

What do I feel in the face of the climate, economic and social crisis: terror, panic, loneliness...

Ornela De Gasperin Quintero

Terror and panic

I watch the videos - the ones that arrive because the worst tragedies are not even covered by the press - of droughts, hurricanes, storms, floods, and famines. I consider it an obligation to see them. If I am not the victim, I must at least know and empathise with the suffering of others, as I have asked men to do and to try to understand patriarchy: 'even if you don't change it, try to feel what we feel, understand our rage'. Now it is my turn, from the privilege of the security I still have, to feel what the victims of the climate and economic impacts detonated by the capitalist system feel. I can't help but panic about what will probably happen to me and to my loved ones. Turning on the water tap, flushing the toilet, and knowing that I am on the side of privilege and that privilege is going to end if the trajectory continues on the course we are on now, accelerating towards the abyss. To be so certain of the catastrophic trajectory we are on, to have the solutions, and to fail to change course. I never had panic attacks until I understood the trajectory we are on.



FOTO: 123RF

Loneliness

All my life, I have had mentors to whom I can turn for advice, support, and opinion. I have been fortunate to work under the guidance of humane and intelligent people whom I respect and admire. And I have always sought opinions. However, in this unprecedented situation, with an uncertain but undoubtedly catastrophic future if the trajectory is not changed, I have no one to turn to for what to do and how to act because no one in the history of humanity has been here before. The word loneliness does not begin to describe what I feel. However, if I appreciate anything, it is the

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True Democracy and Capitalism

companionship of the people I admire today, those who feel as I do and are open about it. Above all, my role model, Julia Steinberger, hardcore activist, scientist and IPCC writer:¹

Where can we find real comfort?

I wrote this as the conclusion of another post, "Cogs in the Climate Machine". It's still word for word what I would write here, so here you go.

Comfort and security are the past, if you ever had them. Many people never did. The Holocene is behind us. What lies in front is still undetermined, and can still be changed. But it will take the fight of our lives, for all of our lives, to change this. This will not be fun, or fulfilling, or a worthy adventure of self-discovery, or a cute feel-good movie, or a task of personal validation. I mean, maybe from time to time there will be those things, who knows. Who cares. This is a fight for life itself. We get to be depressed, despondent, little creatures against the crushing change of geological epochs and mighty economic systems. But we need to be little creatures who are learning to fight very very very fast and very very very well together against the brutal forces of domination which steer our current course.

What does it mean to be loving a vanishing world a this time? As Mary Annaïse Heglar has written: "I don't need a guarantee of success before I risk everything to save the things, the people, the places that I love. ... This planet is the only home we'll ever have. There's no place like it. Home is always, always, always worth it."

Anger, rage, brokenness, shattering

To understand - to allow me to feel - that the climate crisis, social inequalities, poverty and hunger are all problems that could have been changed decades ago. Also, we have everything we need for 10 billion people to achieve decent living standards, using 60 per cent less energy, and there have been, and continue to be, people with power and economic interests who actively prevent the necessary changes. These people, probably victims of feeling like pawns in the chess game of capitalism, under the illusion that they have no choice, or perhaps just plain evil, prefer, as Chomsky says, to sacrifice organised human life to put more money in their already deep pockets. It is simply soul-crushing.

Alienation

Despite the scientific consensus and the impressive forcefulness with which many scientists convey the planetary emergency we suffer (see quotes below), the world is full of absurd advertising: trips, flights, cruises, cars, disposable clothes... Social life is full of talk of anything but the planetary emergency and the social and economic inequalities imposed on us. I live in a state of limbo, between the knowledge that my scientific training forces me to see and accept and continuing to interact in a professional and social world that seems blind to this consensus.

Ambivalence, doubt

Thanks to the privilege of being educated, I understood climate science well enough to decide not to have children because I know it is unlikely to change course. I see a responsibility to inform as many people as possible, by any means possible, hoping that with enough people informed, something will change. And if it doesn't change, at least more people will have the privilege of deciding how to live their lives aware of the scientific consensus, as I did. At the same

¹ Julia Steinberger, y extracto de: <https://jksteinberger.medium.com/things-that-no-longer-comfort-me-8fb1cb351f99>

time, if nothing changes, do I do more harm by reporting? As I report, I risk my job, reduce my professional productivity, and damage my mental well-being. Is it absurd to act and report? Should I live in knowledge schizophrenia? Could I ethically justify my inaction? One day, I think I can, and the next day, I think I cannot. For a person who makes decisions quickly and accurately, without looking back, this ambivalence and pendulum feeling is alien, strange and very unpleasant.

Resentment

Despite having completed the highest level of education at 'elite' universities, I did not understand the real causes of the climate crisis, nor its social impacts, until I was well into my twenties. And I understood them, reading on my own. Why didn't anyone explain it to me? Why did I waste my time studying basic science out of passion when the world was already on a terrifying trajectory with such a compelling consensus? Why wasn't I given the necessary knowledge about how the world works? Why didn't anyone tell me what CIADI was until I was 35? Given this consensus, why aren't more angry people reacting to so much injustice? Some congratulate me for my activism; don't do it; better act. Let's fight together.²

Responsibility

'...The simple fact that human beings have been around for a couple of hundred thousand years and it's the current generation that's going to decide whether it's going to stay that way.'

'Cooperation or Extinction', Noam Chomsky, 2020

The science is clear: this is the defining decade. We are on the brink of crossing the tipping points of no return that will transform the planet into an uninhabitable place. No wondrous technologies will slow the melting of the ice caps once the tipping points are crossed. There are 8 billion living human beings who are suffering or will suffer the consequences. Less than 2 per cent of those people have a doctoral degree. Twenty-five per cent of humanity is under the age of 15. Few of us are educated enough to understand the climate pandemic and, therefore, have an ethical obligation to report and denounce the unjust consequences of it. Our shoulders are heavy.

The scientific conclusions that everyone should know:

Conclusion from: Climate Tipping points, 2023, written by 200 climate scientists from 90 research centres:

'Damaging tipping points in the natural world represent some of humanity's most serious threats. Their unleashing will severely damage our planet's life support systems and threaten the stability of our societies.'

Conclusions of the: IPCC, 2023, written by over 500 climate scientists:

- 'Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health (very high confidence).'
- 'There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all (very high confidence).'
- 'Decisions and actions implemented in this decade will have impacts now and for thousands of years to come (high confidence).'

² Ornela De Gasperin Quintero and Juan Jacobo Schmitter — [CIADI: organismo ilegítimo causante de crisis económica, social y climática en el Sur Global](#), Contralínea, 23 September 2024.

- ‘Aiming for a sustainable world implies fundamental changes in the way society functions, including changes in underlying values, cosmovisions, ideologies, social structures, political and economic systems, and power relations’.

Excerpt from: The 2024 state of the climate report: Perilous times on planet Earth:

We are on the brink of an irreversible climate disaster. This is a global emergency beyond all doubt. Much of the very fabric of life on Earth is at risk. We are entering a new critical and unpredictable phase of the climate crisis. For many years, scientists, including a group of more than 15,000, have been sounding the alarm about the imminent dangers of climate change driven by rising greenhouse gas emissions and ecosystem change (Ripple et al. 2020). For half a century, global warming has been correctly predicted even before it was observed, and not only by independent academic scientists but also by fossil fuel companies (Supran et al. 2023). Despite these warnings, we are still heading in the wrong direction: fossil fuel emissions have increased to an all-time high, the three hottest days in history occurred in July 2024 (Guterres 2024), and current policies put us on track for a maximum warming of about 2.7 degrees Celsius (°C) by 2100 (UNEP 2023). Tragically, we are failing to avoid serious impacts and now we can only hope to limit the extent of the damage. We are witnessing the grim reality of the forecasts as climate impacts increase, generating scenes of unprecedented disaster around the world, and human and non-human suffering. We are in the midst of abrupt climate upheaval, a terrible situation never before seen in the annals of human existence. We have now brought the planet to climatic conditions never witnessed by us or our prehistoric relatives within our genus, Homo (supplementary figure S1; CenCO2PIP et al. 2023 Consortium).

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❖ **About Jus Semper:** The Jus Semper Global Alliance aims to contribute to achieving a sustainable ethos of social justice in the world, where all communities live in truly democratic environments that provide full enjoyment of human rights and sustainable living standards in accordance with human dignity. To accomplish this, it contributes to the liberalisation of the democratic institutions of society that have been captured by the owners of the market. With that purpose, it is devoted to research and analysis to provoke the awareness and critical thinking to generate ideas for a transformative vision to materialise the truly democratic and sustainable paradigm of People and Planet and NOT of the market.

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❖ **Tags:** democracy, capitalism, climate crisis, planetary boundaries, responsibility, alienation, sustainability.

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