

CLIMATE CHANGE, DESPAIR AND EMPOWERMENT

See the article with this title by John Seed & Ruth Rosenhek in [Social Alternatives Vol. 31 No.1, 2012](#)

Workshops have taken place in 2011: [Brisbane](#) May 28, [Byron Bay](#) June 4, [Sydney](#) June 18, [Sunshine Coast](#) July 23, [Canberra](#) July 30, [Melbourne](#) Sept 17, [Ballarat](#) Sept 18, [Parramatta](#) Oct 15 and [Adelaide](#) Oct 29. 2012: [Sydney](#) March 17 and one planned for [Parramatta](#) on August 4.

All proceeds from these workshops benefit the [Australian Youth Climate Coalition](#) , [Beyond Zero Emissions](#) and the [100% Renewable Campaign](#).

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For years, Chris Sanderson has been one of my main sources of information about climate issues. If you'd like to be on his climate news email list contact chris1@jindibah-community.org

In March 2011 he wrote to this list:

"Why is it that not nearly enough ordinary Australians feel that sense of outrage and anger at the actions of a small group of powerful men, whose fortunes are linked to the continuation of burning fossil fuels, who have managed to hijack our democratic process, control our government's policies on reducing their filthy emissions and are willing to sacrifice our planet for the sake of money?"

The energy that anger releases is what we need. They have found it in the Middle East on less critical issues.

What do we have to do to inspire such feelings here?

Is it 'political correctness' or simply apparent 'prosperity' that has exorcised our ability to find the angry energy that is needed to fight just causes - as we did over the Vietnam war for example? Because that's what we need to find now."

I replied to Chris thus:

"I think the answer to "why?" is to be found in the denial of feeling which is so prevalent in our mainstream culture including the environment movement. We live in a culture of denial. Displaying emotions like anger, fear, anguish and despair are never the done thing and we are afraid of these feelings, both of public displays and also afraid of feeling them at all, even in the privacy of our own soul. Publicly revealing such feelings indicates a personal pathology, that I'm "losing it", that I can't control myself the way that a stable person can.

Privately we feel that if we were to open ourselves to the feelings about what is being done to our planet and our future, we're sure we would explode, we'd become hopelessly depressed, maybe commit suicide, something terrible would happen."

In his final chapter in "Requiem for a Species", Clive Hamilton points out that when "we recognize that our dreams of the future are built on sand the natural human response is to despair..."

In the face of the evidence of climate disruption, clinging to hopefulness becomes a means of forestalling the truth. Sooner or later we must respond and that means allowing ourselves to enter a phase of desolation and hopelessness, in short to grieve."

Here he has a footnote to Joanna Macy's despair and empowerment work and this, I believe is the key to your question: the people are going to have to get very angry and the climate movement is the only place where this could begin. Joanna has devised a ceremonial form, a container where it is safe for consenting adults to explore these feelings together and to experience the empowerment that inevitably follows. I highly recommend [the Joanna Macy chapter that Hamilton cites](#).

Thoughts like these have persuaded me into giving "Climate Change, Despair and Empowerment" workshops another shot. I last did a series of these in Oz, US and Canada in 2006 <http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/climate/roadshow.htm> when I also produced a [DVD with that title featuring Ross Gelbspan](#). At that time the movement wasn't desperate enough to embrace the realization that the

passion that we need to be a sharp enough cutting edge to crash through the climate mafia and their running dogs in politics and media lies buried under the emotions we're too afraid to feel, acknowledge and share with each other.

Back then our predictions were considered shrill and hysterical even by the climate movement. But now with climate scientists like Kevin Anderson predicting that not more than 10% of the Earth's humans would survive 4 degrees, perhaps the time is right. Phillip Sutton says that to quickly move to zero emissions and mopping existing carbon out of the atmosphere we have to "make changes beyond those that are politically feasible". I believe that despair work is the way to release the kind of energy that would get our arse in gear to kick start us to be able to move at "emergency speed".

For the Earth

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