

SLIDE ONE- INDIE COVER
SLIDE TWO- INDIE INSIDES
SLIDE THREE-INDIE SUPPLEMENT

Is this not extraordinary.?

Disconnection

This is a minor reflection of a far wider, more profound and sustained disconnection at all levels of society between the seriousness of the threat of climate change and the action that we take in response.

Tony Blair- the UK Prime Minister tells us that climate change is 'a challenge so far-reaching in its impact and irreversible in its destructive power, that it alters radically human existence'¹. His chief scientific advisor, Sir David King says this is the most severe problem we face, far more serious than terrorism². And yet, nothing in the government's response reflects this rhetoric. Its work on climate change is incoherent, underfunded, and constantly undermined by the support that it continues to give to the polluting industries.

In repeated polls over 90 % of people identify climate change as a serious problem³. Yet there is no evidence of any change in people's personal behaviour or in their voting preferences. People buy ever larger cars and homes, fly ever further for holidays, and vote for the parties that promise to do the most to support their expansive lifestyles.

People get conflicting messages all the time...

This is what environmental activists would say about cars

SLIDE FOUR-MINI

Advertisers incorporate the same messages into their own work.

SLIDE FIVE- JEEP

What is interesting here is that the advertiser is not ignoring climate change but is absorbing it into the sales pitch as if to say **“yes I know all about that and I DON’T CARE**

People who we think might care are NGOs which historically have played a hugely important role in social change movements.

Earlier this year I was writing a chapter....

Climate change will have a huge influence...

SLIDE SIX-NGO WEBSITES

And yet climate change scarcely figures in their work
IPCC estimates up to 150 million environmental refugees by 2050

Human rights watch has 21,400 references to refugees

I think we can draw several conclusions....

SLIDE SEVEN-OUR RESPONSE IS OUT OF PROPORTION

[hands up anyone who thinks that our response is about right given what we know about climate change]

What is a proportional response?

SLIDE SEVEN –CANNOT BE EXPLAINED BY DEFICIT OF INFO

This was always the assumption...

SLIDE SEVEN – OR A FAILURE OF POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Yes there is a lack of political will and short time spans but politicians are able to respond rapidly to other issues. Rainer Laufs said yesterday that 'politicians have split brains- we need to push them'... I would argue that this is widespread..

SLIDE SEVEN – NOT RELATED TO CAPACITY TO EFFECT

And other people argue that people's apathy is a result of the powerlessness they feel to effect change. No doubt true, but people and organizations who do have that power. Eg architects

And the people I know who are most actively engaged with this issue and determined to push for change actually have very little personal power

SLIDE EIGHT-WE OBSERVE A PROFUND DISCONNECTION

Hold it there- I could stop there.

Psychologists have a name for this disconnection- cognitive dissonance. Dissonance is destabilising because it challenges our view our core principle and sense of self. We can have three ways of achieving stability: we can **resolve it, deny it, or displace it.**

Everything I've spoken of so far: the refusal to recognise the issue, the compulsive over-consumption; the open and active indulgence in activities we know to be destructive, the 'bring it on' posturing - all these behaviour patterns would, in a psychotherapy context, be seen as symptoms of denial.

One of the reasons climate change lends itself to denial is the enormity of its moral dimension. We can intellectually accept the evidence of climate change, but we find it extremely hard to accept our responsibility for a crime of such enormity.

There are marked similarities with individual and collective responses to state sanctioned human rights abuses where people are faced with huge challenges to their self identity as moral beings. IN such states people achieve a remarkable condition of both knowing and not knowing.

SLIDE NINE-DENIAL IN FACE OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Indeed, the most powerful evidence of our denial is the failure to even recognise that there is a moral dimension with identifiable perpetrators and victims. The language of “climate change”, “global warming” “human impacts” “adaptation” are scientific euphemisms that suggest that climate change originates in immutable natural forces rather than in a direct causal relationship with moral implications for the perpetrator.

Suppression - In South Africa, many white bystanders who intellectually opposed apartheid retreated into private life, cut themselves off from the news media, refused to talk politics with friends, and adopted an intense immersion in private diversions such as sport, holidays and families. In Brazil in the 1970's a special term, 'innerism', was coined for the disavowal of the political.

Above all what appears to happen is that people redefine their 'social norms of attention' that is to say...

SLIDE TEN-STANLEY COHEN

Stanley Cohen “Without being told what to think about (or what not to think about), and without being punished for “knowing” the wrong things, societies arrive at unwritten agreements about what can be publicly remembered and acknowledged”

Kari Marie Norgaard, of University of California spent a year with a small community in Norway in interviews studying their responses to climate change. She concluded:

SLIDE Norgaard

In the case of the people in this community they were strongly aware of climate change but never openly discussed it. In interviews it appeared that they had developed collective narratives to avoid dealing with the issues- little Norway, we are the clean country.

Another very interesting study by academics at the Potsdam institute and UEA in the UK sought to study in Switzerland..

SLIDE TEN-SPECIFIC TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Explain

But I believe there is more to it than this because climate change is not just a moral challenge- it is a very real and direct threat.

We know that risk assessment is highly subjective and there is a large literature on the psychology of risk. John Adams one of the leading UK academic in this field agrees that humans are all provided with “risk thermostats: with a wide range of different settings which trigger a response when people encounter an unacceptable level of risk.

These settings change significantly from person to person- varying considerably with personality gender, culture, life experience. Yet there are also many ‘settings’ that all humans have in common.

SLIDE ELEVEN- FAILURE OF RISK THERMOSTAT

Climate change, on the other hand has none of these qualities. It is, in many ways, perfectly designed to silence our

alarm bells. I believe that, as a result, climate change fundamentally fails to trigger our risk thermostat- intellectually we accept the risk but somehow we do not feel it.

Unprecedented. Primo Levi, seeking to explain the refusal of many European Jews to recognise their impending extermination, quotes an old German adage: “Things whose existence is not morally possible cannot exist”.

AND WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DO NOT RESPOND

Maybe we do wake up.

If so probably because it sets one of our risk triggers –it become immediate and violent and visible

But it is unlikely to be an easy process

Risk of going into greater denial- a spiral of consumption
We can displace it= we could create climate “enemies” but we are also very capable of displacing into an entirely unrelated issue. One denial strategy is to create scapegoats

Strong leaders

Professor Snower talked of what a ‘benevolent dictator’ might do

Public fear, Scapegoats and strong leaders creates a dangerous mix. Add to that confluct over water and land and millions of people on the move and you have a very ugly situation.

SLIDE THIRTEEN- HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD

We recognise that information alone cannot produce change

We openly recognise the tendency to denial

Professor Cohen argues very clearly that denial is the normal state of affairs. He argues that “far from being pushed into accepting reality, people have to be dragged out of reality”.

We encourage emotional responses and “whistle blowers”

David Milliband the UK Minister for the Environment,

We develop a *culture of engagement* that is visible, immediate, and urgent. In other words we bestow on our actions the qualities that engage us best.

As individuals we act with integrity and clarity.

We recognize our own impacts and struggle to live a low carbon life

We are not embarrassed to challenge others

We recognize that there is a larger truth and historical calling that is greater than our own short term interests. We are prepared to take personal risks – for example in our careers, incomes or status- in order to effect the greatest change on this issue.