first phase of shock and denial gives way to anger, followed by attempts at bargaining. Here the dying person seems to argue with death itself—"Give me time to finish x/visit y/have one last z, and I will go happily." When this is relinquished in the face of the implacability of death, depression, and finally acceptance result. In the stage of acceptance the person becomes able to work creatively with the short time left to them, dealing with their affairs, and preparing realistically for their end.

The model has proved popular in industry among people working on the management of change. It may be favored by corporations because they wish, like death, to be implacable, to brook no disagreement, and enter into no bargains. It has also found favor in some work on climate change. Steve Running uses it very effectively in his short article "The 5 stages of climate grief" (Running, 2007) to clarify some of the typical responses to climate change. Superficially the model works well. Like death, climate change will not wait and it will not relent: the model has an appropriate emphasis on the shortness of time and urgency, it demands immediate preparation and adjustment.

For ongoing work, however, Kubler-Ross's model has major shortcomings in relation to climate change. It is a model from the end of life. It describes an experience without transition and without hope. The individual who is dying faces extinction, the loss of loved ones, and the ending of their creative life. There is little or no time ahead and little that can be looked forward to. A dying person has much to be depressed about and an extraordinarily difficult adjustment to make. In contrast, when facing climate change we still have much to hope for and much to play for. The changes and adjustments we make also need to last across substantial periods of time. Sustaining our creativity and resourcefulness is essential. We have the chance to remake our lives. Other models of loss may be more appropriate.

Bowlby and Parkes

In contrast to Kubler-Ross, the work of John Bowlby (1973) focused on loss in early life the loss experienced by infants and small children who face separation from their attachment figures, either permanently or through temporary absence. Bowlby describes a broader range of emotions—disbelief, distress, yearning, longing, and searching alternating with anger and withdrawal; disorganization and the need to reshape identity around a new attachment figure and a new way of life. Bowlby's focus on the effects of bereavement on identity and on the processes of recovery suggest that more creative and fruitful outcomes may be possible than the limited acceptance suggested by Kubler-Ross's model. Parkes (1975) who used Bowlby's work in his studies of bereavement among adults, also places much greater emphasis on questions of identity, on the necessity of time in the working-through of grief and on the necessary incompleteness of the process. The focus in both Bowlby's and Parkes' work is on recovery and on the future rather than on adjustment and acceptance. Their emphasis on the effect of loss on identity is also helpful in addressing some of the resistance and anxiety to changes that proposals for carbon reduction typically bring.

Worden

The most complex model and, in relation to climate change, the one I have found most useful, however, is that of Worden (1983). Building on the work of Bowlby and Parkes, Worden suggests that the work of grief is a series of tasks that can be embraced or refused, tackled, or abandoned. He sees the work as always in progress, never complete. Life will never be the same again, but

meaning may be restored and it may become possible to flourish once more. The work may falter or stall, the bereaved person may return to an earlier stage, sink into depression, abandon their attempt at recovery, take heart again, move forward, and so on. In each of the stages Worden suggests that either the task, or what he calls its negative, may be embraced. In Table 1 below, I have adapted Worden's categories slightly, adding one or two elements from other models.

It seems to me that this model offers more hope and more practical assistance, both in understanding some of the reactions we encounter from the public and in dealing with them. The examples below come from written sources, individual conversations about climate change, and from "Carbon Conversations" groups, where I have used Worden's model as a framework for understanding resistance, facilitating the working through of difficult emotions, and the emergence of a reframed identity and energy.

Accepting the reality of the loss

The idea of denial has certainly gained currency in discussions of climate change, though often without deep understanding of what it means psychologically. The phrase is often used with disapproval and a hint of contempt for those who are deemed to be "in" it. Using Worden's idea of the task allows us to see that there is a process to be gone through in which denial will inevitably feature, at different levels and intensities. It can be an important protection, allowing the most painful truths to be assimilated piece by piece. Jeremy Holmes (1993) describes a young wife's reaction to her husband's death in an accident:

She was completely and chillingly calm, expressing no emotion, simply saying: "Oh, but he's not dead, he's asleep, doesn't

he look beautiful and peaceful." It was only when, several hours later, her mother arrived that she began to sob and wail uncontrollably. (p. 90)

George Marshall (2007) describes in his book "Carbon Detox" how, despite years of immersion in the science and campaigning, it was a long time before the emotional reality caught up with him:

Belief in climate change is not a switch – it exists in degrees and it takes years to acquire. (p. 88)

It is common to meet people who are stuck in an intellectual acceptance of climate change. They are able to chat concernedly about the latest climate predictions, interspersed with tales of their weekend in Barcelona. Moving to a lived, emotional experience of the reality and then beyond that, to an acceptance of the irreversibility of some of the losses seems beyond them. Rather than condemn them, we might do better to see them as needing support, like Holmes' young wife who could not let the reality of her husband's death penetrate her full being until her mother had arrived.

Working through the painful emotions

Worden's second task alerts us to the complexity of emotion that acceptance of the reality of climate change may bring and also to the consequences of continued denial or the consequences of an inability to work through the painful feelings. We should expect people to be sad and angry, to feel guilt and shame, to yearn for that which is lost, to search for more comforting answers, to bargain, rage, and storm.

One group I worked with were particularly resistant to the idea that they should monitor their household energy use and travel.

Table 1. The Tasks of Grief		
	THE TASK	POSSIBLE NEGATIVE RESPONSES
1	Accepting the reality of the loss, first intellectually and then emotionally	Denial of the: • facts of the loss; • meaning of the loss; • irreversibility of the loss.
2	Working through the painful emotions of grief (despair, fear, guilt, anger, shame, sadness, yearning, disorganization)	Shutting off all emotion, idealizing what is lost, bargaining, numbing the pain through alcohol, drugs, or manic activity
3	Adjusting to the new environment/acquiring new skills/developing a new sense of self	Not adapting, becoming helpless, bitter, angry, depressed, withdrawing
4	Reinvesting emotional energy	Refusing to love, turning away from life

Source: Adapted from Worden (1983).

Somehow, they just didn't get round to it. "It hadn't been a typical week," said one. "I meant to, but I was busy," said another. Feelings of guilt, shame, and the fear of being judged lay behind the resistance. Bringing these into the open and providing reassurance was necessary in order for people to manage the task.

A group talking about travel, began to share stories of journeys they had made that they would not make again. There was a mood of deep sadness about the losses they were accepting that needed to be acknowledged, contained, and respected.

The negatives of this second task can be complex but, in regard to climate change, it seems to me that they lead to a reluctance to act at a personal level, or to special pleading, a desire to be a special case. Rather than condemn such people as hypocrites it might be more helpful to see them as stuck in the difficulties of this second task. Bargaining—one of Kubler-Ross's stages, which I place here—is familiar. "I know we'll be flying," said a young climate researcher, talking about his planned holiday in South Africa, "but we don't have a car so I expect it roughly balances out. Doesn't it?"

Idealization can be harder to spot. In grief for the dead, it is usually clear—no ill can be spoken of the dead person and the ambivalence of the lived relationship is denied. With regard to climate change the idealization depends on what is experienced as being lost. The natural world may be idealized—seen only as magnificent, wild, and beautiful, while its dangers, threats, and discomfort are minimized. Living in it, visiting it, exploring it, (regardless of the carbon costs of doing so) can become a drug that cannot be resisted.

A way of life that is under threat can similarly be idealized—anything from suburban life through meat-eating to short-haul flights—will be presented as an essential and non-negotiable good, while its disadvantages are forgotten or repressed.

Numbing the pain through manic activity is another common solution. It can take the form of intensifying destructive activity—rather like Jeremy Clarkson, the UK TV motoring program presenter, who seems to defy both climate change and death with his style of driving. (For a flavor of the man see: http://www.jeremyclarkson.co.uk/jc-top-gear-quotes/) Manic activity can also be found among the climate-aware, however. One group member ruefully admitted: "I'm so frantic organizing others I rarely stop to think about what it means and I haven't even got my own house properly draught-stripped." Recognizing the manic nature of some climate activists' work and acknowledging that it may have something to do with grief could in the long run be helpful, both in providing relief to them personally and in helping them to focus their efforts more realistically.

It may seem harsh to suggest that some of those most concerned with climate change have difficulty in truly accepting its losses. However, grief is no respecter of persons and to grieve for something that many people deny is even a loss is a difficult task.

Adjusting to the new environment

The first steps that widows and widowers take in creating a new life for themselves are frequently painful. It is often a period of false starts and disappointments as well as the discovery that a new or different life can be created and that it is still possible for there to be pleasure and meaning. What is crucial is the level of support people receive, the welcome extended to them, and the opportunity to deal again with the painful emotions of Worden's second task as they make their first steps into the third. Issues of identity can be central here. Who am I if I am no longer Joe's wife? Who am I if I no longer arrive at the school gates in a BMW and holiday with friends in Florida?

With regard to climate change, there is a need for social groups that make sense to people, activities that are rewarding, and multiple points of identification for the "climate-concerned citizen." If the only alternative identifications are those of activist or green campaigner then many who might take personal action will feel excluded and retreat. In the early stages of involvement people can feel disorientated and the support needs to be personally appropriate:

> "It felt weird trying to explain to my butcher, who I've known for years, that the reason I'm buying less meat isn't the money but the carbon emissions. I felt he must see me as a freak, though actually he was quite polite," said one group member.

> "I feel better in this group," said another. "I don't feel odd like I do at work; it makes it seem normal."

The negatives of this task will be familiar to anyone who has talked about climate change to the unwilling.

- "It's all right for you," conversations;
- bitterness at the feeling of having things taken away;
- desire that such a depressing subject should not be spoken of;
- blaming the messenger with accusations that it is a conspiracy to prevent "people like me" having the things they want/need.

Reinvesting emotional energy

The hoped for result of mourning is that emotional energy is freed up for living. The dead person or lost object is not forgotten

but the intensity of feeling lessens. They can be spoken of more casually, with humor and with "warts and all." The memories of what is lost are no longer a constant accompaniment and commentary. Anniversaries may eventually slip by unremarked and with less pain. It becomes possible to distinguish between remembering characterized by yearning, and remembering which maintains a bond with the dead person that can offer strength and support. As all this happens, new relationships become possible, new activities hold meaning, and a changed sense of self and identity develop.

We should not be prescriptive about the kinds of reinvestment of emotional energy we might hope for as people adjust to the losses of climate change and climate change mitigation. Some will undoubtedly become activists. Some may take up community projects or become leaders at work. But others will quietly adjust their lives and continue as privately as before. Not everyone mourns in the same way and we should expect to find diversity in the outcomes as well as the process.

Degrees and Types of Loss

I have written so far as if all loss is the same. While it is true that mourning for all losses tends to follow a similar pattern it may be helpful to consider different kinds of loss and their implications for work on climate change.

The archetype for loss is the absolute of death, the greater power that robs us of whoever or whatever we love. Implacable, merciless, relentless, it arbitrarily destroys relationships, hopes, and futures. It is clear that there are strong aspects of absolute loss, both in relation to temperature rise, biodiversity, destruction of habitat, and in relation to mitigation, where individual lifestyle, prosperity, identity, and relationship may all be under threat.

However, there are also chosen losses where people voluntarily give up something desirable and transitional losses where a loss may be balanced by a gain. Considering these kinds of loss in relation to climate change may be helpful as may the idea of anticipatory loss—the possibility that some of the work of mourning can be done in preparation for a loss that is inevitable in the future (Table 2).

Chosen loss and the capacity for concern

Choosing loss when there is an alternative is often seen as foolish or masochistic: selflessness and self-sacrifice are not popular, contemporary virtues. However, we all make moral choices of this kind. People knowingly lose out because they prefer to hold to values that matter to them. For example, although it is possi-

Table 2. Types of Loss	
Absolute loss	Loss we have no control over: the archetype is death, but other losses such as losing employment, or the extinction of species may also have this quality
Chosen loss	Loss engaged with for reasons of ethics or concern, where a conscious decision is made to relinquish something
Transitional loss	Loss arising from the movement from one experience to another, typically from one life-stage to another
Anticipatory loss	Facing loss through preparing for it and grieving in advance

ble to acquire many consumer items through theft, most people choose not to do so because they believe it to be wrong. Others decide that a good salary and all it brings does not make it OK to work in the arms trade or that the pleasures of a weekend with friends do not justify breaking a promise to visit relatives.

If the desire and the loss in these choices are acknowledged and mourned, they can be left behind and the person can move on creatively with their life. If the loss is denied then the effect is to breed resentment and bitterness, and to create a cruel, puritanical superego that meets the world with severity and criticism. Personal desire is denied, then projected into others who are deemed to be at fault and who can be criticized or disapproved of. This has been one of the pitfalls of the environmental movement in the past but it might be avoided through better understanding of the processes of mourning.

People's positive valuations of the natural world can give them strength in making choices that involve loss. Spiritual and religious beliefs that validate connectedness or responsibility, empathy for the rest of the nature, and opportunities for restorative experiences in natural surroundings may all provide support to people who make these difficult choices. In Carbon Conversations groups it has often been the discussions on these themes that have provided nourishment to group members. The work of Crompton and Kasser (2009) confirms that appeals to intrinsic and self-transcendent values can be valuable in promoting proenvironmental behaviors.

Framing chosen loss in terms of Winnicott's "Capacity for concern" (1963) may also be helpful. "Capacity for concern" is Winnicott's development of Melanie Klein's idea that the achievement of ambivalence involves guilt and the need for reparation for damage done to the loved object. In Winnicott's more positive vision the capacity for concern is " . . . at the back of all constructive play and work." (p. 73). When fierce, instinctual greed, and destructiveness can be acknowledged and contained, then there is the possibility that reparative concerns and constructive aims can

emerge. However, Winnicott also makes it clear that constructive and creative desires and experiences are necessary in order for the experience of destructiveness to be properly acknowledged and lived. In Winnicott's view, although this integrative capacity has its origins in infancy, it continues to be developed and strengthened through the experiences of childhood, adulthood, and old age. In relation to climate change, when the capacity for concern can be awakened in people, then loss can be chosen as part of a desirable, creative act that strengthens the individual both personally and socially.

Transitional loss

Losses that are encountered as the consequence of moving from one state to another may also provide a helpful model in exploring the losses of climate change. Where the new state is broadly seen as desirable, then the ambivalence at leaving behind and losing the old one can be easily overcome. Moving from childhood into adolescence, getting married, moving to a pleasanter neighborhood might be examples of this. It is a loss to know that one can never again hang upside down from a climbing frame with that 10-year-old ease, but the sadness usually passes and the excitements of adolescence compensate.

Sometimes, however, the new state feels less attractive than the old one or the ambivalence is stronger. The transition from middle age into old age is rarely embraced as enthusiastically as that from adolescence into adulthood. Giving up smoking means exchanging a known pleasure and support for the unknown benefit of better health a long way in the future. Whether the transition is achieved is often dependent on whether the elements that are lost can be mourned and let go of.

It is a matter of debate whether the future that awaits us will be preferable to the lives we live now. Some people look forward hopefully to all kinds of social ills being healed in the transition to a low-carbon future. Others focus on the threat to their aspirations and identity. Whether the transitional losses that climate change brings are more positive than negative may depend on the values, perspectives, and social status of particular individuals. Understanding the losses as well as the gains may be particularly important in working with people whose identity is closely reinforced by material objects and social status or whose aspirations are likely to be disappointed because of the changes needed.

Anticipatory loss

There is some evidence that anticipating and preparing for loss can be helpful psychologically (Parkes, 1975). For example, working through some of the emotions of grief may help the wife of a dying man take over the tasks and roles of her husband and make plans for her children's future. Dealing with feelings of anger and bitterness may help someone threatened with losing their job plan for an alternative career.

Anticipatory grieving is rarely straightforward, however. People can feel they are hastening the death of a loved one by preparing for its aftermath. They may feel guilty making plans for a future the dying person will not share. And if the anticipated loss does not materialize or if there is reprieve after reprieve, then the process of anticipatory mourning becomes exhausting and anger and cynicism may replace grief.

Ideas about anticipatory loss may be useful in helping people prepare for the inevitable changes that climate change will bring, particularly those involved in personal carbon reduction. For anticipatory grieving to be useful however, there must be a certain belief that the loss is inevitable, a realistic time-frame in which it is likely to happen and support in dealing with the anxieties that arise. This requires firm political commitments about practicalities and time-scales that most politicians seem unwilling to make at present.

Integrative Solutions

How might we use an understanding of the processes of loss and mourning in a practical way?

Truth, realism, creativity, and values

The first move must be to start telling the truth about loss. We need to withdraw the projections of loss from the future and make loss real in the present. We need both to stop catastrophizing the future and to stop wrapping the present in cotton wool. By doing so, we will diminish both extremes and make loss manageable, both now and for our children and grandchildren.

The second must be to encourage realism about the nature of the transitions we face and what they mean to different people. We need to offer realistic scenarios that people can relate to, with realistic time-scales, choices, and options. Within those scenarios we need to discuss openly the losses that will be involved, the effects on different sectors of society and the impacts on individuals with different desires, aspirations, and identities. The scenario-planning work of Forum for the Future (Goodman, 2008; http://www.forumforthefuture.org) is to be applauded here but it is aimed at an educated audience and there is a need for down-to-earth, accessible material with a similarly thoughtful emphasis.

Following from this, we need to emphasize creativity and involvement in developing scenarios and solutions. We need to reject one-size-fits-all scenarios. We need to listen to and involve diverse communities who will have very different priorities and responses.

Finally, we need to appeal to people's values and their capacity for concern. We need to normalize choosing loss and working through the complex emotions that are involved in it. We need to assert the truth that people are more than their material and consuming selves and that by making difficult choices they will enrich themselves and society.

What is needed to facilitate these moves?

Leadership

We certainly need better leadership from government, leadership that is not afraid to tell the truth, nor afraid to lay out the difficult choices. Ed Miliband, the current UK climate change minister, is no Churchill. He appeals to environmentalists to "hold his feet nearer the fire" and grasps weakly at the hope that a climate-changed world will be a happier one. His appeals reflect the weakness of the climate change agenda within government but he must also bear personal responsibility for not stepping up to the challenge.

In the absence of this kind of leadership, we need to speak out ourselves, to create the platforms where we can present options that include losses as preferable and manageable, rather than as unpleasant choices that could be rejected.

Support structures

Following on from this, we need to create support structures that facilitate the process of mourning and provide containment for the anxieties that will inevitably be revealed. We need strategies that deal with the difficult issues of status and identity and a culture of stories and role-models that offers meaningful examples to identify with.

The Carbon Conversations groups mentioned earlier are one type of support structure that may help as they deliberately set out to address the emotional impact of the changes we need to make and provide structures for sharing feelings and working through resistances and difficulties in personal carbon reduction.[1] Another useful development is the "Work that Reconnects," a form of group-work pioneered by Joanna Macy and described in the book "Coming back to life," coauthored with Molly Brown (Macy & Brown, 1999). Based on systems theory, spiritual teaching, and deep ecology, the groups use experiential exercises to explore people's feelings about the current environmental crisis and help them move toward action.

A culture of understanding

However, just as not everyone who is bereaved wishes to join a group of other bereaved people, so not everyone will want to join groups of these kinds. Creating a culture of understanding and empathy among climate-change activists and organizers is also important. If they themselves understand the processes of loss and mourning they will be better placed to deal with the resistance to change that they encounter. If they are working from a psychological space that embodies their own mature "capacity for concern" rather than an anxious and guilty drive for reparation, they will be better placed to encourage the creativity of others. And if their communications subtly and routinely convey these understandings, then people will feel supported in their private grief, rather than angered at it being ignored.

Setting up practical groups where loss can be negotiated in a less overt way may also be helpful. My experience of energy clubs (where neighbors join together to plan ecorenovations to their homes), informal car-share schemes (where vehicle use is dramatically curtailed through offering and accepting lifts), and vegetable-growing groups is that there is frequently a culture of pioneering spirit and optimism that makes less positive emotion either unmentionable or results in those who experience it feeling either that they cannot step up to the mark or that the enterprise is not for them. Normalizing the sharing of difficulty, disappointment, frustration, and loss in such groups might paradoxically increase their staying power and appeal.

Role-models and stories

Providing role models and stories is well-known as a powerful way of communicating and providing points of identification for diverse audiences. It may be useful to look at the kinds of stories that are communicated, however. There is frequently an assumption that the stories must be positive and hopeful if they are to succeed and that famous people are necessary to make the point. They tend to present end-points, rather than processes—a film-star getting on a bus or a rock-musician digging his vegetable patch, for example. Concentrating on the process of change, including the experiences of loss and grief, might be more effective, though this needs to be done without descending into the confessional of day-time television. Using a diverse range of role-models, that truly reflects the experiences of the audiences worked with would also help.

Understanding identity and status

Questions of identity, status, loss, and change are also crucial. We need to recognize how critical certain aspects of contemporary

consumption are to some people's mental health and to adjust our demands for change so that they take account of the fragility of identity and its dependence on material goods. This is the subject of a separate article (Randall, Unpublished Manuscript).

The Costs of Ignoring Loss

What is likely to happen if those working on climate change do not incorporate an understanding of loss into their policies and programs?

Rejection and avoidance

The most obvious answer is simply that they will encounter continued rejection and avoidance of action by large numbers of people. More subtly, however, we should also expect to find cultural manifestations of Worden's negatives of the tasks of mourning, for example in the form of a growth in manic activity or in idealization of what has been, or might be, lost.

Manic activity

I remarked in an earlier article (Randall, 2005) on the way shopping can function as a protection against unwelcome or frightening knowledge and as a comforting form of denial of climate change. We can also observe manic qualities in this perpetual pursuit of the new, and in the general busyness of contemporary life. Both could be seen as speaking to a sense of unmourned loss, symptoms of a defense, which maintains that there is no time to think, no time to feel, no time to face what has happened.

Idealization

It is also common when loss is not grieved to encounter the idealization of the lost object. Separated from the mix of positive and negative emotions toward them, from the contradictions of their character and from their context, the dead person is set up in the mind of the mourner as perfection personified. They can never be criticized, never remembered without yearning, adulation, or nostalgia.

We encounter a similar phenomenon in the way certain objects, skills, or customs can be elevated as iconic symbols of a past that is idealized and longed for.

False solutions

Pursuing and recovering these iconic symbols become part of a process of false solutions that can sidetrack social movements from engagement with difficult choices. Take for example the current, popular focus on preserving forgotten or vanishing skills. At one level this seems admirable. At another, the skills seem to be idealized. The low productivity, industrial illnesses, and exploitation of the weavers, blacksmiths, hedgers, and ditchers are forgotten. The past is not mourned and moved on from, with emotional energy being reinvested and new solutions being found. Instead, it is set up in collective consciousness as preferable and ideal.

The current focus on the plight of the honeybee could fall prey to a similar process. At the heart of the issue is the need, both for climate change and for the bees, to grapple with monocultural farming methods. There is a need to acknowledge the losses that these farming methods have brought and to acknowledge the losses that giving them up will bring. The risk is that instead of engaging in this process, people will be encouraged to "save" the bees, through engaging in back-garden bee-keeping, idealizing both their own actions and turning the bee into a icon of what is lost.

The populist promise by London mayor, Boris Johnson, to restore the traditional, red, open-backed Routemaster buses to the streets of the capital can be seen as a cynical exploitation of the same phenomenon. The Routemaster bus speaks of a time that is believed to be safer, more secure, more optimistic, less troubled. It can carry ideals of blitz spirit, cheerful Cockney characters, or the confidence of 1960s youth and fashion. The complex reality of life in postwar Britain, with its negative as well as its positive aspects is hidden behind the idealized iconic symbol. The actual problem—how to deliver efficient public transport and a safe, low-carbon, flourishing city in 2010—is side-stepped. The real losses that might be involved in this—from higher taxes to the end of individualized transport—are not mentioned. Public anxiety is soothed at the expense of facing loss and finding an appropriate solution.

Conclusion

Unresolved loss and mourning can thus have real, tangible effects in holding back progress or in distracting us from difficult political action. As I said at the start of this article, the splitting, which projects all loss into the future making it catastrophic and unmanageable, denies the losses that have to be faced now and prevents us from dealing with them. As each task of mourning in turn is rejected and its negative is embraced we become more deeply mired, both personally and socially, in blind alleys, false hopes, and magical solutions. I would like to end this article by offering two examples from those who are dealing with loss, but facing the need to grieve and grasping the possibilities that might emerge from this. The first example is individual and concerns a chosen loss. The second example is public and concerns absolute loss.

A young man spoke in one of my Carbon Conversations groups about his decision not to fly again. He described an emotional journey that started with the wonder of his first experience in an aeroplane, the extraordinary sensation of being above the world, among the clouds or staring down at the patterned fields, forests, rivers, and towns below. It was something he would never forget, but would not repeat, a special experience and a treasured one, a story to remember and perhaps tell to his grandchildren. He described the hardship of the cheapest alternative transport between the United Kingdom and his partner's family in Eastern Europe—24 hr of uncomfortable coach travel. He spoke of the turmoil involved in their decision to settle in Eastern Europe; how hard it was for both of them to decide where to make their lives, facing lengthy separations from her family or from his and the saying of many goodbyes, of which this was one. The world that had brought them together through cheap air flights was no longer sustainable. Family visits would be less frequent and would be made by coach, not air. The pain and grief of this were palpable but his emergence from it was also clear. He and his partner were returning, strengthened by each other and by the decision, to start a new life in Eastern Europe, developing an ecological project that both were committed to. They left behind them possibilities that many of their contemporaries would have thought impossible to relinquish. There was a complexity of feeling held in the group—sadness, anger, longing, and regret, but also hopefulness, and, among the other people present, a deep sense of respect for the difficult and painful decision of the young couple and a renewed realization of what was possible on the other side of grief.

My second example is from a public art project. The educational charity MEMO (Mass Extinction Memorial Observatory) is building a memorial on the Dorset coast, made from local Portland stone, to commemorate plants and animals known to have gone extinct in modern times. They describe it on their Web site (Brooke, 2009; http://memoproject.org):

> The memorial will be a stone monument bearing the images of all the species of plants and animals known to have gone extinct in modern times. It will incorporate a bell to be tolled for all extinct species, including the great many "unknown" species which it is believed perish each year unseen by scientists. The bell will be tolled on the International Day of Biodiversity on 22nd May each year.

The project has met with a mixed reception. Some find the public acknowledgment of our loss hard to take and brand it as an acceptance of defeat. Others see it for what it is—a recognition of the need for grief. One of the ways mankind has always dealt with its losses is through the creation of rituals and memorials. They can help us value what is gone, provide form and structure for painful feeling, help us reassert our determination to rescue something from grief, and work toward the future. By publicly stating, not what we *might* lose but what we *have already* lost, the Memo project brings us face to face with reality. Tangible, public statements of this kind have the potential to provide the containment that will allow people to engage properly with their grief and move on.

Loss is painful. We need to detach ourselves piece by piece from what is past and gone, or from that which is no longer sustainable. We need to grieve, with the full range of emotion which that implies. Only then will we become able to remake our futures using all of our creativity, reason, feeling, and strength.

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Note

1. Materials for these groups are available through the Carbon Conversations Web site www.carbonconversations.org.

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