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Constructing a Positive Lifeworld in Ecological Anxiety: A
Grounded Theory Study of Climate Change Media

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Kurzfassung

Die heutige Zeit – oft als Anthropozän bezeichnet – ist geprägt von einem sich beschleunigenden Klimawandel (KW), global vernetzten Medien und anhaltender kultureller Enteignung indigener Gruppen. In diesem Zusammenhang hat sich ökologische Angst (ÖA) als weit verbreitete affektive Reaktion herausgebildet. Frühere phänomenologische Forschungen haben „epistemische Ausbreitung“ als ein Merkmal von ÖA identifiziert und beschreiben damit eine kognitive Tendenz, den KW mit verschiedenen Lebensbereichen in Verbindung zu bringen, sowie eine verstärkte Informationssuche. Diese Arbeit untersucht, welche soziokulturellen Narrative die Erfahrung von ÖA prägen und strukturieren.

Unter Verwendung eines Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) Ansatz, der sich an der Phänomenologie orientiert, analysiert die Arbeit einen Korpus klimabezogener Bücher, die von Personen mit ÖA als hilfreich für die Sinnfindung zitiert werden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen eine Gegenüberstellung der industriellen Lebenswelt mit einer relationalen Alternative, die oft durch indigene ontologische Frameworks artikuliert wird. Die industrielle Lebenswelt wird wegen ihrer entfremdenden Wirkung kritisiert, die in der objektivistischen Wissenschaft und der Kirche institutionalisiert und in den Ideologien des Kapitalismus und Neoliberalismus verankert ist. Die Attraktivität der indigen inspirierten Lebenswelt, die als Alternative präsentiert wird, scheint sich um eine verstärkte Relationalität zu drehen. Als solche offenbaren die Erzählungen rund um die Lebenswelt im Klimakorpus-Text eine tiefere Dichotomie des Übergangs von einer atomistischen zu einer relationalen Lebenswelt. Der KW wird aufgrund seiner allumfassender Natur als destabilisierende Kraft der atomistischen Lebenswelt identifiziert.

Die Ergebnisse deuten ferner darauf hin, dass epistemische Ausbreitung als dicht vernetztes Muster in den Texten des Klimakorpus existiert, wobei sich der KW auf vier Erfahrungsbereiche erstreckt: Zeitlichkeit, Emotionen, Narrative und Identität. Für jeden Bereich zeigen die Texte des Klimakorpus eine Entfremdung in der gelebten Erfahrung der industriellen Kultur, im Gegensatz zu der Vernetztheit in relationalen Kulturen. Epistemische Ausbreitung scheint ein Aspekt einer relationalen Weltanschauung zu sein. Dieser kognitive Aspekt der ÖA wird daher als Reaktion auf eine Diskrepanz zwischen der durch den KW geforderten relationalen Sinnfindung und einer atomistischen industriellen Lebenswelt interpretiert, die nach wie vor dominiert. Anstatt eine kognitive Abnormalität darzustellen, erscheint epistemische Ausbreitung, wie sie sich in wiederkehrenden Themen und

Erzählmustern im Korpus artikuliert, als Versuch, eine relationale Ontologie in einem soziokulturellen Kontext zu bewohnen, der diese noch nicht unterstützt.

Die These kommt zu dem Schluss, dass ÖA nicht allein als individuelles psychologisches Phänomen angemessen, verstanden oder behandelt werden kann. Das Muster von ÖA mit epistemischer Ausbreitung scheint mit dem Übergang von einer atomistischen zu einer relationalen Weltanschauung zusammenzufallen. Als solches spiegelt es eine umfassendere Krise der soziokulturellen Sinnfindung im Anthropozän wider, in den neu entstehenden relationalen Weltanschauungen in Spannung zu bestehenden Lebensweltstrukturen stehen. Die Auseinandersetzung mit ÖA erfordert daher möglicherweise neben individuellen Bewältigungsstrategien auch kollektive und kulturelle Veränderungen.

Abstract

The contemporary moment—often described as the Anthropocene—is marked by accelerating climate change (CC), globally connected media, and cultural dispossessions of Indigenous groups. Within this context, ecological anxiety (EA) has emerged as a widespread affective response. Previous phenomenological research has identified ‘epistemic sprawl’ as a characteristic of EA, describing a cognitive tendency to link CC to multiple domains of life, alongside heightened information-seeking. This thesis investigates what sociocultural narratives shape and structure this sprawling experience of EA.

Using a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach informed by phenomenology, the thesis analyses a corpus of climate-related books cited by individuals with EA as helpful for sense-making. The findings show a juxtaposition of the Industrial lifeworld with a relational alternative often articulated through Indigenous ontological frameworks. The Industrial lifeworld is critiqued for its alienating effects, institutionalized in objectivist science and the church, and encoded in ideologies of capitalism and neoliberalism. The desirability of the Indigenous-inspired lifeworld that is presented as alternative seemingly revolves around increased relationality. As such, the narratives regarding the lifeworld in the climate corpus text reveal a deeper dichotomy of transitioning from an atomistic lifeworld to a relational one. CC is identified as the destabilizing force of the atomistic lifeworld due to its all-encompassing nature.

The findings further suggest that epistemic sprawl exists as a densely interconnected pattern in the climate corpus texts, whereby climate change extends into four experiential domains: temporality, emotions, narratives, and identity. For each domain, the climate corpus texts present an alienation in the lived experience of the node in the Industrial culture, as opposed to an interconnectedness in relational cultures. Epistemic sprawl seems to be an aspect of a relational worldview. This cognitive aspect of EA is therefore interpreted as a response to a mismatch between relational sense-making demanded by climate change and an atomistic Industrial lifeworld that remains dominant. Rather than constituting a cognitive abnormality, epistemic sprawl as articulated across recurring themes and narrative patterns in the climate corpus texts appears as an attempt to inhabit a relational ontology within a sociocultural context that does not yet support it.

The thesis concludes that EA cannot be adequately understood or addressed as an individual psychological phenomenon alone. The pattern of EA with epistemic sprawl seems to coincide with the transition from an atomistic to a relational worldview. As such, it reflects a broader crisis of sociocultural sense-making in the Anthropocene, in which emerging

relational worldviews remain in tension with existing lifeworld structures. Addressing EA may therefore require collective and cultural transformations alongside individual coping strategies.

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AI declaration

AI was used in the process of writing this thesis in the following ways:

Consensus (Consensus, 2025) was used to locate literature at the start of a new topic-exploration. Consensus is an AI search engine that only searches peer-reviewed academic literature.

ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025) was used as editing help. The prompt used for this was: This piece of text was created for a thesis at master's level. Please critically evaluate it on flow, structure, and nuanced language. Refrain from re-writing it.

*If your mind were only a slightly greener thing,
we'd drown you in meaning.*

-

Richard Powers (2018)

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1. Naming and Framing

1.1 Climate Change Terminology

Many terms have been suggested to describe the current environmental state. Naming considerations are important as different words have different connotations which can influence public opinion and actions (Schuldt et al., 2017). *Global warming* for instance insinuates that only the temperature rise is a problematic result of climate change, and may lead people to overlook, for example, increased precipitation or ocean acidification as direct effects (Lineman et al., 2015). Especially in north-western Europe this may be relevant, as many people may consider a few degrees warmer winters and summers to be a treat. Yet, countries such as Ireland and the U.K. may experience dramatic drops in temperature with the slowing of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) (Jackson et al., 2015).

Climate change seems to generally be the most used term and avoids the above confusion. However, the normal fluctuations of the climate cause some trouble for the term, especially in climate change sceptics. For example, rural farmers may indicate lack of worry about climate change since they have experienced the climate as always changing anyway (Ricart et al., 2019). It is for precisely this allowance of denialism and inability of the term to cause a widespread sense of urgency, that Timothy Morton (2013; CCT4) prefers the term *global warming*. After all, climate change is an effect caused by global warming. Still, considering that *global warming* may leave certain climate effects underrecognized, *climate change* seems more apt.

Other terms such as *climate crisis* and *global environmental crisis* (GEC) are used as well. However, the word crisis has the connotation of a sudden event with a beginning and an end (Henig & Knight, 2023), which may not always suit the lived experience of people, especially European populations. *Permacrisis* has sometimes been used in climate conversations as well, however in meaning it is closer to *polycrisis* referring to non-climate events as well. In public opinion too, it is only loosely connected to the climate (Zatti, 2024). *The crisis of climate change caused by anthropogenic global warming* may therefore be a more comprehensive, but unwieldy terminology. Taking all points into consideration, climate change and climate crisis seem to be the most known, writer and reader friendly terms that also best cover the crux of the issue. Therefore, this thesis will speak of climate change (CC) and climate crisis.

1.2 Describing the Cultural Dichotomy

The world is generally described as being culturally and economically divided into opposing camps: *Western* versus the rest, *Global North* versus *Global South*, *developed* versus *developing* etc. (Wallerstein, 2004). All these terms have different connotations that colour our perception of the involved countries and so it is important to consider the term used to describe this dichotomy (of course, the dichotomy is deserving of criticism in and of itself, but such a discussion is out of scope for this thesis).

Western versus the rest is a popular and pervasive description. However, this division is becoming less useful as countries all around the world are developing into ‘Western’ standards of progress (Horner & Hulme, 2019). Furthermore, it seemingly assumes a Europe-centred map (Khan et al., 2022), yet Australia and New Zealand are deemed ‘Western’ despite their eastern placements on the map. Furthermore, East-Asian countries have in recent years achieved similar or even exceeding levels of welfare and technological advancement. As such, the term ‘Western’ has become increasingly confusing, geographically, economically and culturally. The Global North versus Global South suffers from similar geographical confusion (Sims, 2024). However, it does seem to be a more elegant solution and in terms of climate is useful as the climate effects are likely to vary somewhat accordingly to the North versus South division, as well as reflecting the same place-based focus as the many climate-related emotions.

Instead of geographic division, sometimes the dichotomy is named in terms of progress, for example as developed versus developing countries. This carries the connotations that development and progress is a linear process that places ‘developed’ countries (read: Northern Europe, U.S.A.) at the head of the development race, while developing countries are slowly catching up to reach those same standards (Farias, 2019). This division disregards cultural differences in terms of what countries value as well as in their different achievements. As will become clear later in this thesis, this dichotomy is hurtful and misguided. *Industrialised* versus *Non-Industrialised* seems to offer a pragmatic solution to these problematic terms (Haraguchi et al., 2017; Saba & Ngpah, 2023). It carries a connotation of increased technological, logistic, and modern applications being present in a country. It further offers a way to draw comparisons within countries between their different regions. Especially for this thesis, the dichotomy between nature versus technology and industry is often made.

W.E.I.R.D. is also often used in research (notably as the preferred term of research population criticism in psychology) (Henrich et al., 2010). It stands for western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic societies. As such, it clearly demarks the involved countries, despite the inclusion of western as a descriptor. However, some countries, such as India, may have large internal differences in industrialisation, in ways relevant for this thesis. The term W.E.I.R.D. would then not be applicable according to general conceptions and understanding of the term (Muthukrishna et al., 2020). Therefore, the Industrial versus Non-Industrial dichotomy was chosen as the description of choice for this thesis. However, sometimes other descriptions will still be referred to, particularly if Industrial versus Non-Industrial does not seem to fully capture the dichotomy intended by the author of the original source. Especially the Global North versus Global South will be referred to if the intent is to describe geographic differences.

1.3 On Indigeneity

Another ostensible dichotomy running through the thesis is the Industrial versus Indigenous distinction. The classification of ‘Indigenous’ calls for clarification as well, to avoid a romanticised or homogenised view. Leading Indigenous scholars have offered the definition:

“Indigenous peoples’ refer to the nearly 400 million people across the world whose communities, polities, and nations exercised self-determination according to their own social, cultural, and ecological systems – that is, governance systems prior to periods in which other human groups dominated them through various combinations of imperial invasion, colonial exploitation and occupation, and settlement of their territories” (Whyte et al., 2018, p. 154).

In addition to this governance-based definition, Indigeneity, as referred to in this thesis, also refers to a different worldview:

This worldview is characterized by assumptions of the interconnectedness of humans to each other and to the earth; spiritness, energy, or God as the universal force binding together all things in existence; and balance and harmony among all animate and inanimate entities of the world as the point and purpose of human agency” (Watson, 2022, p. 686).

These two definitions combined highlight two relevant aspects that distinguish Indigeneity from Industrial being. Firstly, Indigenous communities have been systematically violated. Stating that Indigenous wisdom has been lost underrepresents the (continuing) colonial exploitation and repression that has led to a state of endangerment of Indigenous communities (Fine et al., 2023). The ecological trauma that Industrial societies are only now being acutely faced with, Indigenous communities have been facing for hundreds of years already (Boyd et al., 2023). Representation of Indigenous ideas, especially as a non-indigenous researcher, therefore, requires additional sensitivity. Indigenous communities often follow different ontologies, such that Industrial concepts cannot be directly translated and applied to understand Indigenous ways of being (Pernau, 2021; Raippalinna et al., 2023). Similarly, Indigenous knowledge cannot just be extracted and misappropriated for an Industrial context (Fine et al., 2023).

The other aspect that highlights important differences is the interconnectedness pointed out in the second definition by Watson (2022). Industrial societies tend to function along dichotomies that separate and contrast entities. Indigenous communities, on the other hand, are relational and value harmony. This is not to state that all Indigenous groups always live in harmony with nature, but they do tend to have greater ecological understanding and adaptation (Buonvivere, 2024). The contrast of Indigenous versus Industrial could therefore also be represented by *relational* versus *extractive*. However, it is important to note that Indigenous communities do not live in an idealised separate Indigenous world. They often exist within an Industrial context, and Industrial power hierarchies (Raippalinna et al., 2023).

1.4 Reflection on the Research Focus

A persistent issue with CC research is that it focuses mostly on W.E.I.R.D. countries. Regrettably, some might say then, this thesis will add to this overly represented body of research. However, the research aims of the thesis require this focus. The investigation is heavily inspired by and draws on the results of the Oblak et al. (2025a) study, which was conducted in Slovenia, which, while being a post-socialist country (Godina, 2014) is currently solidly placed among the W.E.I.R.D. Since the focus of the research is elucidating the narrative creation of the EA lifeworld, the research and theorizing needs to be done within the context of the original data, i.e. an Industrialised culture.

Calls have been made to provincialize the Anthropocene and its emotional effects (Pernau, 2021), which is especially important for an issue such as EA, as the global issue of CC has large differences in local manifestations (Althor et al., 2016). Generally, countries in

the Global South are expected to be facing more catastrophic effects on a shorter timescale. Yet, most of the fossil fuel burning that is accelerating CC has been done in the Industrialised countries in the Global North, placing them ahead in terms of economic development (Hickel, 2020). Emotionally, these differences are seemingly reflected in anger being more common in the Global South and guilt being more common in the Global North (Kleres & Wettergren, 2017). Still, this thesis is an important contribution to the large body of W.E.I.R.D. focused climate research. Firstly, it focuses on an emotion that is characteristic of this temporality and locality. Secondly, it highlights an under investigated aspect of this phenomenon – the narrative creation of the associated lifeworld. Nevertheless, it is of vital importance to also emphasize that these results are not generalisable to the experience of non-Industrialised countries, and perhaps even non-European countries.

2. Introduction

In 2016, Greenpeace brought a piano, a famous composer and a whole camera crew to the arctic circle to film a performance meant to be a rallying cry. Ludovico Einaudi composed *Elegy for the Arctic* for the event. In the recording of the performance the haunting melody echoes over the surrounding ice, and in the background, a part of the glacier can be seen calving off just as the melody develops into a crescendo of deeper notes (Greenpeace, 2016). It is an image of our times, the tension between what we have achieved and what still seems unattainable. This tension—between technological and civil triumph and environmental precarity—frames the emotional landscape examined in this thesis. We are technologically advanced enough to have a piano be played by a musician floating on a platform in the arctic, recorded with crisp quality and broadcast worldwide (22 million views so far!). Yet, we feel like helpless bystanders watching glaciers calve and melt at an unprecedented rate, seemingly unable to reckon with our destructive influence on the climate.

Elegy for the Arctic was framed by Greenpeace to be the musical expression of 8 million worried voices calling for changes (Jiménez & Tellnes, 2016). These worries, and other emotions, for the climate encroach on increasingly more lives, making it a characteristic of our contemporary existence. This introduction situates the emotional landscape of our age, the Anthropocene, by exploring its temporal dimensions, health impacts, and the overlapping crises that define it. Once situated, several emotions related to CC will be elucidated, with particular attention paid to ecological anxiety. Following this I outline my starting

assumptions, grounded in the research that inspired this thesis, as well as phenomenological and philosophical considerations.

2.1 Temporality

The historical, cultural and temporal context is vital to any understanding of an emotional phenomenon. Emotions research has moved its lens of investigation from internal forces to the forces existing in between individuals in a wider cultural landscape (Pernau, 2021). Therefore, the sociocultural context is slowly taking a more central position in emotions research. Still, scientific discourse, dominated as it is by European concepts (Raippalinna et al., 2023), shapes our conception of relevant emotions to study. Social and scientific conceptualisations can influence the way mental health phenomena are identified, interpreted, and classified (Hacking, 1996). The 8 million voices of *Elegy for the Arctic* were expressing a global, and contemporary worry. Just as the story of Einaudi's performance is a work of the time, this thesis, too, is a result of our age, commonly called the Anthropocene¹.

The 'Anthropocene' as a label for this age builds upon the evidence that humanity has become a veritable geological force² (Pernau, 2021). The name was popularized by Crutzen (2002), who suggested this era started in 1784 with the invention of the steam engine. According to him, markers of this age are human-produced hazardous chemicals, as well as geological changes such as deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, and fossil fuel burning. Humanity has extensively changed the earth, with recent longitudinal research suggesting that humanity's footprint almost certainly covers more than 85% of the earth's land surface (Robbins & Moore, 2013; Sanderson et al., 2022). The most daunting aspect of the footprint is that it will likely outlast us, with nuclear waste predicted to remain problematic as far as 100,000 years into the future (Morton, 2013; CCT4).

¹ In 2024 the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS), the official organisation in charge of geologic timescale, voted against adopting the Anthropocene, as the current age starting in the 1950s (Voosen, 2024). The ICS stated that proof for the Anthropocene was not clear enough and also questioned the specific timing. They suggested that perhaps the start of agriculture, or the colonisation of the new world were also potential markers of significant human impact on geography. Furthermore, they proposed that instead of human impact marking a different era, it should be marked as a specific event. Nevertheless, the term Anthropocene has caught on and is commonly used in scientific and general communication. Therefore, I will also continue to use this term for the thesis.

² The notion of Anthropocene has received criticism for its implication of guilt for all of humanity. Realistically, certain privileged groups have contributed much more to CC, and the start of the Anthropocene, than others. To reflect these power hierarchies, other terms have been suggested: Capitalocene to reflect the exploitative forces of capitalism, thantocene to reflect the ecological damage caused by wars, thermocene to reflect the burning of fossil fuel that has accelerated global warming, and androcene to reflect the destructive values of the patriarchy (Daigle, 2022).

2.2 Climate & Health

However, even in the near future we will see increasingly often and extreme CC effects. We should expect several potential emergency situations:

“(1) extreme heat (increased global mean surface temperature, heat waves); (2) climate change-related water disasters (CCRWDs) (flooding, hurricanes and coastal storms); (3) winter storms, extreme snow and severe CAPE (i.e., convective available potential energy) thunderstorms, tornadoes; (4) droughts; (5) wildfires” (Gawrych, 2022, p. 904).

The first two decades of this century saw a doubling of climate-related emergencies as compared to the 1980-1999 period, with floods and storms being the most commonly occurring events (The Human Cost of Disasters, 2020). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has estimated that 3.3 to 3.6 billion of the world’s population are highly vulnerable to the effects of CC, and that the vulnerability of humans and the wider ecosystem are interdependent (Pörtner et al., 2022).

Besides obvious effects of such emergencies in terms of danger to life and loss of habitable areas, food and water security, climate effects impact health in myriad other ways (Lee et al., 2019; Ramadan et al., 2023; Rocque et al., 2021). With rising temperatures, heat related health and mortality effects are more prevalent. Pollution from industry, desertification, and wildfires have negative respiratory effects. Epidemics are also likely to increase due to CC leading to better life-cycle conditions for vectors (e.g. mosquitos) and pathogens. Deforestation may further increase the prevalence of epidemics by decreasing biodiversity and increasing chances of transmission of pathogens from animals to humans.

Not only are these direct effects creating a hazardous situation for humanity, disproportionally so for populations in the Global South, but several indirect effects are added on top of this (Walinski et al., 2023). CC related disasters cause considerable destruction of habitat, infrastructure, livelihood, and natural resources. The loss of these life-support sources exerts threat and stress on our psychosocial being, as well as wider support systems. For more extreme disasters, this may escalate into social disruptions such as migration, violence, starvation and epidemics. Naturally, the downstream effects then are significant increases in mental disorders and mental health crises. Negative effects of extreme climate events on mental health have been observed in multiple studies (Chique et al., 2021; Ramadan et al.,

2023; White et al., 2023). Mental health can even remain significantly poor long after returning home if the disaster was experienced at a tourist destination, or if the event was experienced prenatally (Walinski et al., 2023). The lack of focus on psychological care in standard post-disaster aid is therefore notably concerning (Massazza et al., 2023).

2.3 Polycrisis

Beyond considerable (mental) health effects, these crises intersect with political and economic systems, forming a challenging landscape to navigate. The emotional temporality of this age with such climate disasters as its background has been evocatively labelled ‘Anthropocene horror’ by Clark (2020). A term meant to capture the response to the interconnected web of disastrous events where CC effects, pandemics, wars, and global financial breakdowns are interlinked. It has been suggested that the situation is unprecedented in terms of speed and scale of the disasters due to intense globalization and neoliberal policies with their focus on limitless economic growth (Henig & Knight, 2023). Another label for this age, popularized by Adam Tooze (2022), is polycrisis. The label ‘poly’ is apt, but ‘crisis’ here might suggest a sense of sudden disaster events, whereas what might truly be inspiring Anthropocene horror is the slow violence (Ahmann, 2018) we are facing. Environmental degradation and Industrial pollution are incremental changes, often not receiving media attention until they have resulted in severe effects. Thus, slow violence in a world that moves in a time of fast-paced global polycrisis results in an anxiety-inspiring sense of horror at pervasive existential threats.

The sense that the threat is permeating every aspect of daily life is further strengthened through the instant and constant global media connections that technological advancements have made possible. Through repeated reports of CC events people may vicariously experience such events despite them usually being quite distant (Ojala et al., 2021), especially for audiences in the Global North. Increased experienced personal proximity makes the threat seem more personally relevant. In this way, media channels can become risk amplification stations, especially when they emphasize more catastrophic CC effects (Shao & Yu, 2023). Coincidentally, this is the type of news that is preferred in the current sensationalist, attention economy on social media platforms (Ali et al., 2019; Robertson et al., 2023) Results on the link between CC news exposure and anxiety levels are heterogeneous, but more in-depth research suggests that the valence of the message may be an important factor. Ogunbode et al. (2022) found that news about CC impacts (negative) was correlated with anxiety, but news about CC solutions (positive) was not. Taken together, these

findings suggest that the media's constant coverage of climate stories can function as a source of amplified fear and catastrophising, but it can also be a catalyst for pro-environmental action. The framing of the story seems to be an important determinant for the story's effect.

Furthermore, humanity is dealing not just with the emotional fall-out of the severity of these crises and the realisation of how much more inhospitable the earth will become, but also of humanity's causal role in it. This combination is blurring the temporal boundaries of the Anthropocene horror that we normally like to place so neatly around our emotional experiences. The people who freely engaged in greenhouse gas emissions, the people whose behaviour we are now experiencing the consequences of, are long dead, and while living were unaware of the negative effects of their behaviour (Jones & Davison, 2021). To whom can we direct our anger then? At the same time, our future seems sometimes to be certainly filled with existential uncertainties (Pernau, 2021). Moreover, looking around at our present, we are overwhelmed with a deluge of extinctions, a severe, and irreversible occurrence (Rolston, 1985). It highlights how our future is cemented by past and present (in)actions. How even if we suddenly fully adapted a sustainable lifestyle, the polluting effects of past humanity would continue to worsen the environmental condition. Considering this emotional turmoil that permeates our age, it is no wonder that Louv (2012) warns for a "quickeningspiral of mental illness" (p. 64).

2.4 Eco-feelings

In 2024, Greenpeace repeated its arctic performance concept, this time with a joint performance by Jacob Collier and Aurora (Greenpeace, 2024). Where the floating platform in 2016 was still decorated with white cubes reminiscent of icebergs, in 2024 it was undecorated and grey. This is mirrored in the background, which also is markedly less snow-covered. The performance is longer, with a calmer melody. It feels less evocative, more dormant. Until the last note of the song, which is not a note, but a harmonized primal scream jointly voiced by the singers. Is this more representative of the emotional state we find ourselves in – driven by global inaction into a state of anxious paralysis punctuated by moments of acute frustration and panic? Researchers have increasingly expended energy into answering this question and delimitating the fine minutiae of emotions arising from CC awareness.

In recognition of the interconnectedness between emotions and the natural world, research has increasingly focused on conceptualising and researching eco and climate emotions. The difference between these two is that eco-emotions refer to emotions felt in response to changes in a wide variety of planetary boundaries such as ocean acidification or

stratospheric ozone depletion (Voški et al., 2023). Climate emotions, on the other hand, are emotions felt in response to CC specifically (Pihkala, 2022b). A cornucopia of differently named climate emotions has been described by researchers, creating a fragmented and sometimes inconsistent field of classifications. Furthermore, it should be recognized that, in the Global North, social norms, notably rationality, impede emotion research in these areas. In this normative framework, emotions, especially negative ones, are less noticed by both participants and researchers (Boler, 1999; Pihkala, 2022a).

Nevertheless, efforts by Pihkala (2022b) have resulted in an initial taxonomy of climate emotions that may steer future research. He divided the emotions into 12 different categories, balancing both positive emotions (surprise-related emotions such as awe, and other general positive emotions such as hope and compassion), and negative emotions (threat and sadness, but also hostility and disgust). However, he also highlights how climate emotions are rarely so clear-cut and tend to manifest as complex compositions of different combinations. Especially, trauma, grief, and anxiety related emotions have received frequent attention in CC related research.

Ecological grief, and ecological anxiety seem to be closely connected in characteristics but differentiated in temporal focus. Both are place-based emotions, as explicitly reflected in the coinage of solastalgia, concerned with the perceived or expected loss of the ecological home environment (Pihkala, 2022b). As such, cultural and occupational influences may be present in these emotions, with people more deeply connected to nature through cultural practices or occupational activities, potentially feeling them more strongly (Thoma et al., 2021). However, despite the strong place-orientations, both these emotions have been often encountered in research with participants in the Global North, whose home environment may not be so endangered by CC yet (Kałwak & Weihgold, 2022). Importantly, feeling climate-related emotions is not concerning; it only becomes relevant to psychopathology when the individual can no longer self-manage (Ramadan et al., 2023).

A sub-concept of ecological grief specifically related to landscapes that has received considerable media and research attention is solastalgia. This condition was named by Albrecht et al. (2007) and refers to the sensation of homesickness experienced when considering the home-environment that has been and will be lost due to CC (Albrecht, 2016). Thus, these individuals feel dislocated, even when they remain at home. Unlike what the name similarity to nostalgia suggests, “solastalgia is not about looking back to some gold past, [...] it is the ‘lived experience’ of the loss of the present” (Albrecht, 2016, p. 48). Narratives around solastalgia linguistically centre around ‘environment’, ‘home’,

‘distress’, and ‘loss’ (Galway et al., 2019), words which illustrate the core experience of solastalgia³. Furthermore, the narratives have also developed to include not just the home environment, but other beloved landscapes as well. To disentangle the phenomenological and conceptually similar climate emotions then, it can be stated that ecological grief concerns the totality of ecological loss, solastalgia is evoked by loss of the ‘home’ landscape and rooted in the present, and ecological anxiety (EA) is a reaction to the anticipated ecological loss and existential uncertainties of the future.

2.4.5. Ecological Anxiety

The American Psychological Association report from 2017 highlights how EA is not just a reaction to anticipated loss, but a ‘chronic fear of environmental doom’ (Clayton et al., 2017, p. 68). The intensity of this experience finds its roots in the unique qualities of CC (Clayton, 2020). Firstly, it objectively is a serious threat that will impact everyone one way or another, so to some extent, worrying about this would be rational. Secondly, it is not a single climate event, but an ongoing threat that is also progressively getting worse, so adaptation needs to be continuously invested in. Thirdly, there are many uncertainties regarding the future impacts, making anxiety more likely than fear. Lastly, it is a global threat, which introduces a social component, such that the reactions of others may guide our behaviours and responses as well.

Soutar and Wand (2022) summarise the specific worries in their report on the results of multiple qualitative studies. Participants revealed worries for their livelihoods, referring to food, water, and economic security, amongst others. Their worries also extended beyond themselves into future generations and the broken world they would inherit. This marked focus on future generations, which was mostly present in the Global North, reveals an interpretation of CC more as a future threat rather than a currently existing threat. This worry is also visible in the many findings that people with EA tend to not want to have children for environmental reasons (Boluda-Verdú et al., 2022). Relatedly, worry for apocalyptic futures was also frequently reported in qualitative work, an orientation that may be fuelled by the omnipresent dystopian future imaginations in popular media (Kaplan, 2016). Lastly, many

³ When considering the abovementioned fact of sensitisation to emotions like solastalgia through environment-based cultural practices, it would be a logical step to connect the concept to Indigenous populations, to whom it is relevant (Soutar & Wand, 2022). However, Indigenous scholars have rejected the term as a description of their experience (Galway et al., 2019), noting that their languages are more relational in nature, and changing environments and their impact on cultural relations should be coded in the local language. In their view, solastalgia builds on individualism and isolation characteristic of the colonial spirit.

participants mentioned being worried about a perceived lack of response from people in their environments, as well as governments. This relates back to the future worries - the longer humanity fails to take appropriate measures, new climate disasters are added on top of the ones we are already dealing with (Diffey et al., 2022).

In terms of measurable symptoms, several efforts have been made to construct a quantifiable definition of EA out of the myriad seemingly associated symptoms. Clayton and Karazsia (2020) presented a four-vector model, including cognitive-emotional impairment (e.g. ruminating, sleep problems), functional impairment, behavioural engagement (engaging and endorsing sustainable behaviour), and personal experience of CC. Cognitive and functional impairment were considered representative of the core emotional climate anxiety. Hogg et al. (2021) added emphasis to ruminating as a core symptom by adding it as a separate factor. They also added worry about personal impact as a significant symptom. These varying scales underscore that EA is hard to define as a single, uniform experience, and that context matters; an overly narrow focus on affective components could miss important facets of the phenomenon. Helpfully, summarizing work presented by Kurth and Pihkala (2022) clarifies three axes of anxiety sources underlying the symptoms: ecological-existential, social (related to feeling judged by others) and practical (i.e. how to properly act in light of CC).

Demographically, multiple studies confirm that the population most vulnerable to EA are women and young people (Clayton, 2020; Verplanken et al., 2020; Whitmarsh et al., 2022). As for nationality, some studies suggest that countries worse hit with effects of CC experience more worry (Ogunbode et al., 2022). On the other hand, the systematic review by Soutar and Wand (2022) suggested that EA is felt more strongly in Industrialised nations, though they also suggested these results may be skewed by limited understanding of CC in Non-Industrialised nations and many competing worries in these nations. Beyond demographics, personal attributions and coping strategies shape EA's intensity and impact. Experiencing flooding does not directly correlate with feeling EA (Ogunbode et al., 2022). Attribution could play a factor here (Cologna et al., 2024), as it was shown that people who did not attribute heavy rainfall to CC felt less of a CC threat from heavy rains. Another important factor seems to be personal coping style and resilience (Clayton et al., 2017; Soutar & Wand, 2022). However, research shows considerable heterogeneity in terms of what coping strategies work best for which groups.

This also raises the question of what the relationship is between EA and wellbeing. A study by Ojala (2005) showed that within groups of people with EA, a significant difference

can be found in wellbeing scores. Predictors of higher wellbeing included the strength and frequency of existential emotions. A sense of being able to adapt to the future climatic changes seems to have a protective influence for developing EA (Soutar & Wand, 2022). Overall, results suggest that there may be constructive and maladaptive forms of EA (Pihkala, 2022a). Constructive forms channel anxiety as a motivating force and may explain the repeatedly found positive correlation between EA and sustainable behaviour and climate activism. On the other hand, maladaptive forms of EA may seriously impair daily functioning (Gago et al., 2024). Notably, it may lead to eco-paralysis where people are unable to act despite a desire to do so (Albrecht, 2011). This may be equated with apathy, but is in fact the opposite, as it arises out of caring too much.

Considering the dire state of the environment currently, and the expected further decline in the future, is such a deep empathic reaction unwanted and pathological? Researchers agree that it is not and that EA could be typed as a moral emotion (Kurth & Pihkala, 2022), and that it is distinguishable from other mental disorders, even generalised anxiety disorder (Hogg et al., 2021). Nevertheless, those with pre-existing mental disorders are more sensitive to ecological anxiety with growing awareness of CC (Gebhardt et al., 2023). The Anthropocene context further sets EA apart from other disorders, since the apocalyptic worries that fuel the anxiety are not delusional and are confirmed daily by media stories (Pihkala, 2018). Furthermore, EA correlates with sustainable behaviours and climate activism (Boluda-Verdú et al., 2022) and may therefore be positive in some sense. A solution may be to differentiate between adaptive and maladaptive EA, in terms of its impacts on the individual's life (Pihkala, 2022a). However, such a distinction further complicates an already terminologically convoluted field. Moreover, it might signal to affected people that their suffering is treated as a resource for the activist cause. Perhaps, then, the label of ecological 'anxiety' - a term with psychopathology connotations - is misleading and should be reserved only for those people presenting with serious negative life impacts. However, this debate should not distract from the actual issue - a large part of the population, predominantly youth, who are suffering and struggling to make sense of their experience (Hickman et al., 2021).

2.5 Wounded World Study

Recent work by Oblak et al. (2025a) elucidates the complex and overwhelming experience of people with EA through the results of phenomenological interviews. They interviewed 30 participants, all but one originally European, and of whom fourteen had a pre-existing psychiatric disorder. Their work mirrored the findings from the studies aimed at

constructing quantitative scales of EA. Participants revealed a variety of disrupting symptoms, with ruminating being prevalent. The practical anxiety was also present, with most participants expressing a sense of loss of agency. Moreover, the various eco-feelings described in the extant literature, such as anger, guilt, and solastalgia, were identified. The qualitative reports further showed a marked sense of temporal alienation in the participants as well as low tolerance for uncertainty. However, the value of the results is in the depth of details not just in the symptoms and behavioural adaptations to the experience of EA, but even more so in the way they construct a picture of the EA lifeworld.

2.5.1. Lifeworld

The concept of lifeworld is central to phenomenology but has received quite opposing interpretations from two different lines of thinking. The first conceptualisation of the lifeworld is credited to Husserl who saw it as a pre-reflective, stable horizon that allows us to have objective knowledge and stable perception (Husserl, 1970). Phenomenology then requires a bracketing of naturalistic assumptions to focus instead on the perceptual processes that actively synthesize our many partial perceptions into coherent wholes. In other words, we can never see all sides of an object at once, but the background of the stable lifeworld allows us to create a coherent perception. Varela continued this line of thinking, extending the idea of embodied intentionality into embodied agents and focusing on the sensorimotor engagement with the environment for perception and cognition (Varela et al., 1992).

With the increased importance of neuroimaging findings in cognitive science, Varela then expanded these ideas further into neurophenomenology (Varela, 1996), where he combined first person reports with third person data. This currently popular approach in cognitive science tends to rely either on micro-phenomenological interviews or descriptive experience sampling (DES) inspired phenomenological data collection. Hurlburt's DES (Hurlburt, 2011) aims to collect moments of 'pristine inner experience' through random, beeped prompts and subsequent in-depth (micro-phenomenological) interviews. This approach sees experience as raw data to be sampled, rather than to be interpreted in its historical and cultural context. Micro-phenomenological interviews focus not only on beeped experiences but may also be focused on other purposefully chosen experiences that occurred in the past (Petitmengin, 2006). The interviewer then repeatedly guides the participant to re-experience and re-describe the moment to arrive at a core, pre-reflective structure of it.

Husserlian phenomenology has been the leading phenomenological tradition in cognitive science, even to this day (Varela et al., 1992). However, its oversight of context and

existential feelings has been criticized from early on. Heidegger (2010) conceptualised a different lifeworld. In the Heideggerian lifeworld, the pre-existing history with and context of the object is more important. The lifeworld then is not a neutral horizon for perception and experience, rather it is historically situated. This conceptualisation makes phenomenology an inherently hermeneutic endeavour as it must focus on interpretation and the historicity of the *Dasein*. Alfred Schutz (1967) developed these ideas further by emphasizing the social construction of meaning. His idea of the lifeworld emphasizes intersubjectivity and the reliance on typifications, i.e. common-sense categories to help navigate social experiences.

Psychopathological conditions⁴ involve anomalies in experience, leading people who live with them to constitute different pathological lifeworlds (Thumser, 2021). In such a lifeworld, the taken for granted *Dasein* may be interrupted in a Heideggerian moment by affective or existential disturbance, e.g. in anxiety the fragility of existence may be revealed (Heidegger, 2010). Therefore, the pathological lifeworld highlights the importance of understanding the complex world-relations. In line with this, Depraz (2020) argues that while microphenomenological interviews are a powerful tool for accessing the fine-grained lived experience of chronic illness, the chronic, relational, and institutional character of psychopathological lifeworlds means that such interviews must be situated within a broader phenomenological and clinical framework. The dynamic co-constitution of psychiatric disorders is a core aspect of De Haan's (2020) enactive psychiatry framework as well. She stresses that a person's history interacts with their biology, environment, but also the wider existential meaning structures. A holistic understanding of psychopathology should then not just focus on the symptoms but also on social and sense-making dimensions.

An important sense-making mechanism to consider for psychopathology in general, but even more so for EA and its existential component, is Karl Jaspers' worldview (Jaspers, 2013). A worldview helps us cope with the boundaries of existence: mortality, isolation, free will, and uncertainty. Situations where we are faced with these 4 facts of life are so-called limit situations ('*Grenzsituationen*'). Confronting these facts and embracing their inherent uncertainty leads to a mature worldview. However, if the worldview is turned into a rigid shell ('*Gehäuse*') in an attempt to protect the mental life, it cannot transform to deal with the

⁴ Starting a discussion on the psychopathological lifeworld just a page after stating EA should not be considered a psychopathology may seem ill-advised. However, most of the participants in the Oblak et al. (2025a) study showed signs of maladaptive EA, meaning they were struggling to self-manage and their EA was significantly impacting their daily functioning. This type of EA therefore still seems to constitute a pathological lifeworld. Furthermore, CC awareness also seems to constitute a classic limit situation as described by Karl Jaspers, due to the existential concerns it inspires.

existential concerns. In that case, a psychiatric disorder forms. Fundamental to an understanding of the psychopathological experience is thus the narrative sense-making processes that individuals employ in their worldview construction, which Stanghellini and Mancini (2017) helpfully divide into five dimensions: lived body, otherness, lived time, selfhood, and lived space.

The study by Oblak et al. (2025a) showed that people with EA experience a specific lifeworld and sense of self therein. They termed this a *being/world*, a two-sided pervasive feeling that nevertheless is not always in conscious lived experience. Firstly, participants felt alienated from their direct social environment, and the larger Industrial culture, and Industrial knowledge. Secondly, they reported a lived experience of inhabiting a wounded world. This is a world irreparably transformed by CC and irretrievably lost. The specific world concept varied between participants, from an idyllic past world of human-nature harmony to the current society and all its opportunities. Whereas the *being/world* experience is a background feeling (Colombetti & Ratcliffe, 2012), EA was a disruptive and conscious feeling that could be caused either by experience of information. Experiential EA could be evoked by natural disaster, but also by smaller events such as changes in nature or offending objects such as plastic. Informational EA was evoked through contact with distressing CC news and was experienced as more anxiety-provoking.

2.5.2. Epistemic Sprawl

Informational EA is particularly interesting as it was associated with a marked cognitive processing anomaly – epistemic sprawl. As one participant noted:

What happened in Belgrade [a stabbing at a school]. And we don't even have to go so far geographically to talk about this. I know about two rapes that happened in the last week. [...] So, this makes me think how truly broad this issue is. [...] How [climate change] touches everything. How it is all connected.” (Oblak et al., 2025b, p. 12)

This quote makes evident how participants saw CC as being interwoven not just with ecological change, but also with the housing crisis and random acts of violence. For the participants, engaging with information, either by obtaining it or producing it, was an important coping mechanism. This CC knowledge, combined with their EA, informed their worldview construction. Unsurprisingly, CC takes centre stage in this worldview. However,

from this central position in the EA worldview, it sprawls out into other areas, infiltrating all facets of life.

Epistemic sprawl may be compared to a phenomenon in psychiatry called overinclusive thinking. This is not to imply that epistemic sprawl is necessarily psychopathological; it may instead reflect an adaptive sensitivity to subtle, realistic connections between crises. In an era where media collapses temporal and spatial boundaries, epistemic sprawl may be less of a cognitive distortion and more of a rational response to a hyper-connected world. It has not been explicitly identified in EA research before, and therefore no assertions can be made yet. Some remotely related findings in EA research include tendencies toward pervasive threat perception, generalized worry, and catastrophizing (Clayton, 2020). More similar might be the affective concept of Anthropocene horror (Clark, 2020). Overinclusive thinking, as used in psychiatry, is a cognitive processing style that has been identified mostly in schizophrenia, but also in other forms of psychiatric disorders such as mania or depression (Andreasen & Powers, 1974; Payne & Hirst, 1957). As with epistemic sprawl, overinclusive thinking involves a dissolution of the boundaries between different concepts. Research suggests it is more of a state marker that disappears as the patient enters remission (Payne et al., 1963).

2.5.3. The Anthropocene Lifeworld

If ‘Anthropocene horror’ (Clark, 2020) describes the affective character of our time, epistemic sprawl may be its cognitive counterpart. Both terms describe an experience of loose boundaries between concepts as a consequence of the Anthropocene lifeworld. Firstly, the polycrisis presents a large collection of disasters, and with CC arguably being the most insurmountable threat, all other disasters may come to be grouped under it. Secondly, the combination of globalisation and social media has led to an overload of information, where the effects are not directly and locally experienced, but rather through a deluge of social media reports. Even activist influencers standing up for multiple issues may contribute, such as Greta Thunberg, originally the CC activism spokesperson, becoming heavily involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Nevertheless, it seems that EA with epistemic sprawl as characteristic cognition could be a central emotion, and shared worldview of our temporality. Hence, increasing our understanding of it is imperative.

2.6 Research Questions

The fact that epistemic sprawl was a worldview shared by 73% of the participants in the Oblak et al. (2025a) study, implies that it might be part of a cultural sense-making progress. While Oblak and colleagues provide detailed and valuable insight into epistemic sprawl, they do so from the lens of understanding the personal lifeworld from the person's perspective. However, the lifeworld is fundamentally intersubjective, and thus socially shared. Furthermore, following the lifeworld concept of Heidegger and Schutz, understanding the sociocultural narrative is necessary to place a phenomenon in its historical and cultural context. Therefore, the question is whether evidence of this newly coined epistemic sprawl also exists in narratives in the wider Anthropocene, Industrial lifeworld. Suggestions of where to find this evidence were provided by the participants themselves; they reported relying on pop-science information sources to make sense of their experience and mentioned several key books in this process. Such pop science books are a valuable source of knowledge as they are constructed out of elaborate sense-making processes and may therefore significantly influence the sense-making processes of the readers in turn. Furthermore, a deeper analysis of the sources that participants found helpful for coping with EA may show us hopeful or healing sentiments to guide the lived experience of being in a wounded world. Therefore, the research questions guiding my investigation into the wider cultural sense-making patterns around CC were formulated as follows:

- What kind of lifeworld relating to CC in the Industrial context is presented by the climate corpus texts?
- How is the epistemic sprawl that characterizes EA reflected and/or addressed in the media consulted by people with EA?
- How is the worldview of CC reported by people with EA generated in the climate corpus texts?
- How can we start to construct a positive worldview while living in a wounded world?

3. Methods

This thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach to the study of EA by applying theories from phenomenology and hermeneutics to gain a deeper understanding of the findings of psychological research. This extension is necessary because psychological frameworks alone often do not address the experiential, existential, and worldview-related dimensions relevant to EA. Phenomenology and hermeneutics are therefore employed to

examine changes in lifeworld, meaning, and self-construction. Methodologically, the thesis employs narrative analysis to investigate how these dimensions are narrated within a corpus of climate-related texts. This interdisciplinary combination allows the thesis to address EA not only as an individual psychological phenomenon, but as a lived experience situated in the Anthropocene social and cultural context.

The research paradigm that guided this thesis was interpretivism (Ricoeur, 1984). This paradigm conceptualizes participants as social beings engaged in social sense making dependent on their temporal, cultural and historical context (Fossey et al., 2002; Levers, 2013). It follows a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, meaning it rejects the idea of the existence of an absolute truth and instead sees subjective experience as reality, and knowledge as being filtered through the subjective, contextualized experience. Meaning, then, is not a pre-given truth that exists independently of the cognition of the people experiencing the moment. Instead, meaning is intersubjectively negotiated. This intersubjective, interpretative moment warrants the use of qualitative methodology.

Furthermore, the current conceptualisation of EA as a phenomenon lacks a unifying theory and generally accepted quantifying measure. At the same time, phenomenological complexity is suggested in reports of people with EA (Oblak et al., 2025a). For research topics that are complex and not easily quantified, qualitative research can provide contextualizing and rich data that can create a deeper understanding of the phenomenon as well as help to create better quantifying measures (Fossey et al., 2002). Therefore, the chosen paradigm and state of knowledge around EA necessitated a qualitative research approach.

My aim for this thesis was to extend the phenomenological findings (Oblak et al., 2025a) on EA beyond the lived experience of the individual to elucidate the wider context in which this lived experience and its associated worldviews arise. Generative phenomenology (Thompson, 2007) offers a theoretical lens that aligns with the interpretivist focus on sense-making, but extends it by emphasising ‘historical, culture, intersubjective and normative’ (Steinbock, 1995, p. 59) aspects of collectively shared experiences. It is concerned with the historical and normative lifeworld in which we are born and die, but that persists despite our coming and going. This focus made it aptly suited to my research aims.

Considering the intersubjective structures that allow the constitution of a persisting meaningful world naturally leads to the study of language and communication (Hymes, 1964; Malinowski, 1923). A main source of intersubjective constitutive narratives can be found in published texts, and the approach par excellence for examining both the visible and hidden meaning within a text in relation to the context in which it was published, and is interpreted,

is hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2012). The interpretation of the text will be influenced by the fore-conceptions of the reader, so being aware of them is important for ensuring a clear interpretation of the text. However, the act of reading the text may make the reader more aware of their fore-conceptions. Such a reciprocal and dynamic interaction is central to all aspects of hermeneutics and has been termed the *hermeneutic circle*. It refers to the links between the part and the whole, both textually and personally. Textually, it may concern the link between one text and the whole corpus, and personally it is concerned with the specific text the reader is analysing and the whole reading history of the reader.

Given hermeneutics' emphasis on iterative part-whole interpretation, it is well-suited to a methodological framework that translates this interpretive stance into a structured, repeatable analytic process. Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT; Charmaz, 2014) offers such a framework of iterative analysis, allowing interpretations to emerge inductively from the data while remaining sensitive to the researcher's co-constructive role. CGT is based on grounded theory as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1965), but is different in its constructivist approach, emphasizing how there is no absolute truth, only an interpretation constructed through the researcher. It prescribes a non-linear research approach suitable to the hermeneutic circle, where data analysis and collection happen at the same time, mutually influencing each other, and the researcher engages in constant comparison of the data. CGT emphasizes abductive reasoning where the researcher lets the theory arise from the data. The researcher must therefore be comfortable with a certain level of ambiguity before the theoretical picture becomes clear and avoid 'lifting stock concepts from their disciplinary shelves' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 108). CGT was the method of choice for this thesis as it fits the philosophical methodological framework, and is particularly well suited to topics where no comprehensive theories of the phenomenon exist, as is the case with EA.

3.1 Positionality

Following the tenet underlying both interpretivism and CGT that the researcher co-constructs the theory, prefacing the presentation of findings from studies done in these frameworks with the author's positionality is a key necessity. As for me, I am a white, European woman born and raised in the countryside of the Netherlands. As such, I was surrounded by a cultivated natural world, with the trees in the forest planted in lines, and the horizon filled with agricultural fields. The national identity narrative mirrors the cultivation of the land, with a key idea being that we battled the sea and won. In addition to the lack of extreme weather events or otherwise natural disaster, due to the geographical location and the

world-renowned flood prevention technology, nature is something to be controlled rather than revered. It was not until my twenties that I saw wild nature for the first time in Canada, and that I became acutely aware of the limitations of the Dutch worldview. From then on, I have had multiple opportunities to engage in culturally sensitive travel. These formative experiences and narratives have made me critical of the conceptions of and interactions with nature central to most Industrial countries.

I started to give more consideration to Indigenous stewardship of the land and how it is lacking in Industrialised culture after visiting New Zealand. At the same time, the position of the Māori in New Zealand and their identity crisis showed that being Indigenous and native to a land is not always clear-cut. In Australia, I noticed how the white spiritual community cherry-picked spiritual practices from different non-western cultures, while giving no consideration to Aboriginal culture. Upon my return to Europe, my reflections on western European indigeneity led me to join a pagan, nature-based spirituality group. These experiences and personal commitments align with the focus on Indigenous worldviews present in the texts, so I was challenged to avoid a confirmation bias in the coding of these themes. Additionally, the importance of these themes to my personal worldview meant I had to avoid hyper focusing on them and keep an open mind to other arising themes.

When Al Gore's 'An Inconvenient Truth' (Guggenheim, 2006) had its moment of fame I was in my early teens. A decade later I realised I was living the inconvenient truth the documentary presented. The natural ice and snowmen of my childhood melted into drizzling winters, and a temperature that used to indicate a summer heatwave became the standard summer temperature while the maximum summer heatwave temperature was 10 degrees higher than what it used to be. CC was further confirmed through increased reporting on extreme weather events in the news and on social media. These are the characteristics of the time I am a child of, and I share the general spirit of mild EA, in terms of a pessimistic image of the future, a lack of agency in how to improve the situation as an individual, and a sense of guilt of not having the perfectly sustainable life habits. An interest in addressing these feelings in my own experience, but also in the experience of those around me, motivated my investigation into the topic of EA.

3.2 Data

The work in this thesis builds on the findings from a previous phenomenological study on the lived experience of EA done by Oblak et al. (2025a). While the interviews have resulted in a rich description of the lived experience, the findings are intimately connected to

the participants' personal views, and thus give no similarly rich description of cultural, historical, and normative factors that give rise to the lived experience. Yet, the participants' responses showed that collecting information is an important coping mechanism, and that the information in media and books helps them make sense of their experience. Several books were discussed as being particularly helpful. To gain a better understanding of the collective sense-making pattern in these times of climate crisis, the books mentioned by the participants were chosen as the corpus texts for analysis (see table 1).

Due to the varied nature and non-scientific audience focus of the climate corpus texts, the contents showed some repetition, as well as tangential discussion of concepts such as language or consciousness. Therefore, excerpts were preferred over a comprehensive analysis of the whole source. I followed the example set by Perneau (2021) and embraced my freedom as a researcher to make the selection based on my assessment of relevance. Nevertheless, as a general approach, I chose introductory and summarizing or concluding sections, as well as body sections dealing with concepts relevant to cognitive processes and human or societal responses to the climate crisis. Following analysis of the climate corpus, I also read and selected quotes from the codebook of Oblak et al. (2025b) to include in the findings.

3.3 Analysis

In line with the conventions of CGT, analysis of the texts was done using iterative rounds of qualitative coding. The practice of coding refers to the process of selecting meaningful words/sentences/sections of text and applying a short and abstract level description to the selection. Due to the nature of the texts, science books edited for accessibility and coherence, one section usually corresponded to entire paragraphs, or topic statements of paragraphs. The coding was performed in ATLAS.ti (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2025). Throughout the entire coding process, I noted down any insights and questions in memos, a practice that is an early, but core stage of analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Early memos consist of noting down any connections, comparisons, or processes the researcher notices. Later memos are more detailed and track, for example, how codes develop throughout the coding process. The practice of memo-writing requires the researcher to spell out implicit or condensed meanings. Thereby, memos are instrumental in identifying gaps during the coding process. Later in the analysis process, memos help to create overarching conceptual categories and inform the theoretical sampling.

Table 1*Summary of the analysed books, in order of analysis*

Title (shorthand)	Author	Year	Thesis
The Spell of the Sensuous (Sensuous; CCT1)	David Abram	1996 (1997)	Industrial culture alienates us from our sensory connection with the more-than-human world through abstract, written language
Metazoa (CCT2)	Peter Godfrey-Smith	2020	Consciousness and subjectivity evolved gradually as animals developed increasingly complex sensing of and agency in their environments; we are part of this evolutionary tree
Active Hope (CCT3)	Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone	2012	Facing ecological collapse requires participatory, emotionally engaged hope grounded in systems thinking, interdependence, and collective action rather than passive optimism
Hyperobjects (CCT4)	Timothy Morton	2013	Ecological phenomena like CC are “hyperobjects” that are massively distributed in time and space, fundamentally disrupting human concepts of causality, agency, and environmental responsibility.
How to Blow Up a Pipeline (Pipeline; CCT5)	Andreas Malm	2021	The climate crisis demands a rethinking of political strategy, arguing that strictly nonviolent activism is insufficient and that strategic sabotage of fossil-fuel infrastructure may be ethically and historically justified.
Braiding Sweetgrass (Sweetgrass; CCT6)	Robin Wall Kimmerer	2013	Indigenous ecological knowledge and Western science can be consolidated through reciprocal, relational ethics to foster more sustainable and respectful human–nature relationships.
Becoming Animal (Animal; CCT7)	David Abram	2005	Human freedom and ecological renewal depend on re-inhabiting our animal sensibilities and re-entering multisensory, embodied participation with the living Earth.
Letters from Prison (Prison; CCT8)	Antonio Gramsci; Lynne Lawner (ed.)	1973	Cultural and political power is sustained through everyday practices and shared “common sense,” making intellectual and moral leadership central to revolutionary change even under conditions of repression.
Ecotopia ^a (CCT9)	Ernest Callenbach	1975	A post-Industrial society organized around ecological sustainability, communal values, and participatory democracy slowly tempts an Industrial citizen to convert and relocate to the community permanently

Note: CCT refers to ‘climate corpus text’ and will be used in the following chapters when I am referring to a specific text from the corpus.

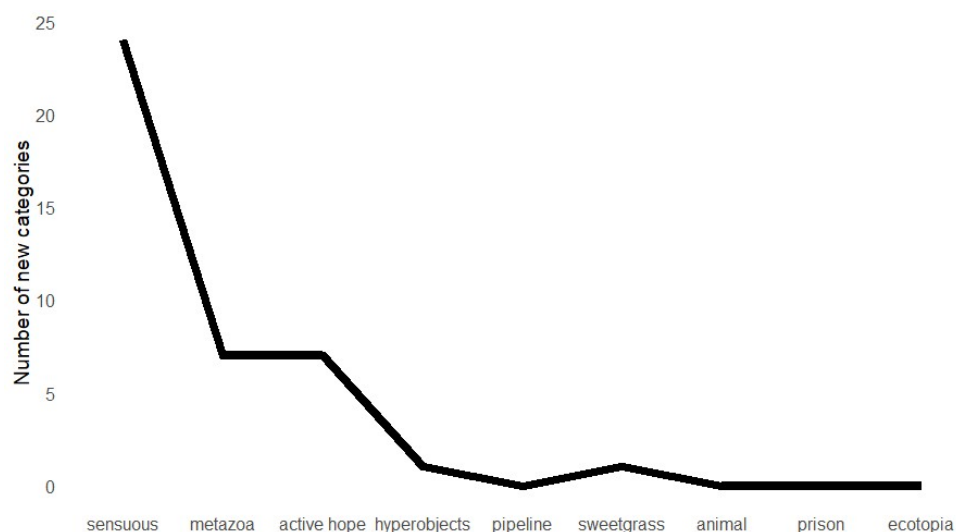
^aEcotopia is a climate fiction book, whereas all the others are pop-science books.

During the first round of coding, I applied an open coding strategy focused on content. As suggested by Charmaz (2014), I worked through the text quickly applying intuitive codes. I then followed up with a round of coding focused on instances of epistemic sprawl, i.e. places where there are loose boundaries between concepts. I looked for instances of ecologically oriented epistemic sprawl, for example in places where the earth's 'pain' was linked directly to societal decline. However, I also coded instances of sprawl not strictly related to ecology, for example where the case was made that every human has synaesthesia evident in blending of the senses. Early in the coding process it became clear that the content and epistemic sprawl themes had considerable overlap, so they were merged.

Having created the preliminary collection of themes, I then completed a round of deductive coding on the full climate corpus. After this round, I organised the codes into the final taxonomy of themes and ran a conceptual depth analysis which confirmed that conceptual depth had been reached, see figure 1 (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Nelson, 2016). The last step consisted of creating a codebook where the underlying codes of each theme were illustrated with relevant codes, and relational codes (Flick, 2018) were marked. This taxonomy formed the basis of the analysis of the lifeworld, but when narrowing in on epistemic sprawl, it became clear a further layer of theory formation was necessary. The lifeworld taxonomy provided a clear conceptual structure but also is an abstraction of a lived experience within this lifeworld with EA that would be better represented by an interconnected web. The last step of theory formation then consisted of identifying the grounding nodes of this web, based on the created memos and, in particular, mind-mapping of the data.

Figure 1

Results of conceptual depth analysis.



4 Results

This section presents a succinct overview of the findings of the CGT analysis conducted on the climate corpus texts. The analysis resulted in the identification of 5 main themes, each with multiple subthemes (see table 2). An extensive codebook with illustrative quotes from all relevant climate corpus texts was created, but due to copyright claims, the codebook cannot be made available in full. Rather, a condensed version, with code names and descriptions of the codes, occasionally illustrated by a quote, is available online here: <https://osf.io/kuv4m>

Table 2

Final taxonomy of themes, final column reports the number of texts the theme appeared in

Level 3	Level 2	Level 1	<i>f</i>
Fighting despair with action			8
	Corporate, individual, or community responsibility		5
		Who is responsible?	3
		Required sacrifice	4
		Necessity of communal solutions and social medicine	5
	Fatalism		5
		Unequal distribution and bourgeois luxury	3
	Imagination-inspired action		6
	The choice		3
	Every small thing matters		3
	Extremism		3
	Linguistic gift and responsibility		3
	Bounded economics		6
		Natural limits and value	3
		Economics	3
		Gifts and reciprocity	3
Cultural ancestry			9
	Time is circular		7
		Future visions	3
		Linear viewpoint	2
	Living, dead, mystical all live in earth		5
	Learning from nature by observation		4
	Ceremony as remembrance and safekeeping		4
	Storied relationship with the land		6
		The role of stories	4
		Current stories	3
		Cultural and temporal relativity of stories	3
	Grammar of animacy		5
Anthropocentric worldview			9
	Damage and limits of science		8
		Industrial vs Indigenous philosophy	2
		Alienating influence	3
		Subjectivity in science	6
	Separating body and mind		4
	Body as basis of experience		5
		Enactive perceiving	4

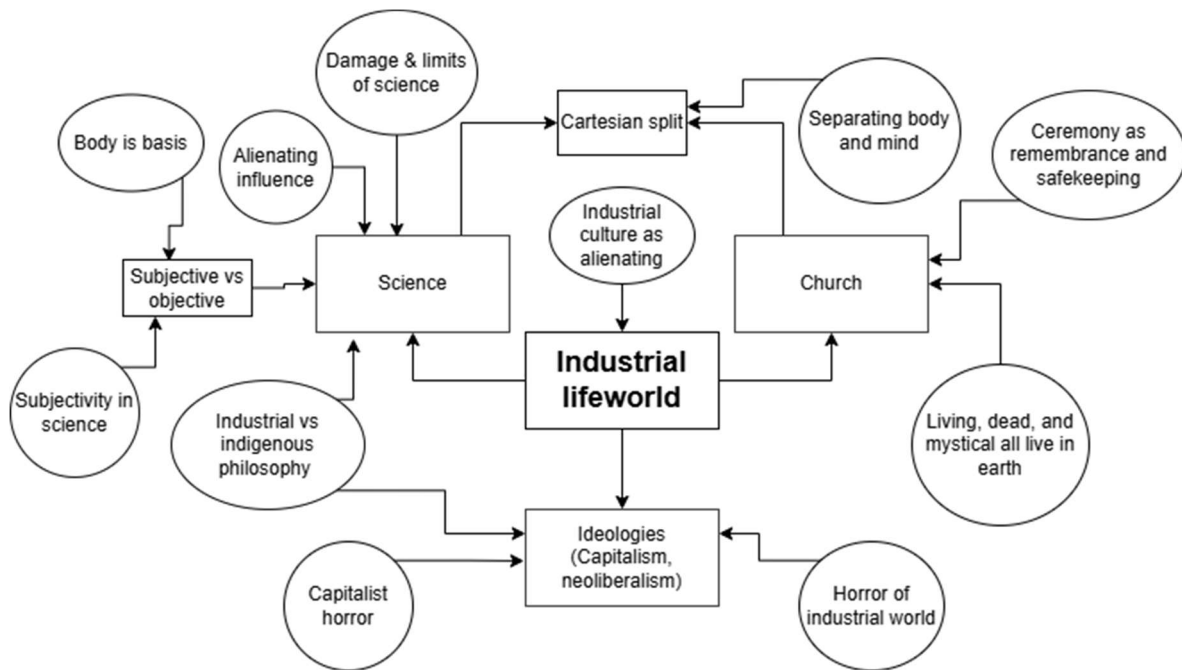
Species loneliness	6
Co-evolved family	6
Embracing non-anthropocentric thinking	4
Climate change is massive	4
Idea of nature	7
Wounded wrathful place	6
Humans as evil	4
Expanded awareness	9
Multiple intelligences/consciousnesses	9
Nature is part of us	6
Ecological self	7
Chosen by nature	3
Horror of the Industrial world	9
Capitalist horror	7
Industrial culture as alienating	7
Nature taboo	6
Technological separation	5
Artificial future	4
Disconnected self	7
Hungry spirit/indigeneity	6
What does it mean to be Indigenous?	4
Anxieties as moral compass	8
Feeling earth's pain	4
Pathological disbalance	6

4.1 Lifeworld

The lifeworld that the texts present shows two configurations of meaning-making with transitional actions from one to the other. On one side there is the industrial lifeworld, presented as being less than ideal, while the alternative is the Indigenous-inspired lifeworld. The critique on the Industrial lifeworld is aimed largely at two different institutions – objectivist science and the church, and the ideologies that underly the Industrial world order, mainly capitalism and neoliberalism (see figure 2). These institutions and ideologies together create a lifeworld that is thoroughly alienating culturally, socially, and even technologically. The individuals living in it are presented as having become disconnected and being left with a spirit that is hungry since the Industrial culture does not provide the social and existential nourishment that many Indigenous societies emphasise. The climate crisis could function as an external force to show the untenability of the Industrial world order, but the climate corpus texts highlight how there seems to rest a taboo on discussing CC. Against this background, the climate corpus texts find widespread anxiety to be healthy and indeed a valuable signpost to new, ecological, ways of living.

Figure 2

Mapping of themes to topics on the Industrial lifeworld



Note. Square boxes represent theoretical sense-making, circles are themes from the taxonomy

A fundamental problem that the corpus texts identify with the institutions and ideologies of the Industrial world is the underlying anthropocentrism, whereby the human experience becomes centralised. Important in the Industrial anthropocentrism is the separation of mind and body, thereby creating a false dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity. The corpus texts generally oppose the idea of the possibility of a completely objective perspective in any human endeavour, instead emphasizing how subjectivity is the core human experience. Furthermore, the corpus texts show how subjectivity also abounds in objectivist science. Still, since objectivist science promotes the erasure of subjectivity in science, it acts as a force alienating both scientists and the general population from their sensuous experience of the world. The climate corpus texts furthermore posit that the mind-body separation and the anthropocentric worldview also separate humanity from the wider natural world with which they have evolved and thus share evolutionary kinship with. In the industrial world, then, humanity is presented as a lonely species isolated from nature at large, but also from its own animal nature. Moreover, there is a sense of cynical anthropocentrism in the climate corpus texts, such that there is little belief in that humanity is a force of good and can lead itself out of the climate crisis.

Yet, the despair that such an attitude may inspire when considering the future of humanity in CC, is actively discouraged by the climate corpus texts, as is gracefully accepting the end of the world. Instead, they generally present a pro-active attitude as antidote to the CC-induced despair and a call to action is weaved through the texts. This is not necessarily a practical call to action, but more of an ideological one. The climate corpus texts emphasise how agency is not necessarily linked to large-scale climate actions but shows up in daily life in the choices that can be made and small actions that can be taken. Furthermore, imagination becomes an important faculty in the fight against CC as it will allow humanity to envision a new world that is worth fighting for, for example in terms of establishing new bounded economic principles. Lastly, in the fight against the affective fallout of CC, the climate corpus texts highlight how the question of responsibility is not straightforward and should therefore be left behind. Rather than staying stuck in the individual versus corporate dichotomy, and assigning required sacrifices based on that, the texts bring in the community and its social medicine as a midway solution.

Indigenous ways of being and living are represented repeatedly in connection to the idea of communal living. One main strength of Indigenous communities that the climate corpus texts suggest Industrial communities have lost, is being deeply rooted in the society's cultural ancestry. Ideas of a circular view of time, whereby situations of the past can inform current and future actions, are relevant to this. The living threads that make the temporal connections in the Indigenous communities possible are ceremonies and stories. Building a storied relationship to the land and community is a central focus in the climate corpus texts, and the need of cultural relativity of these traditions, as well as language use that imparts more agency on non-human nature is emphasised. Furthermore, the texts highlight how in many Indigenous communities, mystical beings do not live in a world beyond our own but reside in the directly surrounding nature instead. Caretaking ceremonies and non-anthropocentric stories then become a direct line to the wisdom of the ancestors.

Lastly, the corpus texts present what the individual experience of being in a more Indigenous-type lifeworld could be like. This is generally presented as a more pleasant way of living that is accompanied by a sensation of being more alive. A core aspect of this new way of being is an expanded awareness. Again, this is presented positively as becoming privy to a richness and beauty in nature that Industrial culture has alienated humanity from. A recognition of the presence and diversity of non-human intelligence and consciousness also occurs in this awareness. The type of person who moves through life in this way is characterised by the texts as having a developed sense of ecological self. This is a way of

being whereby the wider nature becomes part of a person's sense of self. Relatedly, the idea that humanity is part of nature and nature is part of humanity, particularly through the evolutionary mechanisms that have shaped the human body in tandem with the environment is present in the climate corpus texts as well.

Overall, the climate corpus texts present an Industrial lifeworld that alienates humanity from each other and from nature at large. Furthermore, this alienation in combination with exploitative ideologies, is presented as having accelerated CC into our current times of ecological crisis. Indigenous ways of living are identified as sources of inspiration for the creation of a new, ecologically friendly lifeworld. The emotional upheaval associated with CC, of which EA is a part, is suggested to be a healthy force that is natural given the Industrial lifeworld, but that can further aid the required transition.

4.2 Epistemic Sprawl

The lifeworld narrative presented in the texts already results in a highly interconnected web of ideas that expand beyond mere nature to include politics, history, and psychology. The taxonomy of codes captures the different domains that are connected in this sprawling sense yet also shows that they are not independent. Rather, they are interwoven dimensions of a contrast of lifeworlds. This finding is conceptually informative of the sociocultural context of EA. However, in a phenomenological approach to the phenomenon of EA, as this thesis adheres to, the lived experience of this overlapping and mutually reinforcing web of concepts is equally important.

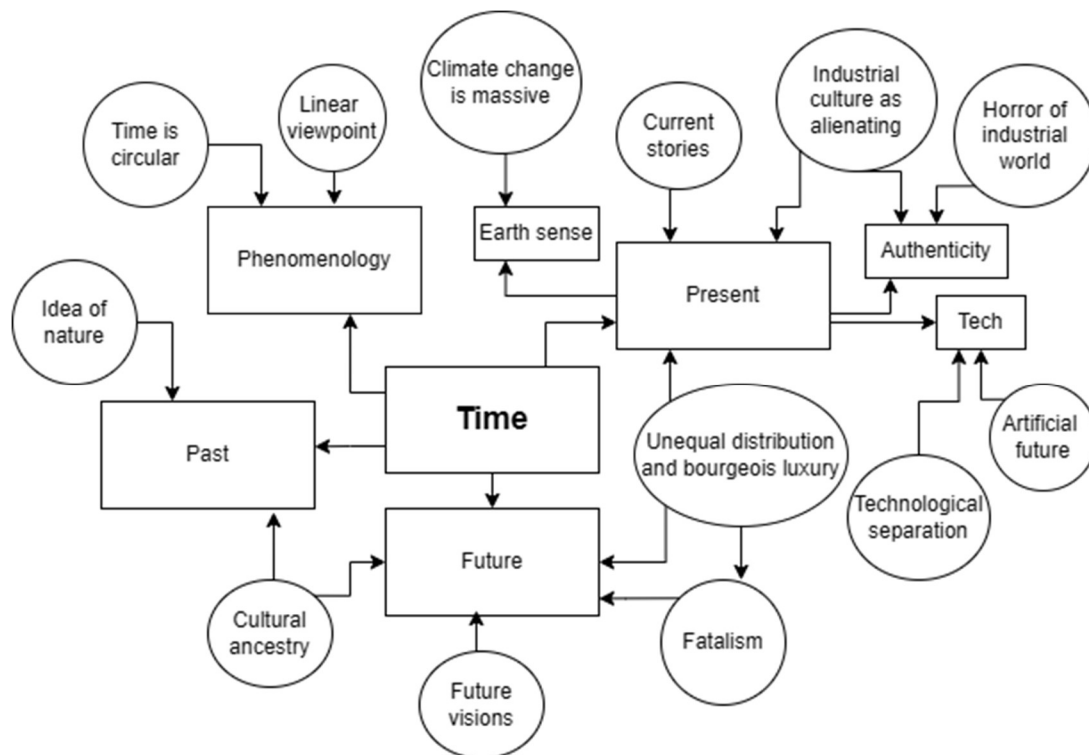
From this perspective, the porous boundaries between experiential domains should not be treated as a lack of analytical clarity, but as reflective of how meaning is lived and organised. This resonates with Lévy-Bruhl's ideas of anti-structural and participatory modes of thought, in which experience is not organised through discrete, hierarchical categories but through overlapping and affectively charged relations (Lévy-Bruhl, 1966). An interconnected web of concepts, grounded by four nodes of lived experience, therefore seems to more accurately capture the phenomenon of epistemic sprawl. The four nodes identified for this were temporality, feelings, stories, and the sense of self. Each of these nodes presents a sense of alienation in the Industrial context, contrasted with more interconnected and positive ways of being inspired by Indigenous cultures.

Temporality (figure 3) covers the experience of time in general and the specific temporal context of the current Industrial society. The climate corpus texts show how Industrial society is built on a linear idea of time, whereas Indigenous communities often

embrace more circular ideas of time. The present moment receives most attention in the texts, with their focus on the current shortcomings of Industrial culture, and the encroachment of CC on the imagined safety of Industrial societies. The alienation of Industrial culture is also most urgently felt in the present, in the disconnect from other humans and nature, which is further facilitated by modern, streamlined technology. The past carries two senses of alienation. First in the loss of cultural ancestry, and second in the idea of having lost an idyllic natural past. The future is presented as generally being marked by a sense of catastrophic loss, but the climate corpus texts attempt to actively disprove the certainty of ecological catastrophe. Indigenous circular temporalities are referenced in this context as more constructive and anxiety-mitigating approaches.

Figure 3

Mapping of themes to topics for the node of time and temporality



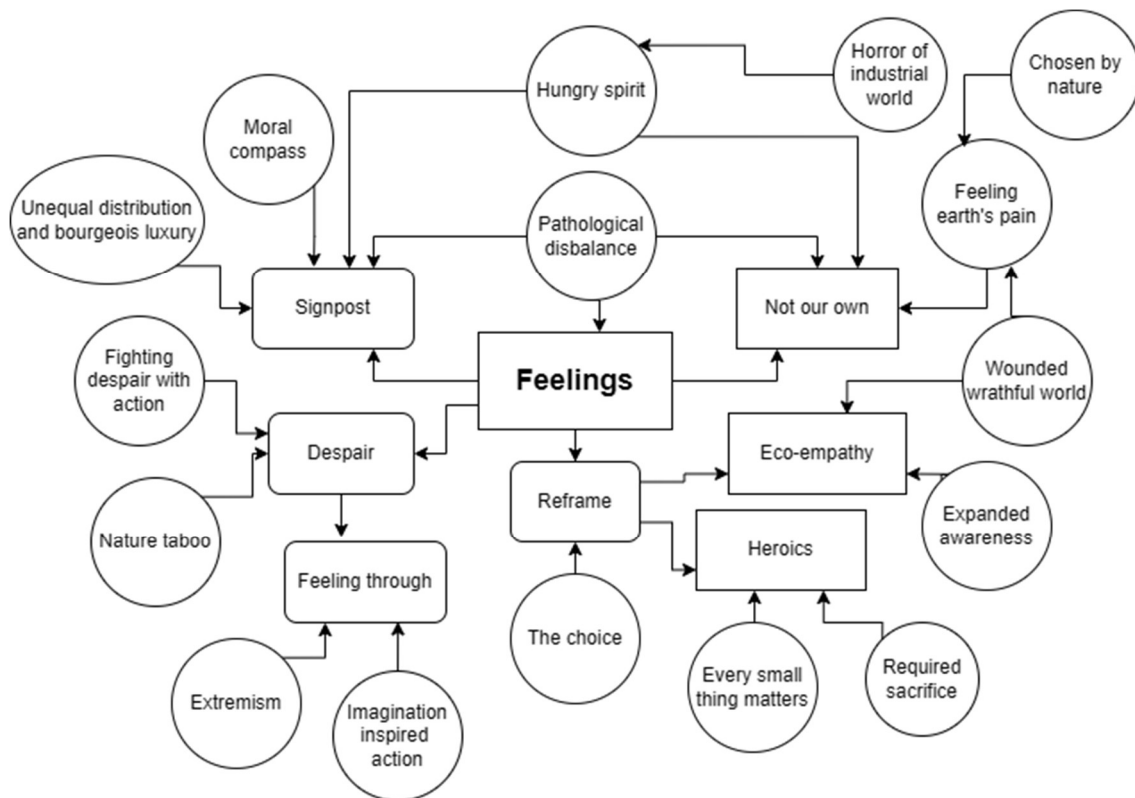
Note. Square boxes represent theoretical sense-making, circles are themes from the taxonomy

The node of feelings (figure 4) encompasses the various affective aspects of CC in the Industrial context. The alienation of the Industrial culture creates a hungry spirit, but the climate corpus texts present despairing emotions that go further than mere sociocultural effects. Rather, they posit that feelings such as EA arise from the earth itself and are thereby manifestations of the natural world being wounded by Industrial living. This interconnection between earth and emotions is at times illustrated by linking general societal health to

environmental health at the affective and spiritual level. Feelings then also become affective signposts towards the damage that has been done, and thus morally desirable phenomena. Specifically in the European context, there has been a type of bourgeois luxury of avoiding these difficult emotions, but some people are waking up to these feelings. The climate corpus texts engage in a reframing of these emotions from psychopathology to positive phenomena, by placing them in a heroic light, highlighting eco-empathy rather than anxiety, and emphasising the moral desirability. In light of the importance of feelings, the texts promote facing the emotions and feeling through them to be guided to healthier way of co-existing with nature.

Figure 4

Mapping of themes to topics for the node of feelings



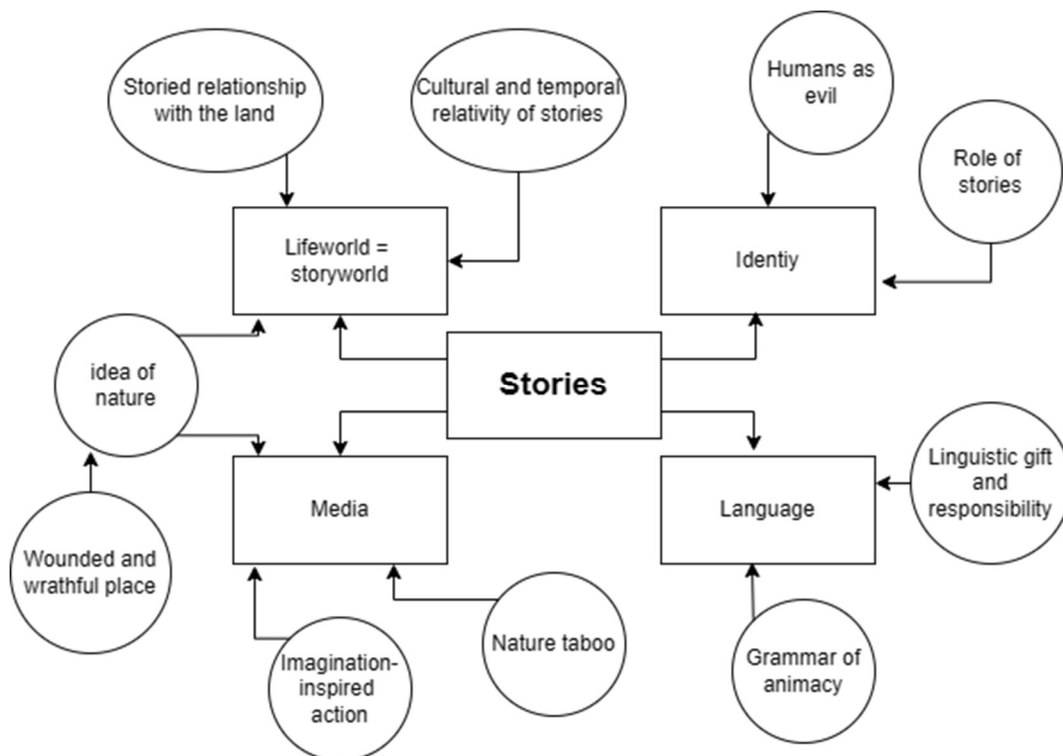
Note. Square boxes represent theoretical sense-making, circles are themes from the taxonomy

The stories node (figure 5) emphasises how sense-making is shaped by the narratives of a society. Importantly, the climate corpus texts suggest that the relationship with the land is storied, and further place that relationship in the context of the alienating and exploitative narratives of Industrial culture, to show that the Industrial narrative is damaging nature. The media are also referred to by the texts as a mechanism to shape the idea of nature, what futures can be imagined, and the general awareness of CC. The climate corpus texts take

stories a step further to also consider medium through which stories are told - language. The way nature is spoken about, even at a deeper, linguistic level, determines our relationship to it. Given the centrality of stories to human sense-making, the climate corpus texts convey a strong need for re-storying of the land and humanity's relationship to it. Narrative awareness and competence are then presented by the climate corpus texts not just as a general necessity, but a personal responsibility.

Figure 5

Mapping of themes to topics for the node on Stories



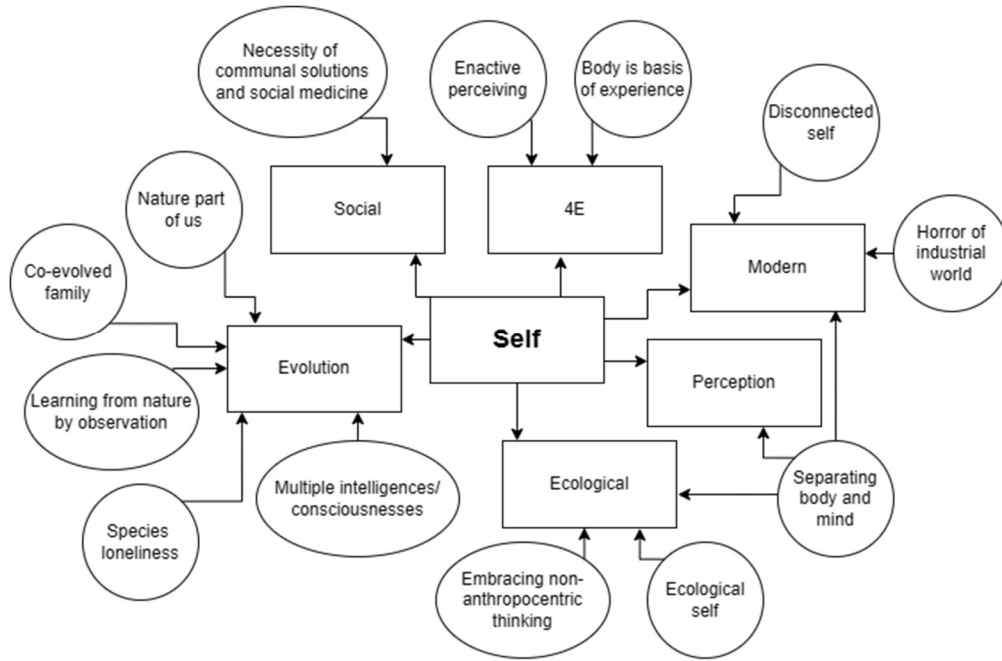
Note. Square boxes represent theoretical sense-making, circles are themes from the taxonomy

The last node of the self (figure 6) highlights how an individual becomes personally connected to CC. From the outset, the climate corpus texts present the Industrial self as thoroughly alienated. The separation of the body and the mind is relevant to this as well. However, the hurtful alienation is placed within a wider context. The texts show how the social self has become alienated and the lack of social medicine aggravates EA, and lack of communal solutions underlies humanity's inability to tackle CC. A further widening of the circle of lost connections encompasses the non-human evolutionary kin. Here, the climate corpus texts emphasise our similarity to non-human species, and how our Industrial viewpoint hides other configurations of intelligence and the wisdom of nature. Furthermore, since nature is part of humanity, by alienating ourselves from it, we are disconnected from an

essential part of the self. The ever-widening circle of selfhood proposed by the climate corpus texts then ends in the ecological self, a self that is thoroughly connected to nature, strongly opposing the Industrial alienated self.

Figure 6

Mapping of themes to topics for the node on the self



Note. Square boxes represent theoretical sense-making, circles are themes from the taxonomy

5 Discussion

The climate corpus texts contrast an alienated Industrial lifeworld with an Indigenous-inspired interconnected world. The differences and transition between the two worlds can be better understood by focusing in on the nodes in the epistemically sprawled web of CC. As such, this discussion will contextualise the ideas of the corpus texts in this sequence, sandwiching the epistemic sprawl findings in between the contrasting lifeworlds. First, I will discuss the basic assumptions of the Industrial world as presented by the climate corpus texts. Then I will discuss the four grounding nodes in the epistemic sprawl web – temporality, feelings, stories, and the self. Lastly, I will discuss the ecological lifeworld that the climate corpus texts promote. To end the thesis, I will return to the research questions and synthesize the theoretical findings into succinct answers.

5.1 Industrial Lifeworld

We live in a time when we are becoming painfully aware of how nature is changing around us. However, Heisenberg (1958) posed that “what we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning” (p. 58). What questions has Industrial culture asked and how has nature responded in turn?

The climate corpus texts generally centre around contrasting Industrial with Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing Industrial culture as an alienating and unnatural force. Two main Industrial entities are critiqued: science, particularly objectivist and positivist traditions, and the church, mainly Christian monotheism, alongside Industrial ideologies such as capitalism, neoliberalism, and the Cartesian split, while other power structures (e.g. gender, race, and age) are only sparsely addressed despite receiving greater attention in the broader academic literature.

5.1.1. Objectivist Science

A key difference between Industrial and Indigenous ways of knowing that the climate corpus paints is the directional flow of inquiry and interpretation. Objectivist Industrial science, that has historically been influential, starts by turning a human, supposedly objective, eye to the surrounding world to probe it and establish fundamental laws. Such an approach risks removing agency from the more-than-human world, turning it into something we (human scientists) interpret and write up, rather than entities of their own intelligence that we could talk to and learn from. The climate corpus texts lament this approach and posit that the misguided pursuit of objectivity divorces researchers and the wider public from their sensuous and emotional knowledge of the world and overlooks Indigenous ways of knowing. Moreover, by framing concepts arising out of Industrial science traditions as universal, traditional Industrial science has historically excluded relational and more-than-human ontologies from the scientific discussion. As such, it has perpetuated a ‘coloniality of reality’ (Burman, 2017) where Industrial ideas remain authoritative. Objectivist Industrial science is thus painted primarily as a force of alienation.

The ideas in the climate corpus texts show that the very question of how EA should be interpreted by science suffers from the objectivity paradigm. If there is only one objectively knowable world, there are correct and incorrect ways of knowing it. The inherent human-nature connectedness that is central to the experience of EA can then become seen as a psychopathology instead of a different way of being. From a more relational viewpoint that

the climate corpus texts identify in Indigenous worldviews, such connectedness may be seen as a positive attunement to ecological systemic entanglement. By not recognising relational ways of knowing, EA can become epistemically misclassified, rather than just misunderstood.

The climate corpus texts thus align with the ontological turn that took place within the last decades, which emphasizes multiple ways of being, rather than one way of being and multiple ways of knowing (Kohn, 2015). An important contribution of the ontological turn to science at large is that it sets the stage for the questioning of the claim of universal and context-independent objectivity of Industrial science ideologies. The focus should be undoing the coloniality of reality, rather than just the coloniality of knowledge, as Indigenous ontologies exist within a materiality of colonial relationships (Chandler & Reid, 2020). Indigenous knowledge should not just be an exotic, homogenous Other with the power to destabilise problematic discourse of Industrial modernity. Embracing the ontological turn should manifest as a solidarity with Indigenous demands for sovereignty, territory, and redress. This call highlights how science is ontopolitical in that it shapes what kinds of beings and relations are considered real.

Relatedly, the objectivist paradigm also determines what is considered a valuable source of knowledge. As the anecdotes in the climate corpus texts show, scientists are often guided by a sense of love and spirituality, disguised in academic terms as curiosity and passion. Furthermore, their personal experience influences not only what they research, but also how they do so and the outcomes they land on. Intuition cannot be disregarded as a source of resolution of research gaps. Yet, it is not a fully ‘objective’, quantifiable source of knowledge, and thus undervalued. The climate corpus texts further argue that the hard sciences are now increasingly doing research that relies on using microscopes or large computer models. It is concerned with particles unobservable to our naked senses, and abstract concepts so large they are often beyond the grasp of non-scientists. By doing so, scientific knowledge becomes divorced from the senses, and the general population may become alienated from the knowledge science creates. This disconnect may explain why people with EA feel overwhelmed rather than empowered by the often scientifically framed CC news, and why the more personal style of narrative, such as present in the climate corpus texts, feels helpful to their anxiety.

Even beyond EA, the emotional impacts of science should not be ignored. The results of science are eventually integrated into the wider society of non-scientist persons. They are not led by a need for purified scientific knowing. Rather, following Heidegger (2010) in his discussion of our primary orientation in the world, we are guided by our ‘care’ (*Sorge*). This

becomes a problem then for an issue like CC and dealing with the emotional side of it. Youth report that in school CC is mostly handled only in science classes and with a scientific vocabulary (Jones & Davison, 2021). Hence, the existential emotions that CC evokes have no space for expression and discussion, leaving students disempowered and disconnected, and all the more anxious. EA is fundamentally an expression of care, that is institutionally unrecognized. Without frameworks for emotional integration paired with the catastrophic knowledge of CC, EA seems to be an existentially uncontained experience.

A new method of bridging objectivist science and subjectivity may be found in New Nature Writing (Moran, 2014). This is a literary movement hailing from the early 2000s that often combines personal narratives with academic or literary passages. A core characteristic of the movement is the rejection of exotic escapism and replacing it with finding meaning in our everyday, often urban, environments. It emphasizes interconnectedness between humans and nature, as well as questioning the boundaries between the two. The strong focus on lived experience of the author creates the potential of this type of literature to let readers be altered in how they feel, see, and relate to the world. The majority of the climate corpus texts could be classed as New Nature Writing, combining science and lyrical personal narratives. The deep subjectivity and personality of these texts may speak to the emotional alienation of EA, but likely also contribute to the epistemic sprawl.

However, the climate corpus texts also emphasize that Industrial language itself continues the anthropocentrism of Industrial objectivist science. Indeed, concepts arising from Industrial metaphysics may be inept at accurately describing non-Industrial experiences and phenomena (Burman, 2017). Some Indigenous languages, for example, differentiate not along a gender division, as happens in various European languages, but along a life-divisions, i.e. word forms indicate whether something is alive or not. Inherent in the grammar patterns are thus assumptions of different ontologies of agency that do not exist in English language. Linguistic variation is also evident in translation of the finer meanings of certain terms. Eco-grief is an often-referenced term, especially in discussion around solastalgia. However, in Persian the term carries connotations of regret, and in Dargwa it is more related to anxiety (Jackson et al., 2019). This may reflect different modes of experiencing the ‘same’ emotion.

In conclusion, then, science is a world-making practice (Raippalinna et al., 2023). Hence, deep reflection on what kinds of worlds are currently created, and which we want to create is important as scientists. The current age is one of cosmopolitanism, and interacting with the ‘Other’ requires an appropriate moral cosmopolitan framework (Laine, 2023). Histories of colonialism and oppression as well as the researchers’ values and missions must

be considered to assure tolerance towards alterity. Already, Industrial and Indigenous ways of knowing are not entirely separate. Indigenous groups often live within or near Industrial societies and use technological innovations in their practices. Individual Industrial scientists are using ecological and systems methodologies, as well as being led by and describing dynamics of love and care. The critique here is on the institution of Industrial science, which is slow to change. The climate corpus texts provide a critique of how this institution alienates scientists and non-scientists alike from their subjective experience of the world. This framing helps us understand how EA, born as it is from deep care for a relational, more-than-human world, may suffer from a sense of ontological alienation from the Industrial science complex.

What would a new, subjective way of science inspired by Indigeneity that the climate corpus texts promote look like? The foundation of many Indigenous ways of knowing is relationality, radically different from objectivist alienation. Tynan (2021) presents an example that highlights how relational knowing differs from the Industrial isolated knowing. She poses the question: “How are a river and a mountain similar?” (p. 600). An Industrial answer would be: “they are both part of nature” (p. 600). A relational answer, on the other hand, would be: “the river flows down from the mountain” (p.600). Knowledge thus becomes framed in relationships. As researchers within a relational frame, the focus is on accepting multiple truths and sharing authorship, rather than extracting original research. The relational foundation of EA may then receive more epistemic recognition, an important first step in developing methods to alleviate the distress it causes.

5.1.2. Church

For most of history, organised religion was the main source of sense-making and emotional care for existential questions. This role is now seemingly divided over both science and the church (Metz et al., 2023). They are differentiated in that science is the most trusted source for explanation and prediction, while religion is catered to providing care, meaning, and community. Both can instil moral sensitivity to local norms in people, by taking a position of authority (Yilmaz & Bahçekapili, 2015). A main difference between the two, however, is the assignment of responsibility and possibility for forgiveness. Monotheistic religions tend to mostly assign responsibility of avoiding sin and attaining eternal salvation on humanity itself (Pernau, 2021). This sense of responsibility was made less overwhelming by the idea of the all-powerful God that could extend forgiveness to misguided human behaviour. Science does not offer such potential for mercy.

Still, it is debatable whether the sense of morality instilled by religion led to desirable effects for the environment. Some monotheistic religions are quite anthropocentric. For example, the idea of humanity's dominion over the rest of nature is expressed from the first narrative of the genesis of the world onwards (Myers, 2014). Research suggests that adherents of Christian religions especially tend to be less concerned about CC. However, the results are not clear-cut and there is considerable variation amongst religions and denominations (Arbuckle & Konisky, 2015). Lack of concern about CC seems to also be related with holding beliefs of humanity's dominion over nature, and limitlessness of earth's resources (Morrison et al., 2015). The climate corpus texts suggest that the disregard of nature in Christian religions might stem from the invention of heaven as the final abode of eternal inhabitation. In such a reading, earth becomes only a temporary residence. In contrast, many Indigenous religions see death as a metamorphosis whereby the spirit moves into the surrounding nature to inhabit another lifeform there. This worldview logically inspires more respect and care for nature.

Nevertheless, religions have been the main provider for mystical experiences. Consistent practice of their central rituals, such as prayer, seems to evoke increased mystical experiences in attendants (Luhmann, 2020). Mystical experiences are relevant to discussion of EA in two ways. Firstly, self-transcendent experience (STEs), which may be evoked through mystical practice, but also through certain drugs, are hypothesised to increase environmental action (Isham et al., 2022). A commonly reported experience during an STE is a sense of dissolution of self-boundaries and becoming one with the whole world. As will be discussed in section 5.5 on the self, a state of such increased connectedness may be desirable for the Anthropocene.

At the same time, however, the dissolution of boundaries is conceptually similar to the epistemic sprawl exhibited by people with EA. Yet, in EA, the boundary-less experience seems to aggravate their anxiety and make it more palpable in daily life. Such an open and unstable space is characteristic of a limit situation (Jaspers, 2013), and careful guiding from the limit situation to a new, healthy worldview as enclosure is key in avoiding psychopathological states. Reports from past mystics have been suggested to show a similar pattern of going from limit situation to new enclosure, as personal and spiritual growth (Škodlar & Ciglencečki, 2017). Mystical practices were important tools for their successful transition. Although mystical dissolution may generally be voluntary and more scaffolded than EA, mystical practice may nevertheless be informative for dealing with the anxiety of the Anthropocene.

Important to note here is that mystics often report using embodied practices. Yet, within Industrial culture, the body and the mind are kept separate, with psychopathologies being within the domain of the mind. This separation is referred to as the cartesian split. It is often traced back to the theories of Descartes in the enlightenment (Gingrich, 2013). The conceptualisation of the split as put forward by Descartes puts the mind as different not just from the body but from all non-mind, mechanical objects. Naturally, such thinking also promotes anthropocentrism, as the human mind is somehow above all other objects. Merleau-Ponty's theories were pivotal in reintroducing the body into cognition (Abram, 1997; CCT1). However, the cartesian split remains influential as obvious in the theories even of renowned solastalgia theoriser Albrecht. His typology of CC impacts is structured along a cartesian split, cataloguing somaterratic (body-earth) and psychoterratic (psycheEarth) impacts (Albrecht, 2011). Although these two are stated to be linked, the dualism betrays how deeply rooted Cartesian thinking still is.

5.1.3. Ideologies

The climate corpus texts suggest that a further separation between humanity and the surrounding nature comes from the (economic) ideologies that are running Industrial society. Capitalism receives hefty criticism for its focus on 'infinite growth on a finite planet' (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 314; CCT6). Its economic growth orientation has recast nature as a resource to be exploited, infinitely. Land has become a property to be owned, rather than held in commons. As a result, produce from the land has become a commodity rather than a gift, and the care for the land is privatised instead of a shared communal activity. Additionally, the use of land is no longer for local benefit, but for the benefit of the system. With globalisation being integral to the system, the local value is not just lost, but local knowledge and biodiversity are endangered as well, due to changing practices to produce globally needed objects (Pretty et al., 2009). The loss of community that the privatisation and globalisation engender, is further increased by neoliberal ideology. With competitiveness and individualisation as its core tenets, it breaks down the communal relationality upon which ethical standards are also built (Kałwak & Weihgold, 2022).

The combination of these forces paints a sombre picture of 'the Good Life' as envisioned by the market forces of the Industrial culture (Isham et al., 2022). The climate corpus texts describe how it creates hungry consumers, blind to the natural Other, burdened with an unfair responsibility for the climate crisis. Continued, and ideally even increasing, purchasing power is the measure of state health. In response to climate concerns, 'sustainable

capitalism' has been presented as a solution, promising a way to keep producing and growing, but somehow staying within the limits of the planet. It has been contested, since nature then continues to be seen as a commodified Other rather than a being with agency. Furthermore, it shows a lack of taking accountability at the state level. Instead, true to neoliberalism, it is passed down to individuals. Kalwak and Weihgold (2022) have noted that it is therefore unsurprising that self-reports of EA are marked by feelings of personal responsibility, guilt, and shame.

In addition to capitalism and neoliberalism, CC and the societal response to it also intersect with other systems of oppression such as colonialism, gender, racism, and ageism. These concepts receive minimal attention in the climate corpus, except for colonialism which is obviously a key concept when comparing Industrial with Indigenous societies. The intersectionality of oppressing ideological systems is somewhat present in the epistemically sprawling statements given by participants in the Oblak et al. (2025b) study, however. For example:

The worst is when I mean, we are going there. Natural disasters will happen more and more and there will be all these kinds of, uh, really the economy will more and more break down and there will be lack of there will be problems of, uh, lack of food, nutrition, lack of many, many things we need for, for life. And so that it will become and what frightens me most that everybody, uh, people will then start to fight for their own. It will be a fight for survival, and it will be a war, you know, uh, the rich against the poor. (Oblak et al., 2025b, p. 33)

And:

And then related to the climate emergency, we also have the issue of apartments. I think that young people, we feel that it is related to sexual violence. Especially lately. (Oblak et al., 2025b, p. 31)

Generally, the climate corpus texts did not mirror such epistemic sprawl to practical and concrete events, rather, they sprawled into more phenomenological phenomena.

5.2 Time & Temporality

How does a starfish see the passing of time (Smailbegović, 2015)? They move so slowly, only with immense amounts of patience, or with time-lapse photography, do we observe their movements. Naked mole rats do not genetically age at all (Ruby et al., 2018), what does time feel like in the absence of physical markers of time?

The world abounds with time-perception alterities (Bawaka Country et al., 2020). Some species outlive us by decades, while other species see multiple generations in one human lifetime. Industrial society functions by an arbitrary measure of time, largely ignoring natural rhythms (Ricoeur, 1980). Therefore, the differentiation between time and temporality is important (Iparraguirre, 2016). Time is empirical, based on our subjective intuition. Temporality is the cultural construction built around it. Distinguishing the two honours the diversity of temporalities, historically and geographically, and questions the hegemony of Industrial time. Furthermore, it allows us to see temporal injustices that take away a culture's right to self-determination (Awasis, 2020), such as the settler time imposed on Indigenous groups. It ignores the multiple temporalities in the confrontation, and disregards how they influence Indigenous decision making.

Industrial time can be described as linear, such that Indigenous, often 'traditional' practices, belong to history, and not to the present, and certainly not the future (Awasis, 2020). Industrial culture has also spatialised time, dividing it up in measurable blocks that are seen as a commodifiable resource (King et al., 2023). In contrast to a line, Indigenous temporalities can be more accurately envisioned as ever-repeating spirals (Reid et al., 2020). The climate corpus texts present Industrial society as temporally alienated, while at the same time advocating for an Indigenous-type interconnected temporality. In this section, a contextualisation of temporality in Industrial and Indigenous phenomenologies of time, will be followed by a presentation of the alienation of the present, past and future.

5.2.1. A Phenomenology of Time

The passage of time in the human condition has been a topic under consideration in many different fields (Moskalewicz & Schwartz, 2020). It is an abstract force that we cannot directly touch or see, yet it is completely inescapable. The bothersome ungraspability of time feels even more pronounced in anxiety, where, such as in EA, the flow of time can be felt to be hurtling too fast towards environmental doom. Doctrines have been conceptualised to give us the sense of having a grasp on time. Religion promises eternity, while physics calls time an

illusion, which is echoed in philosophical theories of unreality. Psychiatry teaches us time can be a source of suffering, but also of giving meaning to our lifetimes. Temporal experience is thus an important marker of psychological functioning. But what is our experience of time like? Some cardinal phenomenological theories on this question have been put forward by Husserl, Heidegger and Ricoeur. Furthermore, ecological research has called for recognition of deep time. Indigenous temporality presents a different, more sprawling phenomenology of time altogether. This section will shortly explore these different theories.

Husserl's innovation came from his focus not on what time is to us, but on how it presents itself in our consciousness. He posited that the present is more than just the feeling of the precise now. Instead, the now- named primal impression, also includes the moments that have come just before- the act of retention, and the moments that will come just after- the act of protention (Bogotá & Djebbara, 2023; Husserl et al., 2013). By doing so, he brought both the past and the future in the present, but in extreme close-up. Retention can then not be equated to memory or recollection. Our experience of existence in time thus consists of these retention, primal impression, and protention timeblocks of continuous intentions, arising and being incorporated into the next timeblock *ad infinitum*.

Heidegger expanded this timeline to include our entire temporal horizon, from birth to the final event- death (Heidegger, 2010). According to him, our way of being in the world, our *Dasein*, is completely rooted in temporality. We are always incomplete and in the process of becoming. The only moment where we can fully be something and find ourselves, is in the moment of death. As such, we are always oriented towards death, caught in an anxiety paradox of ontological insecurity (Berenskötter, 2020). An inauthentic way to deal with this anxiety, according to Heidegger, would be to unquestioningly fall back on traditions. The authentic way, on the other hand, is rooted in a recollection of our historicity. Heidegger argued that our *Dasein* has a thrownness, meaning that we find ourselves in a specific cultural and historical context that determines our authenticity, by delimitating our possibilities and limitations for becoming. Furthermore, our historicity is communal, and our socialisation, our *Mitsein*, also determines the appropriateness of different actions. Recollection then is a movement of connecting the past to the present and the future. Without recollection, time would seem to be mere chronology, such that the past is meaningless, the present alienated, and the future without foundation.

Ricoeur (1980) continued this line of thinking in his formulations of narrative time, focusing especially on the process of recollection and re-examination of historicity. He made a distinction between lived human time, and external, measurable cosmic/world

time. Narrative time sits at the intersection, bridging cosmic and lived time. It flattens lived time, but by doing so also articulates it into a meaningful form. Specifically, narratives allow us to interpret mere chronological events in a meaningful way. Narratives can also be illustrative of our authentic agency in time (Ricoeur, 1980). Epics and quests are the intervention models par excellence, since they centre action and concern, acted out by characters thrown in a world over which they have no direct control. The burgeoning of climate fiction could thus imply that in this temporality marked by EA, we are hungry for epic narratives showing us agency in the times of CC and/or crisis.

However, in the context of CC and its associated EA, the power of historicity and narrative to connect us back to deep time becomes relevant. Deep time refers to the long, pre-human geological existence of the earth and non-human species (Caracciolo, 2021). It concerns a time scale vastly removed from our lived temporal experience and, indeed, temporal imaginary abilities. Events that mark deep time, most importantly evolution, are random, chance-driven events that resist emplotment, and thus complicate narrativity. Furthermore, it questions the idea of historicity, because to what extent and from when on is it 'our' history (Wood, 2018)? Deep time also inevitably introduces place into the discussion of time, which further is pointedly relevant for the place-based emotions CC evokes. The theories by Husserl, Heidegger, and Ricoeur provide rich accounts of lived and narrated time, but function mostly at the level of human experience. In contrast, deep time foregrounds the geological and ecological history of a place, opening the conceptualisation of temporality to include more-than-human histories.

The phenomenology of Indigenous time⁵ does include place as a crucial component, recognising the dynamic ongoing process of the geology of the land, and thus incorporating deep time (Reid et al., 2020). Indeed, the careful storytelling traditions of the Australian Aboriginals seem to have preserved details of cosmic events that happened thousands of years ago (Abram, 1997; CCT1). This highlights the intermingling of myth and existence, where mythical time exists as another coterminous layer in Indigenous lived experience (Iparraguirre, 2016). Furthermore, Indigenous groups see the land upon which they live as being inhabited by their ancestors and descendants (King et al., 2023). For some Indigenous groups, death then is not the end of the temporal horizon, but a metamorphosis into a

⁵ It should be noted that different Indigenous groups hold slightly different ideas about time. Statements made here are based on careful collating of a generalizable picture of 'Indigenous' views of time. When I was not sure if an idea belonged to multiple groups, I have mentioned the specific group's name.

belonging to the larger web of life (Abram, 1997; CCT1). This somewhat contrasts Heidegger's being-towards-death, and death as the point where we leave the 'They' world (Heidegger, 2010). Perhaps for this reason, the direction of temporal attention is different in Indigenous culture too. Heidegger talks of our being-towards-death which focuses on the future, while the Māori live by the saying: *Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua* – I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past' (Rameka, 2016, p. 387).

Everywhen is the term created by Stanner (2009) to describe Indigenous experience of time. Its meaning encapsulates the idea of 'everywhere at all times' (Janca & Bullen, 2003), capturing the intergenerational, coterminous, and geologically based Indigenous temporal phenomenology. In daily life, many Indigenous people focus on the 'here-now time' (Janca & Bullen, 2003). Yet, their conceptualisation of the now is intimately tied up with the past, and the two combined create 'being the time'. Furthermore, time is event-based, its passage measured through progression of life-stages and returning cycles (Sinha & Da, 2019). The temporal distance of events is measured in terms of importance. Janca and Bullen (2003) paint the picture of an individual existing not on a timeline, but in the centre of concentric circles with important events placed closer than less important ones. Furthermore, some extremely impactful events, such as colonial invasions, are conceived of as everlasting and still existing and exerting influence in current times.

A last differentiation between Industrial and Indigenous temporalities can be made in the agency of time itself. In Industrial cultures, agency is perceived as laying predominantly with the present (Pernau, 2021). It is in the now that the initiation exists to look into the past or imagine a future. The past is not seen as having the agency to act back, despite clear examples like trauma where this does happen. In indigenous cultures the situation is quite opposite, and the past and future are seen as having agency and as needing to be treated with respect (Janca & Bullen, 2003; Reid et al., 2020). The damaging policies of the present are said to not just hurt the current environment, but also the past (Bawaka Country et al., 2020). As such, generational timeframes are often used, where the impact of a policy on the next seven generations is taken into consideration (Awasis, 2020).

The indigenous phenomenology of time thus challenges the idea that Industrial ideas of time are objective. Clearly, humanity, and especially Indigenous experience, is marked by multiple temporalities (Iparraguirre, 2016). Industrial communities adhere to the hegemonic time, but outside of that Indigenous communities additionally experience their local, mythical and cosmic temporalities. The climate corpus texts suggest that the industrial loss of connection to such non-hegemonic senses of time, has left Industrial subjects temporally

alienated, inhabiting an anxious now, looking back on a romanticised past that is out of reach, and moving anxiously towards a doomed future.

5.2.2. *The Anxious Now*

The institutions and ideologies described in the previous section 5.1 on the Industrial lifeworld inform modern identity, having shaped our past inventions and laying the groundwork for the future. The growing awareness of the damage these forces are exerting on the wider natural world thus creates a disorienting experience. On one hand, people in Industrial cultures identify with the Industrial world order that has shaped their current experience (Myers, 2014). On the other hand, this world order is increasingly scrutinised and shown to be untenable in the long run. A reliance on the traditional ways of living and conservative ideologies is often used as a coping mechanism for profound existential anxieties, such as the ones evoked by CC. Yet, Heidegger (2010) deemed this an inauthentic way of living, and urged people to scrutinise the old worldview and authentically adapt a more suitable one. Anxiety then becomes an important signpost towards change, as will be further explained in section 5.3 on feelings.

However, as the climate corpus texts emphasize, the Industrial world order that is for now still the hallmark of modernity, is thoroughly alienating, making anxiety harder to carry. The sense of connection is disappearing both between people, and between people and the natural environment. This disconnect receives a lot of attention in the climate corpus. A loss of the ability to hear the voices of the natural environment and learn from them is a main concern. However, it is also implied that we are losing the ability to listen to the other people around us as well, no longer experiencing them as a community. Interactions we have with these fellow residents are on the surface only. In this disconnected state, popularity and status become more important (Lavigne et al., 2011), as evident from the focus of environmental cleanups being more on restoring the name of the causing organisation, rather than on restoring natural balance.

Besides these cultural forces, the climate corpus texts also present technology as a significant alienator. The straight lines and mass producibility of many items in Industrial cultures are far removed from natural items. Instead of finding connections in the human community, we are now connecting ourselves to technology. The proliferation of LLM tools and our increased reliance on technology since the release of the climate corpus texts only makes this alienator more pertinent. In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1997; CCT1), Abram argues for the theory that language has divorced us from the experience of our senses. The

LLMs are trained on an incredibly large corpora of written text, and ‘live’ only in this textual world without any direct grounding in the sensuous world. The technological alienation then becomes only starker, while unrealistic technological optimism is further strengthened.

The lack of earth-sense in LLMs is thus a problem. Yet, Clark (2020) argues that humans lack a complete earth-sense as well. Even outside of Industrial conditioning, the world still feels essentially limitless to us. In the past this was not a severe issue as humans were not technologically advanced enough to be a geological force on their own on a large scale. Times have changed, however. Our lack of earth-sense, individualisation-caused blindness to nature, and the global systems of waste relocation to remote areas has been a fertile breeding ground for climate denial and consumerism (Slaby, 2023). Normally, an ecological system would be limited by its own excessiveness and waste products. However, Industrial human culture has been able to outsource their limiting forces at a large scale and turn a blind eye to negative consequences. Therefore, whatever limits to our system we might have been able to observe, have been sent away.

Now, this convenience of sending away is disappearing, both in terms of physical effects of Industrial convenience, and in uncomfortable emotions evoked by the climate situation. The evidence for this can be observed in the growing of a worldview of living in a wounded world (Oblak et al., 2025a), and CC becoming increasingly socially situated (Jones & Davison, 2021). The climate corpus texts also convey this sense that CC has become all-encompassing. Weather is brought forth in the climate corpus as the prime location of this growing awareness, since it is our most direct sensuous entry into CC. For what are we talking about when we talk about the weather, and how can we adapt to the looming presence of doom behind that everyday conversation? Do we face it, or find ways to avoid it – adopting new topics of small-talk like ‘how are your shares faring?’, or perhaps by turning from the present entirely to find the comforting embrace of an idealised past?

5.2.3. The Romanticised Past

There seems to be a pattern of adaptation that consists of fleeing into the past and mourning the loss of historically constituted environments that we expect will disappear. Solastalgia is a prime example of this ‘anticipatory mourning’ (Pihkala, 2018). The difficulty of such feelings seems to go hand in hand with a numbing of emotions as well as a ‘socially constructed silence’ (Norgaard, 2011) around the topic. The alienated individualisation of modernity then becomes a burden that is carried on one’s own. Furthermore, living in that Industrial culture means that the surrounding cultural environment does not seem to be able

to provide alleviation for the pain of modernity. The search for an answer then turns towards the past, with hopes it will alleviate the situation either through offering a better image of nature, and/or by promising ancestral knowledge.

The climate corpus texts highlight the narratability of the idea of nature, presenting different conceptualisations: as a resource for capitalism, or as a gift for many Indigenous groups. Specifically, the climate corpus highlights how a trend in Industrial culture is to romanticise the past. Modern technologies such as overland electricity lines and windmills are said to ruin the pristine landscape of the past. However, this narrative ignores how the pastoral landscape most of the Industrial countries romanticise has been heavily terraformed by agriculture to its current shape (Tozer et al., 2021). The rolling green hills that often accompany these pastoral fantasies are the result of deforestation and heavy grazing. Furthermore, the past was far from idyllic. Nature has always been exploited by humans (Clark, 2020) and human-caused natural disasters are peppered throughout the history of our existence (Frankopan, 2023).

The other relief sought in the past is ancestral knowledge. The climate corpus texts lament how Industrial culture has lost its connection with its ancestors, and how the ancestor worship still found in non-Industrial cultures could provide guidance and emotional healing. Analysis in the corpus texts often show that these ceremonies usually have roots in caring for the natural environment. The ceremonies are also lauded for their function of marking important transitions and providing the emotional support that such moments need, for example grief (Pihkala, 2018). The climate corpus therefore calls for a reintroduction of such ceremonies. Tied in with the ceremonies are the stories of the ancestors. Indigenous communities show us the benefit of adapting stories with the changing landscape to create ‘old new ways of thinking’ (Awasis, 2020, p. 845). Industrial society used to be guided by stories of gods, but with their disappearance, we became masters of our own fate, with the terrifying burden of freedom as a result (Berenskötter, 2020). New stories can encode for old new knowledge to face our future.

In conclusion then, we tend to look to the past for answers. In the context of the EA discussion, especially the body of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), usually maintained by indigenous groups, is praised (Allison, 2015). Yet, the landscapes on which TEK is based are changing faster than the ceremonies can adapt. Still, empires have fallen many times before, often enough to know that the average civilisation lasts 336 years (Kemp, 2019), and humanity has faced climate upheavals repeatedly as well (Frankopan, 2023). Furthermore, many Indigenous communities have already been dealing with displacement

and ecological instability for centuries (Chandler & Reid, 2020). These times are therefore not necessarily as unprecedented as the climate corpus implies, and we may still be able to find in the past the guidance to grow our resilience to face the future we fear.

5.2.4. *The Doomed Future*

Similarly alienated is the Industrial present from its future, or rather, the future it had envisioned for itself. Industrial rhetoric is dominated by ideals of a line of progression that develops ever onwards and upwards, always bringing new improvements (Verlie, 2019). It conveys these ideals with a sense of certainty and the promise of control. However, the forecasted environmental doom challenges these ideals. Industrial life acquires a new sense of urgency; instead of the Neoliberal race to achieve greatness earlier than peers, we feel like we are now facing a race against the end of the world. Especially for young people this time limit is palpable (Benoit et al., 2022). As one of the signs read at a climate protest: ‘you will die of old age, I will die of climate change’ (Read, 2019). The climate corpus texts locate three specific areas in which the future alienation is most clearly felt.

The first area is, once again, technology, in the sense that it often becomes the locus of unrealistic positive visions of the future (Marcos, 2025). We imagine scientific solutions that will somehow take our pollution and vanish it or turn it into new raw materials, a fantasy clearly present in *Ecotopia* (Callenbach, 1975; CCT9). As a result of this, there is no need for us to change our ways, since technology will soon turn our exploitative behaviour into a circular economy. Since the publication of the climate corpus texts, AI has seen a massive boom, which has brought the discussion of the environmental impacts of this technology slightly more mainstream. Data centres require massive amounts of energy and water to continue running (Siddik et al., 2021), while natural resources are being mined, and depleted, at increasing levels to continue making our modern technology (Pell et al., 2021). This knowledge highlights how we have outsourced the costs of our living standards, and how we might run out of natural resources to fuel our technology, before it is able to provide a magical solution to the climate problems (Marcos, 2025).

The second area is fatalism, which is a direct response to the perceived inevitability of climate doom. The fatalist has an attitude of total surrender to their personal lack of agency in preventing the collapse of the Industrial world order. For them, the focus is not on going down fighting and doing all they can to make the disaster at least a little bit less bad, but on accepting the guaranteed end with grace. Yet, other texts in the climate corpus also point out how this detached approach is a bourgeois luxury. Maintaining an attitude of ‘après moi le

deluge' is simple so long as the effects of CC do not step over your threshold into your direct personal circle, causing mortal damage, as it is in the Global South. The fatalists of the Global North are geographically removed from the climate crisis, and through the media system, also protected from the knowledge of how their affluence arises from historical suppression of the Global South (Slaby, 2025). Research suggests that passive fatalism, a type of fatalism devoid of personal agency, correlates with anxiety and negative coping (Shahid et al., 2020). It demotivates the planning of action for the future, as seen in practical EA.

The final area is the consideration of descendants. An often-measured social effect of CC, also present in the Oblak et al. (2025a) study, is the reluctance of people to have children, out of fear of the world they would be brought into (Hickman et al., 2021). Progeny ensures a type of immortality, and the immortality project has been identified by Lifton (1996) as a common need, and method to quench existential worries. The prevalence of the rejection of this immortality project thus speaks of an anxiety of considerable severity. The climate corpus texts promote a replacement of a self-centred view of the world to one that emanates from an imagined descendant. Adapting such a view intimately connects one to the distinct future and may thereby inspire more sustainable actions, or even activism. In the end, with our descendants on the line, we have a clearer conceptualisation of who we are saving the world for (Benoit et al., 2022).

Yalom's (1980) framework of existential psychotherapy helps to frame all three future-alienations as defensive responses to deep existential distress arising from four ultimate concerns: death, meaninglessness, freedom, and isolation. In EA research, mortality salience appears not merely as fear of biological death, but as anxiety over a collective end to the horizon of being (Crandon et al., 2022; Gago et al., 2024; Hickman et al., 2021), alongside a collapse of meaning as life's normalities dissolve and the Industrial worldview ruptures (Pihkala, 2020). The openness of the future does not feel like freedom, but like overwhelming uncertainty, combined with general low tolerance for uncertainty amongst those with EA (Oblak et al., 2025a). Finally, the existential isolation that stretches out in all dimensions of time described in this section, is intensified by the loss of potential mortality projects. CC threatens not just descendants, but the continuity of all of human life. EA is thus marked by a deep ontological insecurity (Adams, 2016).

5.3 Feelings

Etymologically, ‘to overwhelm’ stems from being emerged (Verlie, 2019). Fittingly, overwhelm is connected to EA in reports (Pihkala, 2020). Thus, before the rising seas come to flood the Global North, we must navigate the waves of emotions. Why are some people drowning? And how can they learn to swim?

Many different and potentially conflicting emotions have been identified as being evoked by the growing awareness of CC and its disastrous effects, with the main eco-emotions seemingly being anxiety, grief, shame and hope (Pihkala, 2022b). The previous section outlined how those with EA live in an alienated and anxious now. The climate corpus texts imply an affective porosity where our feelings are not solely our own but are instead intimately tied up with our sociocultural context and the earth itself. As such, feelings is another area where the alienation/interconnectedness contrast becomes evident. Fear and anxiety are generally associated with distancing tendencies (Ciompi, 2003). In the case of EA, the fear-inducing object is CC, which is an ungraspable object (Morton, 2013; CCT4).

What then, may we distance ourselves from? Should it be from our choice to engage in sustainable behaviour, since our actions are ineffectual for targeting an issue as large as CC? This is the response we can observe in the fatalist attitude. Alternatively, one might alienate themselves from the Industrial world order at large, but since this context has been the cradle of one’s emotional being, what does such distancing, emotionally, look like? This chapter discusses this affective side of EA. To contextualise this discussion, I will first describe the aspects of the Industrial culture that the climate corpus texts link to emotional dysfunction. I will then focus extensively on Ciompi’s theory of affect-logic to understand how culture and emotions come to be linked. Then, I will describe the transition in worldview from capitalism to wounded world, followed by suggestions on how to deal with the wounded world-based EA.

5.3.1. *Hungry spirit*

To be happy is generally thought to be the mark of living well. The roadmap to achieving that state is encoded in the concept of ‘the good life’ (Isham et al., 2022). This concept is passed down to us in the narratives that surround us. However, adopting a more critical lens allows us to see a dominant capitalist watermark all over this map. The Industrial good life has often been articulated around increasing material achievement (Isham et al., 2022). A different life prescription is the Andean concept of ‘buen vivir’. Although intergroup

differences exist (Hidalgo-Capitán & Cubillo-Guevara, 2017), generally the Andean good life is marked by “a way of living in harmony with oneself (identity), with society (equity) and with nature (sustainability)” (Cubillo-Guevara & Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015; as translated in Hidalgo-Capitán & Cubillo-Guevara, 2017, p. 24).

Case and Deaton (2015) published a seminal study showing an increase in middle-age white mortality of what they called ‘Deaths of despair’. These deaths are from suicide, and both short-term and long-term toxic effects of drugs and alcohol. Recent work shows that adolescents also show increased prevalence of internalising psychopathologies such as depression and anxiety (Keyes & Platt, 2024). Thus, for many, ‘the Good Life’, does not translate into satisfaction. Kimmerer (2013; CCT6) suggests this is because it is not our material existence that is hungry, but our spirit. The Industrial world order tends to reproduce incentives oriented toward accumulation and scarcity, and the Industrial individual must struggle significantly to escape the clutches of the subsequent Hungry Spirit.

The climate corpus texts generally support this view, identifying how the adaptation of a person to the Industrial values cultivates a mechanical selfhood, that suffers from *affluenza*. Cushman (1990) referred to this as the ‘empty self’ which is then attempted to be filled through consumer products. Yet, the material wealth can never fill the emptiness, because it originates from a lack of communal support and meaning. Furthermore, contrasting Industrial culture to the relational ontologies found in Indigenous contexts shows its uniqueness in this disconnection. Watson (2022) even posits that harmful separatory behaviours such as racism and sexism are reinforced by and perhaps even originated from this disconnected culture. He further suggests that Industrialism promotes a scarcity mindset to increase consumerism but thereby obscures gratitude.

Against this backdrop, the mental health crisis becomes less surprising. This is not to ignore the power of resilience and human adaptability. Indeed, emotional resilience and small acts of personal resistance may allow an Industrial individual to still lead a fulfilling life. Nevertheless, ‘optimal’ adaptation to neoliberal standards often privileges instrumental rationality over emotional attunement. The climate corpus texts imply that emotionality and nature go hand in hand. As such, the narrative of dominion over, and loss of connection to nature, implies a similar attitude to one’s emotions (Passmore et al., 2023). Furthermore, emotions are often relegated to the domain of the body, which in the tradition of the Cartesian split is overlooked. Yet, emotions can give us important information about our world and our position in it. What information is therefore being suppressed in the Industrial world, and

how is despair healthy in that context? To understand the culture of the Hungry Spirit, it is necessary to understand the underlying affective systems.

5.3.2. Affective Signposts

The Anthropocene times of a changing and threatened world, are an affectively turbulent era. These emotions are urgently present in and shape our lived experience. Emotions have been the topic of extensive theorising; here I will highlight phenomenology. Phenomenological theories have generally adapted a more outward focus on the intentionality and meaning of emotions. Building on from the foundation laid by Brentano (Huemer, 2019), Husserl differentiated emotions from other bodily feelings on the basis of their intentionality (Fisette, 2021) and further posited that emotions constitute value in the external world, and thus its meaning. Heidegger saw emotions as more radically disclosing the world to us and thus being a more pre-reflective openness to meaning (Elpidorou & Freeman, 2015). Sartre (2024) opposed the passive nature of these theories and presented emotions as creative forces. Emotions then not just constitute or disclose meaning but transform the world's meaning to match one's actions. Phenomenological theories thus show how emotions like EA are more than simple reactions to environmental facts, positing them instead as a disclosure of a world that is threatened, finite and interdependent.

Embracing both ideas, we find the enactivist view of affectivity, which builds on the idea of emotions as disclosing meaningful aspects of the world and transforming the world, while also grounding affectivity in embodiment. Within this framework there exist no real distinction between affect and cognition, as it posits that cognition is fundamentally affective (Colombetti, 2018). Affectivity then discloses constraints and affordances in the environment. However, this biological basis appears in tension with dominant Industrial behaviour. How does it make sense to overexploit a system beyond our own energy requirements, such that the supportive environment that we depend on is in danger of collapsing? How can it be that in this biological situation, the emotions of our hungry spirit tell us to consume more, rather than less?

Luhman (1995) put forward the idea of symbolic autopoiesis, which does not take biological but social systems as the basis, which can refer to operationally closed domains such as politics, economy, or science that are structurally coupled to each other. He further posited that what maintains these systems is specific communication codes. When looking at the Industrial world order, the prominent communication codes are efficiency, growth, and progress, which mute the affective feedback from the overexploited natural environment

(Slaby, 2025). EA, then, comes in as a destabilising affective force into the Industrial symbolic autopoiesis, and calls for a reconnection between the biological and cultural autopoietic systems.

Furthermore, Fanon (2008) diagnosed colonial societies with an affective ankylosis, a rigidity of the affective being. Affective vitality becomes stilted and a situation is created where the privileged become numb to the pain and suffering of the racialised other who face systemised violence. Slaby (2023) expands these ideas into a theory of structural apathy of Industrial societies in the face of CC. He posits that Industrial societies function in specific structures of unfeeling regarding CC, that create a distance and indifference to the climate-related suffering of the Global South. Capitalism requires, and builds, a system that allows the Industrial citizen to remain insulated from sustained awareness of their significant ecological cost of their affluent way of life.

Slaby (2025) further explains how this structural apathy is created through habits of affluence. Habits exist of the habituation of the body to a certain way of living and help to reduce metabolic requirements of cognition in this context. However, this habituation also happens affectively. In Industrial societies, affluent living has become a habit. Think for example of the simple practice of driving a car on streamlined highways. This practice requires extracted oil and minerals from the Global South, but the ecological costs of all this is rarely considered in the mundane act of driving. The habits of affluence are further discursively anchored and absorbed in the regional identity. Through this the ecological cost is hidden, and the distress of CC is obscured by the generally more positive and less intense emotions that accompany the habits of affluence.

A comprehensive theory that offers a systematic understanding of this process is Ciompi's Affect-Logic (Ciompi, 1988), which is rooted in phenomenology and systems-theory. Affect refers to all emotion-like phenomena, emotions and moods both, as characterised by psychosomatic energy states in the nervous system. Since relaxation and indifference still have specific energetic consumption patterns, with specific effects on cognitive functioning, affective neutrality is impossible (Ciompi & Baatz, 2008). Of relevance for EA is that fear-based emotions promote a distancing from the relevant cognitive object, while sadness dissolves attachments to lost objects (Ciompi & Baatz, 2005).

In the theory of affect-logic, cognition is seen as significantly distinct from affect, which opposes the enactive affectivity theory that treats them as being the same thing. Ciompi supports this distinction as it allows research to better observe the reciprocal effect of the two. Cognition starts as the ability to make the smallest possible distinction between

different sensory experiences and is then abstracted up to logic, or overarching modes of thinking. This could be personal logics such as a logic of love, but also logics relevant to a wider circle of organisation, such as the logics of war. Despite this clear distinction between affect and cognition, the affect-logic framework does not see them as operating independently. Rather, they are intimately connected, and the name ‘affect-logic’ is supposed to reflect equal weight of both terms on either side of the dash (Ciompi, 1997). Functionally, Ciompi proposes that the energetic pattern of a specific affect shapes cognitive functions in particular ways, so-called operator effects. Affect energies supply the fuel, and the logic sets up the channels for the variety of mental and social activities we engage in.

Through habituation and differentiation, high energy states change into semi-automatic, subconscious low energy states that nevertheless maintain the same operator-effects on cognitions and behaviour. Applied to EA, this framework helps illuminate how CC induced affectivity may present as an intense emotion, for example in response to a negative news item, or as an underlying daily affect. In terms of bioenergetic effects, it is activating in some, and paralysing in others. The operator effect of EA is also evident from the reports in the Oblak et al. (2025a) study, where EA casts a climate crisis glare over all natural phenomena, illustrated in this quote:

“I am riding my bike through the park every day. And I am worried. I look around wondering if the buds are going to bloom or not. These things are changing so quickly. Every season there is something that is changing. Or rather, it is compounding. For years now, April is no longer April.” (Oblak et al., 2025b, p. 46)

5.3.3. Fractals of Feelings

The elegance of the Affect-Logic theory becomes clear when the scalability of the theory is considered. Fundamentally, specific concurrent feelings, thoughts, and behaviours that are repeatedly activated become consolidated into the feeling, thinking, and behaving (FTB) programs. Ciompi posits that these FTB programs are the building blocks of the psyche and are thus what we would normally describe as the personality, both of individuals, but also of whole societies. The hierarchical, reciprocal affect-logic system can be applied to ‘basic’ FTB programs, but also to more complex programs for an individual. Similarly, the system can be scaled up from the individual to the social and even cultural group the individual belongs to. In terms of more complex individual and cultural worldviews, it does

so by focusing on ‘Eigenworlds’. The semi-automatic and semi-conscious habits that the FTB programs result in, create Eigenworlds that function as self-stabilising systems. The more an FTB-program is repeated, the more solidified it becomes, which is in line with observations on neural plasticity. Thus, Affect-Logic proposes a system whereby our personality, built up out of FTB programs, is mostly acquired based on experiences and sociocultural environment. Furthermore, it challenges the idea that emotions are solely our own, showing instead how our affectual experiences are shared with our environment.

According to Ciompi, the scalability of affect-logic follows the pattern of fractals. This is an often-observed morphology of scalable patterns, both in nature and in culture (Ciompi, 2016). In terms of Eigenworlds, then, the basic affects combine with unlimited configurations of cognition to create specific configurations. Affects influence the focus of attention, memory consolidation and perceptual mood (e.g. seeing an overall friendly or threatening world), and are considerably contagious. Frequently occurring FTB programs are further cemented into stable states through social and linguistic feedback. Extreme examples of the fractal functioning of affect-logics are phenomena such as mass-hysteria, or mass-rage. Moreover, many instances of mass action appear to be underpinned by a shared mass-feeling, such as the mass EA and eco-anger that motivated the youth climate protests. Slaby (2025) further proposes a mechanism of a sort of social fractal enforcement of affective norms, whereby small daily social interactions fractal up to a society-level structural apathy.

Analysing the Eigenworld of the Industrial world order from this perspective may then be done in terms of the hungry spirit-logic. As children we learn what good and bad worlds look like based on the positive or negative feelings associated with them (Ciompi & Baatz, 2005). The good world we are shown is full of material wealth. Child-directed marketing of toys has only strengthened this feeling. Material wealth is of course not all good, and the bad world that comes with it is the pollution and waste that it produces. However, as mentioned in section 5.2 on time, we have an ‘away’ for those issues. We are not faced with them and thus are presented with a material world that is only good.

Furthermore, expression of difficult emotions is usually discouraged in everyday conversations, to maintain the neoliberal ideal of rationality (Katwak & Weihgold, 2022). The scarcity-greed-consumerism FTB program is thus instilled from a young age and reflected in fractals all the way up to the overarching Industrial world order. However, no matter how globally established certain FTB-programs, and their associated logics are, with sufficient tension, the system may find a new stable state and overarching logic. In the end, the FTB programs exist to help us adapt to our environment and must therefore suit the environmental

conditions. Following this premise then, the idea of mass-EA as a signal with normative significance is once again emphasised.

5.3.4. *Earth's Pain*

The hungry spirit-logic is pervasive and seemingly stable, but not unquestioned. People are waking up to the ecological damage that is being done, reflected in the growing prevalence of EA. However, as shown by the impact on mental health, this waking up is not gentle nor emotion-less. The theory of affect-logic explains the characteristic of such significant breaks from a prevailing logic (Ciompi, 1988). Where the instilling and habituation of FTB programs is done over-time and through repetition, changes in operating logic can happen suddenly, in so-called bifurcations. These are non-linear changes that are the result of the building up of emotional energies, until they reach a critical point and a new logic is adapted that allows for the dissipation of the uncomfortable or painful emotional energies. This is reminiscent of Sartre's ideas of world-transforming affectivity; a bifurcation is an emotional reconfiguration of the world sense that is under pressure. Extrapolating from this, it can be said that the hungry spirit-logic contradicts the reality of a world that is suffering from overexploitation. Increased exposure to such effects may lead to a bifurcation in the direction of the adoption of a new wounded world logic.

It should be noted that this process is not a straightforward build-up until a certain threshold is reached followed by a guaranteed bifurcation. Intense emotions themselves have a tipping point of overwhelm (Slaby, 2025). When the affective reality that impinges on our awareness is too threatening or unliveable, for example because we feel unequipped to cope with it, we may instead evade the emotion. Sartre's (2024) world-transformation can also bleed into the realm of fiction, where reality can be edited to a version that is manageable. Keeping with the metaphor of this chapter, one can swim a wave but will flee from a tsunami. Especially in Industrial science, the media and socionormative space are well-versed in the buffering of difficult ecological emotions (Slaby, 2025). The unfeeling of EA becomes a readily available hide-out from the tsunami.

Ciompi also observed that in some vulnerable individuals, the critical build-up of emotional tension is resolved through a bifurcation into psychotic thinking⁶. Besides genetic

⁶ The ideas described in this paragraph were put forward by the original thinkers specifically in relation to psychopathological, often psychotic, thinking. Including these thoughts here does not imply the labelling of EA as psychopathological, or the associated lifeworld as psychotic, as that would be in contradiction to the moral/healthy emotion argument presented at multiple different places in this thesis. Nevertheless, the overinclusive thinking present in EA, characterised by porous

and biographical factors, overall increased emotional tension and an instability between feeling and thinking may increase an individual's vulnerability to disordered thinking. Here, the theory shows marked compatibility with Jaspers' theories around worldviews (Jaspers, 2013). His theory also follows the pattern of an overwhelming crisis where previous worldviews are no longer adequate for sense-making. The ontological insecurity of the new open space is resolved by the adoption of new worldviews, but when this process is done sub optimally, the individual may find themselves with new worldviews that lead to abnormal sense-making, and thus psychotic thinking patterns. Considering the enactive affectivity theories that link sense-making to affectivity, Jaspers' theories of worldviews allow for a vulnerability arising from an instability between feeling and thinking, similar to Ciompi.

In the context of the climate crisis, the wounded world-logic may offer a more resonant sense-making worldview. Indeed, the climate corpus texts advocate for it, as it is a more realistic reflection of the critical state of the climate. Feeling pain, anxiety, and despair when considering the destruction is presented as being wide-spread and healthy. From an evolutionary standpoint, too, it seems more sensible to respond to a threat to our existence with painful emotions that may signpost the way to saving behaviours. Problematically, though, overwhelming despair and anxiety are distancing emotions, more likely to inspire disengagement than action. Furthermore, the wounded world-logic presented in the climate corpus texts supports a specific epistemic sprawl where the pain arises not just from our observation of the destruction, but out of the earth itself. The texts describe a pathological disbalance where the health of our society and the health of the earth upon we lived are mirrored in each other. As such, we can only be healed if we heal the earth. It is easy to imagine how such a worldview, combined with the never-ending stream of climate destruction imagery, can lead to immense sensations of anxiety and despair, and paralysis of action that does indeed feel as if being overwhelmed by an insurmountable affective wave.

5.3.5. Eco-empathy

The climate corpus texts thus promote a wounded world worldview that allows us to make sense of a world in climate crisis and recognize our interconnectedness with it. However, the wounded world-logic may be accompanied with overwhelming and paralysing amounts of anxiety and despair, whereas what the situation needs is decisive climate action. Furthermore, the larger societal context still is one that prefers to suppress emotions,

boundaries between concepts, is a classical symptom of psychosis too. Hence, these theories may still aid in the understanding of the epistemic sprawl of EA.

especially negative ones (Rust, 2008). Hence, individuals with EA find themselves pulled in two directions. On one hand, they experience feelings of anxiety and despair without any socially accepted ways to express them, making alienation a more viable way of dealing with them. On the other hand, they read the climate corpus texts that promote interconnectedness as desirable. Having an expanded awareness, which includes being acutely aware of the pain of the earth, is described as a spiritually desirable state. Perceiving the Other is promoted as necessary to break free from the harmful Industrial world order, even if such perception brings more pain. In the end, the climate corpus texts promise that the interconnectedness, at times beautiful and at times painful, leads you to being more alive. Several anecdotes are included in the texts that speak of a sense of being chosen by nature, a privilege that only happens when one is fully perceptually and emotionally interconnected with it.

For the first problem – the avoidance or repression of negative emotions, academic work suggests that not just acknowledging them but fully embracing them, is desirable for the mental health of the whole society. Ivtzan et al. (2016) argue that the ‘good life’ ought to include the light and the dark side of the emotional spectrum, and everything in between. Especially the darker emotions offer immense potential for growth. A society, like the Industrial one, that upholds happiness as an ultimate goal thus obstructs the journey of personal growth and the search for meaning (Hollis, 1996), especially when more difficult and long-term emotions are pathologized (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Another problem particular to Industrial culture is its denial of death, where we are sheltered from seeing and experiencing death and burial personally (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Denying the ‘darkest’ side of life robs our life of fulfilment, which echoes Heidegger’s ideas of our being-toward-death. Against this backdrop, EA, which is both long-term and fundamentally existential and death-oriented, becomes an emotion that Industrial culture needs to recognize.

The challenge of course with EA is that it can both be an activating, but also a paralysing emotion. In the case of the latter, the experience could be more strongly described as despair (Crandon et al., 2022; McKinnon, 2014; Pihkala, 2018). The climate corpus texts also describe despair as the kind of emotion that ought to be transformed into more activating experiences. Yet, despair itself is perhaps not entirely undesirable altogether, because despair and hope both arise from the same source (Tillich, 1965). They both are rooted in situations of uncertainty, where the outcome may take a variety of shapes, some good, and some bad (Verlie, 2019). What is more disastrous, is a state of complete hopelessness, which would indicate that there are no possible good outcomes. If we have anxiety and despair, we have the option to return to the source and go down the other route that leads to hope.

One way to fight despair that the climate corpus texts present, is action. This can be engaging in climate protests, or by cultivating the conditions for local nature to thrive through for example gardening. The important point here is that we have the choice in our daily activities. We can choose to sit down in despair, or to go out and get our hands dirty; every small action can make a difference. Even if it seems futile, the climate corpus texts urge us to remember that every small grain adds to the pile, and every small piece of nature we protect, is one step away from total environmental destruction. Keeping the focus on the impact of small, incremental changes is paramount, as the experience of being too insignificant to manifest change may feed a sense of hopelessness (Boluda-Verdú et al., 2022), which will be a barrier to activation. Highlighting how each pro-environmental action does at least not make CC worse can be helpful (McKinnon, 2014). Furthermore, Malm's (2021; CCT5) manifesto included in the climate corpus, calls for more extreme and forceful actions to obstruct climate-damaging behaviour from the polluting elite.

The second problem those with EA may find themselves with, is that the climate corpus texts promote an interconnectedness of the earth deep enough that we can "hear within us the sound of the earth crying" (Thich Nhat Hanh as quoted in Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 91). Thus, despite already struggling with intense anxiety, they are recommended to become even more acutely and globally aware of the earth's precarious state. Such a call for increased interconnectedness makes sense when placed in the context of Indigenous approaches to health, which the climate corpus texts generally endorse as a positive alternative to Industrial ways of living. The Aboriginal Cultural, Social, and Emotional Wellbeing Program (CSEWB) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017), that recognises the interconnectedness of not just aboriginal being, but of well-being (Dudgeon et al., 2022), has been shown to greatly improve wellbeing in the Aboriginal context. However, the unedited application of an Indigenous framework to an Industrial setting may not be directly helpful. Particularly so because an Industrial person does not usually inhabit the interconnected lifeworld that an Aboriginal person does.

Another solution to overcoming the anxiety-inducing interconnectedness without falling back into alienation that academic work suggests is a reframing of what the feelings represent (Hickman, 2020). EA is not necessarily a cognitive distortion as per classical therapeutical guidelines – there is a plenitude of evidence that justifies the worries of climate collapse. CBT style challenging of the anxious thoughts may therefore be insufficient when applied in isolation. However, what we can do, is reframe our conceptualisation of what the anxiety represents. Anxiety as a term suggests maladjustment, or overly intense worrying

about controllable situations. Instead, we might reframe the experience as eco-empathy. Just as anxiety is founded in an uncertainty that can also lead to hope, the grief and sadness of EA have a foundation in caring for the world (Pihkala, 2022b) that can also lead to empathy, a feeling that is generally more positively perceived.

Reframing the experience thus, as an expression of a valued character trait, may make the feeling of EA more manageable (Hickman, 2020). Indeed, it seems that positive emotions may protect against the negative effects of EA (Voški et al., 2023). The climate corpus texts also promote a subtle reframing towards a more heroic interpretation of the EA feelings. The more story-based texts by Kimmerer (2013; CCT6) and Macy and Johnstone (2012; CCT3) explicitly bring in stories whereby those who recognize the earth's pain and fight for its preservation are a sort of mythical warriors. They may go unrecognised and are sure to be faced with significant loneliness and resistance in their fight but are also the saviours of humanity. The other texts do echo the theme of the required sacrifices for the greater good, as well as the morality of the individual who fights to protect the environment. Such heroic narratives, however, are also at risk of moralising distress or individualising responsibility for the mitigation of CC.

5.4 Stories

The fictional contract of literature asks of the reader: suspend your disbelief; I am going to please you. The referential contract of science suggests: activate your disbelief; as I am going to instruct you (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 8 & 9). How do we set up the ecological contract that pleads: activate your empathy, and I will heal your anxiety?

The time and feelings sections both highlighted how our phenomenology is rooted in narrative. Indeed, Ranke (1981) proposed the label of Homo Narrans instead of Homo Sapiens, reflecting our storytelling nature. This has further been extrapolated to mean that humans reside in a storyworld (Brown, 2017). This world captures experiential, existential, and relational dimensions that dominant Industrial theories underexpose (Moezzi et al., 2017). In the climate corpus texts, the storyworld also becomes a centre of epistemic sprawl. Stories are more than mere representations of CC. Instead, they become domains where boundaries between concepts are dissolved. The temporal, affective, and identity-related sprawls presented in the other sections become connected through stories. Furthermore, narratives may intensify EA by modelling and justifying increasingly loose connections

between CC and personal experience. Thus, they are not necessarily a phenomenological domain like the other nodes of epistemic sprawl, making this more of a meta-node. Arguably, the presence of stories as a meta-node in the theory reflects the narrative focus of the analysis. However, the recurrent mention of narrativity across the climate corpus texts, and the role that stories have in connecting CC to temporality, affect, and identity, suggests that stories are not just a representational medium, but a core mechanism through which sprawl is enacted.

5.4.1. Narrative Turn

Narrativity of the human experience relies on the emplotment of our lives, meaning that our life events are poured into the shape of a plot (Ricoeur, 1984). In essence, narrative thinking is a type of pattern thinking, which is the seemingly unique human ability for pattern recognition and creation, and which may underlie complex emergent phenomena such as language and culture (Logan & Tandoc, 2018). Science, as a discipline, similarly relies on a different type of pattern thinking: paradigmatic thinking (Bruner, 1990). It exists in the language of hypotheses, proofs, and cause-and-effect; ideally finding unambiguous truths. However, as already established at earlier points in this thesis, it may be insufficient in many ways, for example in understanding social behaviours and human desires. The meaning and reasons for those sides of humanity are encoded instead in our stories. This suggests that science would therefore need to embrace more narrative thinking to understand these sides. The narrative turn of the 70ties and 80ties solidified narrative as valid methodology in science, to better research all sides of humanity (Czarniawska, 2004).

With our stories, we make sense of our world, our life, and our actions (Bruner, 1991). Narrative is thus presented as one of the central sense-making mechanism, and instrumental in forming and reforming lifeworlds. Unsurprisingly, then, it is connected to EA and CC in the climate corpus texts. They present it as a cultural lens that determines how we see the world and how we act in it, and, indeed, who we end up becoming. Since the dominant narratives in the Industrial world revolve around environmentally harmful ideas described in section 5.1 on the Industrial lifeworld, CC becomes connected to the Industrial cultural narratives. In response, the climate corpus texts also call for the formation of new stories to guide the transition of the Industrial world order into a new, environmentally friendly future. To better understand this proposition, this section will dive into how narratives shape our life, but also how we shape our narratives. First, I will present how narratives are connected to our identity and further connect us to the environment. Then I will

discuss the role of media in creating the landscape of meaning that a society lives in. Lastly, I will discuss how language shapes our perception, particularly in building our personal sense of agency, but also the agency we attribute to the larger more-than-human nature.

5.4.2. Stories and the Self

The idea that our identity is to a significant extent formed out of narratives is a well-established theory. Cognitive scientists generally differentiate between a minimal self and a narrative self (Gallagher, 2014). The minimal self is the most fundamental sense of being an embodied self⁷, that is pre-reflective and synchronic. Significantly more advanced is the narrative self. This sense of self is what establishes our identity over time, making it diachronic (Gallagher, 2014). It interprets the events and actions of our life and builds a sense of selfhood out of it. The notion of selfhood can be clarified through idem and ipse identity (Ricoeur, 1992). Idem identity includes both structural identity (being a human) and qualitative identity (personality) (Glas, 2003), and I revealed by a ‘What am I?’ question. A ‘Who am I?’ question brings us into the domain of ipseity, which revolves around self-reflection (not necessarily conscious), as well as agency and norms and values. The Ipse identity is the self-identity interpreted over time. Interpretation, particularly self-interpretation, is key here (Gallagher, 2014), as a hermeneutic approach to narrative identity supports sense-making being not just mental, but also embodied, based on actions and relationships. This hermeneutic understanding is relevant to the epistemic sprawl between the human self and the larger environment present in the climate corpus texts.

Since our self-creation happens through narratives, our narrative competence becomes relevant; the better we are at integrating our actions and experiences into a unique self-history, the better we often are at understanding ourselves and others (Nelson, 2003). We learn narrative thinking in childhood through all the story-telling in for example fairytales that we are exposed to (Hutto, 2008). These stories teach us how and to what normative standard we should interpret others and thereby lay the blueprint for how we come to understand ourselves. Furthermore, they shape what we can become (Gallagher, 2014). As such, our narrative competency and style are intimately interwoven with our sociocultural context. Not, however, in a deterministic way; due to the interpretive nature of the narrative

⁷ I follow the embodied definition that Gallagher (2014) proposes, since this can recognise the similarity of human experience to the less cognitively advanced lifeforms that we have evolved from, a line of thinking relevant to the next section on the self.

self, it remains somewhat unstable and sensitive to new external inputs (Bruner, 1991). Hence, conversation-based therapies may inspire great change in a person's life⁸.

The narrative self is often disturbed in EA in two important ways. Firstly, in terms of the temporal dimension. The narrative self normally helps us make sense of the future, by delimitating the horizon of affordances (Aho, 2020). However, in EA this horizon collapses into a horizon of threat, severely limiting the possibility for creating a life-narrative. Concurrently, the corrupting negativity may also spread towards the past, showing past events in the light of missed chances and failure. Secondly, CC disturbs the narrative self by endangering place-based narratives (Passmore et al., 2023). Many community identities are based around traditional practices that are dying out due to changing environments and biodiversity loss. This state of disorientation and alienation of the storyworld may contribute to the development and/or aggravation of EA.

5.4.3. Stories and the More-Than-Human World

The narrative self in these times of CC thus suffers from an erosion of temporal and place-based narrativity affordances. Narrative identities are always positioned within a wider sociocultural context, and not freely personally constructed (Czarniawska, 2004). What's more, the more-than-human environment further contextualises the sociocultural world. From this perspective, identity is not just humanistically, but also ecologically relational. In the Industrial tradition it is often easy to lose track of the ecological layer, since here meaning is narratively negotiated in an anthropocentric storyworld (Boyd et al., 2023). Yet, this storyworld in and of itself may be disorienting too, as the all-encompassing, looming CC reveals the limits of the anthropocentric approach (Bergthaller, 2018). It is most accurately represented in complex mathematical models that are intellectually inaccessible to most people. CC also resists our traditionally anthropocentric story-telling. It is not a linear process and does not have a single actor that can be foregrounded in the narrative to represent CC. Arguably, as the climate corpus texts state, it is in large part the anthropocentrism of our narratives, and thus our experiences, that have allowed us to break the balance between humanity and the larger natural world. Many voices have therefore called for the creation of

⁸ An example of this in EA is the finding that individuals who suffer from it can be greatly helped by re-storying their emotions as eco-empathy instead of eco-anxiety (Hickman et al., 2021). More research is needed however to determine how effective conversation-based therapies are. Since EA seems to be a disturbance of more than the narrative self, conversation-based therapies may have limited effect (Boyd et al., 2023).

new, non-anthropocentric narratives to guide the Industrial world order. This call for a re-storying of the land is also echoed by the climate corpus texts.

5.4.3.1. Re-Storying the Land.

For many indigenous peoples, the landscape is not a neutral background of life, but a cultural heritage (Galway et al., 2019). It is filled with relationships of reciprocity and respect where stories are connected to specific places and formations and often told from the perspective of animals. Despite rarely involving Indigenous people in the research, the investigation of solastalgia, a place-based emotion, is also adapting a less neutral concept of place. Galway et al. (2019) found that two-thirds of the papers on solastalgia defined place as a socio-ecological concept, while only a fifth spoke of it as a purely environmental concept, free of human social or political construction. The construct of ‘landscape’ is increasingly being used by researchers to refer to the socio-ecological natural place where humans live in a relational and dynamical system. It is hoped that viewing the world through the lens of landscape will help us recognize the mental and spiritual effects of CC, as well as how our identities are tied to it.

The adoption of ‘landscape’ may be a first step to re-storying the land, by elevating it from a mere background to humanity’s achievements, to a force that acts on our identity and emotional world. The climate corpus texts emphasise how re-storying the land will help us heal through stories. They further highlight how stories have always ensured our survival in the landscape, by coding for ways of caring, for survival-enhancing behaviours, and warning against humanity’s destructive tendencies. The dominant Industrial story of the land has been rooted in engineering, politics, and science, and defined by materialism. It would be better, the texts posit, to model the new story on indigenous beliefs where landscape is rooted in spirituality and seen as being alive. Such a story would inspire a sense of responsibility of reciprocal care in us.

Which landscape exactly we live in will also be shaped by the story we live in. Referring back to Ciompi’s theories in section 5.3 on feelings, it could be said that the story can set the tone for the landscape-logic. Tuan (2013) speaks of how our logic of the environmental world has consistently been a landscape of fear. In the past we were fearful of the power of nature, with its constant threat to human livelihood. Currently, we are more fearful of the fragility of nature, as in EA. Accordingly, we have thus moved from a sort of reverence to anxiety. Contrastingly, the climate corpus texts, with their focus on the Indigenous landscape, paint a picture of a landscape of gratitude instead. Undeniably, in the

times of CC the cosmologies that we were rooted in are being disrupted, with disorienting and pathological effect on our psychological wellbeing (Boyd et al., 2023). How, then, can we use the foregoing and different landscape-logics to deal with the change and increase the ability to take appropriate actions - through fear or through affirmation?

5.4.4. *Stories in Media*

We are exposed to both negative and positive stories through the media. Especially CC has been increasingly reported on since 2017 (Pihkala, 2018). This is notable, because media is a key factor in maintaining social meaning, in a process of cultural autopoiesis (Luhmann, 1995). A social system of meaning that is operationally closed, and self-producing, relies on communication to recursively generate symbols and codes that allow for constant reproduction of meaning. Note that the operational closure of the system refers to how the meaning of symbols and narratives is confined and reproduced within the social system, constituting local meaning-making. Latour (2012) furthermore remarked how media is an establishing force for setting conversation scripts. The global media system that we have now is therefore an interesting phenomenon, as it creates a global system that is further reinterpreted in local systems. Herein lies a challenge for, and connection with EA. Due to its place-based nature, local interpretations need to be given space on top of the global effects that are presented.

Analysis of the CC related themes and frames of media can help to understand the narratives we are exposed to more. Interestingly, Hase et al. (2021), found evidence of regional differences in focus between the Global North and the Global South. CC and its effects were a more often covered topic in the Global North and also received more of a science frame in this region. In the Global South, media reports focused more on the challenges and impacts CC has on society and thus had a more humane and community focus. These regional framing tendencies echo the climate corpus idea that Industrial society is science-led and alienating, while non-Industrial areas are more socially oriented.

5.4.4.1. Positive versus Negative Framing

In terms of framing, media can be largely divided into two categories: fear/threat framing, or positive/gain framing. The appropriateness of either of the two for the issue of CC and EA is contested. Generally, the climate corpus texts note how socially, there seems to be a taboo on the negative effects of CC, such that mentions of it should be left out of social encounters. At the same time, the climate corpus texts find fault with the overly negative

focus of CC news, even calling it a ‘reification of despair’ (Malm, 2021, p. 92; CCT5). They further imply that media reports default to purified statistics and graphs, instead of more visceral reports of CC. This is in line with Luhmann’s idea that media filter complexity and distil it into accepted abstracting codes. In this case, the graphs become an abstract replacement of the visceral and emotional feedback of the changing environment.

The differential effects of fear versus gain message framing are complex and require nuanced interpretation (Tannenbaum et al., 2015). Fear-based framing can be effective to motivate attitude or behaviour change, especially when paired with actionable steps, but it may also induce anxiety or avoidance. The negative effects may be reduced if the message includes hope-messaging (Nabi & Myrick, 2019). Gain-framed messages have less danger of evoking psychological reactance but are also better suited for prevention behaviours (Gallagher & Updegraff, 2012). However, the intended goal of a specific message is usually not the evoked emotions, but the performed behaviour. Research on motivational message framing often runs into the intention-behaviour gap (Grimmer & Miles, 2017). Personalisation to the recipient’s emotional coping ability (Doré et al., 2019), values and goals (Joyal-Desmarais et al., 2022), and implementation context (Fennis et al., 2011) increases behaviour likelihood, but such personalisation is unworkable for global media at large.

In the case of CC and eco-friendly behaviour, media thus finds itself in a difficult bind. CC itself is perceived by some as too disturbing to engage with news about it at all (Norgaard, 2011). Threat-framing may induce anxiety, when the issue in EA is anxiety-induced paralysis. Research also shows that levels of EA are positively correlated with media exposure (Whitmarsh et al., 2022), especially media that portrays climate related disasters (Ogunbode et al., 2022)⁹. Positive framing is useful mostly for preventative behaviours, for which it seems to be too late¹⁰, and may also decrease the motivation to engage in eco-friendly behaviours (Chapman, 2019). Another issue for this matter is the financial incentives for media to engage as many people as possible. Sensationalist and negative headlines reach

⁹ The direction of this correlation is not known. It may be that increased exposure to news increases EA. However, as Oblak et al. (2025a) suggest, people with EA actively seek out news stories to satisfy a need to be informed.

¹⁰ One could note here that CC and eco-friendly behaviour might be framed such a way that it prevents further worsening of the climate. Indeed, this framing also appears in the climate corpus texts. However, when adhering to the claim that CC is unnarratable (Bergthaller, 2018) and complex beyond our immediate grasp (Morton, 2013; CCT4), such an approach may not have the most intuitively positive appeal, and the threat of CC overall may still overpower the positive preventative framing.

more engagement (Ali et al., 2019; Robertson et al., 2023), thus a systemic disregard for emotional and mental health is incentivised. The predominance of negative new stories around CC intertwines with the negative focus inherent in EA, to reinforce the notion in people with EA that we are doomed (Pihkala, 2018).

Thus, the question arises what media should focus on when discussing CC – nudging behaviour or managing intense emotions. The climate corpus texts prioritise the motivation of eco-friendly behaviours. The ethics of nudging are highly debated, but as Schmidt and Engelen (2020) note, in high stakes situation, which CC arguably is, ethical acceptability increases. They further state that potential harmful outcomes are likely to be avoided if the nudges are based on public policy. However, public policy is created by governments, which are entrenched in the ruling culture, and heavily influenced by lobbying from, for example, the fossil fuel industry. As Slaby (2023) claims, the ruling institutions have invested in a media culture that promotes structural apathy:

“Discursive patterns are deployed purposefully that deflect attention from complicity in harmful practices, shift blame to victims or third parties, and avoid or water-down compassion for certain populations marked as less worthy of collective concern.” (p. 168)

Any nudges based on this cultural tradition would then likely not lead to the behaviour envisioned by the climate corpus texts. A change of the emotional position towards more-than-human nature and the overhaul of Industrial Institutions and their stories at large would be required instead.

Benoit et al. (2022) further remark how years of problematic media communications, and communal inaction towards CC has led to people putting up defences to engage with CC news. Positive framing may be able to subvert these defences. As Nordhaus and Shellenberger note (2007, p. 2), Martin Luther King made history by saying I have a dream, not I have a nightmare. The climate corpus texts call for media communications that promote a more nurturing stance towards the more-than-human natural world. Achieving the goals of a deeper emotional connection with the environment and a changing of the Industrial narrative requires a more reflexive stance from journalists, writers, and scientists, using frames that go beyond doom, but even more specifically, in terms of the language we use. The climate corpus texts suggest that Industrial language inadvertently perpetuates exploitative attitudes towards more-than-human nature. Can language really have such large influence?

5.4.4.2. Linguistics of the Lifeworld

Language use is recognized as being instrumental in the development of human intelligence in general (Lupyan, 2016). It allows us to discuss objects that are not present in our perceptive field. Furthermore, it augments abstract concepts that we encounter, not in the sense that experiences are unthinkable before we name them (Lupyan, 2012), but in that culturally-dependent meaning is signalled (Casasanto, 2008). Additionally, it makes it possible for us to cooperate with others in larger structures. Overall, we and our environment are enlanguaged (Druzhinin, 2025). Yet, certain academic fields treat language as merely a tool for communication (Lupyan & Clark, 2015), despite evidence that language steers our attention, perception, and social interactions (Fausey et al., 2010).

Especially in terms of space and time, some evidence is found for linguistic relativity (Boroditsky, 2012). The physical placement of the future seems to depend on linguistic conceptualisation of it, with English placing it in front, Aymara (spoken in the Bolivian Andes) placing it behind, and Mandarin Chinese placing it below (Casasanto, 2008). The ordering of temporal events also correlates with language, following writing order for most, such that English speakers would order from left to right, but Hebrew speakers from right to left (Boroditsky, 2012). However, absolute languages, whose speakers orient by compass direction (North-South, East-West), follow compass directions in temporal ordering; in these cultures, the images were always placed from east to west (Boroditsky & Gaby, 2010). Grammatical gender also seems to correlate with linguistic differences, such that art shows predominant depictions of death as a woman by Russian painters, but as a man by German painters (Boroditsky, 2012). Lastly, colour discrimination follows linguistic patterns, but this effect on perception of colour disappeared in a verbal interference version of the task, further strengthening the hypothesis of linguistic influences on perception (Winawer et al., 2007).

These results suggest that promoting increased reflexivity in language use around an issue as threatening and urgent as CC is appropriate. Especially when considering that research finds a positive correlation between increased media use and climate anxiety in youth, which seems to have its roots in reduction in perceived efficacy for addressing CC (Maran & Begotti, 2021). The climate corpus texts take this position a bit further and emphasise that language is our responsibility and we ought to speak for the land and animals that cannot directly speak for themselves. They promote going beyond words to connect with feelings and emotions. This also means rejecting the scientific language of objectivity that speaks about non-human nature, rather than speaking to it. The climate corpus texts hope this

will increase humanity's response-ability in the face of CC, and increase the attribution of agency to the more-than-human world.

5.4.5. Stories of Agents

Agency is the sociocultural capacity to act (Ahearn, 2001). The climate corpus texts elaborate on human agency by comparing the state of humanity with that of protagonists in epic stories. Just like those characters, we are ill-equipped to deal with a larger-than-life problem. However, once again like the heroes in the stories, we can learn the necessary skills to overcome the problem. This also ties in with the warrior narrative that was introduced in the previous section on feelings. The warrior is somehow elevated from the average person as they are more keenly aware of problematic situations, have the bravery to face the challenge, and the strength to make the required sacrifices, both materially and socially. The climate corpus texts thus create a narrative that validates the overwhelm and practical anxiety connected to EA, while also framing the experience in a heroic way. However, is this enough to increase people's response-ability, i.e. their ecological agency?

Agency is a key concept in psychology and thought to be an important aspect of psychosocial functioning (Bandura, 2018). It remains somewhat challenging to uniformly define. Generally, it refers to a person's ability to effect changes in their environment. Agency is not present in direct role-governed behaviour, which would make a person only an actor. An agent, on the other hand, experiences a sense of power when affecting the environment. Autonomy is also often described as a requirement for agency, referring to a sense of freedom from external forces and ownership of the action. Some authors, however, also note that autonomy may not always be conscious (Ahearn, 2001), and that it may arise out of a need rather than a want (Konopasky & Sheridan, 2016). Importantly, agency should not be equated with free will or mere resistance (Ahearn, 2001).

The sociocultural environment is a large determinant of what agency might look like for an individual. Norms and values shape an individual's perception of the world, such that inequalities are often perpetuated by the oppressed themselves (Ahearn, 2001). An important vehicle for sociocultural influence is language, and linguistic influences are thus tightly bound to agency. Language sets the relevant affordances and constraints for the sociocultural environment, since language is the modality that filters the perceived affordances in our environment (Gorniak & Roy, 2007).

The climate corpus texts call for a new language of animacy, that prescribes more intelligence and agency to the more-than-human world. Research does show that a person's

agency is linguistically marked in narratives (Konopasky & Sheridan, 2016), and sociocultural biases may be linguistically reproduced in attributions of agency to narrative agents (Lafrance et al., 1997). However, Kimmerer (2013; CCT6) argues that Industrial anthropocentrism is reflected even at a more structural level, and that a new grammar of animacy is needed. Whether grammar is that influential is debatable. Dixon (1994) did find an animacy hierarchy, where languages with grammatical encoding of differences in level of agency, used lower agency grammar for non-human objects. However, the database for this study also included some Indigenous languages, contradicting Kimmerer's suggestion. It is thus unclear to what extent grammatical agents and societal agents are comparable, even if they do sometimes overlap (Ahearn, 2001).

A more manageable and likely effective undertaking would be to focus on the stories we tell, how we tell them, and where we tell them. Agency will still be an important aspect for this, as practical anxiety is a core feature of EA (Kurth & Pihkala, 2022). Actions reaffirm our agency, especially when our actions align with our self-narrative and moral orientation (Gallagher, 2014). Encouraging more sustainable behaviours may thus start with narratives that reflect more sustainable morals. However, some sociocultural, place-based sensibility needs to be involved as well in the creation of stories. Industrial individuals and organisations need to be mindful when adapting Indigenous ideas and stories. Their stories exist in chronotopes - historically and culturally significant landscapes in which agency is enactively created for Indigenous groups (Ahearn, 2001; Bakhtin, 2010). Even language can be said to be linked to a specific location (Fine, 2023)¹¹. Stories can help a group adapt to circumstances, but they must thus be located in the physical and temporal landscape. Language frames the past and the present, and can describe the future, ideally in such a way that it promotes a sense of agency.

¹¹ In fact, Fine et al. (2023) argues that the linguistic dispossession of Indigenous groups through language schools and forced relocations is a cause of CC and local ecological knowledge is lost or ignored this way. This alienation may become more relevant with the development of Generative AI programs. 97% of the world's languages are classed as low-resource in GenAI programs (Dennison, 2025). Naturally, many Indigenous languages are underrepresented or missing from databases. Thereby, their knowledge of local ecologies is being lost.

5.5 Self

*In the last century, the inspirational idea took hold that we are all made of star stuff. The old English word *Dustsceauwung* – roughly translated as a contemplation of dust – shows that before star stuff, we contemplated how we all come from dust and return to it (Esposito, 2024). Is that all we are – broken down atoms of the earth's past and the wider cosmos? Or can the essence of being and meaning also be found in the relations with ecological kinship networks (Passmore & Howell, 2014)?*

The experiences described in the previous sections are tied together by one core aspect - the self. We do not have pure experiences, rather we experience ourselves in time, feelings, and stories. Section 5.2 on time proposed that the Industrial temporal alienation can be addressed by creating better narratives to understand where we have been and where we are going, as well as connecting back to our authenticity - the sense of who we are within our sociocultural context. Section 5.3 on feelings showed how emotions and cognitions are mutually influential and consolidated into feeling-thinking-behaving programs which over time become personality traits. Lastly, section 5.4 on stories showed how our sense of self and our sense of agency are thoroughly intertwined with the narratives we are exposed to and identify with. The self thereby becomes the last node in the interconnected web of CC and EA.

As with the previous topics, the climate corpus texts lament the alienation of the self that exists in Industrial cultures. They propose that the disconnected self fostered by Industrial ideals has neglected connection with Others and the world. The Other here is identified both as the social Other, as in the other humans in our communities, but also the wilder Other that is abundant in nature. Our sense of self tends to foreground independence at the expense of the many ties we have to our surroundings. With this approach, the Industrial self has also lost the sense of reciprocity to other humans and the natural environment. Once again, this is presented as being in stark contrast to Indigenous approaches. The indigenous self is often more connected and communal (Dudgeon et al., 2019; Urrieta, 2019). It is presented as being built on ancestral knowledge, emotionally expressive, and healthy through its spiritual connection with the land.

The concept of self has a rich philosophical tradition, with Charles Taylor (1992a) explicitly addressing the issue of the modern self. He identified a sense of disengaged self and traced its birth through Industrial philosophical traditions. His arguments are built upon

and expanded into embodiment, community and morality; ideas that the climate corpus texts also echo. This section will follow this line of thinking in its exploration of the sense of self. First, I will expand on the idea of the modern self, its history, and underlying perceptual factors. Then I will move from this alienated sense of self to the climate corpus presented idea of the fully connected ecological self. In this journey I will touch upon the ideas of 4E cognition, the social self, and our evolutionary kinship with more-than-human nature.

5.5.1. Modern Self

The essence of the sense of self can be hard to grasp. Taylor (1992a) claims that it arises out of our self-understanding, thus promoting a hermeneutic and dialogical construction. Furthermore, the self is partly constituted by our moral stance, through its illuminating of where we stand on a variety of matters and how we have arrived at that position. This conceptualisation of the self thus also bleeds into a horizon, that in Taylor's ideas, is inherently moral. The horizon consists of a shared cultural and moral framework, informing us of what is worthy, noble, and what constitutes the 'Good Life'. Additionally, Taylor's approach is communal as well, and thus he sees the horizon as importantly including communal level purposes, that stretch beyond our personal preferences. He further links the self back to temporality, by stating its importance for the horizon, as well as how the narrative of the temporal past informs the identity formation¹². Language is also related to the self in this framework, in the sense that humans are inherently linguistic beings, and thus, in the communal context, rely on dialogical sense-making structures.

The modern self suffers from a loss of this important horizon, since Industrial culture tends to obscure and individualise it (Taylor, 1992a), thereby creating a general cultural disengagement from the great moral chain of being (Taylor, 1992b). Instead, rationality and autonomy are valued, leading to individuals having to create their moral values from scratch. This has created a modern self that is disconnected from a thick framework of morality and lacks a sense of shared communal movement towards a higher good. The modern self thus suffers from an ungrounded individualism and moral uncertainty. This is relevant to the practical uncertainty of EA, where people are no longer sure what they can do, while they also struggle with the sense of guilt for their and their ancestors' contribution to CC. Furthermore, the modern self suffers from instrumental reasoning, where other humans and larger nature are framed in terms of cost-benefit, rather than for their inherent value.

¹² The self and identity are treated as different concepts by Taylor. For the purpose of this discussion, limited as it necessarily is in scope, the two concepts will be conflated into one.

Modernity then becomes marked by a loss of freedom (Taylor, 1992b). Specifically, the modern ideals of individualism and authenticity increase the *illusion* of freedom, but in actuality limit it. Industrial cultures act in line with negative liberty, which refers to a stance of freedom arising out of a lack of obstacles (Taylor, 1985). In contrast, Taylor promotes a thicker, qualitative freedom, that recognizes that no obstacles are neutral, and that the overcoming of some is more relevant. This endeavour is best guided by a strong moral framework, cultural horizon of significance, and community-based meaning-making narratives. It has been previously discussed that overwhelming freedom can inspire anxiety, and Taylor's explanation shows how this becomes coupled to a lack of agency.

The dire state of individualised selfhood is one that the Industrial world has arrived at only relatively recently. It can be understood by looking at the genealogy of transcendence, through its different epochs of being (Heidegger, 2002). Each epoch, with its own configuration of the self, affords different ways of experiencing responsibility, threat, and care, each of which are disrupted in EA. In summary, in antiquity the *subjectum*, the ground of truth, was the cosmos, in the Middle Ages it was God, and in modernity it became the Self (Blumenberg, 1985; Habermas, 2023; Taylor, 1992a). Hence, "I think therefore I am" (*Je pense, donc je suis*, Descartes, 2004). This radical change contributed to the emergence of the autonomous, rational, self-grounding subject we know as the modern, Industrial self.

Since the self is lived narratively, moments of cultural storytelling can illuminate theoretical shifts. The move to the modern, self-inventing self is mirrored in literary development. Characters started inventing themselves, and authors were concerned with finding meaning and originality (Bloom, 1997; Watt, 2001). The loss of heroism in literature is an important factor here, as it set the stage for the final collapse into the current postmodern, fractal self. Pre-modernity valued, above-all, honour, but in the modern period this was exchanged for dignity (Taylor, 1992a). Honour is an externally determined state, that depends on one's place in the societal power hierarchy. Dignity, on the other hand, is egalitarian and internally focused, telling humans that they have a universal, inherent moral worth. Identity then becomes not determined by social status, but by one's own making.

The crisis of the dishonoured self is highlighted by the response of soldiers to the carnage of WWI, an event which has been cited as the catalyst of the change from late modernity to postmodernity (Fussell, 2000). The old ideal of honour was intimately connected with ideas of glory, sacrifice and noble deaths, making the horror of war a contribution to a grander narrative. However, in late-modern discourse this meaning-making framework was not available to soldiers anymore, and their experiences of slaughter in the

trenches became meaningless. Literature from around that time shows the shift into an ironic stance, where writers used colder, less lofty and less romantic values such as bravery and courage instead of honour. Writers no longer idealised the experience of war and instead described the grim and unheroic reality, narratively paving the way into postmodernism.

The move into postmodernism, was once more accompanied by a change in sense of self. Subjectivity in this age is no longer bounded by a grand narrative, instead becoming fragmented and decentred (Jameson, 1992). The postmodern self then is fluid and relational, a development that Taylor (1992a) finds alarming. He maintains that humans cannot live outside of a historically grounded framework of strong moral evaluations regarding what is good/bad, better/worse etc. Thus, he opposes both the atomistic rationalism of modernity, and the dissolution of self in postmodernity. Instead, he promotes a middle ground, where the self is not fixed, but also not dissolvable, and historically and socially shaped. Authenticity is still key but exists as a thick and situated trait.

In the postmodern context, the practical anxiety of EA can be understood as a combination of the loss of the grand narrative, culturally enforced individualisation, and the need for personal achievement. Importantly, the narrative of personal achievement undervalues the influence of historical power hierarchies on achievement capabilities of descendants. Historically privileged Industrial countries have become rich through environmentally destructive behaviour (Slaby, 2025), of which their descendants are still benefitting (Jones & Davison, 2021). Historically underprivileged non-Industrial countries have less resources now to deal with the fall-out of CC, and catching up with the Industrial countries would seemingly require engaging in the same environmentally damaging behaviour that is no longer accepted. Environmentally friendly behaviour often means giving up habits of affluence and comfort in Industrial countries (Whitmarsh et al., 2022), and without a grander narrative to positively ground this narrative, it can feel like an unfair burden to Industrial descendants.

The postmodern age can thus lead to a disenchanted mindset rich in nihilism and alienation. Meaning is hard to find in this age, exactly because, as Taylor maintains, meaning arises out of shared cultural horizons instead of solely personal preferences. Humans are embedded in the socio-cultural-historical context and narratives. More than that, they are embodied in it. The engaged subject can be recovered from this embedded and embodied place. The tradition of 4E cognition philosophy is in line with this idea. However, before expanding on this, one question remains. If the disengaged subject promotes such alienation,

insecurity and disenchantment in humans, how has the split, or disengagement, of the embeddedness and embodiment from the self been able to take place and remain?

5.5.1.1. The Inner Spectator

The internalisation and privatisation of our subjectivity can be illuminated by two main factors: the loss of external enclosure and the perceptual peculiarity of our subjective experience. Before Copernicus, humanity was unaware of the vastness of space and instead imagined the world to be cradled in some external structure (Abram, 2010; CCT7). The breakdown of this led to a widespread disorientation. Epistemic authority had to move from the previously stable and intelligent frame of an ordered cosmos, towards the knowing subject that could represent, measure and internally verify the world. Thus, the collapse of the cosmic enclosure spurred human subjectivity to find a new enclosure for epistemic certainty - the skull. Somehow the external vastness that was experienced before, now became an experience enclosed within the self. This pattern is similar to the mechanism Jaspers (2013) describes at a larger scale: a shared worldview broke down, and to contain the following disorientation, a new *Gehäuse* had to be found. When we lost our intimacy with a cradling cosmos, we turned inward to find it in ourselves¹³.

The other phenomenon that may have supported the move towards an internal subjectivity that is separated from the body is the peculiarity of the lived experience of our selves (Ataria, 2016). (Neuro)scientific findings strongly suggest that this separation has no physical basis, yet the experience of it is undeniable. Ataria (2016) explains this by separating our experience into that of self-as-subject versus self-as-object, following the philosophical inheritance from Husserl, James, and Wittgenstein. We experience our internal self from a first-person perspective (1PP), yet we seem to be able to experience the body from a third person perspective (3PP) in addition. He posits that (physical) reflections and inner talk are key mechanisms in obtaining this 3PP. By seeing our own reflection, for example in a mirror, we get a new perspective of ourselves. When we engage in inner talk, there is also a sense of speaking to ourselves as an object. Furthermore, inner talk often revolves around planning,

¹³ Interestingly, Morton (2013; CCT4) makes the point that CC destroys the background of world against which we have lived humanity and thereby reintroduces intimacy with the larger world. CC forces us to step out of the anthropocentric cocoon and become unavoidably entangled with the wider more-than-human nature. Furthermore, this leads to a closeness without mastery of one over the other.

which may have had evolutionary benefit as well. This activity requires the imagining of a temporally abstracted, in a way disembodied, future self ¹⁴.

Thus, there is a phenomenological separation, that, as Sartre (2021) proposed, leaves us with three different selves. There is the body as internally experienced, the body as experienced externally through the eyes of others, and the body that arises from the deeper awareness of existing as a body for others. This last dimension has been culturally foundational of the 3PP view that has become reified into an ontological claim under Cartesian dualism. Certain philosophical traditions of the Industrial world order promoted the lived experience into a metaphysical truth, thereby closing investigation into the relational context of the phenomenon. The idea of the internal spectator took hold, and the sensorimotor coupling with the environment that constructs the self in a relational and dynamic way was overlooked. This is the approach that is being challenged by the tradition of 4E cognition.

5.5.2. 4E Cognition

The roots of 4E cognition are often credited to Merleau-Ponty's ideas of phenomenological embodiment (Gallagher, 2023). In a move exactly contrary to the phenomenological intuition of separation described above, he posited that we are first and foremost a lived body in the world (Moya, 2014). In fact, the bodily experience is so fundamental, that it becomes "a constitutive or transcendental principle, precisely because it is involved in the very possibility of experience" (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2013, p. 135). Thus, the lived body and its place in the wider sociocultural context cannot be separated from cognitive existence. Such a broadening of the conceptualisation of what the core of the human self is allows for a broader theory of cognition but also begs the question of where the boundary should then be placed.

Consistent with epistemic sprawl, the climate corpus texts draw a fuzzy boundary between humanity and more-than-human-nature. These ideas are supported by certain thinkers, as will become clear at the end of this section. First, however, the tenets of 4E cognition will be summarised as a bridge from Cartesian science to the full connectionist ideas of the climate corpus. The 4E ideas show how a transition away from Cartesian thinking is being made¹⁵, by rejection of representationalism, the separation of the mind and

¹⁴ Intriguing support for this hypothesis is found in that the ability to recognise oneself in a mirror, and start using language, occur at the same developmental phase (Ataria, 2016).

¹⁵ The newest trend in cognitive science that receives most research attention currently is predictive processing (PP) (Gallagher, 2023). Efforts are being made to consolidate the ideas of PP with 4E cognition, and even ecological models of the mind. Nevertheless, it traditionally focuses on the

the world, and the idea of cognition as brain-bound. They thereby give credence to the endeavour of promoting a more ecological presentation of the self and its cognitive processes. While 4E theories do not themselves require an ecological ontology, they loosen the conceptual constraints that make such an ontology impossible within Cartesian frameworks. Furthermore, this reconceptualization of cognition will also help to explain why EA is not merely an emotion about CC, but a disturbance of sense-making itself.

The 4 E's stand for embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended cognition (Gallagher, 2023). Calls have been made for the inclusion of other E's into this, but the original 4 remain the standard. Across the 4Es, but even within each one, there are numerous debates and contradictions on where the boundary is between cognition and the world, and what shape representations have in the system, if they are even present at all. As such, following Shapiro (2007), 4E cognition may be better understood as "a research programme, rather than a theory, . . . to indicate that the commitments and subject matters of [4E] remain fairly nebulous" (p. 338).

Embodied cognition focuses on how the physical body takes part in cognition, rather than merely being the container of the cognising organ - the brain (Gallagher, 2023). These ideas are well-represented in the climate corpus texts (Gallagher, 2023). Especially the foundational nature of the body on our being in the world is emphasized. The texts oppose the idea that we are this incorporeal internal spectator, since without our body, we would have none of our experiences. At the same time, the limitations that the body impose on us are also highlighted in the texts. The only experience we can have of the world is the one shaped by the experience of our own body. We can imagine what other creatures may experience, but we can never know what that experience is like. Indeed, we can never experience what it is like to be a bat (Nagel, 1974).

Embedded cognition turns its lens to the environment the cognising agent exists in, and how it scaffolds their cognition (Gallagher, 2023). This research program thereby has a dual focus. The first is active embeddedness, which looks at how agents can shape their environment to suit their goals. The second is passive embeddedness, which concerns how already existing environments enable or constrain cognition. Overall, embedded cognition

internal model, made by a brain that has no direct access to the outside of the world. Thereby it separates cognition from the body and the environmental context. Andy Clark (2016) has opposed this interpretation of PP by explaining how active interference exists to support the body-environment coupling, rather than the other way around. A proposed middle ground is that PP cognition has both a representational side that optimises the probability of the internal model, and a dynamical side that optimises the agent-world coupling (Constant et al., 2021).

thus sees the environment as a support for cognition. These ideas echo in the climate corpus texts, particularly regarding the natural environment. Embeddedness is present in the constant reminders of how nature generally scaffolds Indigenous being in a positive way, while Industrial removal from it has negative effects.

Extended cognition radicalises embeddedness and sees environmental factors as constituting cognition (Gallagher, 2023). It thoroughly questions where the boundary of mind lies, and even what exactly mind is. Generally, if an action or process that happens externally would have been considered a cognitive process if occurring internally, it should be considered as cognition. The vast plains of cognition that the extended mind hypothesis opened were bounded by three additional criteria regarding the external resource or information: it should be reliably available, automatically assumed trustworthy, and easily accessible. Extended cognition is only implied in the climate corpus texts, particularly in the criticism around technology. The climate corpus texts suggest that our entanglement with our technology causes us to become alienated from nature, thereby revealing a notion that external tools do have some constitutive effect on our being.

Enactivism adheres to a view of tight coupling between the agent and the environment that constitutes a reciprocal interaction (Gallagher, 2023). Central to the idea of enactivism is the concept of autopoiesis (Maturana & Varela, 1991). An autopoietic system is self-producing, self-maintaining, operationally closed and biologically autonomous. The challenge for living systems lies in the tendency of order to fall into entropy. To avoid total loss of energy, the system must maintain a boundary with the outside world, while also taking up energy from the environment. To identify environmental sources of energy, sense-making of this environment is required. Sense-making thus requires an embodied and intentional perspective on the environment from the living system's viewpoint. Enactivism is present in the climate corpus texts in the ideas that we are in a reciprocal perceptual relationship with the world, expressed as a wish to subscribe more agency to more-than-human nature in its ability to act upon us as well. A prime example of this is the notion, introduced in section 5.3 on feelings, that anxiety arises from the earth enacting its crisis on us.

The ideas of all 4E, but especially extended and enactive cognition, break away from the Cartesian tradition ¹⁶. Furthermore, a 4E approach to EA, as deeply entangled as the lived experience of it is with the body, the environment, and the media, can increase our

¹⁶ Specifically, they argue against the cartesian split of mind versus matter. They are still rooted in naturalistic science paradigms and tend to proof their ideas using experimental findings.

understanding of the experience. However, EA also has a strong social component, and the climate corpus texts too focus on our social entanglements. Although social relationality is present in some of the 4E theories, they tend to focus more on individual sensorimotor coupling, than on the deep social relationality, and ecological existence that the climate corpus texts present. The next sections will focus on these aspects in turn.

5.5.3. Social Self

One of the theories of cognition that is often considered part of the 4E tradition as well, outside of the core four, is distributed cognition. This idea was established by Hutchins (1995) in his seminal book *Cognition in the Wild*. His analysis of the navigation of ships showed how cognitive processes can, and sometimes perhaps must, extend beyond the context of the individual. He proposed that cognition can be distributed in three ways: to material or environmental tools (which stays close to extended cognition), over time, and socially. Particularly the social extension of Hutchins' distributed cognition is a valuable clarification of a social dimension previously only implied in 4E theories. Since then, other thinkers have also recognized how our ideas are formed by our perceptions of what others are thinking (Druzhinin, 2025; Thumser, 2021). This social dimension of being is quite pertinent to the discussion of EA, as CC operates at the level of the social self in various ways.

CC is often presented through science, and thus gains a status of being an objective, science-related phenomenon (Benoit et al., 2022). While scientifically described, the impacts and meanings of CC are notably socially situated (Jones & Davison, 2021). Humanity has always been closely connected with the environment, emotionally through fear and awe, creatively through traditions and stories, and personally by connecting our (tribe's) identity to our environment (Hulme, 2008). However, in the Anthropocene, Industrial community has become more socioculturally rather than ecologically grounded. The acceleration of CC, the adverse effects, a local society's ability to adapt or mitigate - all these factors are influenced by and structured along socioculturally determined axes of rich versus poor (Jones & Davison, 2021). Social norms have inspired overconsumption such that we have arrived in our current crisis and continue to complicate the situation for the groups that have become disadvantaged or vulnerable through other effects of the same social norms. Policies that are being made now to mitigate CC often continue to disadvantage the same groups.

Despite the evidently intimate connections between CC and the sociocultural landscape, research on the effect of CC at a community level is lacking (Gawrych, 2022). Many communities are already experiencing disruptions due to CC-related relocations and

immigrations. There is growing concern that loss of community cohesion and identity will arise from this, partly from the dispersion of community members, and partly from the loss of the culturally grounding environment. Furthermore, it seems that EA does not just arise from the threat to the physical world, but also from the threat to the social world (Pihkala, 2020), and the potential cultural trauma of CC (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). As previously stated repeatedly, the identity of the Industrial world order has historically been built on “scientific, technological and economic power” (Myers, 2014, p. 56), which is threatened on all fronts by CC. Additionally, it has been suggested that EA arises partly through normative suggestion of its suitability as an emotional response to CC (Ogunbode et al., 2022). Especially for young people this may be a strong descriptive emotional norm.

As such, it is clear that there is a plenitude of social factors that are impacted by CC and are potentially expressed as EA. These factors remain underexposed when looking at the individually-focused, self-contained system of the self analysed by 4E theories. With most research currently overly focusing on the individual manifestations of eco-emotions and CC effects, valuable information is missing. Indeed, a warning to stop individualising CC is in place (Katwak & Weihgold, 2022). Understanding individual effects is necessary, but equally necessary is to understand the social factors. Investigating the social self in the context of CC may illuminate better practical and emotional approaches to EA (Foster, 2022). The climate corpus texts advocate for this pivot from an individual versus corporations binary to the community as an overlooked middle ground. Particularly in terms of emotional support through social medicine.

5.5.3.1. Kinship - Community

The climate corpus texts strongly communicate that humanity is stronger as a collective, both practically and emotionally. Indeed, researchers of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, the longest study of happiness in the world, conclude that the main determinant of happiness and health is the strength of our relationships (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). The theoretical concept of social capital resonates here as well, as it underlines the value of strong communities. Social capital took off as an enduring concept in the 80s/90s of the last century, and points towards the resources we can find in social networks (Wall et al., 1998). Through these networks we can find information, opportunities, and support, while the trust and reciprocity inherent in the networks lower the cost of cooperation and increase access to help. The climate corpus texts place this against the background of Industrial culture, to show how the ideologies upon which it is built threaten the communal spirit. The

texts posit that the socially unsupported individual is placed in a state of survival where they may come to prioritise self-preservation strategies, manifesting as greed over reciprocity.

The feeling of being socially isolated and unrecognised is present in the reports of people with EA (Oblak et al., 2025a, 2025b). They feel alienated through their different way of seeing the world: “But you realize that people in your family don’t experience the world in the same way and that a blade of grass is not a priority to them” (Oblak et al., 2025b, p. 114). At the same time, they feel that this different way of being is divergent enough that it will not be accepted by others: “I very often feel like I have to adjust my opinions to others. I feel my primary responses are oftentimes very different from, say, my coworkers or my friends. So, I have to cover my responses. I have to mask them” (Oblak et al., 2025b, p. 114). The experience of not being recognised this way is central to the experience of EA. Actions speak louder than words as well. People with EA reported that they receive words of understanding from those around them, that later turn out to be empty when observing their actions. People still invest in oil, take the car to a nearby workplace, or feel like they deserve exotic vacations and short plane rides.

Such ecologically unfriendly behaviour can be understood at a deeper level as an inauthentic way of living, by considering the state of endangerment of not just individual survival, but of individual identity, through the concept of the social self. Honneth (1996) has formulated the theory of social recognition that aims to explain how our existence in a social network is the foundation of our sense of self. He suggests three levels of social recognition that are necessary for identity formation. Firstly, individuals need love, an emotional recognition, that provides them with a basic sense of self-confidence. Secondly, individuals need rights, in legal recognition of their being a morally responsible person with equal rights, which allows them to build self-respect. Thirdly, individuals need solidarity, through a sense of social esteem of being recognised for one’s contributions and abilities within a community, so they can build self-esteem.

Only when these three are sufficiently institutionalised, can an individual experience individual freedom. In this formation of the requirements for individual freedom, Honneth builds on Hegel’s idea of intersubjective freedom. In Hegelian tradition, freedom is thought to reside in the experience of ‘being-with-oneself-in-the-other’ (Arentshorst, 2015). By this Hegel means the recognition of a free subject in the other, and through that recognising that same freedom in oneself. If instead others are perceived as threats or obstacles (as Sartre (2021) proposed relationship are structurally liable to be), the self can never be truly free, due to a lack of this reciprocal recognition of freedom. Industrial society emphasizes negative

freedom (lack of barriers), and reflexive freedom (the chasing of autonomous goals). While these are necessary sources of freedom, they are not sufficient to achieve full individual freedom. Thus, in modern Industrial society, we find a situation where economic ideals motivate competition, changing environments are threatening place-based sense of community, and social recognition is undervalued as a requirement for individual freedom.

Pernau (2021) further shows how the modern self is limited in her critique on the buffered self. Industrial society upholds the buffered self as ideal. This self has some connections with the outside world, but importantly, has an independent and consistent core that is not affected by the outside world. The concept of the operationally closed autopoietic self echoes strongly here. Furthermore, the buffered self is emotionally isolated, creating the situation where society-level affect-logics go underrecognized. The buffered self even has a sense of temporal isolation, where selfhood temporally predates relationality, in the narrative sense. The 'I' exists before it forms relations, rather than recognising that the 'I' is born out of relations. Previously discussed epistemically sprawled themes as identified in the climate corpus texts thus show up as aspects of life alienated by the buffered self.

In contrast, a porous self, which has historically existed in human communities, is emotionally and temporally connected to its social context (Pernau, 2021). Balance and order come from being in harmony with the context of existence, rather than from retreating to an autonomous self. The preference for the buffered self in the Industrial society is tightly connected with the need to control the world outside of the self. The ideal is a self that is unaffected by the outside world and its erratic patterns (Clark, 2020). Once again, the sociocultural preferences also show up in works of literature. Ghosh (2020) shows how modern literature presupposes a sense of orderliness in nature, which, he further claims, is incorrect to the current state of instability caused by CC. This mirrors the desire for order and control inherent in the buffered self. Overall, it seems that the Industrial society tries to purify the boundary-breaking messiness that communities require. After all, living in a community is not conducive to maintaining full autonomy and strict schedules, it requires a porosity and harmonious entanglement with the Other. Only then can a healthy social self be cultivated.

5.5.3.2. Kinship - Evolution

However, if the social self depends on recognition and community, the question arises of where the boundaries of that community lie. The climate corpus texts emphasize that the kin we need to learn to live with does not just refer to our human kin, but to our evolutionary kin as well. They promote a view of recognising the one family tree we have all come from,

and the qualities we share with other animals. In fact, it may be our perceived similarities that make the differences stand out more. At the same time, the way we interpret these differences is thoroughly influenced by the narrative the society spins to address it. Darwin challenged the creation view that predominated at the time and highlighted the evolutionary process that humanity arose from. However, the view of evolution that is usually presented is a survival of the fittest (Watson, 2022) - a somewhat ruthless process of competition. Yet, scientists are increasingly emphasizing the benefit of collaborating and networking in addition to competition when it comes to survival success (Axelrod, 2025). Examples of symbiosis abound in nature after all (Raina et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Abram (2010; CCT7) points out how the theory of evolution in a sense resonates with the ideas of totemism found in some Indigenous groups. Totemism relies on the idea of sharing kinship with a certain animal. Theories of evolution show us that we do in fact share this kinship with animals. However, the climate corpus texts posit how under the yoke of Industrial culture theories of evolution have sometimes been interpreted more as a proof of human exceptionalism. Humanity has ended up a lonely species at the top of the evolutionary pyramid. The texts also show how many Indigenous groups interpret the evolutionary relationship in the opposite: humans are the youngest and thus most naive species. Therefore, we ought to learn from other species.

The evolutionary kinship narrative also allows for a perceptual shift that the climate corpus texts talk about. One of the themes that arises from the texts is that we are intimately part of nature and, vice versa, nature of us. In the evolutionary sense, the texts pose how our senses have evolved to fit the surrounding more-than-human nature, and the specific niche we inhabit in the animal kingdom. The Industrial existence removes humans from this evolutionary, sensuous inheritance. Through this removal we have become displaced, and, as Loring (2020) argues, we need to re-find our niche. To do so we need to recognise our ecological being, and the balanced relationality with the local nature that inhabiting a niche requires. A niche is more than the natural habitat for which a species has evolved, a niche refers to a way of living, with reciprocal relationships that impart responsibilities and constraints on all species in a series of mutual feedback loops. Inhabiting a niche then requires locally situated empirical knowledge that is found in Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) systems as previously mentioned¹⁷.

¹⁷ An argument against the idea of anthropogenic-caused CC is that CC is natural. Even if human exploitation of the natural resources is pointed out, the argument is sometimes made that there are many examples of exploitative species in nature. This debate revolves around the questions: is CC

Kinship is a concept that has been central to anthropological investigations of exotic and Indigenous groups from the start (Hylland Eriksen, 2001). However, these leading early discussion on kinship focused mostly on human family kinship, i.e. how do people keep track of genealogical changes through marriage and birth etc. However, work by Indigenous scholars highlights how Indigenous kinship networks extend beyond human kin, to include non-human kin and indeed the country itself (Dudgeon et al., 2019). The fundamental relationality of Indigenous kinship networks is quite different from Industrial ways of relating, and in tension with the linear, hierarchal Industrial view that aims to separate humanity from their surrounding natural environment. Importantly, the relationship kinship networks are not just descriptions of becoming but prescribe dependencies and responsibilities that turn into ways of being and ways of acting.

In fact, the relationship between people is secondary to the relationship of people with the land (Tynan, 2021). Accountability is not a trait that exists in relation to yourself or your own actions, but to your actions towards your relationships. Tynan explains the practical differences between these approaches through the practice of cultural burning. Aboriginals in Australia have long engaged in cultural practices of burning to heal the country. The megafires of the recent years, in particular those in 2019/2020 were partly caused by disconnected, colonial practices of land management (Fletcher et al., 2021). In many of the large natural parks in New South Wales, fire prohibitions had been in place to protect the nature. However, the built up dead material then became potent fuel for the megafires (Nolan et al., 2020). Even if land management burning practices are now introduced, they differ in leading intent from aboriginal cultural burning. Land management burning is often framed in terms of human asset protection, whereas cultural burning is a relational practice that maintains the health of the country and thereby heals all the kin relying on it.

The difference in foundational intentions between the two practices highlights the real difference in the Industrial self versus the social self. It is not just in the sense of how we understand ourselves, and that taking a more social self approach allows us to better research humanity. Embracing a paradigm of the social self means embracing a different way of relating and being. The Industrial, modern approach to land tends towards entitlement and

natural? Are humans natural? Taking the niche approach allows for a solid line of arguing against this naturalisation of human exploitation. Within a niche, if one species dominates and exploits the resources, the resulting shortage of resources will curb the growth of the dominating species. The Industrial human world order is globalised in such a way that local accountability is lost and ecological costs are externalised. From such a view, Industrial human behaviour is not natural, and neither is CC.

rights – the land exists for us to take from (Tynan, 2021). Land management practices exist to ensure continued productivity of the land. The relational approach instead emphasizes a sense of being with the land. It instils a porosity of the self where external patterns in the environment perturb and impact the sense of self. Furthermore, it creates a sense of relational responsibility in taking care of the more-than-human kin and land itself.

5.5.4. *Ecological Self*

As abovementioned, in Indigenous kinship networks, the human-to-human relationships depend on and are secondary to the human-to-land relationship. The social self is thus still not the primary sense of self. Instead, this approach moves into a sense of ecological self, a concept introduced by Naess in the 80ties (Naess, 1990). Based on his and others' uses in the literature, it can be defined as “a wide, expansive or field-like sense of self, which ultimately includes all life-forms, ecosystems and the Earth itself. Experiences of ecological self involve: (a) an emotional resonance with other life-forms, (b) a perception of being similar, related to, or identical with other life-forms, (c) spontaneously behaving towards the ecosphere as one would towards one's small self (with nurture and defence)” (Bragg, 1996, p. 95). It thus expands relationality to include the Earth itself.

This approach aligns with the ideas of deep ecology (Bragg, 1996). Its contrast, shallow ecology, has been criticised for focusing more on the surface level of CC. It would aim to create technological solutions for specific problems or create interventions to address mental health challenges. In the case of EA, shallow ecology would then aim to decrease the distress of EA without looking at the deeper causes of it. Deep ecology, on the other hand, focuses exactly on these more foundational and systemic aspects that allowed the climate crisis to develop. Any change it aims to make would therefore be focused on changing foundational values and worldviews. Furthermore, deep ecology is ecocentric rather than anthropocentric. Evidently, the approach of this thesis, and the lifeworld created in the climate corpus texts are aligned more closely with the deep ecology approach.

In section 5.4 on stories, the movement from idem to ipse identity was explained by going from asking ‘what is this person?’ to ‘who is this person?’. The step to the ecological self is marked by asking the question ‘where is this person?’ (Valera, 2018). As such, it recognises the embeddedness of the self with their home. The conceptualisation of home that Naess follows echoes Heidegger, in that it is the place where an individual chooses to dwell (Valera, 2018). This dwelling is not just being on Earth, it is a specific Being-in-the-world. The unheimlich-ness that we are witnessing in Industrial society, through solastalgia and EA,

are expressions of the inability of the Industrial self to dwell, partly due to Industrial alienation, and partly due to CC-related changes in environment or even relocations. Importantly, dwelling is not a passive process. It involves active sense-making and building of meaning, in a reciprocal process between the human and the environment. Due to this intimate relationship, this framework resists a dualistic separation between humanity and nature, or anthropocentrism and ecocentrism.

This also raises the point of Othering, and whether we can even deem the more-than-human nature as Other. This sense of looking beyond the human is also present in the climate corpus texts. The main idea that they convey is that once we expand our awareness, from an Industrial viewpoint to an ecological one, we perceive a richer world. In this expanded world we can also better see the qualities of the Other – the more-than-human nature. We can start to recognize ourselves in the Other, but also how capabilities that we have – consciousness, intelligence – have manifested differently in our evolutionary kin. We can recognise the multitude of being, without attempting to collapse it into a hierarchy of complexity with humanity on top. It is the difference that is meaningful. Ideally, we can move from a neurocentric view, to one that recognizes the different forms of intelligence/agency in plant life. Furthermore, a sense of anthropomorphising nature is weaved through the climate corpus texts, giving personality to more-than-human nature. This seems to be done as a narrative strategy to imbue the aliveness of nature into the texts, or as an epistemic strategy to increase the perceived agency of the more-than-human world.

The practice of Othering, however, leads to an important tension within different Industrial traditions, and between Industrial and Indigenous philosophies. The three main thinkers mentioned in relation to theorising about the social other, Hegel, Honneth, and Sartre, each conceive the Other differently. Their ideas can be framed as an answer to the question: how can a self exist among others without losing itself? Hegel (1998) states the other can be a condition of freedom through mutual recognition but can also become domination. Honneth (1996) radicalises recognition by making it necessary for self-realisation, and placing it not just interpersonally, but institutionally. He further theorises that lack of institutional recognition results in social pathologies. Sartre (2021) opposes these ideas, by framing the other and its objectifying gaze as a potential threat to freedom. Relations are structurally in danger of becoming conflictual, in which freedom becomes an act of resistance rather than harmony. Indigenous ideas of kinship networks render secondary the self-loss question (Tynan, 2021). Their starting point is not this self/other split present in

the theories of the Industrial thinkers. Personhood is relational at its core, connecting with other humans but also the more-than-human kin.

Naess' ideas around the ecological self sit as a sort of bridge between these two traditions. It opposes Sartre, expands the Other as present in the ideas of Hegel and Honneth, yet also retains a sense of the Industrial individuation of self into the relational ideas of the Indigenous kinship network. He answers the question of self-loss with others by changing the assumption of the preferred outcome. Sartre, Hegel, and Honneth all presuppose a self that is bounded. Naess questions the idea of a bounded self and instead aligns with a porous sense of self. The scalability of the self into the surrounding ecology then becomes a condition for flourishing. He thereby attempts to hold together the Industrial concern for individuation with the expanded, ecological relationality. The dichotomy of collectivistic versus atomistic has a long tradition in Industrial philosophy¹⁸, so combining the two is a difficult position to take. He attempts to resolve it by explaining that the self is discernible, but not isolatable (Naess, 1990). The individual is part of an ecological network that together forms a Gestalt, while at the same time, each individual forms a gestalt of itself (Valera, 2018).

Deep ecology, in which the ecological self is grounded, also stands apart from other psychological theories by its fundamentally phenomenological approach to ethics (Bragg, 1996). It avoids being morally descriptive and instead aims to discover the experiential basis of ecologically ethical behaviour, hypothesizing that an expanded sense of self naturally leads to a more caring attitude towards the more-than-human world. This seems somewhat anthropologically naïve. Indeed, a critique that is often levelled at these claims is that it is overly positive. Deep ecology assumes that, true to humanist psychology, humans have a tendency to move towards self-realisation and that, when possible, will prioritise caring for themselves. Then, by extending the self out into the world, caring for the environment becomes less of an altruistic instinct and more a type of self-care. Yet, one only needs to look at statistics of self-neglect and self-abuse to see how problematic these claims are. On the other hand, studies do find a correlation between ecological self-identification and pro-environmental behaviour (Pong & Tam, 2023).

Importantly, for the discussion of EA specifically, stronger ecological identification correlated with increased levels of CC-related psychopathological symptoms (Thomson & Roach, 2023). A stronger ecological self is also correlated with higher EA (Grénman et al.,

¹⁸ The dichotomy is also implied in the climate corpus texts, so it is expanded on in the next section on the lifeworld.

2025). Yet, these studies also show that a stronger sense of ecological self is correlated with higher well-being scores. Although the causal relationship between the ecological self and well-being remains ambiguous, the ecological self may provide a valuable avenue for coping with EA. With a stronger ecological self, nature-based and meaning focused coping strategies may be more effective (Corvello et al., 2025). Thus, keeping EA as a practical anxiety, and growing the sense of ecological self can address the emotional struggles associated with EA. However, the ecological self seems quite separate from the modern self, as described at the start of the section. How achievable is it then to grow this sense of self?

The demands of the ecological self can seem steep. To achieve it, one would have to span the Industrial separation between human and nature, carry significant burden of moral responsibility and adopt a new sense of self. However, this task can be made to seem less daunting by questioning the narrative of modernity, as Latour (2012) does in *We Have Never Been Modern*. He states that the main project of modernity was purification: separating nature from society, facts from values, and objects from subjects. However, Industrial society continuously produces hybrids, such as laboratories or climate models. Even science itself depends on alliances and persuasion to determine funding structures. Many pre-modern societies and current Indigenous ontologies acknowledge these mixed networks of humans, objects and more-than-human nature. Latour provocatively argues that modernity then is not more rational, rather, it is more self-deceiving. Following this line of thinking, the Anthropocene does not necessarily require a moral or psychological transformation of the self. Instead, it requires the recognition that we have always lived in intimate ecological entanglements. Practically, and ethically, society must reconfigure to a procedural approach where all entities in a network are acknowledged and considered.

While Latour gives valuable grounding procedures, he does not provide an affective stance for being in this entangled state. At the start of this section, I described how the move from modernity to postmodernity has been connected with an increase of irony, a stance that echoes the emotional flattening of Latour's proposal. The post-modern viewpoint proposes a detachment of the self from the world to an outside position from where it believes it can observe the structures that create meaning. However, Morton (2013; CCT4) argues that CC has shown us that this is impossible. As a hyperobject it infiltrates every part of our existence, bringing us in intimate connection with all of ecology. There is no way to step outside of that. Morton therefore, somewhat confusingly, reappropriates the term 'irony' to refer to a kind of reflective and epistemic irony for this entangled way of being. We are living inside CC and

therefore incapable of fully knowing, seeing, or understanding it. This conceptualisation of our epistemic position in the Anthropocene overcomes the purity-fantasy of modernity.

Combining the three may be a fruitful answer to EA. Naess' ecological self provides emotional protection, but practical uncertainty. He further highlights the importance of dwelling in the local niche, rather than trying to encompass the global system. Latour brackets lived experience and emotion in his theory but gives a lucid account of situated responsibility in local networks. He breaks through the modern conditioning and calls for a recognition of the fact that humanity was never separate from the rest of ecology. Morton provides a way to live Latour's insights through an epistemic humility, and a rejection of moral exceptionalism. Together they provide a conceptual framework for embracing the ecological self that has always been inside of us.

5.6 The Ecological Lifeworld

Who do we want to be? Cosmos Sheldrake (2024) sings about wanting to be soil, while the beauty of ecology can be heard in the background. Nature is not just a nice aesthetic addition to the track. In a new initiative by Spotify, nature is now an official artist, and co-authorship of Sheldrake's song is shared with nature. The royalties that Nature makes are invested in Indigenous and community-led biodiversity projects (Chhabra, 2025). Can the reconfiguration of the Industrial lifeworld begin like this?

The placement of the boundary determines what we see as relevant, in daily life and in scientific enquiry (Hutchins, 2010). Locating the correct place for the boundary has therefore been a focus of many modern scientific paradigms. With the development of 4E cognition, the attention moved instead to the boundary itself, and the processes that take place there. Focusing on this location brings the embodied and ecological aspects of being to the fore. In the case of this thesis on EA, the lack of conceptual boundaries, termed epistemic sprawl (Oblak et al., 2025a) guided the analysis and shaped the lens with which the material was interpreted. This approach has uncovered important dynamics of alienation versus interconnectedness that seem to feed the disorientation present in EA.

Overall, the climate corpus texts present a worldview consisting of an intricately connected web of concepts. I identified four main grounding nodes in this web: temporality, feelings, stories, and the self. For each of these themes, the climate corpus texts presented the same dominant framing. Industrial society and its guiding ideologies seem to sustain a deep

alienation that sometimes leaves individuals deeply distressed, expressed as EA. A new state of being to remedy this could be a deeply connected and relational way of being such as many Indigenous communities uphold. If Industrial society finds a way back to this, the climate corpus texts suggest, it will find itself in a harmonious relationality between humans and the more-than-human world. While this would not magically resolve and undo the already ongoing CC, it would place humanity in a better place to adapt to the changes and develop a lifestyle that has more long-term sustainability.

This section will trace the rupture of the Industrial worldview into EA, and how an ecological lifeworld may be constructed instead. To do so I will first expand on how the Industrial lifeworld is constructed and how the gaining of an ecological awareness in it means coming to terms with guilt and responsibility. I will then link this to the metaphysical nature of EA, followed by a critical evaluation of the terms anthropocentrism and ‘becoming Indigenous’. Next, I will deepen the understanding of EA by looking at the underlying tension between an atomistic and relational worldview, and link that to psychosomatic manifestations of that tension in individuals. Lastly, I will use an existential psychotherapy framework to identify how an individual can progress from awakening to the climate crisis to taking practical action.

5.6.1. Industrial Worldview

The interconnectedness of a variety of cultural factors to CC is not unexpected. The conditions that have led to the acceleration of CC are deeply entangled with global systems of inequality and violence. The epistemic sprawl of EA seems to be connected with a growing awareness of how a variety of factors previously interpreted as ‘ecological indifferent’ (Clark, 2020, p. 69) are in fact causal of ecological violence. For example, the links from consumerism and land privatisation to ecological disruption are referenced by the climate corpus texts. The temporal dimension is relevant to this as well, as the current system is the results of a long history of discriminatory systems (Raippalinna et al., 2023). Particularly important here is the displacement of Indigenous populations, that have caused the destruction of generations of local ecological knowledge (Ford et al., 2020).

This larger Industrial system does not exist in isolation from the people who live inside it. Rather, it has a significant shaping influence on their personal worldviews. The lifeworld that we are exposed to in childhood becomes, through repetition, the horizon of our experience in adulthood and shapes our worldviews. Section 5.3 on feelings showed how the process of worldview formation, through feeling, thinking, behaving programs is

fundamentally embodied (Ciompi & Baatz, 2005; Škodlar & Ciglencečki, 2017). Considering the explosion of technological infiltration in modern life and the associated increase in time spent inside, Industrial humanity is at danger of losing the embodied connection with nature (Passmore & Howell, 2014). It was further discussed how Industrial societies suffer from an affective ankylosis (Fanon, 2008) that distances them emotionally from the physically distanced populations that are suffering the effects of CC, a process fuelled by the habits of affluence of Industrial societies (Slaby, 2023). Furthermore, in section 5.4 on Stories I touched upon the narratives, and media climate, that allow the indifference and naiveté of Industrial societies to continue.

The affective framing of indifference and affluence helps to avoid the overwhelm of the full anguish of CC (Slaby, 2023). The habits of affluence instituted through this framing further hide the affective side of CC. Humans tend to procrastinate on existentially difficult emotions, and the habits of affluence conveniently crowd the inner affective theatre, such that the difficult CC-related emotions can remain unfelt. However, the inner affective theatre is now in competition with the online theatre on social media. Since social media capitalises on emotional engagement, it not only decreases the perceived informational distance between Industrial and non-Industrial communities, but also the emotional distance. As a result, the affective social echo chamber changes from only Industrial voices that are stuck in affective ankylosis to include non-Industrial voices as well.

As Myers (2014) explains, humanity tends to identify with the world they belong to as long as their sense-making tools, their worldview, suffices to understand the world. Through social media the spectres of the ‘ungrievable lives’ of the non-Industrial world come to haunt the indifferent Industrial world (Butler, 2009). Furthermore, as the climate corpus texts show, there is a narrative in the climate media sphere that promotes a more ecological sense of selfhood. Both these factors can contribute to a person awakening to the full impact of the climate crisis. As the Developing Ecological Consciousness (Corvello et al., 2025) model shows, after awakening to the crisis comes a state of emotional turmoil that can lead either to resilient coping and climate action, or to overwhelming EA.

What people in the Industrial culture wake up to, specifically, is their own responsibility in the climate crisis. Existing within the Industrial context, and living to its high living standard, makes one an ‘implicated subject’ to some extent (Rothberg, 2019). The comfort of the Industrial living standard arises out of historical and ongoing exploitation of the earth, and oppression of, mostly, the Global South, and Industrial living thus has a steep social and ecological cost (Bryan, 2022). There is another sense of alienation here, in that

Industrial subjects are alienated from the costs and outcomes of the system in which they live (Slaby, 2025). Even if the implication of the self in CC is only an unintended effect, it nonetheless objectifies the self (Clark, 2020), since suddenly the ecological costs of the physical existence of the Industrial subjects become a burden.

Such a realization can inspire a deep existential anxiety. The state of being a self-determining agent with full freedom and responsibility to make something of themselves, as the Industrial self is told it is, can already induce anxiety (Passmore et al., 2023; Yalom, 1980). The unbounded opportunities of a life of personal freedom to determine one's fate can be maddening. In the Anthropocene, this freedom is made extra heavy by the realization that not only does one need to make the correct choices for self-realization, but also for environmental protection. For, if being alive puts such a burden on the environment, how ought one to live to be worth this. Does one's value outweigh the costs (Jones & Davison, 2021)? Furthermore, even inaction can be problematic, as through the passive existence within an Industrial culture, harm still happens (Sartre, 2021).

Moreover, the dominant neoliberal narrative tends to place the responsibility for addressing CC onto the individual, both in terms of building emotional resilience, and in making sacrifices. The climate corpus texts lament how sustainable living has come to be perceived as a steep sacrifice in Industrial culture. There are multiple factors underlying unwillingness to make the sacrifice, related to both the cost of the sacrifice and the social narrative. Firstly, it is assumed that greening one's lifestyle turns into an exercise in deprivation (McKinnon, 2014). After all, neoliberal competition means that giving up resources means falling behind in the rat race (Kałwak & Weihgold, 2022). Secondly, CC is a massive problem. As the climate corpus texts point out, an individual is tiny in comparison and a change in behaviour of one individual is not likely to make a difference. The individual who wants to change, then, is doomed from the start.

Furthermore, it seems social standards of unacceptability have not caught up with CC (Blühdorn, 2015). Mundane concerns over, for example, the cost of gas, outweigh the collapse of the climate. This is also because the powerful privileged who benefit from the continuation of harmful actions influence the social narrative to downplay the harmful effects of Industrial behaviour (Slaby, 2023) and navigate the blame away from the Industrial individual. Lastly, as discussed in section 5.5.1. on the modern self, individuals no longer identify with grand narratives (Fussell, 2000). A sacrifice then becomes a cost/benefit analysis, instead of a heroic deed to save the planet. Interestingly, the climate corpus texts do

seem to lean into re-establishing grander, heroic narratives in the context of CC that may inspire more extreme or sacrificial behaviour.

What the climate corpus texts also highlight, however, is how the current narrative around responsibility for the causation and solution of CC is unproductive. This narrative is often presented as a dichotomy wherein individuals are placed opposite of corporations and governments. This is a clear example of Industrial either/or thinking that wants to attach responsibility to specific atoms of the society (Bryan, 2022). In the end, as the climate corpus texts point out, behind the corporations and governments that are demonised are individuals whose small daily decisions compound into environmental harm. The neoliberal ideology of winners versus losers promotes an individual greed, that would be punished when living in a group context, as is supposedly the case in Indigenous societies. The climate corpus texts therefore call for communal solutions that connect individuals back into a network of social support and power that can mandate change. However, in the highly individualised Industrial society this can be far out of reach.

Thus, the awakening to CC places an individual in a disorienting state. It is not simply a matter of recognising the fault in one's behaviour and changing it. Rather, one's implication in the crisis creates a confrontational swirl of guilt and responsibility, as well as despair at the general inaction of the surrounding un-awakened society. The Industrial worldview shatters and its faults are critically reflected on. This stage is the limit situation as Jaspers (2013) describes where the old worldview is no longer sufficient, and a new one is not yet formed. The crisis does not arise from disagreeing with norms and values (Thumser, 2021). Rather, it arises from the realisation that the lifeworld that previously constituted meaning can no longer do so in a way that makes sense. In the context of CC this discordance of meaning is both affective and existential. Individuals become alienated from constitutive meaning-making patterns and look for new ways to make sense of Industrial ideologies, temporality, feelings, stories, and themselves. This is the fertile soil from which EA tentatively emerges.

5.6.2. Ecological Anxiety

EA has been presented by multiple authors as being a moral emotion rather than a psychopathology. It is moral in the sense that it flags where our current actions are failing and endangering our continued existence on this earth, and new norms and values are needed to guide our behaviour. This is in line with empirical research that is showing practical anxiety to be a core aspect of EA (Kurth & Pihkala, 2022). Given the oncoming climate crisis, EA can even be deemed adaptive in its future oriented stance (Clayton, 2020). The increasing

prevalence of EA can then be interpreted as a sign that the entire Industrial society needs healing, and EA can guide the transformational journey that is required (Hickman, 2020).

Yet, EA is considerably more than the practical dimension, or merely a moral emotion. It can be deemed an existential anxiety, encompassing ontic worries, especially in regard to well-being, moral questions, and spiritual concerns (Ojala et al., 2021). As discussed in section 5.5 on the self, EA and the ecological self are intimately connected in ecological discourse, but the transformation of the Industrial self into the ecological self is quite the journey that requires a fundamental restructuring of being. The relational worldview as linked to Indigenous thinking is in many ways considerably contrasting to the Industrial worldview. Thus, the narratives in the climate corpus texts centre around fundamental questions about reality. In that sense, then, EA seems to be more of a metaphysical emotion instead of just a moral emotion.

5.6.2.1. To be human

The climate corpus texts imply the most fundamental anthropocentric question that is age-old: what does it mean to be human? The answer to this question in the climate corpus is not positive. Some of the texts imply a sense of humanity being inherently harmful to planet earth, and that drastically reducing our number would be desirable. A similar disdain for humanity is present in the reports by people with EA (Oblak et al., 2025a). As noted by various authors, this response is not entirely unexpected or irrational, since humanity's actions are deeply implicated in CC (Mento et al., 2023; Myers, 2014; Passmore et al., 2023). It is humanity's exploitative nature that has caused CC, and humanity's slowness to accept its own guilt and mobilise into a more ascetic lifestyle that continues to fail to address CC. This situation challenges any sort of positive identity we might form of humanity.

A common critique of Industrial society, in the climate corpus and wider literature, is that it is too anthropocentric. Therefore, calls have been made for a new age that is ecocentric. However, as Droz (2022) highlights, simply getting rid of anthropocentrism will not solve the issue. Firstly, there are practical challenges. Epistemologically, it is impossible to obtain non-anthropocentric knowledge as socio-culturally situated humans, and describing the point of view of nature still requires the application of human concepts and languages. Metaethically, new nature-based values still arise from human evaluative practices, must guide human behaviours, and hide a certain value imperialism since the "objective" non-human values have been selected by a human culture. Pointing to anthropocentrism as the culprit of CC also overlooks the interlocking systems of human versus the rest dualisms,

capitalism, Industrialism, consumerism, and fantasies of control. Arguably, those forces are what is endangering the more-than-human world.

Taking a purely ecocentric approach to environmental protection can also be dangerous if it operates in the human culture and its persisting power hierarchies. Placing nature's right over human rights can carry democratic and imperialist risks in certain institutional contexts if it remains unclear where authority lies (Droz, 2022). The key question to ask is thus who is centring whom, in which domain and what is thereby excluded. The idea of 'enlightened' anthropocentrism aims to move in this direction. This movement emphasizes that only humans create moral values and act on them, but that their overall well-being depends on healthy ecosystems. Robust environmental protection should therefore rely on a human-centred ethic along those lines. However, there is still a danger for it to slip back into human exceptionalism. To assure sensitivity to cultural pluralism in this context, local, participatory and context-sensitive movements are critical.

5.6.2.2. Becoming Indigenous

When the goal is local, participatory, context-sensitive movements, Indigenous groups are often invoked as qualified candidates for leading the required transformation. Respectfully engaging with Indigenous ideologies and idealising them as a solution to the hurtful Industrial ideologies, however, are two quite different approaches and the latter is unfortunately too often the one taken. The climate corpus texts often illustrate alternative ways of being, that oppose Industrial standards, by describing Indigenous practices. While the climate corpus does not strongly romanticise Indigenous ways of being, it also does not generally offer practical ways to introduce this way of being into modern Industrial life. This choice is defensible, as the climate corpus also highlights how it is not possible to create a globally appropriate way of being. Rather, it reiterates how new narratives need to be locally grounded and relevant.

Still, anthropology does have a strong colonial heritage that is still present in modern scientific thinking as well. As Chandler and Reid (2020) argue, the colonialism of Industrial science is now represented by the strain of thinking focusing in on 'becoming Indigenous'. It takes Indigenous knowledge as a way to overcome the wicked anthropocentrism of Industrial society, and to transcend the age of the Anthropocene into a new future. It thus hinges on the idea, present in the climate corpus through Morton's (2013; CCT4) work, that the world has already ended. The appropriation of Indigeneity presents the fantasy of an escape plan. Although the colonial approach is supposedly discarded, this claim remains in the realm of

fantasy; Industrial knowledge is elevated to the position of the saviour, but the physical inequalities in land rights and resources are seldom addressed. Furthermore, the approach is still rooted in an Industrial approach to science, and thereby not accommodating of the multiplicity of Indigenous lifeworlds. Indigenous knowledge then becomes reduced to a homogenous ‘transferable skill set’ (Chandler & Reid, 2020, p. 17) stripped from its local context that Industrial scientists can appropriate as they see fit.

Again, the climate corpus texts do not engage in such extreme forms of romanticisation, but the historical and current colonial context of the Industrial knowledge milieu is important to keep in mind. Especially in a European context, as this thesis exists in, this may be relevant. The Indigenous cultures of Europe have mostly been integrated into Industrialised society (Ala-Kortesmaa, 2025). With such a lack of local nexus to Indigeneity, the danger of romanticisation is likely to be more pertinent. After all, the media landscape is less likely to report on the less beautiful realities of Indigeneity (Belfer et al., 2017).

5.6.2.3. Contrasting Worldviews

Simply referring to Indigenous ideologies and supplementing them with anecdotes leads to vague practical steps, in European context but also outside of it. The climate corpus texts refer to two main dichotomies: subjective versus objective science, and Industrial versus Indigenous ways of being, which relate to perception and participatory feeling, respectively. Both of these link back to the same underlying existential debate. Not just ‘What does it mean to be human?’, but ‘How are we as humans related to the world?’. Once again, then, a deeper analysis of the climate corpus texts and surrounding literature inspires a move from a moral analysis (e.g. being a good/bad human) to a metaphysical analysis, focused on the metaphysical debate between an atomistic versus a relational worldview.

The atomistic worldview maintains that everything is made up of discrete, independent units – atoms (Chalmers, 2009). The relations between them are secondary and external, they connect the units and situate them, but do not constitute them. The world is already fully structured and the mind mirrors or models this in a representational process. Complex phenomena in the world can be explained by decomposing the phenomena into the simpler parts that constitute it. This worldview can be traced back to Aristotle’s ideas that substance is primary (Mabbott, 1935). This matured into the objectivist approach to science (Burnston, 2021) that has been criticised at multiple points in this thesis. Wittgenstein (1922) radicalised this atomism into logic and language. He stated that the world is the totality of facts, and reality has a fixed logical structure. Meaning is found in the correspondence

between language and the world. Atomistic assumptions still remain influential in Industrial society.

In contrast to this, the relational worldview poses that relations are primary, and that entities emerge from them rather than precede them (Walsh et al., 2021). Knowledge and meaning are not represented, but enacted, as well as participatory since the knower is part of what is known. This forms a world that consists of a field of relations, practices and histories. Hegel (1998) systematised the relational ontology in modernity, promoting a view of mediated and dialectical understanding. Heidegger (2010) developed this phenomenologically, stating the world is a meaningful totality before it becomes a collection of things. His view of the lifeworld, as well as Schutz's (1967) translation of this into the social domain, as being disclosed through moods, practices and history is aligned with the relational worldview. Enactivist theories, with their emphasis on cognition as a relational process, also sit in this tradition.

Observing Indigenous epistemologies and ways of being is powerful in the context of this contrast of worldviews, as they provide a living alternative to the atomism that Industrial culture is rife with. As discussed in previous sections, relationality in Indigenous living shows up through their recognition of being embedded in a network of ecological, historical, and ancestral relations. They also honour affect as an epistemic aspect of living, rather than a secondary ignorable phenomenon. However, it is not Indigenous practices that Industrial society needs to appropriate, but the relational worldview that they adhere to, and that some Industrial traditions also embrace. It would make the re-imagining of concepts related to CC possible; ecology can then be conceived of as consisting of co-dependent, emergent networks, and psychopathology can be understood in terms of altered world-relations rather than internal defects. Bridging these two, EA would then show up as a disruption of relational world-meaning, rather than individual distress.

5.6.2.4. Connecting to the World

This underlying metaphysical orientation that often goes unnoticed and unquestioned, manifests in our psychological being in the world. Watson (2016) made this concrete in his Half-Connecting Theory (HCT). Based on psychoanalytic and phenomenological findings, this theory states that humanity's natural tendency is to search for connection with the surrounding environment, human and more-than-human. However, starting in antiquity, the atomistic worldview prescribed a different approach that led to individualisation and dichotomising, with you versus me as the most basic dichotomy (Watson, 2022). The practice

of Othering is thus a cornerstone of this worldview. Instead of seeing oneself as part of nature then, the Industrial person sees the world according to a human versus nature dichotomy. Watson maintains that this is unnatural and therefore provides a template for psychopathology that is deeply embedded in the cultural worldview of the Industrial world.

HCT further claims that a worldview becomes deeply ingrained in the lifeworld – phenomenologically, but also physically. Watson (2022) states that the worldview manifests in “every kind of human movement, behavior, emotion, and idea—as well as all forms of residence, architecture, communication device, building tool, fashion, utensil, appliance, and vehicle” (p. 693). A culture’s metaphysical orientation can thus be identified by analysis of their tools and technologies. Half-connecting cultures, which Industrial culture would be classed as, create technologies that reproduce dichotomies. The boundaries between one and the other are firmly embedded in technology. In contrast, full-connecting cultures, such as Indigenous cultures, create technologies that encompass a balance between parties, and where agency is also evenly distributed. A full-connecting tool would be a carrier that is made of natural, biodegradable products, as opposed to the plastic bags that Industrial countries (and the world’s oceans) are overflowing with.

Since the half-connecting worldview bleeds from the metaphysical into the physical realm, Industrial children are socialized into it from birth, both at home and in institutional structures that reinforce the worldview (Watson, 2022). Not only is their consciousness resting on half-connecting ideas, but their body is also trained to maintain distance and a boundary. Sanity is re-found in isolation after having been around others, rather than finding it in the very connections with them. Hence, the half-connecting psychopathology may be configured in three different ways. Some individuals may be physically attuned to connection but be obstructed in forming those connections through a consciousness that strives to protect boundaries. Other individuals may consciously support full-connecting ideas but lack the ability to experience physical oneness with the world, and perhaps even recoil from accidental physical connections. The most obstructed individuals are those that are half-connecting in both body and mind, and who are thereby completely blocked from receiving the social medicine that the climate corpus texts call for. When addressing these blocks in therapy it is pivotal to also consider the world the individual exists in, and to what extent that world could reciprocate the newly cultivated full-connecting worldview of the individual. If the lifeworld is still half-connecting, the individual will remain unfulfilled and in distress.

Thus, HCT clarifies an alternative potential fundament of EA. Considering the state of crisis of the world, and the pathological state of disconnection of the Industrial world, EA is

an appropriate signpost of the Anthropocene. Epistemic sprawl, too, is not an abnormal cognitive pattern from a full-connecting or relational metaphysical viewpoint. The problem lies in the mismatch between the relational worldview and the Industrial lifeworld. A worldview is an individual's own sense-making prerogative. The lifeworld, however, is socio-cultural and requires a collective transformation. Furthermore, the Anthropocene lifeworld has become globalised, such that the Industrial worldview has lost local context-sensitivity. As such, the overwhelm of EA that can descend into practical paralysis is understandable – the individual feels the need to live differently but is up against a global institution that requires the revolution of the collective. Yet, intimate and widespread social connections are hard to build in the atomistic, half-connecting Industrial culture.

5.6.3. Building the Ecological Lifeworld

The lifeworld that the climate corpus texts construct is one that is ecological connected and relational. As Watson's (2016) HCT posits, this is indeed a positive lifeworld. Thus, metaphysically, it has been constructed. The challenge in EA is that it cannot be brought into being from one day to the next by an individual or even small collectives. It requires a radical transformation of the Industrial lifeworld. This is a daunting perspective. For what can an individual do in that case? Especially for EA this is pertinent, as this practical uncertainty is a key aspect of it. The question that remains thus, is how can an individual start to actually build this positive lifeworld? And how can scientific enquiry help to shape the toolbox?

To better understand the move from EA to action, the wishing versus willing framework proposed by Yalom (1980) is helpful. Being grounded in existential therapy practice, this framework investigates how change can be made with patients, i.e. how can they go from unbothered, to wishing for change, to actually making the change. Yalom poses that the realisation of existential freedom and the responsibility that comes with it can inspire considerable anxiety and guilt. Echoing the sentiment of many thinkers before, he welcomes these feelings as requirements for change. Wishing can only be successful when based on these deep existential feelings, not when it is based on morals. It has to arise from the awareness of one's own responsibility for becoming. Accepting this responsibility can inspire power and hope but is only the "vestibule of change" (p. 286).

To transition into a state of willing where the change can be made, the individual needs to make a decision and commit to a certain path. When it comes to this decision, Yalom here echoes the idea by Ciompi and Baatz (2008) described in section 5.3.2 on affective

signposts: there is no neutral state. Psychophysical energy is always flowing either to maintain the status quo or to transition into the wished for state. This theme also appears in the climate corpus texts; we always have a choice to make no matter how hopeless the situation seems. The role of the therapist in this process is to disencumber the will so it can flourish into action. It is important that the therapist is not too directive in this as the change then still is not self-motivated and will not be sustainable.

In the context of this thesis, it can be said that, in a way, the climate corpus texts take the role of the therapist for people with EA. Especially so when considering that Yalom states that insight can be an important factor in disencumbering the will. The need to engage in producing and consuming knowledge shown by people with EA (Oblak et al., 2025a), therefore seems to be a good intuition. In a specific way, the climate corpus texts can also be helpful by making the decision and commitment to a greener and more relational being-in-the-world less difficult. Yalom describes various methods for making decisions less painful, one of which is devaluing the unchosen alternative. The climate corpus texts are quite rigorous in their disapproval of Industrial culture. Industrial individuals are likely to struggle with conflicting motivations. They want to be greener and more relational, but they do have living and social needs to satisfy. A complete renunciation of Industrial living while still entrenched in that lifeworld poses its own existential threat that they need to navigate. Especially in Europe where the general lack of Indigenous culture would make it hard for people to connect back to that.

When looking at Yalom's warning that the therapist should not be directive, the climate corpus texts can be said to be a good therapist, as they do not spell out explicit practical step. Rather they imply global strategies that can be adapted to local culture. The first is to learn to bear the wounded world, but giving expression to the emotional upheaval of CC, for example through ceremonies. The second is to learn from Indigenous approaches to life, however, as the wider literature shows, this should happen alongside a taking accountability of being an implicated subject and decolonisation of the Industrial worldview (Chandler & Reid, 2020). A core aspect of the Indigenous worldview to apply to industrial life would be to incorporate into the self by cultivating a sense of ecological self, which may also increase well-being in EA. The third is the re-storying of the land and our relationship with it, such that we can imagine the new relational and sustainable world we want to build.

The last strategy arises more from Yalom's framework, combined with a general lack of explicit description of it in the corpus texts: taking power and embodying agency. The collective EA present in Industrial society faces a unique constraint in movement to the action

stage: the power to make a change depends less on personal strength and more on powerful non-entities such as economics and politics (Chandler & Reid, 2020). The climate corpus texts mention ideas of an economy that is somehow bounded by ecological limits. Furthermore, they advocate for an economy that is based more on gifts and reciprocity rather than endless growth. New ecologically friendly economic models have been suggested (Elo et al., 2024), but no such concrete examples are given in the climate corpus texts. As such, the description of institutional power structures seems to remain in the sphere of the ideological, without presenting more practical knowledge that could help people with EA understand their functioning.

5.7 Research Questions – Revisited

This thesis started with posing general research questions regarding the lifeworld and epistemic sprawl to guide a constructivist grounded theory analysis of CC media consulted by people with EA. The analysis has shown that the phenomenon of EA touches upon rather foundational aspects of lifeworld construction. Furthermore, the epistemic sprawl present in the reports of people with EA was reflected in a heavily interconnected conceptual web in the climate corpus texts. The four grounding nodes in this web represented core, but distinct aspects of lived experience. For the sake of clarity, I will explicitly return to the research questions in this section, to integrate the findings of the domain-specific analyses into a coherent account of how EA is mirrored, structured, and sustained by CC-related media.

5.7.1 What kind of lifeworld relating to CC in the Industrial context is presented by the climate corpus texts?

The climate corpus texts construct the contemporary Industrial lifeworld as one characterised by fragmentation and alienation across embodied, social, temporal, and ecological dimensions, with CC functioning as a destabilising force that exposes these underlying tensions. The Institutions linked to the Industrial lifeworld promote a type of world-making that is narrow and privileges certain modes of world-making while marginalising other, more relational ways of being and knowing. In light of the wider sociocultural development of modernity, the disorientation in this lifeworld can be understood at a deeper level as being accompanied by a disorienting loss of grand, heroic narratives and moral grounding (Fussell, 2000; Taylor, 1992). Furthermore, having grown up in the Industrial world, its tenets are internalised into an individual's identity, aggravating the

personal disorientation when perceiving the damage and untenability of Industrial culture (Myers, 2014). CC is identified as an important destabilising force of the damaging Industrial status quo and thereby becomes connected to individual feelings of disorientation.

5.7.2. How is the epistemic sprawl that characterizes EA reflected and/or addressed in the media consulted by people with EA?

Across the climate corpus texts, epistemic sprawl appeared as a recurring pattern linked to four core experiential dimensions: temporality, affect, narratives, and selfhood. CC then becomes relevant to increasingly broad areas of lived experience. The climate corpus texts posit that in each of these dimensions, Industrial experience is marked by alienation, whereas a healthier and more productive experience would be one of interconnectedness. The nodes for the sprawl are thus positioned as gateways into an experientially richer life. While distinguishable from each other, each of these nodes mutually influence the others.

Across the climate corpus texts, temporal framings of CC are consistently affect-laden. The loss of past landscapes, current instability, and unavoidable catastrophe are rarely presented neutrally; they are experienced as emotionally overwhelming, urgent, or paralysing. Temporal alienation is also presented as thoroughly connected to a deep sense of existential and ontological insecurity where humanity is facing an unprecedented crisis and the ever-improving image of the future it identified with is being threatened. Heidegger's (2010) theories show how such an inauthentic and disconnected way of being in time may be reflected in increased emotional turmoil and inability to deal with the existential worries.

Heightened affect is seemingly suggested by the climate corpus texts to be helped by narrative containment. The climate corpus texts repeatedly use stories to organise diffuse emotions into morally meaningful plots, often framing CC in terms of heroics, responsibility, and empathy. Emotions are presented as valuable sources of information and the climate corpus texts promote moving towards them and embracing them, an action for which re-storying may be useful. Ciompi's (2016) affect-logic theory highlights how anxiety is a distancing emotion and thus how reframing away from anxiety can be useful. Reformulating what the 'Good Life' looks like to one that is less materialistic and more ecological, and breaking through the taboo on CC in media and conversations to clarify the impact of the Industrial world on nature are echoed in wider literature as well (Grénman et al., 2025; Slaby, 2025).

As climate narratives increasingly position humans as implicated agents, victims, or even villains, the stability of the modern self is challenged. The climate corpus texts show

how the self becomes porous, extended, and ethically overburdened. When the self is reconstructed as ecologically embedded and morally implicated, CC becomes relevant across domains of life that were previously experienced as separate, such as consumption, relationships, future planning, and even bodily existence. EA becomes an embodiment of the earth's despair, and a person's actions and identity become framed in terms of the burden they place on the environment and whether their choices compensate for this.

5.7.3. How is the worldview of CC reported by people with EA generated in the climate corpus texts?

The worldview of CC reported by people with EA is generated in the climate corpus through processes of cross-domain leakage, whereby concerns originating in one experiential domain (e.g. climate science) extend into others (temporality, emotion, narratives, identity) without clear conceptual boundaries. In doing so, the climate corpus texts provide a sociocultural narrative framework that mirrors and amplifies the experiential patterns described by participants with EA. They show the overarching narratives that underpin the experiences of people with EA in the [Oblak et al. \(2025a\)](#) study. Thereby, this thesis illuminates the sociocultural context in which the EA worldview arises.

A core phenomenon reported by the participants in the [Oblak et al. \(2025a\)](#) study was alienation. The climate corpus texts trace this back to the Industrial lifeworld in which Slovenia too exists. Specifically, the participants identified alienation in terms of lack of community and temporal alienation. The sections on time and the self showed how these senses of alienation are a specific product of the historical sociocultural developments of the Industrial world order into a fragmented and inauthentic lifeworld, that suffers from a lack of moral guidance ([Heidegger, 2010](#); [Taylor, 1992](#)). This situation is also reflected in the participants' reports on feelings of shame and guilt and a lack of agency. The climate corpus texts emphasise the difficulty of assigning guilt and responsibility straightforwardly in the climate crisis and that communal actions are the best way out of the moral uncertainty.

The climate corpus texts further show that the alienation of not just the current community, but also the communal wisdom of ancestors who have overcome difficulties in the past, leaves Industrial individuals both with a lack of moral guidance, as well as a general lack of knowing how to act practically. This sense of practical uncertainty is clearly present in the reports of the participants in the [Oblak et al. \(2025a\)](#) study. In line with [Yalom's \(1980\)](#) theory that insight can help in moving to a state of willing change, the participants reported engaging in knowledge consumptions and production, sometimes in excess.

However, the participants also reported struggling with the ambiguity of CC coverage in modern media. As Slaby (2025) theorises, the habits of affluence in the Industrial world rely on a media climate where the full effects of CC and the contribution of the Industrial lifestyle to them remain mostly hidden. Media can then thus conflict with individuals' personal experience of CC. The climate corpus texts present a more unified image of CC and highlight how CC is not discussed enough and in the right way. However, the texts are also quite critical of the objectivist science institution of the Industrial world order. Oblak et al. (2025a), refer to the concept of epistemic trust (Fonagy & Allison, 2014), which describes the extent to which an individual trusts the knowledge produced by a certain source. Low epistemic trust increases uncertainty which in turn increases anxiety. It may be that the climate corpus texts inspire increased epistemic dis-trust of Industrial information, thereby aggravating EA. More research on this would be required, but could be beneficial in aiding to create a sort of epistemic therapy for EA.

While there may thus be problematic patterns in information consumption, participants did report that information creation was helpful in increasing their sense of agency. The climate corpus texts mirror this sentiment in their focus on re-storying. The new creation of stories as suggested by the texts, and as experientially helpful for participants, may be helpful in another way. A major source of disorientation for the participants was the sense of EA being a new experience that they did not know how to deal with. CC then inspires not just an uncertainty towards the future, but also in the present, towards the self. As explained in the section of stories, narrative creation is a major contributor to the sense of self (Gallagher, 2014), and a re-storying of the land, as the climate corpus text suggests, may thus be necessary not just for better ecological existence, but for general sense-making of the EA experience.

5.7.4. How can we start to construct a positive worldview while living in a wounded world?

The climate corpus texts suggest that constructing a positive worldview in the context of CC involves a shift from an atomistic to a relational mode of sense-making, while acknowledging that such a worldview remains difficult to inhabit within an Industrial lifeworld that has not yet structurally changed. Epistemic sprawl is thus framed not as an individual cognitive failure, but as a structural response to the tension between emerging relational ontologies and existing sociocultural conditions.

The participants in the Oblak et al. (2025a) study reported a variety of difficulties, centring on alienation and epistemic disorientation as major symptoms. The climate corpus texts validate this experience by confirming alienation as a core aspect of Industrial culture and connecting CC to a large variety of factors. This thesis has shown how the surface-level move in the texts from an Industrial culture to an Indigenous-type culture, relies on a foundational level move from an atomistic to a relational culture. Combining the insights from Oblak et al. (2025a), and the analysis of the climate corpus texts, the results suggest that epistemic sprawl is not merely an individual cognitive tendency, but a structural response to the encounter between a relational mode of sense-making and an atomistic lifeworld.

When framed as such, epistemic sprawl itself is not necessarily a cognitive error, even if it may inspire a more pathological presentation of EA in some individuals. In fact, the climate corpus texts suggest that a more relational, and thus epistemically sprawling, worldview is warranted in the time of the Anthropocene. They show how CC is an overarching phenomenon that demands relation thinking. Its effects are not contained only to ecological systems, but impact various human systems as well, from food production to migration, and the associated challenges. Furthermore, it is not just human systems, but specific intersecting hierarchies of power and ideology that have accelerated CC. As such, CC cannot be relegated to ecology alone, but must be tackled as a sprawling collection of interconnecting systems. Furthermore, as the discussion in this thesis has suggested, CC is extended into long temporal horizons, towards geology way back in deep time, and hundreds of generations of humanity into the future. Lastly, the responsibility for causing and mitigating for CC is distributed and requires an approach rooted in communal relationality.

Yet, the Industrial lifeworld remains atomistic. The climate corpus texts lament how responsibility and achievement are framed individualistically, inspiring continued exploitative ecological practices. This also promotes division more than collaborating, where a small difference in a movement can lead to a schism into smaller atomistic collectives rather than the one bigger relational collective that is required (Balser, 1997). This division goes beyond human collectives into the more-than-human world as well. Rather than a porous, ecological self, the Industrial lifeworld is built for a bounded self. Lastly, the atomism of the Industrial lifeworld encourages the compartmentalisation of life into specific domains. A boundary-crossing, all-encompassing phenomenon such as CC does not fit this approach. As such, the climate corpus texts imply that to make sense of CC, the Industrial worldview is inadequate, and the loss of the worldview exposes the faults of the Industrial lifeworld.

Sense-making is at the core of lived experience. The worldview is the prime tool for informing this process (Jaspers, 2013). The loss of the Industrial worldview in the times of the Anthropocene with its accelerated CC is therefore logical when considering the mismatch between the ecological situation and the Industrial lifeworld. As the in-depth discussion of the four epistemically sprawled nodes has shown, the Industrial lifeworld is in many ways almost the polar opposite of the Indigenous lifeworlds that are presented as desirable alternative. The main desirable aspect of Indigeneity that the climate corpus texts identify is relationality. Within these narratives, a positive worldview in the Anthropocene is therefore suggested to be a thoroughly relational worldview.

However, as Oblak et al. (2025a) state, and as supported by the climate corpus texts, humanity now lives in a wounded world. Intimate relationality with such an entity can be a heavy weight to carry. The climate corpus texts suggest making this easier by reframing and re-storying the feelings and the context. A positive worldview in CC then acknowledges the pain of the earth and humanity, but links this experience back to being more empathetic, more heroic, and living more deeply. Narratively, work can be done to make climate action manageable, admirable, and natural. These individual efforts in constructing a positive worldview while living in a wounded world may eventually contribute to the construction of a society-wide positive lifeworld that is socially and ecologically relational.

6 Conclusion

This thesis started from a generative phenomenology base to see how climate literature read by people with EA mirrors their unusual cognitive pattern, and what lifeworld the literature creates. The results show a sense-making pattern, shaped as a narrative of Industrial alienation intimately connected with CC, contrasted with a way out of the crisis by adopting a more relational stance. Thus, the texts validate the difficult emotions associated with EA and provide insight into where the sensation of alienation comes from. Furthermore, they can inspire the critical attitude towards, and partial rejection of Industrial culture for a greener lifestyle by highlighting all the shortcomings of Industrial culture. However, the texts seem to also stay mostly in the sphere of wishing, not providing many actionable, practical steps that readers could consider.

Furthermore, the texts support the epistemic sprawl observed in people with EA by linking CC to many different factors. The important points of gravity in this scramble of conceptual and causal connections are temporality, feelings, stories, and the self, though even

those 4 themes are mutually influencing each other. When everything is connected to CC so thoroughly, and an individual is highly anxious of CC, maintaining appropriate epistemic and existential boundaries may be challenging. Yet, research suggests that EA, uncomfortable as it is, may be desirable on a community level as it can promote sustainable behaviours.

Overall, the theory of this thesis thus implies that addressing EA may be less about alleviating anxiety *an sich*, and more about guiding the transition from an atomistic to a relational worldview, and from a half-connecting being to a full-connecting one. EA seems to arise from the rupture of the Industrial worldview, while climate literature presents a new relational worldview. However, this new worldview is in tension with the Industrial lifeworld that people with EA in Europe mostly live in. Epistemic sprawl may then be a manifestation of overapplication of relationality, and a clash between the new worldview and the Industrial lifeworld. A new, more fitting, relational lifeworld cannot just be inhabited at will in an Industrial context, as it needs to be built first. As such, the theory of this thesis points to new avenues for understanding the practical and epistemic anxieties of EA as more than an individual pathology. Instead, it may be related to a crisis of sociocultural sense-making, and the construction of a culture-wide new relational, and potentially positive lifeworld.

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