INTRODUCTION

'Post-political' climate change

> We have only just begun to understand what the idea of climate change is doing to us. Not just what it is doing to the ecological and physical conditions of our existence but, more importantly, to our political discourses, social relationships and imaginative worlds.
>
> (Hulme 2010: 273–4)

A strange thing has happened to the issue of climate change. For many years, it seemed that the objective of environmental campaigners was to push climate change on to the agenda of political leaders and to encourage media attention to the problem. The aim seemed to be to get everyone to agree that climate change was an important matter for public concern, and that action should be taken. It seemed to work. The politicians and journalists did pay attention, and (almost) everyone did agree that it was indeed very important. I watched this change happen at the university where I work. When I started here in the late 1990s, environmental concerns were not part of official university policy and nobody thought that was odd or unusual. Over the years, things gradually changed. Every office got a recycling bin. Low-energy lighting was installed, and turned off automatically if sensors detected no movement. When the university commissioned new buildings, they were designed on eco-friendly principles. Posters about sustainability appeared around the corridors and we held an exhibition about it in the courtyard. The environment became an important focus, not just of academic groups and research projects, but of corporate identity and institutional governance. Now, environmental concerns are very prominently part of official university policy and nobody thinks that is odd or unusual. A new consensus has been established; common-sense assumptions have shifted, not only in one university, but across society. Yet the strange thing is that just when everyone started to agree that climate change was a really important issue, it began to look as if that very agreement itself was a problem.

By the first decade of the twenty-first century, it appeared that the efforts of climate campaigners had been spectacularly successful. New energy policies were being put in place, new taxes and economic incentives were being introduced, new low-carbon lifestyles were being marketed and adopted, all in the name of reducing human impacts on the environment and combatting climate change. From presidents and prime ministers to rock stars and Hollywood actors, everyone was paying attention to the issue. As Erik Swyngedouw (2010: 215) describes, a consensus emerged that was 'now largely shared by most political elites from a variety of positions, business leaders, activists and the scientific community', with the 'few remaining sceptics…increasingly marginalized as either maverick hardliners or conservative bullies'. And yet, just at the moment when the campaigners' goals were being achieved, it started to seem that in fact this would not produce any meaningful change. Instead, we found ourselves in a 'paradoxical situation', in which a 'techno-managerial eco-consensus' insisted that 'we have to change radically, but within the contours of the existing state of the situation…so that nothing really has to change!' (Swyngedouw 2013: 2, 4). Similarly, Ingolfur Blühdorn and Ian Welsh (2007: 194) describe an early twenty-first century '*Zeitgeist* which insists on the official acknowledgement and incorporation of environmental concerns', but which at the same time continues the 'established practices and principles' of consumer capitalism.

Critics started to argue that the idea of getting the issue of climate change into mainstream discussion had been mistaken all along; that the consensus-building approach produced little or no meaningful action. As Amanda Machin (2013: 5) points out, 'Decisive action is underpinned not by consensus but by disagreement, for without a choice between real alternatives there can be no decision'. Yet the issue of climate change has come to be characterised by a 'strange non-political politics' that works through 'compromise, managerial and technical arrangement, and the production of consensus' (Swyngedouw 2013: 1, 5). That is the problem of climate change as a 'post-political' issue, which is the subject of this book.

The 'strange non-political politics' of climate change have been understood as symptomatic of a broader shift towards post-politics or post-democracy, and also as contributing to or helping to cause that shift. In both respects – as symptom and cause – this raises questions about whether part of the problem might be how climate change is represented, discussed and framed as an issue, and whether a different discursive framing might be a way to politicise it rather than reinforcing depoliticisation. With regard to media and popular culture, the role of emotions – particularly fear – is often understood to be key: apocalyptic depictions of climate change are supposed to prompt urgent action, but may instead result in paralysing dread. By way of introduction, let us consider each of these in turn: the concept of 'post-politics' that provides the wider context for this discussion; the apparently paradoxical character of contemporary climate change politics; and the role of media representation and framing in (de-)politicisation.

Post-politics?

Ideas about 'post-politics' or 'post-democracy' are attempts to understand what has happened to political life in Western societies since the end of the Cold War. As Slavoj Žižek describes it, there has been a 'degeneration of the political', in which former conflicts have been replaced by 'postmodern *post-politics*':

> In post-politics, the conflict of global ideological visions embodied in different parties which compete for power is replaced by the collaboration of enlightened technocrats (economists, public opinion specialists…) and liberal multiculturalists; via the process of negotiation of interests, a compromise is reached in the guise of a more or less universal consensus. Post-politics thus emphasises the need to leave old ideological divisions behind and confront new issues, armed with the necessary expert knowledge and free deliberation that takes people's concrete needs and demands into account.
>
> (Žižek 2000: 198)

With the end of the old ideological dividing lines of the Cold War era, politics has been hollowed out: we still use the terms 'Left' and 'Right' but these no longer relate to distinct worldviews or grand narratives of history. Capitalism has become the limit point and horizon of the possible, and the scope of political debate has shrunk to minor disagreements over technical matters of administration and management. Traditional differences between political parties seem less visible and less important, and established parties are sometimes rejected entirely by voters, in favour of 'outsider' figures or populist causes. Explosions of protest and anger rarely align with traditional patterns of political representation, but nor do they readily translate into stable new political formations, and the overall trend has been for people to disengage from formal politics and the public sphere.

As Žižek acknowledges, in a sense Francis Fukuyama's announcement of the 'End of History' at the end of the Cold War was accurate. While rejecting Fukuyama's triumphalist 'renaturalization of capitalism' (Žižek 2008: 405), radical critics of the post-political confirm his more downbeat assessment that we can now anticipate, not a bright and optimistic future, but 'centuries of boredom':

> The end of history will be a very sad time…the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands.
>
> (Fukuyama 1989)

This has now become a common description of today's diminished political landscape. What Žižek and Fukuyama render in the framework of high-octane Hegelianism, Colin Crouch describes in empirical sociological terms with his idea of 'post-democracy'. This is not the same as the concept of the post-political, in that

Crouch is concerned with structural changes in power and institutions, but it does result in a similar view of contemporary public life. As he explains, the concept of 'post-democracy' describes:

> situations when boredom, frustration and disillusion have settled in…when powerful minority interests have become far more active than the mass of ordinary people in making the political system work for them; where political elites have learned to manage and manipulate popular demands; where people have to be persuaded to vote by top-down publicity campaigns.
>
> (Crouch 2004: 19–20)

Crouch's account, and indeed Fukuyama's, usefully draw attention to the fact that the 'triumph' of capitalism and liberal democracy was not an unalloyed victory for Western political and economic elites. The lack of a meaningful framework for political engagement and contestation meant that they were cut off from their own societies and deprived of mission and purpose. Concerns about a 'democratic deficit' express this problem: a society governed via market mechanisms and expert management and administration is in many ways of course a godsend for elites who do not have to make concessions to workers or engage the demos; but at the same time, if the public does not participate, or if it rejects detached structures of technocratic governance, then those elites lack legitimacy. The repeated popular rejection of the European Union in referenda across several countries over a number of years is a prime example.

As far as Crouch (2004: 104) is concerned, the changes described as post-politics or post-democracy are 'inexorable' and it is 'impossible to see any major reversal of them'. Instead, the task is simply to 'learn to cope' with post-democracy, 'softening, amending, sometimes challenging it' (2004: 12). Others contend that nothing fundamental has really changed. John Urry (2011: 91), for example, maintains that politics is alive and well in the grassroots and on the internet, and dismisses the post-political critique as nostalgia for a 'golden age' that never existed. To Jodi Dean (2011), claims about post-politics are 'childishly petulant': effectively, the Left is saying 'If the game isn't played on our terms, we aren't going to play at all. We aren't even going to recognize that a game is being played'. While conceding that there is some descriptive accuracy in accounts of the shift towards 'consensus, administration, and technocracy', she argues that business and financial interests are still waging political battles and that Žižek's arguments are 'better read as a critique of the left', which 'accepts capitalism' and has 'conceded to the right on the terrain of the economy'. If the Left would just have enough self-belief to reclaim this terrain, she implies, then politics could return to normal.

However, these critiques arguably miss the point. There is a distinction between everyday politics and 'the political' – understood as an underlying 'non-foundational foundation' of human social life. This rather awkward formulation is necessary because the theoreticians of the post-political adopt the 'post-foundational' view that there is 'no essential ground to any social order' (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014: 10). This takes on the Heideggerian distinction between the ontic (everyday being)

and the ontological (the possibility of being itself), and uses it to distinguish between everyday politics, as a 'contingent and incomplete attempt to ground a particular set of power relations on an ultimately absent foundation'; and 'the political', understood as that very absence, which 'undermines the social order constructed upon it, and which holds open the possibility of radical change' (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014: 10). Post-politics means the closing off of the possibility of change, although the political is understood differently by different theorists. For Chantal Mouffe (2005), it is a trans-historical notion of antagonism between enemies; for Jacques Rancière (1999) it is the assertion of equality; and for Žižek (2002) it is class struggle. The political however, is only accessible via actual political phenomena – so the emergence of depoliticised consensus (as around climate change) is understood as problematic in that it conceals, disavows or forecloses the fundamental antagonism of the political, which is denied expression in the world of everyday politics.

Hence, Žižek says that post-politics should be understood as a 'wrong ideological impression':

> We don't really live in such a world, but the existing universe presents itself as post-political in the sense that there is some kind of a basic social pact that elementary social decisions are no longer discussed as political decisions. They are turned into simple decisions of gesture and of administration.
>
> (in Deichmann *et al.* 2002: 3)

Or as Anneleen Kenis and Matthias Lievens (2015: 22) put it in relation to climate change, the 'political foundation of society…can be rendered invisible by depoliticised discourses', thereby closing off 'the possibility to contest and change its order'.

At the same time, though, Dean's accusation of petulance is surely right in the sense that discussions of the post-political do often come across as an excuse. The possibility of politics is said to be 'closed off', 'ruled out', 'shut down' and so on, as if this was something *done to* or imposed upon the Left and for which it bore no responsibility.[1] It is as if the losing side in an argument complained that the winners were foreclosing the possibility of further disagreement by pretending that we now all agreed. If one continues to disagree, then why not say so? Unless perhaps one has run out of convincing arguments. If, as Žižek (in Derbyshire 2009) says, the 'only real question' is 'was Fukuyama right or not?', then the key post-Cold War political question remains whether a genuine progressive politics can be revived, reclaimed or reinvented in order to question this 'post-political' universe.

The premise of this book is that politics most certainly does not carry on as before, and that it will be a challenge to reinvent it. Such a reinvention will obviously not happen while we aim only at 'softening' a configuration that we accept as inevitable, but nor will it happen by simply pretending that left-wing politics is alive and well but just waiting in the wings somewhere off-stage. The specific aspect of the question addressed in the pages that follow is thus not only how and why the issue of climate change works in depoliticising ways today, but also whether it could instead be made to work differently, as part of efforts at re-politicisation.

Climate change as a 'post-political' issue

Climate change has become part of this post-political consensus – indeed, for Swyngedouw (2013: 3) it is the 'emblematic case' and '*cause célèbre* of de-politiciza-tion'. Critics of the post-political do not all agree with one another, either in terms of their general theoretical orientation, or about the specifics of how climate change should be understood as a post-political issue (see Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014); but a concern with the mainstreaming and de-politicisation of climate change is the common starting point. This is not seen as a problem inherent to green poli-tics as such, but as something that has happened to it, or around it, and which has compromised its former radicalism. Swyngedouw, for example, who has done more than anyone to develop an analysis of climate change as part of the post-political consensus, suggests that the mainstreaming of contemporary environmentalism has 'unfolded in parallel' with broader contextual changes which have 'evacuated dis-pute and disagreement from the spaces of public encounter', implying that there is no necessary connection between environmentalism and the emergence of post-politics, only that the latter imposes a 'particular framing of climate change' which 'forecloses (or at least attempts to do so) politicization' (2010: 215, 227). He also argues that green politics itself has been ready to compromise, noting the 'rapid transformation' of organisations such as Greenpeace and the German Green Party. Where once these organisations offered 'a politics of contestation, organized action, radical disagreement and developing visionary alternatives', he argues, they have now been integrated into 'stake-holder-based negotiation arrangements aimed at delivering a negotiated policy' (2010: 227–8).

The assumption is that ecology used to embody a radical anti-capitalist outlook, but that this has now been incorporated into the mainstream as part of the develop-ment of consensual post-politics, and that this process of depoliticisation has then been reinforced by the institutionalisation of climate governance arrangements. Much as Crouch (2004: 98) describes post-democratic transformations in terms of new techniques and institutions of neoliberal governance, so Swyngedouw (2010: 215) argues that the depoliticisation of environmentalism is 'institutionally cho-reographed' in new 'postdemocratic institutional configurations'. It is not just that 'radical dissent, critique and fundamental conflict' are marginalised, but this is then further reinforced via 'democratically disembedded' institutional arrangements 'like "the Kyoto Protocol"; "the Dublin Statement", the "Rio Summit", etc.' (2010: 227).

This all seems descriptively accurate. We might think, for example, of the way that international climate summits purport to decide 'the future we want' (Ki-Moon 2012), outside of any democratic debate about, or mechanism of accountability for, that future. Yet if, as Chris Methmann (2010: 345) argues, 'climate protection' has become an 'empty signifier', adopted as an 'important policy goal' not only by national governments and the United Nations but also by global economic institu-tions such as the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, it is not immediately obvious why this would be the case. Why would it appear

necessary to 'integrate climate protection into the global hegemonic order without changing the basic social structures of the world economy' (Methmann 2010: 345)? Why would it seem important to incorporate environmental concerns into 'hegemonic' frameworks of post-political consensus? According to Swyngedouw (2010: 219, 228), environmentalism now works as a 'new opium for the masses', playing the 'radically reactionary' role of forestalling 'the articulation of divergent, conflicting and alternative trajectories of future socio-environmental possibilities', and 'reproducing, if not solidifying, a liberal–capitalist order for which there seems to be no alternative'.

In making this argument, both Swyngedouw (2010: 219) and Žižek (2008: 439) follow the lead of Alain Badiou, who said in a 2007 interview that:

> the rise of the 'rights of Nature' is a contemporary form of the opium of the people. It is an only slightly camouflaged religion: the millenarian terror, concern for everything save the properly political destiny of people, new instruments for the control of everyday life, the obsession with hygiene, the fear of death and of catastrophes…it is a gigantic operation in the depoliticisation of subjects. Behind it there is the idea that with strict ecological obligations one can prevent the emerging countries from competing too rapidly with the established imperial powers. The pressure exercised on China, India and Brazil has only just begun.
>
> (Badiou in Feltham 2008: 139)

Only the last of these points, about economic competition, indicates why Western elites might have a material interest in adopting an environmentalist agenda. But this does not explain the larger argument about the ideological character of environmentalism as a 'camouflaged religion' and the 'control of everyday life'.

To see the problem, we can compare Badiou's point with the very similar argument made more than three decades earlier by Jean Baudrillard, who said in 1970 that environmentalism was 'a new "opium of the people"' (Baudrillard 1974). Baudrillard put forward a traditionally Marxist ideology-critique, whereby he compared environmentalism to a 'witch-hunt', in that it attempted to unite antagonistic social classes in a 'new crusade' against a mystified threat by 'shouting apocalypse'. 'Nothing better than a touch of ecology and catastrophe to unite the social classes', he remarked caustically. It is a powerful critique, yet it no longer seems plausible to explain the official adoption of environmentalism as a way to paper over political divisions, an elite strategy to silence dissent and suppress demands for social change that might otherwise erupt at any moment. In 1970, Baudrillard pointed to things like the May 1968 student revolt in France and the opposition to the Vietnam War in the US as signs of a 'potential crisis situation'. In that context, it made logical sense to critique ecology as an 'ideology that could remake the holy union of mankind, beyond class discrimination, beyond wars, beyond neo imperialistic conflicts' (Baudrillard 1974). Today, however, those sorts of struggles and conflicts are conspicuous by their absence – as, indeed, the notion of 'post-politics' points out.

If they face no significant political challenge, why would Western elites need this new pacifying ideology? What now calls forth this 'ideological support structure for securing the socio-political status quo' (Swyngedouw 2010: 223)?

According to some, it is climate change itself that presents an existential challenge to the capitalist order. Methmann (2010: 369), for example, argues that 'climate mainstreaming' serves the goal of 'sustaining capitalism': environmentalism has adopted a way of 'remedying the dislocatory effects of climate change for hegemonic structures without changing them'. A similar argument is developed by Blühdorn (2007: 269), who argues that the elite's 'ostentatious declaratory commitment to effective action' should not be interpreted as 'evidence of the political will and ability to address and resolve the problems of unsustainability', but should rather be seen as 'a societal strategy for sustaining the unsustainable'.

The implication that, in the absence of a political challenge to the established order, the challenge instead comes from the threat of climate change is reminiscent of the ideas of 'risk society' theorists Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, for whom it is the 'manufactured uncertainty' of industrial modernity that now drives social and political transformation, with risks and hazards themselves acting as 'quasi-subjects' (Beck 1998: 19). Beck and Giddens take the risk society thesis in different directions as regards climate change. Beck's work acknowledges that 'In the name of indisputable facts portraying a bleak future for humanity, green politics has succeeded in de-politicizing political passions', but retains a hope that the global threat may yet drive us towards a positive outcome by issuing a 'cosmopolitan imperative' for greater cooperation (Beck 2010: 263, 258). Giddens (2009: 114), in contrast, finds that tackling climate change is best served by his own brand of Third Way 'radical centrism' – the epitome of the post-political (Žižek 2000: 198). Giddens (2009: 114) argues that climate change should be 'lifted out of a right–left context' and the 'usual party conflicts should be suspended or muted'. Blühdorn (2007: 261) takes another view, arguing that the threats of risk society have been successfully neutralised by 'technological optimism' and a 'positive identification with the established system of democratic consumer capitalism'. If that were true, though, and a techno-optimist consumerism was the dominant outlook, then it would again return us to the puzzle of why elites feel it necessary to embrace discourses of environmentalism and sustainability.

Blühdorn's most interesting suggestion in this respect is that we have entered an era of 'simulative politics'. This is a 'seemingly schizophrenic condition where citizens want politics to be no more than symbolic, but still complain about democratic deficits and "merely symbolic" politics' (Blühdorn 2007: 265). This 'seemingly nonsensical form of political communication' arises from a condition where:

> citizens articulate demands which they do not want to see seriously implemented…a condition where citizens expect – in the sense of both *want* and *anticipate* – that the government *does not* seriously implement the demands which they, nevertheless, continue to articulate.
>
> (Blühdorn 2007: 264–5, original emphasis)

Drawing on Baudrillard's concept of simulation, Blühdorn characterises contemporary political communication as 'show politics' or the 'performance' of politics, whereby the goal is to maintain the appearance of 'the vitality and viability of politics itself' (2007: 267). Concerns about 'sustainability', he notes, are expressed not only in relation to the environment, but in all sorts of areas – 'pensions systems, health care systems, transport systems, the system of representative democracy and so forth': all are seen as 'unsustainable'.

> In all of these policy areas there is a sense of acute crisis and much talk about 'radical shake-ups', 'tough decisions' and 'hard policy roads'. There is a striking consensus between political elites and general electorates that it is time to stop *talking* about things and take *decisive action*: Cut through the rhetoric! Get down to the issues!
>
> (Blühdorn 2007: 252, original emphasis)

Yet such urgent demands for action simply add another layer of performance, he argues: the 'performance of seriousness'. What motivates the performance is the post-political situation itself: the 'exhaustion of authentic politics' and the fact that 'there is no vision of any viable alternatives' (2007: 265). In the 1970s and 1980s, Blühdorn suggests, the 'anti-politics' of radical ecologists meant 'rebellion against established mainstream politics' and its replacement by 'the authentic politics that was supposedly being rehearsed in the societal margins'. Today, however, 'anti-politics' just means 'frustration with politics', 'disengagement' and 'depoliticisation' (2007: 261–2). In this situation, the performance of '*authentic* eco-politics' has itself 'become ideological', since it sustains the simulation of meaningful political engagement (2007: 269, original emphasis).

Most critics of the post-political do not share Blühdorn's pessimism about democratic politics, and indeed the point of the critique is to think about how the post-political might be challenged and overcome. Rather than seeing contemporary political communication in terms of simulation, others have sought to analyse how particular discursive framings of climate change depoliticise the issue, and to figure out how it might be represented differently.

Media, culture and emotion

If, as Kenis and Lievens (2014: 5) argue, 'Fundamentally, depoliticisation is situated on the level of representation', then we need to understand exactly how this works not only in political discourse but also across the media and popular culture. Much previous work on the media and environmental issues has assumed that political and media elites are reluctant to pay attention and need to be pressured and encouraged to do so – an assumption that no longer seems to make sense in the context of the post-political mainstreaming of environmental concerns. Regarding climate change specifically, most critics have understood the problem in terms of a lack of consensus, with the media giving too much space to a diversity of conflicting views

about the causes of and responses to global warming (for example, Boykoff and Boykoff 2007). But what if the problem was the opposite? What if the promotion of consensus and narrowing of debate was encouraging inaction and disengagement rather than promoting change?

According to Anabela Carvalho (2010: 172), the news media play an important role in 'processes of political (dis)engagement in relation to climate change', in terms of the way that media representations 'construct particular "subject positions" for individuals and cultivate dispositions to action or inaction'. Drawing on research which has shown how the public is often depicted as passive and 'childlike', with its opinions represented in terms of 'moods' and 'emotions' rather than rational political perspectives (Lewis *et al.* 2004), Carvalho argues that the media generally present climate change as the concern of elite decision-makers, and relegate ordinary citizens to the role of 'spectators or bystanders' (Carvalho 2010: 174–6).

Carvalho's comments here usefully highlight a further important aspect of debates about the post-political: the emotional dimension of representations of climate change. The most obvious aspect of this is, as Swyngedouw (2010: 217) notes, the 'continuous invocation of fear and danger'. Contemporary representations of climate change frequently involve 'millennial fears' and 'apocalyptic rhetoric', encouraging a paralysing uncertainty in the face of 'an overwhelming, mind-boggling danger…that threatens to undermine the very coordinates of our everyday lives and routines' (Swyngedouw 2010: 218). This is undoubtedly true, and indeed is what one would expect in the context of broader development of risk consciousness and a 'culture of fear' (Furedi 2005) – in both politics (Lipschutz 1999) and the media (Altheide 2002) – at the turn of the twenty-first century. Some have argued that fear is a useful mobiliser for environmental action (McNeill Douglas 2010), but it is also often viewed as problematic for various reasons. Sometimes it is rejected simply because it is inaccurate, as in James Lovelock's acknowledgement that he was too alarmist about 'Gaia's revenge', for example (Johnston 2012). More often, what the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) think-tank describes as an 'alarmist repertoire', characterized by an 'inflated or extreme lexicon', an 'urgent tone and cinematic codes', and a 'quasi-religious register of death and doom' is seen as ineffective or even counter-productive since it offers only a 'counsel of despair' (Ereaut and Segnit 2006: 7). Such criticisms have not meant that apocalyptic, fearful constructions of climate change no longer feature prominently in public discourse: as the IPPR suggests, the 'sensationalism and connection with the unreality of Hollywood films' that such apocalypticism involves may be 'secretly thrilling'; a form of 'climate porn' (2006: 7).

While much of this discussion stays at the level of a pragmatic assessment of whether evoking fear is useful or not, there are other, potentially more interesting things to say about the emotional dimension of climate change communication. For one thing, it is striking that the importance of emotion and affect has repeatedly been rediscovered. In a 2016 survey of the field, Susanne Moser noted that greater attention was being given to 'the role of emotions in climate change communication', explaining that:

> This greater focus on the affective and emotional (as opposed to just the cognitive) side of climate change is partly driven by the irrational-seeming lack of concern about the problem and persistent psychological distancing, partly by the often intense emotional reactance to climate change (and its messengers) by those who do not 'believe' in climate change, and partly by the increasingly observed sense of despair and hopelessness among those who understand the science and experience early impacts and/or the lack of commensurate action.
>
> (Moser 2016: 6)

Moser was updating an earlier, 2010 survey, in which she had noted how researchers were beginning to realise that 'messages are more than the words or information conveyed' and that attention needed to be paid to 'the emotions that are being evoked' (Moser 2010: 40). Birgitta Höijer (2010: 718), for example, published an interesting study of how news reports 'address a number of different emotions to anchor climate change in everyday discourse'. In 2009 – the year, incidentally, that the academic journal *Ecopsychology* was established[2] – a report by the American Psychological Association's Task Force on the Interface Between Psychology and Global Climate Change noted that 'risk perceptions…are influenced by associative and affect-driven processes as much or more than by analytic processes' (Swim *et al.* 2009: 37). The implication that emotional appeals are as important, or more important, than information and rational argument had already been made explicitly in a number of studies. Anthony Leiserowitz (2006: 63) had argued that 'risk perception is greatly influenced by affective and emotional factors', for instance; while Elke Weber (2006: 116) had suggested that 'attention-catching and emotionally-engaging informational interventions may be required to engender the public concern necessary for individual or collective action in response to global warming'.

In fact even then, the idea that affect is more important than cognitive reasoning was not a new one. There was already a long research tradition in psychology making this point both in general terms and specifically in relation to environmentalism. Julie Ann Pooley and Moira O'Connor, for instance, argued at the turn of the century that 'the key entry point for environmental education is via the affective domain' (Pooley and O'Connor 2000: 712). It may be that this argument – for the importance, even the primacy, of emotional reactions over logical thought – continues to be reiterated (often as if it were a new insight) because it chimes with contemporary concerns and assumptions. In relation to environmental campaigning, it offers an explanation for why information campaigns do not appear to be entirely successful in persuading people to 'go green' (Ramesh 2011). More broadly in politics in recent years we have seen the rise of the idea of 'nudging' the public to adopt particular ideas or behaviours rather than making an argument that they should do so (Thaler and Sunstein 2008). The notion that political leaders should 'nudge' citizens, or that they should seek to address voters' emotional wellbeing (Richards 2007), perhaps reflects the difficulty that such leaders and other political actors now have in making directly *political* arguments, given the exhaustion of Left/Right politics since the late 1980s.

The loss of the modernist Left/Right framework has provided fertile ground for the development, not only of a 'culture of fear', but also of what has been referred to as 'post-traumatic culture' (Farrell 1998), 'traumaculture' (Luckhurst 2003), or 'therapy culture' (Furedi 2004). This emotional, therapeutic discourse provides a framework for managing individual anxieties about agency in a social situation characterised by greater uncertainty and a perception of powerlessness. This implies that, while Swyngedouw (2010: 218–9) and others are no doubt correct to argue that visions of eco-apocalypse are both symptomatic of, and also reinforce, a post-political outlook in which the urgency of impending climate catastrophe closes down democratic debate about possible futures, this does not work through fear alone. Apocalyptic framings of climate change give indirect expression to the loss of modernist political subjectivity, but not simply through negation: rather, agency is re-interpreted in moral and therapeutic terms relating to how people should conduct themselves in relation to the environment. Hence, as Amanda Rohloff (2011: 640) says of Al Gore's high-profile environmental campaigning, notwithstanding the presentation of climate change in apocalyptic terms, a de-politicised presentation of the issue as a 'moral' question actually provides a kind of assurance: 'global warming becomes not an uncertain risk, but a moral certainty'. This does not suggest any break from a post-political framework, but it does indicate that there is more going on than simply scaring people.

A frequent observation about environmental apocalypticism is that, unlike in religious conceptions, it involves no moment of transcendence or redemption (Swyngedouw 2010: 218–9, Levene 2010: 60). As Pascal Bruckner puts it:

> The Christian Apocalypse presented itself as a revelation, a passage in to another temporal order, whereas this apocalypse reveals nothing, it issues the final judgment: pure apocalypse. No promise of redemption, just an ideal for survivors, an 'epidemic of remorse'.
>
> (Bruckner 2013: 65)

Yet rather than a complete absence of redemption or salvation, it might be more accurate to say that environmental apocalyptic narratives offer a kind of pseudo-redemption: there is a sense of individuated, personalised, therapeutic redemption, to be achieved through inward-focussed projects of the self. This therapeutic appeal explains why emotional engagement continues to be offered as the extra magic ingredient; the thing that could potentially make both media and celebrity campaigning work effectively (Doyle *et al.*, forthcoming), and that could even address the wider problem of political disengagement and the democratic deficit (Richards 2004).

About this book

Many books on climate change communication, perhaps close to all of them, are basically concerned with making such communication more effective, whether that

is understood in terms of the transmission of scientific knowledge or the dynamics of public engagement. This is not one of those books. Given the way that, as critics of the post–political point out, environmentalism has become mainstreamed in recent decades, it would be limiting to adopt this sort of pragmatic, policy–oriented approach. Moreover, I have consciously tried not to take any of the assumptions in the literature for granted, mainly because the situation seems to demand it: what many people used to take for granted regarding the oppositional, radical anti–capitalist character of green politics and the reluctance of elites to engage with the issue of climate change no longer seems to describe contemporary experience. If we keep expecting or wanting things to conform to these assumptions we are unlikely to see the present for what it is. That is the reason why the book works with the concept of the 'post–political'.

In the spirit of not taking established assumptions on trust, the first two chapters review the history of how environmental issues, particularly climate change, have been taken up in mainstream politics and news reporting. Chapter 1 tries to make sense of the way that climate change emerged as a political issue in the late 1980s by putting this in the context of both the prior history of elite engagement with environmental issues and the particular challenges that political leaders faced at the end of the Cold War. As this implies, the incorporation or mainstreaming of environmental concerns is not a recent phenomenon: it has happened before, at the very moment, in fact, that is now seen as the high point of ecological radicalism, the early 1970s. Back then, the issue worked for elites in much the way described by Baudrillard at the time, as a means to cohere a divided society. But environmental concerns were also taken up by establishment politicians as a potential source of meaning or spiritual renewal: a way to offer their societies some higher purpose than mere consumer satisfaction. The end of the Cold War encouraged a new generation of political leaders to seize on those same possibilities, finding meaning and purpose in the fight against climate change in order to help fill the void created by collapse of Left/Right politics. This is the Fukuyamian moment so central to Žižek's argument about the emergence of post–politics, of course, when the ending of modernist grand narratives of history made the challenge of discovering a new political vocabulary both more urgent and more difficult to accomplish. The result was the assimilation of more genuinely ecological themes into mainstream political discourse, and also the emergence of an emotional, therapeutic framing.

Chapter 2 offers a meta–analysis of research on the ups and downs of the environment as a news issue over time, interrogating the different ways that such fluctuations have been theorised and explained. These patterns have been widely misunderstood, it is argued, mainly because critics' assumptions about the media's attitude to reporting on climate change have led them to misinterpret the evidence. The result is that much work in this area not only adopts an incoherent model of the relationship between media and centres of political power, but also works to enforce conformity and consensus in an uncritical fashion.

While Chapter 2 focuses on the news media in their reporting role, Chapter 3 examines the role of the media as campaigners in their own right, trying to raise

public awareness of environmental concerns and to advocate for change. Analysts of the post-political have criticised media research agendas which simply encourage greater consensus in news reporting, and have instead argued for more attention to be paid to the ways in which the media may either promote depoliticisation or work to politicise the issue of climate change. Here we follow this newer agenda, looking in detail at two contrasting case studies, both of which involve eco-friendly 'lifestyle journalism', but in different ways – one example, the BBC, is constrained by conventions of journalistic impartiality and could be said to have an institutional obligation to depoliticise; whereas the other example, the *Guardian*, is regarded (and regards itself) as a leading oppositional voice on environmental issues. A dilemma of green lifestyle journalism is that by focussing on consumer behaviour it risks inadvertently promoting the very thing it seeks to critique. Yet here too, it is argued, the problem has not been well understood: what this genre of journalism promotes is not consumerism so much as an etiquette of 'correct' behaviour and self-monitoring.

Somewhat similar concerns are the starting point for Chapter 4, which looks at the phenomenon of celebrity environmental advocacy, including the efforts both of activist *celebrities* such as Leonardo DiCaprio, and of celebrity *activists* such as Al Gore. The domain of celebrity again involves a potentially jarring juxtaposition of anti-consumerist campaigning with luxury consumer lifestyles, of course. Celebrity campaigners have been roundly disparaged as offering 'heroic' role models and promoting their own 'brand' as much as the causes they espouse, but they have also been praised for their potential to act as 'emotional pedagogues', connecting with audiences in a more visceral way and teaching us how to feel about climate change. Assessing these debates, the chapter argues that rather than the 'politicisation of emotion' that some critics have seen in recent celebrity interventions, what is actually on offer is an emotionalisation of politics, translating issues of public concern into personal, therapeutic terms.

Chapter 5 extends this discussion, re-examining the relationship between celebrities and audiences, and the sorts of solutions to climate change that celebrity campaigners promote. Counter-intuitively, recent research has suggested that the key audience for celebrity campaigning is not the public but elites, for whom celebrity engagement with an issue stands in for public interest in it. In this respect, the involvement of celebrities in climate change campaigning is symptomatic of 'post-democratic' and 'simulative' forms of political communication. The policy proposals typically offered in celebrity interventions have often been criticised as not challenging, or even addressing, the systemic dimension of the problem of climate change, focusing instead on small-scale, individualistic, light-bulb-changing actions. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Naomi Klein's more radical approach, which takes on many of the conventions of celebrity emotional advocacy but seeks to avoid the pitfalls identified by critics of celebrity campaigning. While it certainly cannot be accused of adapting to a techno-managerialist outlook, however, it seems that the greater radicalism of Klein's perspective also means greater anti-modernism, cutting away the ground of the political agency it ostensibly seeks to promote.

As may be apparent already, there is a line of argument running through the book about where to draw the line between the mainstream and the marginal, the consensus and critique. This is what makes the phenomenon of 'post-political' climate change an interesting one: it demonstrates quite clearly that the ground has shifted and that we need to rethink critique. We appear to be offered a choice between a techno-managerial administrative consensus on one side, and a repudiation of modernist subjectivity on the other. Most fundamentally, we need to rethink whether climate change has any place in progressive politics, an issue to which we return in the Conclusion.

Notes

1   It is also worth noting that, as Swyngedouw and Wilson (2014: 302) point out, 'the original problem of depoliticisation addressed by post-foundational theory was not post-politics, but the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism that had stifled the intellectual freedom of the Left'. This is one way of reading it, perhaps. Another would be to say that radicals were eager to jettison the working class as the political subject of historical change because that was preferable to admitting their own political failure. The paradigmatic text in this tradition is Laclau and Mouffe's 1985 work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.
2   See http://www.liebertpub.com/overview/ecopsychology/300/. This is a US publication. A *European Journal of Ecopsychology* (http://eje.naturalresourceswellbeing.com) was also founded the following year.

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