



## Shadows of Extinction<sup>1</sup>

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### Introductory Preface

This short article started life as a commissioned chapter contribution to the recently published collection of pieces concerning Extinction Rebellion (XR) published by Penguin, *This Is Not a Drill*. An outline of the key ideas was hammered out in consultation with one of the original commissioning editors.

While the urgency of response to the Climate Emergency and the necessity of awareness of potential social collapse must not be downplayed, any movement that ignores the power of the shadow in its own process is destined for self-destruction. The six sections are designed to focus illumination on to the deepest areas of shadow at the heart of the process of XR. Sadly, some of those dynamics of darkness are already starting to manifest in the behaviour of the movement. Although the literary form of street theatre and the role of clown or jester gave an opportunity to raise the unspeakable in the circus of the court, current editorial leadership has perceived the contribution as an abortive attack rather than a consultative resource at this embryonic stage in the development of XR.

The chapter has been rejected in its present form, but is being published here and circulated, in the hope that its content has the potential to cast a little light in the gathering gloom.

15 February 2019

### *Editor's Note:*

It will be useful and illuminating to read this article in conjunction with David's article on 'The Pre and Perinatal Grounds of Capitalism and the Free Market Economy', and Jo Wooley's review of David's recent Matrix event – both in this issue of our online magazine.

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The circus clown faced the bright light and cried: '**Shadow! I see no shadow! Where is my shadow?**'. On cue, the crowd chorused in concert: '**It's behind you!! BEHIND you!!**' This brief article explores some of the critical issues hiding in the shadows behind the brilliantly lit façade of Extinction Rebellion.

### • **A Movement Mobilized in Response to Fake Science**

If the 'Hothouse Earth' paper set alarm bells ringing around the world, then the prediction of human extinction following a 12 degree increase in average global temperature by 2026 pressed the panic button for every innate catastrophile on the planet! The greater the level of fear aroused by a source of information, the greater the level of disruption of our cognitive faculties for critical evaluation! The original post on the 'Arctic News blog-spot' was treated uncritically as 'Gospel', and went viral. Some

sober reflection on the basic climate science may be in order:

- Planetary heating is driven by the gap between incoming (solar) radiation and outgoing terrestrial energy. The current imbalance drives heating of about one third of a degree per decade. The Extinction Prediction anticipates an average rate of ten degrees over eight years. That is an impossible jump of over 40 times the present heating rate! It ignores the Thermal Inertia Coefficient of the Planet (being the rate of change of temperature in response to a net radiative imbalance of 1 watt per square metre).
- The Extinction Prediction consistently confuses change in forcing with change in temperature, ignoring the time taken for a given forcing to work its way through the complex planetary system! It collapses the Time dimension!
- Most significantly, the Extinction Prediction ignores the fact that a hotter planet radiates more energy to space. This Radiative Damping Coefficient reduces the net radiative imbalance by about 3.8 watts per square metre for every one degree increase in average global temperature. The projected increase of 10 degrees would require a massive decrease of 38 watts per square metre to be set against the proposed drivers of global heating. The authors completely ignore this powerful negative feedback!

With the basis of the Extinction Prediction exposed as fake science, we are free to look beyond the shadow to the harsh realities of climate catastrophe:

**First**, planetary temperature is far more sensitive to change in CO<sub>2</sub> concentration than predicted by the (very conservative) computer models underlying the ‘Paris Agreement’.

**Secondly**, planetary climate is far more sensitive to small changes in global temperature than previously understood.

**Thirdly**, human civilizations (and all other life-systems) show huge shifts following even tiny variations in climatic conditions.

**Fourthly**, social dynamics respond massively and unpredictably to shifts in civilization.

**Fifthly**, collective unconscious reactions can explode across communities almost instantaneously.

**This cascade of response multipliers opens up the risk of societal collapse at a level that is far more profound and on an even shorter time-scale than envisaged by the originators of Extinction Rebellion!**

### • **A Movement Mistakenly Confusing the Levers of Power**

If ‘policymakers’ are puppets, then power lies in the hands that hold the strings! Accurate analysis of the levers of power is necessary (though not sufficient!) for effective mobilization of system-change. The phantasy that governments and heads of state hold executive power underlies the strategic thinking of Extinction Rebellion. It also undergirds the idealism of political aspirants around the world. At another level, it motivates the work of climate scientists, and particularly that of leading scientific advisors, as they seek to influence key institutions and dependency leaders at the heart of international negotiations.

Disillusionment is an essential step in the clarification of effective strategies of fundamental change. Greatest power is wielded by those for whom applied solutions to the global crisis pose the greatest threat. They are represented at an individual level by those whose personal wealth depends for its maintenance on the stock valuation and investment income driven by the activity of the ‘fossil majors’. Those same institutions undergird the economic viability of governments and nation states. They control their policy-making. They represent the string-holders of international puppets.

At an even deeper level than the organizational enormity of the ‘fossil majors’ stand the national survival and stability of the fossil-energy source-holders. Their dependency is absolute. It covers economics, political and military power, social and ethnic cohesion and religious control. These are the armoured citadels of the energy cartels. Their power rests, like that of drug barons in a different domain, on the end-users of the product they bring to market. Disrupt that chain, and their power

vanishes back into the sand like water in a parched desert.

- **A Movement Manipulated by Figures from the Dark Side of the Web?**

Several years ago I received an invitation to attend an international conference in Holland. The subject matter was seductive, covering issues that fitted the core of my passionate concerns. It seemed to address key issues in the application of systems-dynamics analysis applied to the understanding and resolution of the planetary crisis of climate change.

I began to explore the institutions and people behind the invitation. The deeper I went, the more worried I became. Individuals were anonymous and their identities deeply encrypted. There were no open institutional roles. Communications merged into the shadows on the dark side of the web. It appeared I had stumbled into the active frontiers of a small core of international anarchists whose primary purpose was to disrupt nation-states and render their populations ungovernable. They had identified climate change as a critical vehicle for their purposes. They were attracting activists who shared commitment to their vehicle but not necessarily to their core objectives. Open links between the anarchic shadows and the early movers and shakers of 'Extinction Rebellion' are now becoming clearer.

More recently I have become aware of engagement from the other side of the political spectrum, as extreme right-wing fascist groups have joined the fray. They seem to be employing not dissimilar tactics to achieve completely different ends. Obviously my paranoia is available for all to see! But the issues must be explored and brought into the light, if Extinction Rebellion is to move forward into the domain of public trustworthiness.

- **A Movement Manacled by Dynamics that Make the Problem Worse**

Recognition of climate change as imminent trauma on a global scale provides a clue to the dynamics of existential threat. Collective terror of reaching full-term in the uterine space of 'Mother Earth'

immobilizes all realistic hope of successful parturition. That lies buried behind a tsunami of fear.

The words of Greta Thunberg echo around the internet: 'I do not want your hope. I want your panic. I want you to feel the fear that I feel all the time!' Her words resonate as a 'point attractor' to every innate catastrophile on the planet. They echo, trigger and re-stimulate the most deeply buried primal experience at the very heart of the dynamics of human civilization. They precipitate retaliatory rebellion against all experiences of constraint, whether those be contextual or peer-group, familial or parental, boundaries of the 'Alma Mater', controls of government or the implications of 'Limits to Growth'.

The dynamics of collective foetal regression act as handcuffs on the task of effective problem-solving in the face of the harsh realities of our global predicament. They fuel the utopian myth that overcoming the opposition will usher in a post-revolutionary age of sustainability. They harness and intensify the bifurcatory processes of splitting or idealization at every level of society. They underlie the fractal behaviours of despair, of impotence, of self-harm, abuse or violence. They generate flight into a dissociative world of entertainment and distraction moderated through the interface of artificial intelligence and virtual reality.

The activity of informative education collapses into repeated examples of enacted primal psychodrama. Any movement manacled by these dynamics serves only to make the problem worse. Deconstruction of defences in the face of collective fear is a prerequisite for the demonstration of courage, as we engage the future of a world in crisis.

- **A Movement Masking Effective Solutions to the Global Predicament**

Historically, England marks the matrix of the Industrial Revolution, the transition from purely renewable sources of energy (muscle, wind, water and biomass) to include the heat-generating oxidation of fossil hydrocarbons. It was the portal of unimaginable sources of power, profit and population whose exponential export down the

corridors of empire laid the foundation for today's global problematique. Gaseous waste-product was dumped for free into the atmospheric 'sky-fill' site with cumulatively catastrophic consequences for climate change. Initial ignorance of the collateral damage has passed beyond the fall into the knowledge of good and evil. Now we know what we have done. Original guilt from consumption of forbidden fruit has morphed into unmanageable cultural addiction.

Recovery from that addiction, the detoxing of the system and the deconstruction of the complexity of dependency mark the path to future sustainability. The clarity of the map is masked by the inappropriate projection of responsibility, rage and retaliation into national corridors of impotence. As the smoke-screen clears from the shadows of Extinction Rebellion, it becomes ever clearer that the required phase-change cannot be precipitated by the symbolic imprisonment of the few, but by the courageous leadership of the many as exemplars of the change they wish to see at the heart of the world of tomorrow.

That leadership involves repudiation of all use of fossil energy as well as rejection of all financial dependency on profit derived from its use. The fractal nature of the transition is profound. It includes deeply personal transformation, relational and familial reconstruction, shifts in local community, in neighbourhoods and institutions, in businesses and organizations, in work and leisure, in travel, transport and technology, in politics and economics ranging from the purely local via cities and nation-states to the national, regional and international and ultimately global infrastructure. It covers the whole realm of power generation and the financial instruments of management and exploitation, consumerism, advertising and media manipulation. In short, as the shadows clear we will need to find ourselves vitally connected in structures of mutual support to endure the convulsive rupture of going 'Cold Turkey', as society breaks free from its collective addiction.

- **A Movement Massively Unaware of Its Role in the Psychodrama of the Collective Unconscious**

The deepest darkness lies at the point where shadows overlap. It is the domain of the unconscious where we remain most deeply unaware of being unconscious at all! Here lie the roots of religion and the psychodynamics of war. It is the black hole of collective defence reinforcement whose gravitational power determines the interstellar dance of human civilization. Its event horizon masks a singularity in the dimensions of space and time. Here are the roots of our collective pre-conceptions, the dark parameters of paradigm protection.

When society comes under the most extreme pressure it throws up patterns of leadership drawn from the most profoundly traumatized and psychotically defended cadres of human experience. As they rise to positions of influence, they are treated as gurus of social dependency, supported by projections of followers with whose unconscious dynamics they collude most deeply. Here lie the survivors of multi-generational trauma whose experience is carried forward in the very RNA of their cellular dynamics. They join company with the victims of near miscarriage or survivors of attempted abortion, whose consequent experience of environmental relations is potentially death-dealing and malign.

Some experience extremes of placental failure laying down life-long patterns of defence against resource deprivation. Enough can never be enough, and exponential wealth accumulation sucks resources from all around. Common full-term placental degrade drives irrational commitment to exponential growth, while the trauma of birth itself stands at the boundary of foetal being, the archetype of grief and the loss of the known world. Walls are erected in futile attempts to keep out unwanted parts of the psychodynamic imprint. Catastrophic post-natal male genital mutilation energizes castration anxiety that masks all access to earlier traumatic impingement.

Truly, all human life is here. If Extinction Rebellion is to emerge from the shadows it will need to continue to focus the most powerful light on those areas of deepest darkness. If it fails, it will be destined to perpetuate the very dynamics it seeks to overthrow.

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Turning her back on the glare of the Super Trouper, and resisting the lure of the paparazzi, the clown cried: ‘**So THERE is my shadow! It has been there all the time!**’ The crowd clapped and cheered, then they joined her all in the dance, did they!

**And the clown wept for joy.**

## Notes

- 1 A brief summary of the theoretical framework underpinning the argument here, embedded in an autobiographical account, is entitled ‘Foundations of Psycho-Social Analysis: Origins of a Paradigm Shift’. It contains active links to further reading, and has recently been released to the Apollo-Gaia website, where it can be found at: [http://www.apollo-gaia.org/foundations\\_of\\_pscho.html](http://www.apollo-gaia.org/foundations_of_pscho.html) [=https://tinyurl.com/yxh4r6ob].
- 2 The Meridian Programme and the Apollo-Gaia Project are hosted by The Unit for Research into Changing Institutions (UK Charity Reg. No. 284542), Meridian House, 115 Poplar High Street, London E14 0AE, UK, Tel: +44 (0) 207 987 3600, Fax: +44 (0) 207 515 8627, e-mail: [info@meridian.org.uk](mailto:info@meridian.org.uk). Web-sites: [www.apollo-gaia.org](http://www.apollo-gaia.org) and [www.meridian.org.uk](http://www.meridian.org.uk).

## About the Contributor

David is the leading international Systems Analyst with the Meridian Programme. He has a working track record in consultancy research stretching back over 45 years since his appointment by the then Director of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations to lead Psychoanalytic Research into the dynamics of Schonian Networks. This led (in 1982) to the foundation of the new scientific paradigm of Psycho-Social Analysis. In 1987, David was tasked with the leadership of the ‘Manhattan Project of Behavioural Science’, re-named ‘The Meridian Programme’ (ongoing). He pioneered the exploration of pre and peri-natal experience in driving the unconscious dynamics of human behaviour, from individual imprinting to macro-social defences. ‘Matrix’ design workshops were developed as a consultancy-research methodology and deployed across some 50 events in 17 countries and four continents. Research now includes social networks, multi-level learning systems and applied complexity-science. In 2005 David began researching the feedback dynamics in climate systems, leading to a series of engagements with the Club of Rome. In 2006 David founded (and still directs) the ‘Apollo-Gaia Project’ and has been involved with the ‘Global Systems Dynamics’ project of the EU Commission.