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Citation for published version:

Mihai, M 2024, 'Representing ecological grief', *Polity*, vol. 56, no. 3, pp. 359-383.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/730512>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1086/730512](https://doi.org/10.1086/730512)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Polity

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Representing Ecological Grief

Abstract

In the 1960s, conservationist Aldo Leopold noted: ‘One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.’ Decades later, activist Greta Thunberg interpellated world leaders: ‘I want you to act as if our house were on fire. Because it is.’ Together, these quotes capture two central features of environmental activism. First, despite growing public concern, environmental loss – including more-than-human deaths, species extinctions, devastated ecosystems – is grieved only by environmental scientists, activists, and witnesses. Second, they highlight the temporal gulf separating those who despair at mounting environmental degradation, and those who, trapped in a ‘business-as-usual’ temporality, remain indifferent.

While the environmental humanities and eco-psychology have analysed these phenomena, political theorists are lagging behind. This paper addresses this gap by bringing theories of representation and chronopolitics to bear on a flurry of recently published memoirs chronicling activists’ emotional and temporal alienation. I read these as self-authorised representative claims aiming, first, to summon the already grieving into a self-aware constituency and second, to bridge the ‘segregated temporalities’¹ of hegemonic and environmentalists’ time. I argue that they illuminate a key aspect of representation in the context of environmental crisis: that it can be primarily understood as grounded in a chronopolitical conflict over competing understanding of time. As concrete illustrations, I examine Daniel Sherrell’s *Warmth: Coming*

¹ P. J. Brendese, “Black Noise in White Time,” in *Radical Future Pasts*, ed. Romand Coles, Mark Reinhardt, and George Shulman (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 2014), 81–111

of *Age at the End of Our World* and Danielle Celermajer's *Summertime: Reflections on a Vanishing Future*.

Keywords: ecological grief, political representation, political temporality, autobiography

Introduction

In the mid-1960s, the American conservationist Aldo Leopold noted that ‘One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen.’² Decades later, world-famous activist Greta Thunberg interpellated world leaders: ‘I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house were on fire. Because it is.’³ Read together, these quotes capture two central socio-emotional features of environmental activism. First, despite recent and significant increase in public concern about the entwined climate and biodiversity crises,⁴ environmental loss – including present and future more-than-human⁵ deaths, the extinction of species, the destruction of whole ecosystems – is recognised and grieved only by environmental scientists, activists, victims and witnesses, especially within Indigenous communities.⁶ Second, they attest to the temporal gulf separating two broad groups that live out of synch with each other: those who, alarmed at the slow pace of redress, despair at mounting environmental loss, on the

²Aldo Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanach* (New York: Ballantine, 1966), 166.

³Greta Thunberg, “‘Our House Is on Fire,’” *The Guardian*, January 25, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/25/our-house-is-on-fire-greta-thunberg16-urges-leaders-to-act-on-climate>.

⁴ A 2021 study surveying 10,000 young people highlighted the worrying rate of climate anxiety among the 16–25-year-olds in both the Global South and North. Caroline Hickman et al., “Young People’s Voices on Climate Anxiety, Government Betrayal and Moral Injury,” SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester: Social Science Research Network, 2021).

⁵ The term ‘more-than-human’ covers a capacious variety of entities such as ‘other animals, living beings, organisms, physical forces, spiritual entities, and humans’ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 1.

⁶ Scholars have shown that disavowing (certain) human and other-than-human deaths are politically and ethically imbricated. Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*; Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Nancy Tuana “Climate Apartheid,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 7, no. 1 (2019): 1–31.

one hand, and those who, trapped in a hegemonic ‘business-as-usual’ temporality, turn a blind eye to it, on the other.

The experience of feeling emotionally and temporally alienated has recently emerged very strongly in various media,⁷ but most elaborately in numerous memoirs by environmental activists, scientists, and scholars. Published globally but mostly in English in the Global North over the last decade⁸, these works consistently testify to their authors’ loneliness in a ‘world of wounds’ and foreground the psychological effects of feeling out of time. While the emotional effects of environmental loss have been studied extensively⁹ – particularly in the environmental humanities¹⁰ and eco-psychology¹¹ – political theory is yet to explore them. This paper seeks

⁷ See, for example, Timothy Gordon, Andrew N. Radford, and Stephen Simpson, “Grieving Environmental Scientists Need Support,” *Science* 366, no. 6462 (October 11, 2019): 193–193; Jonathan Lambert, “How Scientists Wrestle with Grief over Climate Change,” *Science News*, February 25, 2020; Gaia Vince, “How Scientists Are Coping with ‘Ecological Grief,’” *The Observer*, January 12, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2020/jan/12/how-scientists-are-coping-with-environmental-grief>; Joëlle Gergis, “Joëlle Gergis on Mourning and Making Sense of What We Have Lost on the Frontlines of the Climate Crisis,” January 18, 2021 <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/audio/2021/jan/19/joelle-gergis-on-mourning-and-making-sense-of-what-we-have-lost-on-the-frontlines-of-the-climate-crisis>; Peter Kalmus, “Climate Scientists Are Desperate,” *The Guardian*, April 6, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/apr/06/climate-scientists-are-desperate-were-crying-begging-and-getting-arrested..>

⁸ For a few representative texts, see Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2015); Sheila Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold* (Toronto: Penguin, 2015); Dahr Jamail, *The End of Ice* (New York: The New Press, 2019); Hope Jahren, *The Story of More* (Toronto: Knopf, 2020); Hannah Malcolm, *Words for a Dying World* (London: SCM Press, 2020); Peter Stott, *Hot Air* (London: Atlantic, 2021); Ben Ehrenreich, *Desert Notebooks* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2020); Clayton Thomas-Muller, *Life in the City of Dirty Water* (Toronto: Penguin, 2021); Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac, *The Future We Choose* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2021); Gretel Ehrlich, *Unsolaced* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2021); Katharine Hayhoe, *Saving Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021); Danielle Celermajer, *Summertime* (London: Penguin, 2021); Daniel Sherrell, *Warmth* (New York: Penguin Books, 2021); Lisa Wells, *Believers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

⁹ For a survey of research on environmental emotions, see Panu Pihkala, “Toward a Taxonomy of Climate Emotions,” *Frontiers in Climate* 3 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fclim.2021.738154>.

¹⁰ Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose, “Keeping Faith with the Dead,” *Australian Zoologist* 38, no. 3 (June 1, 2017): 375–78; Glenn Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* (Cornell University Press, 2019); Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, and Matthew Chrulew, eds., *Extinction Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, *Mourning Nature* (McGill-Queen’s Press, 2017); Stef Craps, “Ecological Grief,” *American Imago* 77, no. 1 (2020): 1–7; Panu Pihkala, “The Process of Eco-Anxiety and Ecological Grief,” *Sustainability* 14, no. 24 (January 2022): 16628; Joshua Barnett, *Mourning in the Anthropocene* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2022); Mihaela Mihai and Mathias Thaler, “Environmental Commemoration,” *Memory Studies*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980231176037>.

¹¹ Thomas Doherty, “Ecopsychology and Environmentally Focused Psychologies,” *Ecopsychology* 2, no. 4 (2010): 203–4; Scott Sampson, “Ecopsychology and the Third Crisis,” *Ecopsychology* 5, no. 4 (2013): 212–14; Patricia Hasbach, “Therapy in the Face of Climate Change,” *Ecopsychology* 7, no. 4 (2015): 205–10; Benjamin White, “States of Emergency,” *Ecopsychology* 7, no. 4 (2015): 192–97; Jonathan Coope, “How Might Indigenous

to partially address this gap by discussing this flurry of publications in relation to two bodies of work in political theory – theories of representation and of chronopolitics – that, I suggest, can elucidate the emotional and temporal aspects of environmentalism. I argue that these memoirs articulate non-electoral, self-authorized representative claims that stage a political conflict between two ‘segregated temporalities’¹²: of the grieving and of the variously indifferent to environmental damage. In couching their claims chronopolitically, these authors pursue two goals. First, to constitute the already grieving into a public with a shared experience by validating their emotional isolation and articulating a vision of political hope that does not oppose mourning to action; second, to bridge the gulf between those perpetuating hegemonic ‘business as usual’ time on the one hand, and activists, scientists and survivors attuned to the environmental crisis, on the other. Thus, these authors address two constituencies: first, that of the already grieving, whose temporal horizon of action is shrinking and whose experiences are often illegible to broader publics; and second, a larger constituency of potential grievers, who might learn to see ecological loss as morally salient and be moved to act ‘as if our house were on fire’. In articulating these claims, I argue, they reveal an important aspect of political representation in the context of environmental activism, namely that it can be primarily understood as grounded in a chronopolitical conflict, i.e., a conflict over competing understandings of time.¹³

The first section reconstructs the tenets of constructivist theories of representation¹⁴ focusing on self-authorized, non-elected forms of representation. In conversation with

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) Inform Ecopsychology?,” *Ecopsychology* 11, no. 3 (2019): 156–61; Paul Rhodes and James Dunk, “Eco-Psychology,” *Australian Psychologist* 58, no. 3 (2023): 154–60.

¹² P. J. Brendese, *Segregated Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

¹³ For a historical analysis of activist temporalities in 20th C Europe, see Alexandra Paulin-Booth and Matthew Kerry, “Activist Times,” *European Review of History* 28, no. 4 (2021): 475–83.

¹⁴ Michael Saward, *The Representative Claim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and “Performative Representation,” in *Reclaiming Representation*, ed. Mónica Brito Vieira (London: Routledge, 2017), 75–94; Lisa Disch, “The ‘Constructivist Turn’ in Democratic Representation: A Normative Dead-End?,” *Constellations* 22, no. 4 (2015): 487–99 and *Making Constituencies*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022); Mónica Brito Vieira, “Founders and Re-founders,” *Constellations* 22, no. 4 (2015): 500–513; Mónica Brito Vieira, ed., *Reclaiming Representation* (London: Routledge, 2017).

theoretical research on the political valences of autobiography, I then show how certain memoirs articulate representative claims. The second section turns to the literature on chronopolitics¹⁵ to highlight the temporal dimension of representation, with a view to throwing into sharp relief the chronopolitical conflict underpinning environmental activists' experience of grief and alienation. As we shall see, this conflict maps onto the racialised temporal segregation amply theorised in political theory.¹⁶ As concrete examples I then analyse two autobiographical texts that most effectively represent activists' 'outlaw emotions'¹⁷ – their grief at environmental loss, past, present, and future. Daniel Sherrell's *Warmth: Coming of Age at the End of Our World* and Danielle Celermajer's *Summertime: Reflections on a Vanishing Future*, both from 2021 vividly dramatise the chronopolitical conflict that, I argue, is at the centre of much environmental activism. Both constitute non-electoral, self-authorised representative claims formulating counterhegemonic environmental temporalities meant to serve as counterweights to thanatogenic, 'business as usual' time. To establish their own credibility and legitimacy as self-appointed representatives, both authors articulate their own sensuous, intimate knowledges of the structural production of environmental loss. While, as I show below, Sherrell works within an anthropocentric perspective and Celermajer within an ecocentric one,¹⁸ they both seek to recognise and constitute the already grieving into a lucid yet hopeful constituency, but also bring into co-temporality those who grieve and those who

¹⁵ See, for example, Michael Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity," *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 245–68; Charles Mills, "White Time," *Du Bois Review* 11, no. 1 (2014): 27–42 and "The Chronopolitics of Racial Time," *Time & Society* 29, no. 2 (March 12, 2020): 297–317; Romand Coles, Mark Reinhardt, and George Shulman, eds., *Radical Future Pasts* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

¹⁶ Mills, "White Time"; "Chronopolitics of racial Time".

¹⁷ Alison Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge," *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (January 1, 1989): 151–76.

¹⁸ Anthropocentrism insists on human exceptionalism and a hierarchical view of morality, with humans as the ultimate object of moral concern, while eco-centrism foregrounds the inescapable interconnectedness between humans and the more-than-human, ethically recognises more-than-human life as intrinsically valuable, and extends compassion beyond species boundaries. As Robyn Eckersley shows, however, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are merely the extremes of a heterogenous spectrum of positions. *Environmentalism and Political Theory* (London: UCL Press, 1992). Based on Eckersley's distinctions, one can roughly locate Sherrell in anthropocentric and Celermajer in eco-centric territory.

don't. In the process, they both foreground the emotional registers of environmentalism and the temporal dimensions of their representation.

Memoirs as Sites of Non-Elected, Self-Authorised Representation

Over the last two decades, representation theory has taken a 'constructivist turn'.¹⁹ Building on radical democratic theorising,²⁰ constructivists recognise the role power plays in the articulation of political identities, claims and positionings. Moreover, they argue that the constitutive, symbolic, performative and mobilizational functions of representation need urgent attention. Whereas Pitkin's classic model of representation²¹ conceived of it dyadically (the represented – the representative) and of the represented and their interests as pre-existing representation, constructivist scholars propose a triadic approach: a claim-maker presents themselves as the right person to speak *about* and *for* the interests of a specific constituency in front of an audience.

Constructivists argue that claims 'to represent or to know what represents the interests of someone or something'²² have a constitutive effect on both the representative and the represented. Therefore, first, a group's 'commonality is thoroughly political'²³, i.e., the representative claim conjures 'an invoked or summoned subjectivity'²⁴. Second, the claim-maker needs to present themselves as someone who can credibly and legitimately speak for that group. Thus, the constitution of political subjectivity via representative claims obtains

¹⁹ Saward, *The Representative Claim*; Lisa Disch, "Toward a Mobilization Conception of Democratic Representation," *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 1 (February 2011): 100–114; Laura Montanaro, *Who Elected Oxfam?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Lisa Disch, Mathijs van de Sande, and Nadia Urbinati, *The Constructivist Turn in Political Representation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

²⁰ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 2001).

²¹ Hannah Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

²² Saward, *The Representative Claim*, 38.

²³ Lisa Disch, "Introduction," in *The Constructivist Turn*, 10.

²⁴ Saward, *The Representative Claim*, 43.

when the representative mobilises existing cultural resources to fix one among many competing significations of the constituency they seek to represent.

In making claims, representatives interpellate their intended constituency (the group they claim to represent) to follow their vision of social reality. The constituency's members can accept or reject it, thus deciding the claim's success. To enhance the chances of uptake, the claim

taps in a community's pool of hermeneutical resources and takes shape within its material infrastructure, via processes of discursive articulation and affective interpellation. The context of representation is ideational, affective, and material [...]. The claims that 'stick' are – most frequently – those that resonate with existing, stabilised imaginaries.²⁵

Representation therefore requires a careful balancing of cultural intelligibility and its 'unavoidable inclination to transcend the "here" and "now" and to project instead a "would-be" or "ought-to-be" perspective.'²⁶ Put otherwise, representation's creativity and its potential to inspire social change depends on its contextual sensitivity, i.e., its effective mobilisation of cultural resources within a specific political constellation, but also on its capacity to transcend the context's parameters, if ever so slightly. As we shall see, in the case of environmental mobilisation, the "would be" and "ought to be" perspectives projected in representative claims essentially stage a conflict between two different understandings of political time – the time of environmental emergency and 'business-as-usual' time – and articulate an injunction against further 'temporising'²⁷ or 'dithering'²⁸, i.e., the unjust postponing of much-needed action.

For constructivists, electoral representation does not exhaust representation. Non-elected representatives – interest-group leaders, activists, scientists, spiritual figures –

²⁵ Mihaela Mihai, "Foundational Moments, Representative Claims and the Ecology of Social Ignorance," *Political Studies* 70, no. 4 (November 1, 2022): 962–82.

²⁶ Nadia Urbinati, "Representation as Advocacy," *Political Theory* 28, no. 6 (December 1, 2000): 760.

²⁷ Brendese, *Segregated Time*.

²⁸ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

supplement elected representatives' claims, by 'opening up new lines and styles of representation, which can be more sensitive to intensity of preference and particular lived experiences, often beyond territorially defined interests.'²⁹ Montanaro defines self-appointed representatives as 'non-state, non-elected actors, with powers to influence and persuade rather than legislate and coerce'³⁰. Self-appointed representatives can radically challenge the very terms on which electoral representation is organised, including the structuring antagonisms of the public sphere, but also *whose* interests matter, *why*, and *when*. If articulated in support of democracy,³¹ they can render politically visible and empower marginalised groups. Moreover, they can also stage new lines of political conflict, mobilise constituencies to recognise previously neglected perspectives or issues, and establish a timeframe for action.

Extending the existing reflection on non-elected, self-authorized representation, this paper investigates the representative claims inherent in autobiographical works, and particularly in memoirs³² – a non-fictional genre of life-writing that, while using novelistic techniques, claims a grounding in facticity: 'memoir presents itself, and is therefore read, as a nonfictional record or re-presentation of actual humans' experience.'³³ While representation scholars have not explored memoirs as repositories of representative claims, feminists, as well as critical race, post- and de-colonial thinkers have reflected on the political role of autobiographical writing. For disadvantaged groups, they argue, the 'I' in the text simultaneously affirms a claim to authorship – to being a knower who can narrate, a capacity

²⁹ Seward, *The Representative Claim*, 93.

³⁰ *Who Elected Oxfam?*, 43.

³¹ For the democratic ambivalence of self-appointed representatives see Montanaro, *Who Elected Oxfam?* and "Who Counts as a Democratic Representative?," in *Creating Political Presence*, ed. Dario Castiglione and Johannes Pollak (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 186–203.

³² Memoirs are usually written in prose, in 1st person narrative form. Although due to memory's unreliability the line between memoir and fiction is very porous, memoir embraces the assumed – though disputed – pact of truthfulness between writers and their readers. See Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1996). Generally speaking, genres shape a work's reception and 'govern the expectations of readers.' Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, ed., *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 54.

³³ G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 15.

historically denied to various categories of humans³⁴ – and invokes for the readers a ‘we’, i.e., a community that shares experiences of marginalisation.³⁵ Memoirs can also render politically visible those who have been silenced historically³⁶ and produce alternative accounts of reality³⁷ that enable self-emancipation or self-creation for authors belonging to excluded communities.³⁸ Lastly, they can suggest alternative modes of political organisation.³⁹

Building on this literature, I propose that authors of memoirs chronicling disavowed environmental loss and experiences of temporal alienation constitute themselves as self-authorised, non-elected representatives, who try to re-shape the terms of the debate by staging a political conflict between the community of the environmentally attuned and those who, for various reasons, remain indifferent to the urgent crises. This conflict is articulated in emotional and temporal terms, highlighting the gap between those who grieve the accumulating effects of extractivism and the closing of the future, on the one hand, and the unresponsive, who proceed as if the planet could withstand current patterns of consumption indefinitely. These authors resist being infantilised or dismissed; instead, they invite audiences to heed their intimate knowledge and experience of past and ongoing catastrophe, to mourn what has been lost, and perhaps be moved to act. Put otherwise, they seek to recruit potential grievers, summon into being a larger constituency of environmentally responsible individuals, and press on them the need for immediate and meaningful action, in the ‘now’.

³⁴ Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*.

³⁵ Kenneth Mostern, *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁶ Henry Gates, “Editor’s Introduction,” *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Fall 1985): 1–20.

³⁷ For example, Indigenous autobiography presupposes a collective of ancestors, kin and cosmological forces who co-author the narrative, disrupting colonial imaginaries of selfhood and human exceptionalism. See Jo-Ann Archibald, Jenny Lee-Morgan, and Jason De Santolo, *Decolonizing Research* (London: Zed Books, 2019); Hertha Sweet Wong, “Native American Life Writing,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, ed. Joy Porter and Kenneth Roemer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 125–44; Sophie Harding, ed., *Our Words, Our Revolutions* (Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2000); Michael Calvert, *In Our Own Aboriginal Voice 2* (Nanose Bay: Rebel Mountain Press, 2019).

³⁸ Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (London: Verso, 1993).

³⁹ Moreover, it unmask the specificity of universalising discourses and recovers marginalised cultures. See Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); bell hooks, “Writing Autobiography,” in *Talking Back* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 155–66.

Scholars of representation have – to a certain extent and at least implicitly – recognised its temporal valences. As Saward wrote, representatives ‘define who and what counts as political or pressing, in a given setting.’⁴⁰ They establish their own credentials for deciding that ‘the time is now’, while the public performance of representation can ‘institute [a] shared experience of a specific and consequential temporality.’⁴¹ This paper suggests that this is precisely what is happening in the case of the memoirs considered here: these authors seek to hail audiences into a specific, alternative temporal horizon, invoking their own loss and grief to justify their standing as arbiters of political time. To analyse the mechanics of such claims against the background of a hegemonic temporal order, I now turn to the literature on chronopolitics.

The Chronopolitics of Alienated Ecological Grief

Intersubjectively articulated, public constructions of time organise social life, as well as interpretations and assessments thereof. Different and often competing understandings of social temporality co-exist, underpinning historical conflicts and practices.⁴² ‘Chronopolitics’ refers to the ‘multiple different ways in which power relations between groups – whether formally acknowledged in recognized systems of governance or not – affect both the representations of the relations between these groups and the world, in their specifically temporal aspect, and the material relation of these groups to the world, in their specifically temporal dimension.’⁴³ This definition captures the double nature of chronopolitics as a ‘vector

⁴⁰ Saward, *The Representative Claim*, 48.

⁴¹ Saward, “Performative Representation,” 82.

⁴² Kimberly Hutchings, *Time and World Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Mathias Thaler, “On Time in Just War Theory,” *Polity* 46, no. 4 (October 2014): 520–46.

⁴³ Mills, “The Chronopolitics of Racial Time,” 299.

of power'⁴⁴: it covers *both* symbolic *and* material conflicts between different accounts of time, its protagonists, and its direction.

Scholars have focused extensively on how the asynchrony between hegemonic and subordinated political temporalities sets the stage for chronopolitical conflicts.⁴⁵ These conflicts cover alternative historical narratives, their relationship to distributions of power in the present, and visions of alternative futures.⁴⁶ The term 'segregated temporalities' captures what is at stake in such conflicts: the dominant political imaginary insulates itself against marginalised communities' insistence on *the unforgettable* – on the structural reproduction of injustice over time – and on the urgency of redress. Thus,

[S]egregated temporality refers to how experiences of time diverge across peoples, how a range of political subjects are viewed as occupants of different time-zones, and how these divergent temporal spheres are mutually entwined. A closer look at this entwinement reveals how various strategies of political power are implicated in segregated temporality and the corresponding efforts to counter its impact.⁴⁷

Productively mixing historical and theoretical work, researchers have thus shown how hegemonic temporalities discount and delegitimise 'the grievances and aspired futures of temporal outcasts'⁴⁸ – of groups whose experiences are out-of-synch with dominant *grand récits* that obscure violent pasts and historical injustices, whose present reverberation is invisibilised. Temporal disjunctures are based on class, ethnicity, religion, gender, ideology, and various intersections of these axes of identity. For example, 'racial time'⁴⁹ describes the historical vision of colonial, white supremacist extractivism, whose effect is the expulsion of

⁴⁴ _Brendese, "Black Noise in White Time"; Elizabeth F. Cohen, "The Political Economy of Immigrant Time," *Polity* 47, no. 3 (July 2015): 337–51.

⁴⁵ Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity"; Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009); Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Coles, Reinhardt, and Shulman, *Radical Future Pasts*; Mills, "White Time" and "The Chronopolitics of Racial Time."

⁴⁶ Mills, "The Chronopolitics of Racial Time."

⁴⁷ Brendese, "Black Noise in White Time," 82.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 85.

⁴⁹ Mills, "The Chronopolitics of Racial Time."

its multiple subordinate others from memory.⁵⁰ This is not merely a symbolic exclusion, but one that has ongoing material implications, as evident in mass incarceration, police brutality, socio-economic deprivation, and, I would add, disproportionate vulnerability to environmental degradation. Moreover, a strategy of ‘temporizing’ – indefinitely postponing redress – helps reproduce structures of privilege trans-generationally.⁵¹

But while the dissonant temporalities and memories that challenge hegemonic traditions are usually downplayed in favour of curated views of ‘History’, they do mobilise dissenting communities of resistance. Alternative temporalities resist the disavowal of ongoing loss, insisting that ‘now is the time’ to address it. To quote Joseph Winters, ‘[T]hese dissonant attachments – to traumatic events, unfinished struggles, neglected histories, and the recalcitrant dimensions of that past and present that resist closure and the eagerness to ‘move forward’ – are necessary to challenge current configurations of power, especially since the effectiveness of power depends partly on its ability to produce forgetful subjects.’⁵²

This paper proposes that environmentalists’ memoirs formulate representative claims that seek to destabilise the hegemonic political order by staging the kind of chronopolitical conflicts these thinkers analyse. While scholars of chronopolitics have focused on human-centred, racialised conflicts between defenders of white temporalities and marginalised communities of colour who demand justice ‘now’, this paper foregrounds the segregation of environmental and ‘business as usual’ time, which nonetheless presupposes historically racialised, classed, and gendered exclusions. ‘Business as usual’ time is white time, underpinned by capitalist, colonial and patriarchal structures that invisibilise the

⁵⁰ In “Black Noise in White Time” Brendese shows how in the US, white time colonises politics to the exclusion of African Americans, whose cultures are reified as static and ‘out of time’. This also applies to Indigenous peoples in settler colonial states. As Mark Rifkin argues, however, synchronicity by assimilation – insisting on getting Indigenous people in synch with colonial time – reproduces the initial violence of colonisation. See *Beyond Settler Time* (Duke University Press, 2017).

⁵¹ Mills, “The Chronopolitics of Racial Time.”

⁵² Joseph Winters, *Hope Draped in Black* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 6.

disproportionate shouldering of environmental harms by socio-economically marginalised populations of colour. It is the temporality of the privileged who draw the greatest benefit from ongoing extractivism, whose livelihoods are not yet severely affected by devastation, who have the resources to insulate themselves against the worst effects, and who believe – naïvely – in quick techno-fixes. Needless to say, it is also anthropocentric time, wherein more-than-human deaths and extinctions do not even register.

To challenge this temporal order, environmental activists and scientists – some of whom belong to the communities most affected by environmental degradation,⁵³ and all of whom are close witnesses to destruction by virtue of their work – constitute themselves as arbiters of political timing and invoke a new subjectivity, one that inhabits a different moral order, where the time for both grief and action is now. Through their testimonies, they render legible their own experience as ‘emotional outcasts’ who are sensitive to environmental damage: as Alison Jaggar⁵⁴ argued, subordinated experiences are often accompanied by dissonant or ‘outlaw’, i.e., conventionally unacceptable or illegible emotions. When ‘shared or validated by others’ – or, as I argue, when represented – these emotions can inform ‘a subculture defined by perceptions, norms and values that systematically oppose the prevailing perceptions, norms and values’, thus becoming ‘politically because epistemologically subversive.’⁵⁵ Outlaw emotions can support the development of alternative social imaginaries that question the status quo, including its temporal horizon of action.

This paper argues that memoirs foregrounding environmental grieving represent these emotional outlaws, validates them, and makes them visible to themselves as a constituency of

⁵³ In their memoirs, Indigenous activists Sheila Watt-Cloutier (*The Right to Be Cold*) and Clayton Thomas-Müller (*Life in the City of Dirty Water*) chronicle their grief and anger at ongoing extractivist colonisation. As Kyle Whyte showed, Anthropogenic climate change is only ‘an intensification of environmental change imposed on Indigenous peoples by colonialism.’ “Indigenous Climate Change Studies,” *English Language Notes* 55, no. 1–2 (March 1, 2017): 153.

⁵⁴ Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

environmentally attuned people, who do not share a time zone with their societies' mainstream. Moreover, as I show below, it articulates for them a renewed vision of political hope that is compatible with both grief and action. Simultaneously, a second representative claim is at play: in articulating visions of grievability⁵⁶ that encompass the more-than-human, they summon into existence a constituency that could learn to be affected⁵⁷ by ecological degradation. In other words, recognising that 'constituencies or groups cohere as political agents only insofar as they are represented,'⁵⁸ they interpellate their audience affectively, to recognise the moral salience of piling losses and the urgency of meaningful action.

To render my arguments concrete, I now turn to two memoirs – Daniel Sherrell's *Warmth: Coming of Age at the End of Our World* and Danielle Celermajer's *Summertime: Reflections on a Vanishing Future* – that, I suggest, most systematically vindicate my reading of ever-accumulating testimonies of ecological grief in recently-published memoirs. While many recent autobiographies tackle the anguish and temporal alienation associated with environmental awareness,⁵⁹ these two books centre the experience of ecological grief explicitly. While Sherrell highlights grief's everyday, routine manifestations from a generally anthropocentric position, Celermajer focuses on crisis grief and works with an ecocentric framework. Most importantly, both authors stage the chronopolitical conflict and perform the double representative function I outlined above. First, they represent 'outlaw' environmental grievers: Sherrell speaks for environmental activists on the verge of burnout and suicide, while Celermajer represents the Australians most attuned to the more-than-human devastation wrought by the great fires of 2019-2020. I argue that both articulate 'resistant knowledges'⁶⁰ –

⁵⁶ Judith Butler, *Frames of War* (London: Verso, 2009).

⁵⁷ van Dooren, *Flight Ways*, 140.

⁵⁸ Disch, "Introduction," 2.

⁵⁹ See especially: Jamail, *The End of Ice*; Stott, *Hot Air*; Wells, *Believers*; Thomas-Muller, *Life in the City of Dirty Water*; Malcolm, *Words for a Dying World*; Devi Lockwood, *1,001 Voices on Climate Change* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021).

⁶⁰ Patricia Hill-Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

sensuously and emotionally anchored knowledges – about the multiple losses produced by ongoing and invisibilised environmental degradation, knowledges that, once representatively validated, can disrupt hierarchies of credibility and the chronopolitical visions they underpin. Second, both address those trapped in ‘business-as-usual’ temporalities who just might, upon hearing their stories, show themselves capable of inhabiting the time zone of ongoing catastrophe.

The texts’ narrative and stylistic choices aim to establish the self-authorised representatives’ standing, i.e., the right of the ‘I’ to speak for the ‘we’, with a view to securing uptake. To minimise the risk of ‘reading back’⁶¹ – i.e., of being rejected or dismissed – the authors legitimise their claims by articulating in words their complex emotional intimacy with the temporality of grief and fear and by reporting harrowing stories of loss. As we shall see, formally mixing confessional writing, epistolary tropes, and theoretical reflection, they establish their credentials as knowers with the necessary standing to represent and indeed conjure an alternative chronopolitical vision of reality.

Mundane Grief: From Knowing to Realising to Acting

In *Warmth*, Daniel Sherrell provides a powerful account of his experiences as a climate activist and emotional outlaw, which sheds light on the chasm separating activists’ emergency temporality from the majority’s ‘business-as-usual’ chronopolitics. The book combines a coming-of-age as coming-to-grief story, with rich confessional sections on the painful emotional experience of being a climate movement organiser, and theoretical reflections on the relationship between grief, despair, and action. This section zooms in on the double representative claim emerging from Sherrell’s memoir.

⁶¹ Seward, *The Representative Claim*, 54.

First, *Warmth* addresses the already grieving: he thematises and validates ecological grief, highlighting its association with despair and discusses how to make grief compatible with action, without thereby reducing it to its instrumental value. Sherrell rescues environmental griever from their isolation ‘in a world of wounds’ and constitutes them as a collective with a shared experience, all the while inviting them to learn how to balance grief – an introspective emotion – with a specific form of hope underpinned by outward practices of noticing. Second, Sherrell uses the chronicle of his relentless anguish and ambivalence regarding procreation as credentials to stage a conflict with the broader community, whom he invites to reckon with the certainty of misery for future generations. Writing the memoir as a letter to an unborn child – whose very existence is uncertain given accelerating environmental degradation – Sherrell summons a constituency who can grapple with the effect of current patterns of extraction and consumption on future generations. In doing so, he tries to bridge the ‘segregated temporalities’ separating those who ‘stay with the trouble’⁶², i.e., activists confronting the enormity and rhythms of the environmental crisis directly and relentlessly (and who are beginning to doubt whether having children is any longer ethical), on the one hand, and the many who engage in various forms of denial and deflection, on the other. He invites the latter to join the grieving, forewarning them, however, about grief’s own fragility to an ever-accelerating pace of catastrophe, which allows less and less time to process each emerging loss. Let me unpack these claims in turn.

First, Sherrell represents the routinised anguish experienced by environmental activists in the Global North, whose grief at the growing loss of human lives and livelihoods has become ‘repetitive and dull’⁶³. Unlike colonised and exploited populations who have historically borne the brunt of the intertwined climate and biodiversity crises, they are relative latecomers to

⁶² Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

⁶³ Sherrell, *Warmth*, loc. 1687.

grappling with the existential choices that these crises make increasingly difficult. Although attentive to distinct animal extinctions – what he calls apocalypses ‘in miniature’⁶⁴ bearing a meaning ‘deeper even than sadness’⁶⁵ – he works within a predominantly anthropocentric moral imaginary, wherein extinctions should be best understood as bellwethers for humans’ becoming increasingly alone on the planet. For Sherrell’s companions, grief is the permanent emotional accompaniment to ongoing political failure, punctuated only by short and sporadic successes that provide only minimal boosts.

Sherrell’s analysis of the experience of mundane grief helps readers see how the segregation of activists’ and the majority’s temporalities emerges both retrospectively and prospectively. Like those grieving for historical human losses caused by racial oppression, Sherrell insists on the ‘unforgettable’, i.e., human losses already produced by ‘natural’ catastrophe and gradual erosion. Moreover, he also faces ‘anticipatory grief’⁶⁶ for predictable future losses, given the slow pace of mitigation and adaptation. Sherrell thus recognises and validates those unable to find peace in the present, for that would require ‘ignoring the carnage’.⁶⁷ Only deadening exertion through activist work makes life bearable by splitting it into multiple, continuous tasks, at a time when the future itself needs ‘shoring up’: since the ‘the world transforms from a premise into a question’, humans need to ‘work desperately to answer it in our favour.’⁶⁸

Under the weight of the future and its ‘constant and relentless arrival’⁶⁹, grief sometimes gives way to fantasies against the most culpable, herein included democratically elected representatives, whose sense of urgency is not synchronised with his own.⁷⁰ At other

⁶⁴ Ibid., loc. 2363.

⁶⁵ Ibid., loc. 2397.

⁶⁶ See Ashlee Cunsolo and Neville Ellis, “Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change-Related Loss,” *Nature Climate Change* 8, no. 4 (April 2018): 275–81.

⁶⁷ Sherrell, *Warmth*, loc. 1776.

⁶⁸ Ibid., loc. 1296.

⁶⁹ Ibid., loc. 2024.

⁷⁰ Ibid., locs. 1126, 1472, 1475.

times, it fuels an ‘erotics of the Apocalypse’⁷¹, i.e., a lazy longing for a clear-cut ending, along the lines proposed by Roy Scranton⁷². While Sherrell confesses to these (rather common) temptations, he tells his constituency to refuse both in managing the chronopolitical conflict facing them: revenge would involve the unacceptable dehumanisation of wrongdoers, while the apocalypse both misrepresents the nature of the crisis (which refuses us a conclusive end) and collapses the difference between *acknowledging* and *surrendering to death*.⁷³

Instead, activists are asked to remain fixated on the future, prophets of escalating loss who do not, however, become paralysed: Sherrell exhorts griever to tap into grief’s mobilising power, without, however, using it merely instrumentally. For Sherrell, like for others⁷⁴, grief is compatible with action. He rejects dichotomic choices between mourning and organising, weeping and working. On the contrary, he interpellates his constituency to do both, however imperfectly. Building on Eve Sedgwick’s distinction between *knowing* and *realising* what death means⁷⁵, he suggests that grief constitutes a head-on reckoning with climate catastrophe and an undoing of the self’s certainties, which allows individuals not merely to *know* intellectually or propositionally, but to *realise* practically – embodiedly, in time and space – the deaths produced by ecological degradation. Making the jump to realisation requires allowing oneself to be vulnerable under the weight of the situation, accepting discomfort and pain, going past the point of despair till ‘you can observe it without blinking’.⁷⁶ This process does not involve a steeling of the self – a common trope in public debates, one that presupposes (unwarrantedly) a sovereign self in control. Grief should also not be reduced to its strategic

⁷¹ Ibid., loc. 1132.

⁷² Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*.

⁷³ Sherrell, *Warmth*, loc. 3108.

⁷⁴ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2006); David McIvor, *Mourning in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Winters, *Hope Draped in Black*.

⁷⁵ “Reality and Realization,” in *The Weather in Proust* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 206–15.

⁷⁶ *Warmth*, loc. 3173.

utility for activism: grief is a thing in itself, part of one's 'inner geology', which activists should learn how to read.⁷⁷

Sherrell's idea of grief has a second orientation: the turn *inwards*, towards realisation, needs to be accompanied by an art of noticing, of looking *outwards*, which he articulates based on his learning from Indigenous practices. He warns his constituency against romanticising Indigenous worldviews; he reflects on his positionality in relation to his Goolarabooloo hosts and on the potentially escapist motivation behind his decision to visit them. His time sense sits uneasily with Indigenous rejection of chrono-linearity as, for the Goolarabooloo, everyone is 'never less than fully implicated, never more than partly in control'.⁷⁸ He knows that Indigenous cultures are not sources to be mined for wisdom or expected to provide solutions to problems caused elsewhere, and acknowledges his own unease at being temporally alienated. In confessing his own limitations, the self-authorised representative attempts to establish his standing for showing how grief could be balanced by practices of noticing more-than-human beings and entities. He invites grievers to orient themselves outwards, for such an orientation can provide solace and prevent despairing paralysis.

Thus, Sherrell's representative claims seek to simultaneously validate 'outlaw' experiences of ecological grief and conjure a constituency of activists who can 'tread the liminal ground between denial and resignation, not always buoyed by hope so much as the terror of what giving up would force us to admit to ourselves.'⁷⁹ This is a community who, despite punctual moments of temptation – for revenge, for the apocalypse – can still appreciate 'the near-limitless human capacity to make things matter' and believe that the chronopolitical

⁷⁷ Ibid., loc. 3198.

⁷⁸ Ibid., loc. 2863.

⁷⁹ Ibid., loc. 1344.

gap can be bridged since ‘a new world can always be summoned’⁸⁰ as the future is not yet fate.⁸¹

In relation to broader audiences, Sherrell’s memoir can be read as enacting the chronopolitical conflict whose resolution depends on the expansion of the constituency of grievers. The author pursues this objective, first, formally: his memoir is written as a letter to his unborn child, whose potential conception he is pondering over carefully, given the diminished quality of future life on the planet. The expectation of horrors-to-come leads him to apologise for his ambivalent desire for the child. This formal choice serves as an epistemic prosthesis for the readers’ imagination to go travelling into the future and grapple – intellectually and emotionally – with the fact that future lives are constituted as expendable by current patterns of environmental destruction. Against the background of a (still) anthropocentric and natalist culture, invoking the uncertain fate of a human child, questioning the wisdom of bringing them into existence, and confessing to the anxiety he feels for this child’s future enables Sherrell to interpellate a constituency who might develop ‘an ability to notice the world that comes next. An ability, that is, to live there.’⁸² For, as long as grief resides in a segregated temporality, a new world cannot come into being.

Second, Sherrell warns his readers about the ever-diminishing time for grief. Walking the streets of Manhattan, he ruminates about the fate of the 9/11 memorial, given rising sea levels. This leads him to realise that not only will the routinisation and accumulation of catastrophes leave less and less time for processing death: it will also endanger the very materiality of commemorative places, which will need safeguarding. Sherrell’s second representative claim thus tackles both the spatiality and temporality of grief: he summons his

⁸⁰ Ibid., loc. 2740.

⁸¹ Ibid., loc. 3124.

⁸² Ibid., loc. 2641.

readers to take up the work of ‘protecting grief itself’⁸³ since the very possibility of moving from knowing *to* realising *to* acting presupposes a time and a space for grief.

To conclude, Sherrell builds his credentials as a self-authorised representative by providing a visceral chronicle of activists’ mundane, relentless, and temporally alienated grief and confessing his struggles with despair, the temptation of violence and its flipside, escapism, as well as his ambivalence about procreation. Tapping into a mostly anthropocentric imaginary wherein natural losses matter in predominantly in relation to human needs and interests, he conjures first, a narrow constituency of emotional outlaws for whom he articulates a new vision of hope, anchored in grief and outward noticing. Second, the memoir opens up the possibility of solving the chronopolitical conflict it stages by conjuring an extended constituency, who could learn to imagine the bleak future the next generation is destined for. As we will see in the next section, however, ecological grief-fuelled representative claims can go further and interpellate constituents to overcome human exceptionalism, extending grievability to more-than-human beings. It is to this more radical proposal that I now turn.

Crisis Grief and Lucid Hope

Authored by philosopher-environmentalist Danielle Celermajer, *Summertime* chronicles the impact of the 2019-2020 bush fires on an Australian community of more-than-humans, featuring a human couple and several rescued pigs, donkeys, horses, and ducks, all of whom lived together in nurturing multi-species relationships in the rainforest. Structured into sections entitled *before*, *during*, *after* and *world*, the text builds up tension by taking readers on a journey that culminates in horrific mass death. *Summertime* thus reads like a grief-infused thriller, punctuated by theoretical reflections that elucidate the segregated temporalities separating

⁸³Ibid., loc. 1428.

those who reckoned with the disaster's magnitude, on the one hand, and those who remained impassive, on the other.

This section identifies two representative claims in the text. Like Sherrell, Celermajer dramatizes the chronopolitical conflict between those who turned an indifferent eye to devastation, and the 'second' Australia – those who, rather than joining the traditional New Year celebrations in Sydney, faced the terror and the grief triggered by catastrophe. For the latter, Celermajer's memoir performs a validation function, recognising their intense suffering and their sense of alienation from those inhabiting dominant chronopolitical horizons. Additionally, the author summons them into embracing a particular type of hope, one anchored in 'outlaw' grief, which requires its articulation in words. This is a lucid kind of hope that is not a feeling, but an active orientation to the world, targeting the prevention of loss and suffering. In contrast, Celermajer's second representative claim seeks to bridge the temporalities of those who grieve and those who don't. In addressing this second constituency, she deploys three strategies. First, she recounts the story of her community of more-than-humans, thereby offering a prefiguration⁸⁴ of an alternative vision of sociality. Second, she chronicles the fires' impact on this community to make visible the violence of environmental destruction and its all-encompassing reach. Third, through a series of conceptual innovations – 'anticipatory nostalgia', 'emergency prostheses', 'animal refugees', 'omnicide' – she provides a new vocabulary for capturing the unfair distribution of environmental privileges and losses. These terms deliver 'semantic shocks'⁸⁵ that, I suggest, conjure a wider constituency, who can appreciate the moral salience of more-than-human death. Let me develop these arguments in turns.

⁸⁴ For an accessible introduction to prefiguration see Paul Raekstad and Sofa Saio Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

⁸⁵ Maria Pía Lara, *Narrating Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

First, the memoir articulates in words the terror and the grief that those affected by the fires experienced in an alienated way. People who faced death in the eye acquired an embodied, sensuous and urgent knowledge, that led to despair at ‘our stubborn resistance to recognising our fragility, our addiction to ways of living on this planet that have brought the fire and that have brought us here.’⁸⁶ The memoir’s thriller quality helps render legible the sensorial knowledge of death’s proximity. Celermajer represents vividly a hot, smoke-filled universe, and the horror of being trapped in it. Such knowledge cannot be unlearned and is difficult to capture in words. And yet, this is Celermajer’s first accomplishment as a self-authorised representative: she articulates this knowledge narratively and conjures a constituency of the grieving, recognising their outlaw emotions as appropriate, and formulating for them a vision of hope that can be cultivated in the wake of catastrophe.

Like Sherrell, Celermajer has an ambivalent relationship with hope given accelerating and accumulating environmental catastrophes. In a theoretically illuminating move, she traces a tension between honesty and hope. Widespread self-delusion is her key target: with acute sensitivity, the author traces the many temptations and comforts of hope as a feeling, especially when the danger is not imminent, and especially in the shape of technological solutionism. Objectifying herself, she turns a harsh gaze on her own desire to be hopeful, even in moments of crisis, and to distract herself from impending death. She confesses that she too had been ‘seduced by the type of magical-thinking hope that promises an antidote to the noxious brew of fear and helplessness.’⁸⁷ Living in honesty in the wake of loss, however, requires the grieving to see hope as a strategic device at best, a compass that orients them towards the actions that might prevent some of the suffering that is surely coming. Celermajer issues an injunction against being seduced by consoling fantasies that detach hope from mourning when

⁸⁶ Celermajer, *Summertime*, 78.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

immediate dangers have passed, and instructs her constituents to recognise that hope and mourning are always intertwined, since ‘death may always be crouching on the horizon.’⁸⁸

Celermajer’s critique of hope goes even deeper: she emphasises that the very centrality of progress in human culture should make hope suspicious, premised as it is on a chimera of human separateness *from* and mastery *over* nature. For her, unless understood as a dimension of action – rather than a feeling – hope is a ‘low-cost soporific. Placation. Immunity from the ongoing assault. *A way of delivering those of us who remained safe from the direct violence of the fire a second safety from the violence of grief and the infinity of loss.*’⁸⁹ The only way out of self-delusion lies with humans’ learning to articulate the grief some already experience into words and building a resilient sense of lucidity on the basis of it – one that can penetrate the ‘astonishingly resilient armour’⁹⁰ they built to avoid reckoning with escalating loss and their own fragility.

Lucid hope requires those affected by the fire to stare grief in the face and not rush to overcome it. Alongside the terror triggered by the approach of the fire, grief constitutes a form of sensuous knowledge, one that resides ‘in the bones’⁹¹, that permanently scars those hit by the fire, but that can also, the author suggests, potentially nurture their commitment to an alternative, non-anthropocentric worldview. Like Sherrell, Celermajer believes that grief has an epistemic quality to it, in the sense that it enables a recognition of one’s attachment to place and the relationships it underpins, which can be lost irretrievably.⁹² Grief at the loss of more-than-human life – grief narrated/represented – forces a reckoning with ‘hot and dead’ reality, and this is what the memoir delivers: a summoning into existence of a constituency that does not move too quickly to overcome grief, but instead insists on staying-with-the-trouble, as a

⁸⁸ Ibid., 189.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 134, my emphasis.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 135.

⁹¹ Alexis Shotwell, “A Knowing that Resided in My Bones” in *Embodiment and Agency*, ed. Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell, and Susan Sherwin (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 58–75.

⁹² *Summertime*, 97.

precondition for lucid hope and for taking responsibility beyond anthropocentrism. Unlike Sherrell, Celermajer proposes such hope can be an instrumental dynamo for unsentimental action – disenchanting action perhaps – action more effective for that very reason.⁹³ What is more, *Summertime* suggests – and itself instantiates – the idea that articulating grief in words might enable the grieving to recognise each other as belonging together: their shared experience might lead them to act collectively, develop resolve and sustain it, and, when it gets too late, withstand disaster together, on the firm ground of honesty.

The second representative claim addresses Australians indifferent to the fires’ devastation. Like Sherrell, Celermajer aims to solve the structuring chronopolitical conflict at the centre of her representative claims by bringing them in synch with the grieving. To do so, she deploys three strategies. First, in contrast to Sherrell, she recognises more-than-human life as valuable non-instrumentally, rejects human exceptionalism, and extends grievability and compassion beyond present and future humans. These ecocentrist principles underpin the work Celermajer and her partner put into the creation of a multi-species community in the rainforest. The community lives prefiguratively *as if* an egalitarian, non-exploitative, mutually caring relationship beyond the human boundary were possible. Thus, Celermajer’s acute grief is filtered through an ecocentric lens that opens more expansive ethical landscapes for her constituents/readers’ imagination.

Second, Celermajer minutely recounts the anticipation of death and the horrific losses the fire wrought on this community. Her terror is shared with the non-human animals: ‘There is terror in their bodies and it is passing into my body. Their knowing becomes my knowing’ – a moment of deep connection that shows the limits of human illusions of separateness and exceptionalism: as the crisis intensifies, they are ‘standing, and sensing, here together.’⁹⁴

⁹³ Disenchanted action oriented by active hope can materialise as prefiguration, but need not be limited to it: activism, contestation, intellectual work all fit the bill. I thank an anonymous reviewer for the invitation to address this point.

⁹⁴Celermajer, *Summertime*, 109.

Chronicling the death of Katy, one of the two rescued pigs she cared for, makes palpable Celermajer's own suffering but also Jimmy's, Katy's lifelong companion. The two pigs had been saved from a slaughterhouse and cared for by various humans committed to offering them a flourishing life. Both were relocated to what was thought to be a safe place but, when the wind changed direction, Katy died an agonising death, her body an archive of unimaginable suffering, which Celermajer relates unwaveringly. Her pain is mirrored by Jimmy's disoriented and reclusive behaviour. The death of rescued animals, such as Katy, but also other animals who died when their sanctuaries burnt, is multiply hurtful to the humans who had tried (and ultimately failed) to give them a second chance. The viscosity of grief is recorded in a way that brings home – concretely – the intensity of environmental loss: Celermajer mourns ecocentrically – for Katy but also for the millions of unknown beings killed and contemplating the enormity of death takes her beyond the point of toleration.

Her grief is not shared: Celermajer reports her inhabiting a different time zone in relation to the Australians relaxing over the weekend or celebrating the New Year in Sydney – ‘like voyeurs at a funeral’⁹⁵, as the fires devour millions of animals and hectares of forest. Like Sherrell, she admits to rage and a deep estrangement: ‘The gap between me and all of these people feels inestimably vast and I look upon them with a mix of alienation and disdain’ through a ‘film of bitterness’, on the other side of a ‘new, malign fence.’⁹⁶ This fault line splits the country into two conflictual chronopolitical orders: ‘the Australia that is saturated with the reality of the climate catastrophe and the Australia for whom it remains abstract.’⁹⁷ In prefiguring an alternative form of more-than-human sociality and narrating the sensuous knowledge she acquired through grief, Celermajer reaches out to the latter Australia, aiming to bring it into co-temporality with those awake to the immensity of death.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 77.

The third strategy this memoir deploys to reach its broader constituency is through ‘semantic shocks’⁹⁸, i.e., conceptual innovations and unusual juxtapositions of terms, meant to reorient its constituency’s judgement and affective registers. These shocks track the structural violence that caused the fire and the extraordinary death it brought about, and invite leaps of the imagination into an alternative world, where environmental loss matters intrinsically. Since old frameworks of meaning-making are no longer useful in times of accelerating destruction, a new language is necessary, and the text provides ample examples. To express the fact that everyone and everything is at risk of being killed in ‘unnatural disasters’⁹⁹, Celermajer coins the term ‘omnicide’ as a corrective to Raphael Lemkin’s anthropocentric ‘genocide’. The embodied, intimate knowledge of accumulating death inspires a feeling of ‘anticipatory nostalgia’, in relation to the surviving animals, trees and ecosystems she knows will eventually disappear.¹⁰⁰ She also discusses the plight of ‘animal refugees’ – animals who survived by running into new areas: a term reserved for humans is deployed to describe the displacement and suffering inflicted on non-human animals. Flight is their only escape, since they do not have ‘emergency prosthetics’ – the technological tools that enable humans to navigate these perilous times. In transforming the legal-political language to decentre humans as the privileged victims of climate change, Celermajer thus estranges the reader from anthropocentric frameworks of thought and the ideas of moral personhood they presuppose. ‘Omnicide’ seeks to bring to the fore entangled vulnerabilities, while ‘animal refugees’ point to the human responsibilities that emerge from that labelling. ‘Unnatural disasters’ indicate anthropogenic violence, while ‘emergency prosthetics’ highlight the uneven distribution of privilege and vulnerability to environmental devastation. Through all these defamiliarising

⁹⁸ Lara, *Narrating Evil*.

⁹⁹ Celermajer, *Summertime*, 102.

¹⁰⁰ This syntagm recalls Ashlee Cunsolo’s ‘anticipatory grief’ for what will surely disappear – see “Climate Change as the Work of Mourning,” *Ethics & the Environment* 17, no. 2 (2012): 137–64.

moves, the author provides a new perspective on how to act and love differently ‘amid grave danger.’¹⁰¹

Throughout, like Sherrell, Celermajer is careful to establish her standing and credentials as representative. Her story of the multi-species community and the nurturing relationships underpinning it renders the subsequent account of loss and suffering vivid for those who know environmental devastation only abstractly, and pushes their moral imagination to travel into non-anthropocentric terrain. Moreover, she confesses to her own limitations and temptations, and makes sure that her rage at the indifferent is not self-righteous: fully aware of her own implicatedness¹⁰² in the system that produced the fires, she sees a temporal chasm opening between her current self, frantically trying to save her beloved animals, and her earlier selves, who could not have imagined a disaster of such magnitude: ‘[T]here is knowing and there is knowing’.¹⁰³ She admits to feeling the ever-present temptation of escapist hope, and it takes a massive catastrophe and sustained psychological effort to repress it, for it is in the intimate experience of terror that knowing turns into realising. In acknowledging the temptations of escapism, rage and wilful ignorance, and in offering a poignant and intimate account of the *before*, the *during* and the *after*, Celermajer acts as a self-authorized representative for both a real and an aspirational constituency of mourners.

Conclusion

The two memoirs are grounded in the facticity of environmental loss and its effects on environmentalists, which both authors seek to render visible politically. Both grieve environmental loss, past, present, and future, and seek to validate this marginalised emotion by summoning into being a self-aware constituency of existing grievors, who face destruction

¹⁰¹ Celermajer, *Summertime*, 163.

¹⁰² See Rothberg *The Implicated Subject* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2019).

¹⁰³ Celermajer, *Summertime*, 77.

‘alone in a world of wounds’, to reference Leopold again. Moreover, both authors try to inscribe these losses into public consciousness by conjuring a larger human community whose moral imagination can be rendered environmentally sensitive ‘now’ because ‘our house is on fire’. In doing so, they could be seen as trying to stimulate ‘a heightening of intensity or attention in this moment, involving a sense of (shared) significance or import’¹⁰⁴: both propose alternative chronopolitical visions in tension with hegemonic ‘business-as-usual’ temporality and a modified conception of hope-anchored-in-grief, which, they suggest, might support lucid action when time has almost run out.

The framing of these counter-chronopolitical representative claims is, however, different for the two authors: Sherrell opts for a broadly-speaking anthropocentric and implicitly natalist vision for his claims, whereas Celermajer invites her readers to contemplate what it would mean to extend the realm of grievability – and therefore also of justice and care – to the more-than-human. Since ‘[E]very making of a representative claim involves challenging, reinforcing, or modifying a certain code’¹⁰⁵, one could reasonably speculate that, against the background of a predominantly anthropocentric and natalist culture, Sherrell’s more conservative claims are perhaps more likely to resonate – than Celermajer’s ecocentrism. While Sherrell deploys the figure of the unborn child to summon his broader constituency to consider the loss (past, present, and future) of human lives and livelihoods, Celermajer opens the possibility of an alternative configuration of reality, on different, ecocentric bases: *prefiguratively*, by inviting her audience to contemplate the possibility of multi-species forms of sociality, and *normatively*, by interpellating a constituency who could learn to grieve beyond species boundaries. Lastly, while Sherrell tries to articulate an idea of hope as good in itself, Celermajer accepts its persistence only instrumentally, as a compass for action.

¹⁰⁴ Saward, “Performative Representation,” 82.

¹⁰⁵ Saward, *The Representative Claim*, 76.

Having read this conclusion, some readers harbour a concern about the demobilizing effects of focusing representation on grief. After all, most scientific, scholarly, activist, and political interventions on adaptation and mitigation still emphasise the value of hope – however qualified and moderated by realism as to the irreversibility of the damage already done.¹⁰⁶

In response, it should be clarified, first, that the mobilizational force of invoking any emotion is contingent on the communicative abilities and standing of the representative, the dispositions of the audience, the socio-cultural context within which such claims are made, and the timing thereof. Second, the relentless focus on hope – sometimes critically called ‘compulsory hopism’ or ‘hopium’ – has silenced legitimate emotions such as anger and grief, and, in the process, obfuscated the potential for growth and learning that these uncomfortable emotions might generate. Moreover, third, it runs the risk of obscuring the complexity and urgency of the problem, as well as the scale of the collective efforts needed to address it. Turning to grief – and to a re-imagined vision of grounded, lucid hope as articulated in these texts – might just be what is necessary to re-calibrate our emotional and temporal registers in light of the nature of our current predicament.

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¹⁰⁶ Tim McClanahan et al., “Identifying Reefs of Hope and Hopeful Actions,” *Conservation Biology* 23, no. 3 (2009): 662–71; Andrew Fiala, “Nero’s Fiddle,” *Ethics & the Environment* 15, no. 1 (2010): 51–68; Aaron Rizzieri, “Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope,” *Environmental Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (October 1, 2011): 194–97; Maria Ojala, “Hope and Climate Change,” *Environmental Education Research* 18, no. 5 (October 1, 2012): 625–42.; Byron Williston, “Climate Change and Radical Hope,” *Ethics and the Environment* 17, no. 2 (2012): 165–86; Jonathan Boston, “Hope in the Face of Ecological Disaster,” *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice* 20, no. 1 (2013): 4–10; Lisa Garforth, *Green Utopias* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2018); Carl Cassegård and Håkan Thörn, “Toward a Postapocalyptic Environmentalism?” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, no. 4 (December 1, 2018): 561–78; Jennifer Marlon et al., “How Hope and Doubt Affect Climate Change Mobilization,” *Frontiers in Communication* 4 (2019): 20; Michael S. Northcott, “Ecological Hope,” in *Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, ed. Steven van den Heuvel (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 215–38; Mathias Thaler, *No Other Planet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mathias Thaler, Michael Rothberg, Danielle Celermajer, Mónica Brito-Vieira and Camil Ungureanu for their generous suggestions. Warm thanks are also owed to the participants at the event series *Landscapes of Political Memory* (UCLA, April 2023) and at the workshop *Environmental Emotions: Theory, Testimony, Politics* (University of Edinburgh, May 2023). The anonymous reviewers offered insightful questions and comments, for which I am grateful. Research for this article was supported by UKRI-AHRC under grant AH/X009106/1.