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The end is nigh. No longer the sandwich-board slogan of the local eccentric, climate change has brought the apocalypse into the mainstream. It may not be directly impinging on our lives just

yet, but don't be fooled, it is just around the corner and it's coming to get us. All of us.

But do we need an apocalypse to shock us into action? Is the world not in a bad enough state anyway? What if burning oil didn't damage the climate? It would still pollute the oceans, provoke resource wars, create wealth and poverty, fuel automobiles, chainsaws and tanks, be the raw material for plastic bags and Barbie dolls. If cutting down forests didn't reduce the planet's ability to store carbon, it would still cause the extinction of species, the eviction of forest peoples and extinguish the pleasure that the rest of us have of being in a green and healthy environment. So why all the fuss about climate change? Yeah, OK it is a big deal.. But the world-view which fixates on climate change as the big issue is certainly incomplete, and at worst blatantly dishonest. If it is to be the basis for action, then the agenda of climate change should be critically examined, as fomenting panic of a coming apocalypse may not really be the most interesting direction in which to move.

Don't believe the scientists!

The way climate change is sold to us is a myth, like so much of the modern world. At the very least, it is a concept that has been developed so entirely within the paradigm of capitalist science that outside of this it makes no sense. It is useful to remember this before getting too worked up about it.

Climate change starts life as a scientific theory, but is accepted by many who would in other moments be highly critical of science. Science is not 'pure' or 'objective'. It is subjective and profit driven. It needs results and the more dramatic they are the more funding will become available to the research teams, the more prestige to the individual researchers. And the more urgent and imperative the climate change problem is made to seem, the more money flows in. Individual scientists are surely sincere in their desire to make a difference, that's why they went into climate not biotech. But nevertheless they are subject to market pressure: they translate their findings into climatic apocalypse to persuade others to act but also to ensure the importance of their work is fully realised and remunerated.

These same arguments may be used by oil companies and others with an anti-ecological agenda, but they use them because they know they ring true in the popular consciousness.

It's not just scientists: there must be millions of people making a tidy sum out of the climate change panic wave: politicians, consultants, carbon traders, ad execs, journalists, 'green' businesses and NGOs. Millenarian paranoia, like any other engineered fear, creates growth opportunities. Look how many billions were made out of persuading the world that their computers needed to be 'millennium compliant'. All these people, professional, well-paid, defining for us what is climate change. Whether well-intentioned or not, they are all tied to their respective institutions, and must act according to the role of these institutions within capitalism.

NGOs, for example, market fear. It is their product. The more people worried and distressed by the threat of climate change, the more money flows into Greenpeace's bank accounts. Their job is to hype the crisis, big up the apocalypse, and then reassure the public that our future is best left in their hands. As an antidote to fear they sell hope, the belief that a solution is possible. They

choose words carefully when marketing climate change to us. “Last chance” sells better than “no chance at all”.

This is distinct from the role of the scientists who try to be impartial observers, unaffected by their research and not affecting it either. They write reports in the passive voice to remove themselves from the equation. Uncertainty is acknowledged, but veiled so as not to detract from the authority of the text. Emotions have no place and this warps the story somewhat. Maybe sometime a researcher cried over the destruction they witnessed through their work, maybe what they saw made them so angry they went out at night and put a spanner in the works. But none of this is written down in peer-reviewed journals; instead they construct a formal, passionless, dead theory of climate change. Even when researching the impacts on people’s lives there is nothing personal.

They’re all hard at work shaping and honing the climate change concept:

Politician: “my party has the policies to protect both the climate and the economy”

Car company: “with 40% lower carbon emissions than the average SUV, if you choose our car, you’re really doing your bit”

Hippy Capitalist: “holiday in a luxury yurt this summer, only £300 a week with free reiki session”

Journalist: “...which makes it the windiest November since records began. Tune in next time for another thrilling episode of freak weather fortnightly”

Oil company #1 “It’s all a lie. Global warming will not happen”

Oil company #2 “The crisis is upon us. But oil (sorry, energy) companies are the only players who can act quickly enough now. So you’re gonna have to trust us”

The oil burns, the forests burn, the sun shines, the world turns. People eke out a living, institutions consolidate their power. Climate change leaves the atmosphere, the forests and the icecaps behind and becomes twisted and mangled by capitalistic institutions and ends up a creation of their market needs. Our perceptions of it cannot be isolated from their manipulations, and if we use their concept then we run the risk of simply serving their agenda and reproducing their world.

But hang on a moment! I should point some things out for all those people reading this who can only remember snowfalls from when they were a kid, or whose home was washed away by floods such as have never been seen before. Please don’t stop reading. I have to be clear that I’m not trying to claim that the climate isn’t changing. I refer to climate change as a myth not because it is false or wrong, but because it is so mediated and modified as to be a fiction. If I point out that capitalistic societies need to create apocalyptic threats, then that is certainly not the same as saying that severe problems don’t exist.

Unecological...

If we understand ecology in the way that both academic scientists and traditional societies do, as a set of complex relationships between the components that make up ecological systems then the theory of climate change quickly strays from being an ecological concept... Some concept of ecology remains when trying to model the effects of a changing climate on particular ecosystems, but very soon the globalised nature of the concept requires that everything is made quantifiable: kWh, tons of CO₂ emitted, price per ton, mean global temperature rise, \$\$\$.

Suddenly we have moved from a concern for the unpredictable changes that may occur in ecological systems and their impacts on our societies towards an ethereal and highly alienated apocalyptic paranoia. We are reduced to simply counting the calories.

Take a quick glance at all the un-ecological actions that are being done in the name of climate change: forests are cut down and people evicted from their land to make way for carbon-sucking fast-growing monoculture plantations, nuclear power stations are being reconsidered, new efficient cars and aeroplanes are being produced, rivers are dammed, and plans are made for huge geo-engineering works to increase the planetary albedo (the amount of sunlight reflected by the earth) or the amount of ocean algae. All of this makes perfect sense in the number-logic of climate change, but actually makes no sense at all.

Eco-devastation cannot be reduced to a set of numbers to do this has more to do with preparing climate change's niche in the logic of capitalism than understanding how to minimise the stress our civilisation is placing on the planet's ecosystems. If we accept this ecology-by-numbers then new oppressions such as the seizure of land for new plantations to store carbon begin to seem reasonable, even if only as necessary evils. If monoculture plantations score higher on the green scale than old-growth forests, then it seems that 'thinking globally', as the old slogan goes, is not going to get us out of this mess.

Can such an alienated concept lead to anything other than despair or disempowerment?

"The planet is dying and the only way to save it is if 6 billion people become conscious of what's happening and co-operate, taking action for positive change"

Well maybe it's what's necessary, but it's not a thought that leaves much to be optimistic about. As one individual amongst the six billion, what are you going to do? "I guess I'd better go and install those low energy lightbulbs then..."

Here's a scare story: the Iberian peninsula may well dry up and become an uninhabitable desert due to climate change. How many years left before the apocalypse? Twenty? Fifty? The reality: we don't need to wait so long. Already it is drying up because of intensive water use for intensive agriculture. Forest ecosystems may be changing due to changing climate, but they are also changing because every year property developers go and deliberately burn them down to build a new development of holiday flats or plant a eucalyptus plantation. These threats are far more tangible and immediate than climate change, and a parallel story could be told for any part of the world. Nothing is ever straightforward, but these real, concrete situations that directly affect our lives are much easier to get our heads around and effectively resist. When they are so omnipresent, why look to the distant spectre of climate change to motivate your anger?

Here's an even scarier story: Think for a moment about how and by whom the necessary drastic changes could be brought about to do away with the global oil economy. The easiest to imagine would be some sort of highly authoritarian state or institution, as the more control an organisation has over the population, the quicker it can implement changes. It could obtain popular legitimacy from the resigned belief that it was the only option to prevent crisis. In short some sort of eco-fascism. States are already creating the global threat of terrorism to increase their stranglehold over us, and are quite prepared to do the same with the ecological crisis. It may be our last chance to stop climate change, but is this a future that anyone wants to see? But come on - something must be done!!!!

How do you face up to the end of the world?

“Climate change is the biggest threat facing the world right now, so therefore should be the focus of all our action”

Such a statement could equally come from an official resolution of the G8 heads of state at one of their summits or from someone who has been outside that summit with the black bloc throwing rocks at cops. The difference is that the politicians who have seized some degree of control over billions of lives may actually be able to have some sort of (albeit superficial) influence in the matter. Those of us at the grassroots are really quite limited in what we can directly do, as challenging climate change from below would require the participation of all the world's communities. So the “something must be done” attitude changes very quickly into “somebody must do something”, and people tend to look out of desperation to the greater leverage that those with power have. People who in their everyday lives choose to live in an uncompromising, disobedient and anti-authoritarian way, end up militantly calling for the implementation of the compromised, authoritarian Kyoto protocol or campaigning for some new global agreement even more controlling and far reaching, believing that only states and corporations are sufficiently organised to be able to react in the time-scale necessary.

It is meaningless for those at the grassroots to shout that “something must be done” because Al Gore will do it anyway, and people will always listen to Al Gore more than they will listen to any of us. The only thing it is good for is to make you feel that by shouting, you were actually doing something. “Something must be done” is a knee-jerk reaction to the prediction of global doom, which was anyway a manufactured threat. Lots of things should be done, but is it not better to just get on with doing them in places where the “something” can actually make a concrete difference?

From Climate Change to Climate Action.

Climate change has become very fashionable over the last few years, in north-western Europe at least, and especially in Britain. The newspapers carry stories about climate change every day, people talk about it when they talk about the weather, every heatwave, every heavy rain, is a sign of impending doom. It's the case in grassroots movements as well, summer 2007 sees the second annual 'climate camp' in Britain, trying to build on the winning formula of the temporary-eco-village-cum-resistance-camp in the anti-G8 mobilisation in 2005, and a culture of 'climate action' has grown up.

I don't know what to reply when people from other places ask me about this climate movement that has grown up on the island. Quite often they don't really get why people would put so much effort into climate change when there are so many more immediate and tangible topics which could result in more effective struggles. But not having been part of it, what can I say? Usually I give the generous explanation that appeals to me: that emboldened by victories over the road-building and genetics industries, there are people around who have the utopian belief that it is possible to stop all carbon emissions at source. If this is the case then I certainly wouldn't want to dismiss or condemn such a commitment out of hand: while idealistic beliefs may seem slightly naive, they also have the potential to keep us vital and rebellious, and without that what have we got? But having said this, the activist culture which surrounds this new movement is not without its problems.

Interesting also is the resourcefulness of certain struggles and communities when they appropriate climate change as an excuse for doing what they were doing anyway. An example of this in the UK is the idea of 'transition towns' where people take advantage of the widespread concerns about climate change and peak oil to give legitimacy at a mainstream level to initiatives which would otherwise be marginalised to the 'alternative community'. The things they talk about renewable energy projects, permaculture, local currencies, straw-bale homeopathy clinics would probably happen anyway, as there are many more good reasons to do them than just because of climate change. And people who want to make their towns sustainable are quite adept at jumping on any bandwagon that can increase the scope of their projects: look how much mileage was made out of Agenda 21, a fairly insipid document that came out of the UN greenwash summit in Rio in 1992. Good on them for their opportunism, taking advantage of the agenda set by institutional groups to promote their projects. There's nothing wrong with this at all, but it is clearly distinct from defining a radical agenda for ourselves.

But if we understand climate change as a global and multifaceted problem, does that not encourage us to think more holistically everything's connected to climate change, it's not just a single issue? Well it does seem to encourage this to some extent, at least in terms of resource use, as the need to simultaneously challenge your lifestyle and resist growth of the oil machine. Campaigners against a new road may remind people that climate change is one good reason among many not to build more roads, people living in a low-impact community in the woods can use it as an argument to convince locals of the necessity of their existence, those fighting migration control can describe how ecological destruction is forcing many more people away from their lands. A lot can be linked to climate change, but not everything.

The mess we're in is more complicated and far far worse than the over-consumption of resources burning up the planet.

The climate justice movement also has some important points to make in its analysis of climate change: the rich are disproportionate in causing the problem, the poor are the first to suffer. This may inspire rage and fury, but the problem is the same: on a global scale, where is there room for those at the bottom of the pile to act? As the anger subsides into resignation we realise that climate change was no more than an instructive tool to explain injustice to those who don't have to deal with it on a daily basis....

A global problem of problems needs a global movement of movements...or not.

Climate change appeals because it threatens global ecological collapse, and that's something that the activists feel everybody should take an interest in. It's made more interesting when it is combined with peak oil, the logical-extension-of-economic-theory which says that the rising cost of oil extraction will destroy the economy. So there's huge scope for brooding conversations about the fate of the planet.

"Which will hit us first, economic or ecological collapse?"
Everyone has a stake in the apocalypse.

Such a grand threat can provoke a range of attitudes, the most common being the missionary position:

"we have one last chance", "together we can save the world"

It seems there is something of this in the British Climate Camp organisation their posters reassure us "you are not fucked" in big friendly letters, another flier backs it up: "we're not toast yet".

This really doesn't seem to fit in with everyday experience, to such a degree as to be totally ridiculous. Clearly we are all totally fucked in so many ways fucked in the head, living in a fucked up society that's fucking up the planet for no hope of change. Apart from the nauseating language which evokes the gung-ho spirit of plucky brits in the blitz, the claims made are blatant deception. Why would someone write something like that? Even the numbers are made-up: the organisers of the climate camp 2006 claimed 600 participants, which is quite a lot, yet the publicity for 2007 says "thousands" participated in the previous camp.

What, they may argue, is wrong with creating a bit of optimism? In such a hopeless situation people won't be inspired to act if they don't have something to cling to. It's just a little white lie between friends. The 'last chance' story is not entirely without foundation after all: if we believe the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change then we might be alright if emissions are cut by 60-80% over the next 30 years.

Greenpeace try to convince us that it's the "last chance to save the earth" in order to bolster their corporate profits; when activists make similar claims it's because they're trying to build social movements. That's why there's so many glossy fliers hyping up the event, telling us it's going to be really cool, inflating the number of participants and so on. The truth is not as important as the effect the words have.

The theory is that big problems need big movements: so the climate camp aims to attract as many people as possible. All are welcome, it's all democratic, consensus decisions between hundreds of people, everyone has an equal voice. If the local MP says he supports the climate camp then that's surely a good thing, isn't it the cops are less likely to evict, and it gives legitimacy to the camp so more people come.

One of the aims of the climate camp is popular education, and I guess it is interesting to provoke discussions between people from different backgrounds and with different presuppositions. On the streets and runways, however, the forms of action can only become more stage-managed and less interesting. Climate change is so global, so vague yet all-encompassing that the 'broad church' approach can only depoliticise, appealing to a lowest common denominator to the point of blandness.

It's surely the dream of those who get off on being leaders of social movements it alleviates the frustration of seeing your world collapse about you to see a friendly movement leader telling you that there is something you can do. So they lie to the masses, hoping that their movements grow.

There is a growing and disturbing trend that has been lingering around radical circles over the last few years, based on the theory that blind positivity can lead to interesting and unexpected successes. Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's books have provided some of the theoretical bases for this, and it has been taken up by some who want to unite the masses under the banner of precarity, organise migrants and mobilise for summits. For many coming from the left wing tradition, it has been the message of hope that they were wanting to hear at a time when their ideologies seemed more moribund than ever.

The theory goes that in an increasingly confusing post-modern world, reality is no longer a concept worth worrying about. Thus theoreticians who should understand capitalism well enough to know better, write that a global basic income or free movement for all is an achievable goal. They may not believe it themselves, but ostensibly want to inspire others to believe in it, claiming that the 'moments of excess' generated by such utopian dreams will give rise to potent movements for change.

Maybe that's the theoretical rationale for hyping climate change. It is certainly a suitable testing ground for the politics of manufactured hope, being so alienated from our actual everyday realities. But whilst the new movement politicians - facilitators not dictators - watch their movements grow, there is still a case for living in the real world.

We are living through various crises - ecological collapse, social disintegration, technological control- and we need all our powers of observation and trying to understand in order to survive and resist this onslaught. Stressing about the coming apocalypse, and pretending that it can be solved by goodwill and wishful thinking is just a distraction from this.

No future

Sometimes being a little more honest, and acknowledging how desperate and hopeless the situation we are in actually is, can actually be more inspirational than convincing yourself of the possibility of salvation. It won't attract the people with most to lose, those who don't want to be any more than concerned citizens. But who needs them and their self-sacrifice anyway, we can build something more genuine.

Over the last 50 years at least, the most interesting counter-cultural currents have always developed with a background assumption of desperation. When your world is shit then you learn to live for the moment, living immediately and creatively. The beat generation and the original hippies sprang up in a time when everyone knew that the world could be senselessly destroyed by some lunatics pressing nuclear buttons. Punk grew from the city streets where the acceptable options for urban youth were not worth following. Travellers, road protesters, squatters: all these potent movements share a common supposition of 'no future' - that we have no place in the society that is offered up, that nothing good can happen other than what we create for ourselves here and now, making islands of sanity in a world gone off course.

No future is not just limited to subcultures, it exists throughout society. Many many people don't see the point of the modern world any more and have no interest in worthy schemes to save it. The non-believers almost certainly outnumber the believers, just they don't shout about it so much.

I've no wish to glamorise despair. But to realise our alienation and impotency at the planetary level can lead us in various different directions. Either we resign ourselves to apathy and inaction, or we take action where we can, empowering ourselves and giving ourselves hope at the level at which we can actually make a difference. We take control of our lives, building a present which we can live in. And when this comes under attack, we resist harder, knowing that it is something that we have created, and that if it is gone we have nothing to lose.

Faced with something like climate change, we don't accept how it is defined for us from above; we learn to understand it in terms of what we already know. We've seen ecological destruction by now, we understand the imperative of defending what we still have. We live in a society of domination and control and so can recognise the potential for authoritarianism disguised as ecology and so brace ourselves to resist it. We notice that the many fronts of capital's war force people into movement and so accept that our communities will have to change. We watch the world becoming ever more unpredictable and realise the need to be able to react quickly to new threats, which requires strong relationships between us and a continual desire to understand ourselves and the world around us.

Truth is not attainable: objectivity will always be an illusion. Reality, on the other hand, understood as what we see when we stop deliberately blinding ourselves to what is going on around us, is an option. In a society where so many people around us choose to leave the blinkers on, this kind of reality is maybe the first vital step to freedom.

We don't lack information, it's just hard to accept. In the same way that it becomes easy to pretend that sexual abuse is not taking place in your immediate surroundings, it is also easy to believe that activism can save us from climate change. But in neither of these situations does the purposeful ignorance actually take us forward. Only engaging with what we know is there, including our own fears and inadequacies, could really lead to a practical and honest vision of possible ways out.

There is no future: whether due to climate change and peak oil or the general social and ecological disintegration that is so clearly happening all around us. Smash things up and burn them down because we know we need to eliminate them from our world not because it's some democratically agreed campaign objective. Learn new skills for sustainable living because we thirst for knowledge to reclaim our lives, not as a demonstration project photo-op to show the journalists.

It's a totally serious proposition: leave climate change to the people who invented it - scientists and businessmen, politicians and NGOs. It's not for us. Let's instead take control of our lives, resist the new roads and airports when we can, but also recognise that whatever happens to the climate, the world is changing for the worse faster and faster and we are always going to be facing new attacks. To survive them we need to be strong in ourselves and in our communities. We need to live out our anger and act out our desires in the present and not let ourselves be controlled by someone else's apocalyptic vision of the future.

<http://www.sinkingfeeling.net>