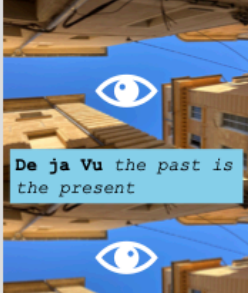


# TOWARDS A PSYCHOANALYTIC GEOGRAPHY



De ja Vu the past is the present

These terms are attempts to contain within language feelings and sensations that emerge in certain spaces and environments. They all relate to experiences upon which language stumbles.



YnnonU edT: the familiar is unfamiliar



The sublime the beauty and the terror

In *Tiger in the Smoke*, Lynda Nead explores the uncanniness of the Great Smog in London, created by a confluence of a cold weather system and coal fires that immobilised the city in December 1952. Nead writes that the fog

"interferes with time and space and feeling; when it appears it seems to bring with it all the fogs of the past"

The materiality of the fog, in obscuring visibility and muffling the visible signs of modernity in the city allowed the topological dimension to creep forwards and bring with it layers of the past.

"Freud broke from the historiographical model that sees history as the unrolling of a straight line that separates the past from the present and created instead a model in which past and present are imbricated: 'one in the place of another' wrapped or folded into each other"

Lynda Nead



# environmental history from the couch

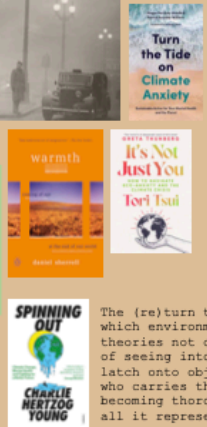
Billy Holt, University of Bristol  
bh13488@bristol.ac.uk

Environmental History explores human interactions with nature. Psychoanalytically informed approaches human subject, to the interplay of contradictions, projections, transferences and desires could provide interpretative value to the study of the nature that emerges from these interactions.

This poster introduces some psychoanalytic concepts and considers ways in which they relate to the study of environmental history.

When writing and thinking about climate change we often reach for psychoanalytic language: denial, repression, anxiety, dissociation. It seems to be the only way to make sense of the state we are individually and collectively in, trapped between guilty pasts and ominous futures, competing desires, nightmares and fantasies of possible cures.

It is perhaps unsurprising that a new generation is turning back to Freud and psychoanalytic thinking, an approach to human subjectivity that is comfortable with contradiction and loss. Subjects seeking to tweak the structures of the self when the structures of the world seem unmoveable, to settle for a more 'ordinary unhappiness'.



# CLIMATE ANXIETY and the return to Freud

NYT article from 2023



Historians have been integrating the body and mind in histories of experience and emotion, challenging methodological binaries that limit our understanding

The analyst is drawn to these knotty states such as the uncanny as they reveal the way the multitudinal self is forever entangled and conflicted, a conflict that registers in the ego as paradoxical.

One way to make sense of this dissonance is to understand psychic space as topological, structured differently to the order of euclidean material space. Topological space is structured around the relationships between points, rather than defined numerical distances, this means it is malleable and can take the seemingly paradoxical forms.

Psychoanalytic approaches to experience also see the mind/body as integrated, but also dissonant and entangled in a complex way. Our common neurosis reflect points of misalignment.

These two realms of experience are interconnected and mostly compatible. However, there are points of dissonance and rupture, adding a new dimension to the ways we inhabit spaces and places.

## Chaco Canyon, New Mexico

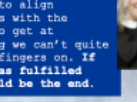


The impossibility of fulfilling desire need not be tragic: it is the bottomless reservoir from which art and culture stems, as we attempt to align ourselves with the world, to get at something we can't quite put our fingers on. If desire was fulfilled that would be the end.

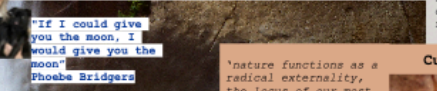
In art, architecture, and other cultural products we see humans expand vast effort to connect to something out there, something always beyond reach.

This dynamic is a useful addition to our attempts to make sense of human interactions with the environment, in particular the value we transfer into the environment and its objects. It is a model of desire and pleasure seeking that accounts for our neurotic behaviours.

Jacques Lacan's approach to psychoanalysis was grounded in a theory of language and the symbolic, which he understood to be the structure of human experience. Our desires are formed by a sense that something is missing (the mythic lost object)



"If I could give you the moon, I would give you the moon"  
Phoebe Bridgers



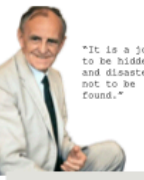
'nature functions as a radical externality, the locus of our most sincere feelings and beliefs. Nature, or the environment, is not "out there"—it is how we relate to what is "out there"—and to what is "in here."

but this object is never had or can ever have- it is a 'positional void' This structure to our desires creates a drive towards satisfaction that can't ever be fully resolved.



Cueva de las Manos  
We search in the world for something missing within, in an effort to become whole again

# THE HOLDING ENVIRONMENT: TIME LOST AND GAINED



D.W. Winnicott: English Paediatrician and Psychoanalyst

"It is a joy to be hidden, and disaster not to be found."

One model for psychoanalysis is the idea of good enough care which means allowing space in which the analysand can negotiate their place in the world, not as a doomed project but as a way of maintaining balance. Things will fall apart, disillusionment occurs, but recovery is possible. This relates to the model of the holding environment, a concept developed by British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, referring to the space the parental figure creates for the infant to struggle safely and find new ways to relate to experience.

He saw the therapeutic space as a way to recreate this dynamic in the lives of the adult analysand, with an understanding that as we grow up we find it harder to find the time and space needed to come to terms with the loss at the heart of existence. Winnicott's approach has informed political projects to build a society that provides these spaces and the slack needed in the world to come undone without breaking. This could be through, the family, community, the state. It could be financial space (welfare) or designing a built environment that is welcoming rather than hostile. For many, it can be found in interactions with the environment; in gardens, parks, the view from a window or a swim in the sea.

"Sweet like honey, karma is a cat / purring in my lap / 'cause it loves me."  
Taylor Swift, Karma

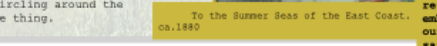
# THE THING



Gold rushes, manifest destiny, the Oregon trail, the Oklahoma land rush: the history of the American west is full of irredeemable promises with terrible consequences

Everywhere in environmental history we see patterns of searching, capturing, cultivating; seeking to find or create the thing that will fulfil us but instead leaves us forever circling around the impossible thing.

Jacques Lacan: French Psychoanalyst



To the Summer Seas of the East Coast. ca. 1890

This structure to our desires coats the world in meaning. We invest in the possibility of objects being "the thing". In the environment we have a capacious domain for our fantasies.

The commercialisation of retreats to nature fully embraces the fantasy, tugging on our dissatisfactions, hinting at satisfaction

The Anthropocene, 2030, 2050, and the constellation of dates marking extinctions. Opening and closing time parameters is a political tool intended to coax the human subject into individual and collective action. Environmental history is increasingly sensitive to the malleability of time and how it ebbs and flows in space. Psychoanalytic thinking aids this exploration of the relationship between temporality and lived experience.

Psychoanalysis does not seek to live in denial of the real, but instead finds a new way of relating to the real, where and the world. It is a matter of cultivating new perspectives on the past and present. The creative effort is credited with delivering a cosmic perspective shift through the visual spectacle of the earth alone against the backdrop of space.

One important aspect in the holding environment is its dependability and the steady temporality of the analytic space. Environmental historians have paid great attention to temporality, considering the ways in which a landscape, a tree, the sound of water can warp time and defy the dominant temporality of capitalism (in which we never have enough time). Through psychodynamic and embodied processes the rhythms of the non-human can latch on to our own, allowing us to feel time echo, refract, go backwards, diminish or dissipate.



St Cuthbert pictured with others warning his feet. Cuthbert lived an isolated life on Farne Island, on the windswept Northumbrian coast. Cuthbert found company in otters who warmed his feet and eagles who prepared his dinner

Humans have long 'gone to nature' to convalesce when the troubles of life in society become unbearable, which has informed the values and qualities we transfer onto landscapes, environments and non-human life. How can this theory help us to make sense of the cathexis (psychological investment) in the environment-spaces like parks or gardens we cling on to in the urban landscape, journeys or pilgrimages?

He was observed by one of the brothers of the monastery, who secretly followed him at a distance, wishing to know how he passed the night. The man of God, Cuthbert, resolutely drawing near to the man who had set up to his waist, the waves in succession rising as high as his armpits. When he came back from the sea others immediately followed his footsteps, stretched themselves on the sand before him, licking his feet, wishing they dry with their fur, and warning them with their breath.

THE LIFE OF ST. CUTHBERT, BISHOP OF LINDISFARNE Bede the Monk