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## Absurdist Rituals to Process Ecological Grief

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## UVM ENVS Capstone: Creative Arts Project 2022

### Absurdist Rituals to Process Ecological Grief - Written Component

#### Introduction

##### Personal background and motivation for this project

As with thousands of other young, impressionable, idealistic 18-year-olds, I was swept up by the charm and green washing of UVM, and attended my first semester in Fall 2016. The required reading for the incoming class was *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* by Elizabeth Kolbert, who then came to speak at Ira Allen Chapel. I remember the talk being a bit depressing. A couple years later, I saw Bill McKibben talk at the UU Church at the top of Church Street. At this point, we had been above 350 ppm of CO<sub>2</sub> for about 30 years.

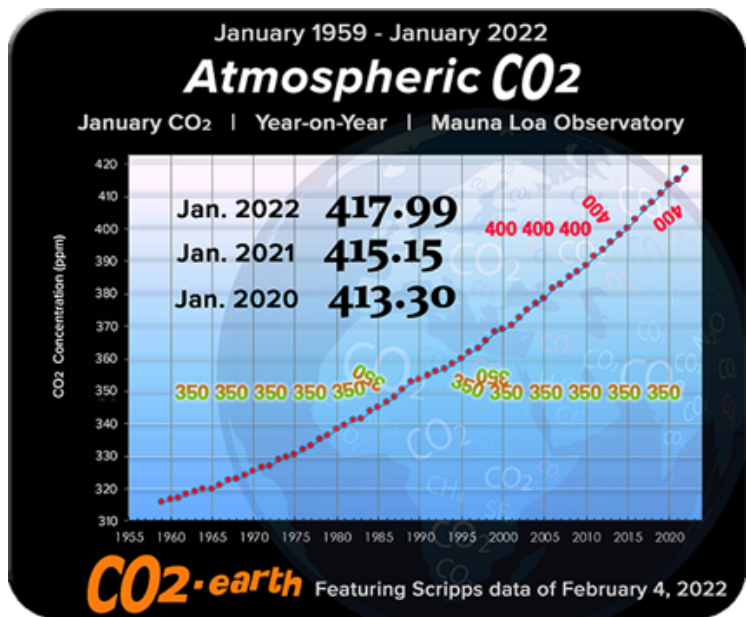


Figure 1. Stonks go up!

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.co2.earth/>

There is no way I can look at this information without breaking into depressed laughter. I know I'm referencing a meme (with "stonks"), but in all seriousness one of my references is a paper that looks at climate change memes: "Overall, we propose that engaging in content generation in the form of memes enables individuals to feel re-empowered and reduce the psychological distress they experience due to climate change." (Elgaaied-Gambier and Mandler, 2021)

After holding out as "undeclared" for as long as possible, I decided to major in Environmental Studies because I care about humans and the earth, and it seemed the logical intersection. My thought process was simple: without an earth, or one hospitable to humans, nothing else will matter. And yet we are at the point where human intervention is needed, and if we don't care for each other, how can we care for the earth? It's all connected.

As an Environmental Studies student, I was confronted with the heaviness of the future for humans and the earth in every single course I took. The soil, the air, the water, the systems, are all not looking good. And we have known this, and have exacerbated the situation for decades, nay, centuries, starting with imperialism, settler colonialism, industrialization, and capitalism. And the various marginalized, oppressed, and affected people have been screaming and fighting and violently silenced (with dabbles of little victories) for just as long. In some ways, I feel like my whole college "career" has been in preparation for this project.

I have lost track of the number of times people, including my parents, from older generations have thrown up their hands and said: "Thank God we have this bright, young new generation to innovate and solve the climate crisis. You all bring me so much hope! Things have changed so much since I was your age!" I, we, did not consent to this existence, and surely not to solving the biggest problem we did not create. I am only 24, an incredibly privileged person who has hardly experienced any systemic hardship, and *I* am tired.

Climate work is all of our work, but under capitalism, aside from being hired by nonprofits, it's hard to not see engaging in any active effort as activism, and subsequently burning out quickly. Such burn out seems to be a key part of how capitalism works. For people who do not have a fulfilling spiritual practice or hobby that helps them acknowledge the grief, or fuel their souls to keep going, having rituals to process ecological grief might help.

I knew I was fascinated by the idea of ecological grief for over a year, when I, influenced by my performance art course, decided to live-stream myself on my Instagram account, sitting perfectly still wearing a skeleton mask on my face in spring 2020. This grief was something I had been feeling for a while. Often a class session would end on a horribly depressing note, and my classmates and I would walk out glassy-eyed, as we compartmentalized what we just experienced so we could get to our next class, or close our laptop and stare out the window.

I decided to minor in studio art as my own form of ongoing therapy for learning about the perilous condition Earth is in. *Time-Based Media*, with Prof. Madsen Minax (Fall 2019) was one of the most impactful courses I took. Despite having taken dance classes from preschool through 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and two dance courses in college (*Movement and Improvisation* with Paula Higa, Spring 2017, *Contemporary Dance 3* with Julian Barnett, (Fall 2019), it was in *Time-Based Media* where I really learned about performance art, and was introduced to Marina Abramovic, and Fluxus, who has inspired some of this work. Through Higa, I first learned about Susan Sgorbati, and authentic movement, and focusing on concepts such as “the particular” and “embodiment”. I later took a workshop on improvisation with Sgorbati and Hannah Dennison in fall 2019. Pandemic permitting, I have been attending community-based Vermont Thursday Dance, and contact improv. Movement, dance, embodiment, connection, and play have all deeply inspired my project of crafting rituals.

## **Project Description, Goals and Rationale**

I created absurdist rituals to be performed and engaged in with the goal of helping myself, and hopefully, individuals and communities process current and impending ecological grief, brought on by the increasing climate disaster. The products include 27 written rituals, a video art project documenting performance of the rituals, this written component, and a large visual map connecting these things with my thoughts and research, via the platform Miro. The rituals range in detail and length, and not every ritual was recorded via video. As the climate disaster will only increase in severity, I intend the rituals to be able to be revisited and repeated, for emotional maintenance, not to “solve” anything. They are designed to be performed with minimal equipment or setup, and can be modified for accessibility or fun. I intentionally chose not to attempt to observe and analyze the results of people engaging in the rituals, as it would take away from the “process” nature of the project. My goal in doing this creative project (as compared to a formal research thesis) is to create processes and opportunities that anyone can engage with and that occur in the public sphere, and not just a finished product to be logged into the database of past undergrad research.

Another hope I have for this project, and the growth of conversations and support around climate anxiety and ecological grief, is that maybe, if more people knew that there was support for dealing with the overwhelming dread of thinking about climate change, they would feel more empowered to delve into activism, or at the very least, not live in climate denial. Because it feels so overwhelming beyond words to think about climate change, especially when the overwhelming nature is not deeply acknowledged.

### ***Why Absurdist?***

When so many disciplines and lenses (science, politics, society, history, culture, economics, psychology, philosophy, etc.) have been employed to process and to try to solve climate change, and when, according to science, we have not done enough to alter the future out of doom’s way, what left is there to turn to but art, and specifically, the absurd? How do you begin to convey the value of

the absurd to people immersed in a culture that allegedly values rationality and practicality above all else? In such a society, how does one begin to comprehend the pain, suffering, loss, and destruction of the past, current, and ever-increasing climate disaster that should not have happened, and could have been prevented, or at least mitigated? For me, one of the antidotes to the cognitive dissonance of living in this world is engaging in embodied absurdist practices. We have ignored and not prioritized change for decades and centuries even, throughout eras of imperialism, settler colonialism, industrialization, and capitalism. Meanwhile, the various marginalized, oppressed, and affected people have been dissenting and fighting while being violently silenced (despite occasional victories that should not go unacknowledged) for just as long. Most people already engaged in climate activism, or in the environmental field, are already painfully aware of the lack of impact a single person, or even collective organizing, can make in the face of billionaires forcing us all to stay on the track of infinite growth despite the worsening climate disaster.

One of the reasons for the specifically absurdist nature of the proposed rituals is that of protest; these rituals will have no value from the view of the capitalist society that praises production. The rituals themselves will not help mitigate measurable impacts of climate change in any way, i.e., there is no planting of trees, (thereby doing a good thing for the environment while engaging in a repetitive task), nor a “killing two birds with one stone” mindset. Rather, the existing trees may be hugged, or a potential tree-planting zone is sung to, and, to continue the above-mentioned analogy, stones are tossed in the air with no other reason behind the initial action.

### ***Why Rituals?***

From personal experience, repeated actions are soothing. I also have diagnosed OCD and am interested in potentially bringing into dialogue the clinical concept of rituals, and their intersection with rationality and power. Further, I have enjoyed dancing all my life and am fascinated

by how our beliefs become embodied in physical acts. Finally, rituals have also been used to help process grief across cultures and time. I will expand on this in the literature section.

### ***Why Ecological Grief?***

In my personal experience, an outward presentation of anxiety is more common than grief in a capitalist society that is perpetually preoccupied with the future. Especially for those without a religious or spiritual community, grief is not acknowledged or processed for the loss of people, let alone non-human entities such as the Earth. Anxiety suggests uncertainty about the future. If we trust the overwhelming research on climate change, we know what will keep happening. Hence, like hearing the news of a loved one with a terminal illness, we are in a state of impending grief. Our collective “mother” earth should not be dying yet.

### **Results!**

The results of my creative project include:

- A. Miro board: [link here](#), which shows all the elements of my project in a non-linear form
- B. Link to video which illustrates several rituals being enacted (currently unlisted, must use link: <https://youtu.be/m0VwMccnHKg>)
- C. List of ritual scores (asterisks indicate the rituals enacted in the video)
  - greet every living thing you see with “hello” and “goodbye” alternating
  - \*collect stones. carry them in the hem of your shirt, against your stomach
    - keep adding stones until your shirt rips or stones fall
    - leave the fallen stones
    - variation. bury each stone that falls. anoint w your sweat
  - obtain a list of animals that have gone extinct in your region. whisper their names into a mountain spring
  - \*collect cigarette butts and arrange in a spiral on a sidewalk or park or something. don't respond when people ask what you're doing.

*note: I collected the cigarette butts for Caro because the weather looked uncertain, and I didn't want to get the cameras wet*

- talk with a friend. start everything you say with “remember”
  - variation “what if”
  - variation “in reality” and false statements
- meticulously clean out the peanut butter jar (or any other plastic container)
  - write a letter to whoever finds the jar
  - confess something
  - put this piece of paper in the container with the lid on it.
  - put it in recycling
- wear clothes inside out for an hour or day
  - deny it when people ask
- journaling prompt: what would your day look like if you were dead?
  - what would your dog's day look like?
  - the tree you walk by?
- \*take a nap
  - (or find solace)
  - in unusual places (or small spaces)
  - (fake) snore loudly
- invite a stranger over for tea
- weave sand
  - at the beach?
- \*dig a big hole with a teaspoon
  - pour tea in it
  - stir
- \*pour water from one vessel to another
  - increase height each time
  - finish by drinking the water
  - or, ask someone to catch it
- pack for a journey
  - walk down the street
  - wait at corner for 20 minutes
  - return
- arrival and departure
  - in a kitchen chair



- at the restaurant
- jump from
  - one universe to another
  - to the past, 5 minutes ago
  - to the future
  - to the present
- wash your whole body in the kitchen sink, starting with your hands
- pull up a plant
  - burn the roots
  - smear soot on legs
- nervous tics
  - scratch head
  - clear throat
  - repeat 5 times
  - have movements flow together
- swaddle a beloved object (or memory)
  - sing it a lullaby
- set an alarm to wake yourself up every half hour one night
  - write down the first word that comes to mind
- embalm a stone fruit
- break something unbreakable
- find the shortest hair on your body.
  - pull it out
  - put it in your pocket
- move like everything originates from your toenails
- dance with yourself!

**Resources, Previous Work and Literature: Emotional impact of climate change; Grief Processes and Rituals; and Art, Performance and the Absurd**

My research examined traditional academic work in books and peer reviewed journal articles, current movements in climate anxiety and grief via websites and blogs, as well as various forms of

art and media including video and poetry. These curated, and necessarily inexhaustive resources are the foundation and inspiration for the creation of absurdist rituals to process ecological grief. The three main themes foundational to my project were: 1. emotional impact of climate change, 2. grief processes and grief rituals, and 3. the absurd, the Fluxus movement, and performance art.

For the sake of efficiency, I am not going to go through all the existing literature on grief and psychology, nor why/how climate change exists and is bad, as the former is out of my background, and the latter is generally understood in academia, and is in the news daily.

## **Emotional Impact of Climate Change**

### ***“Self-help” books addressing climate change emotion***

I first want to discuss two “self-help” books, *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety: How to Keep Your Cool on a Warming Planet*, by Sarah Jaquette Ray, and *Facing the Climate Emergency: How to Transform Yourself with Climate Truth* by Margaret Klein Salamon, a psychologist and founder of Climate Awakening. Both were published in 2020, and neither cites the other’s work. Anyone could pick up these books, although people feeling climate anxiety might be more likely to seek them out. Ray’s book discusses academic research, personal experience, ideas of Buddhism, the work of adrienne maree brown, Joanna Macy, and much more with the purpose of utilizing “mindfulness, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence” (Ray, 14) to cultivate resilience and stave off burnout. Salamon’s work focuses more on sitting with the uncomfortable and overwhelming emotions that climate change brings up, such as grief and fear. Both books are calls to action.

Through research that led me to other resources, I am aware of at least two more books on the same topic that are in progress. One is *Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Crisis*, by Britt Wray (scheduled to be published in May 2022). Wray is the writer of the blog Gen Dread, where she reflects on the anxiety of processing climate change. Another is one that Aimee and

LaUra of Good Grief Network are currently writing, about their creation of “10-Steps to Personal Resilience & Empowerment in Chaotic Climate.”

Based on just these two books alone, and the knowledge that two more are in progress, I believe my desire to create rituals to help process emotions related to climate change is justified. But extensive peer-reviewed articles back it up as well.

### ***Academic literature addressing mental health impacts of climate change***

Clayton and Karazsia (2020) have tried to create a way to measure climate change anxiety, with the hopes that it could be used in terms of legislation and policy pertaining to climate change anxiety. Cunsolo has done a great deal of work creating a framework of ecological grief within the realm of climate change anxiety. She has also worked closely with the Indigenous Nunatsiavut communities, helping them document their experiences. Clayton mentions how there are many similar terms, with slightly different meanings, implications, and evidence for climate anxiety. One of them is ecological grief, defined by Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) as “the grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change” (275).

A key article in the field is “A Scoping Review of Interventions for the Treatment of Eco-Anxiety,” published in September 2021. Until this review, most of my scholarly articles were about how climate change impacts mental and emotional health, but not usually focused interventions for treatment. This article included a review of existing literature, and then analyzed the sources into themes and subthemes of different psychological approaches for treatment of eco-anxiety. Grief awareness and group rituals came up frequently. “Almost half of emotion-focused interventions focused specifically on illuminating and supporting clients’ grief processes inherent to engaging with their eco-anxiety” (10). In addition, the authors note that “this review’s findings reflect a strong theme present across many papers namely that, in order to engage with eco-anxiety, it is just as vital

to provide a space for the expression of emotion as it is to act” (14). The review goes on to quote Pikhala from his climate anxiety report.

Climate anxiety researcher Pikhala [13] and psychoanalyst Randall [32] particularly draw attention to the misguidedness of pushing clients too quickly into action. Pikhala [13] bemoans the oft-adopted model that “the antidote to anxiety is action” (p. 11) and Randall explains that a focus on guiding clients towards ecological lifestyles changes without first addressing the immense losses and attacks on identity those changes will catalyze is doomed to fail [32]. (14)

This review identifies grief as the most central emotional component of this distress, as 14 of the 34 records reviewed pointedly refer to it. In doing so, they seem to validate the definitions of eco-anxiety proposed by mental health practitioner Lertzman (as cited by Dockett [16]) and researcher Albrecht [17], who conceive of eco-anxiety as form of deep mournful melancholia. (14)

This suggests that non-productive, non-action-focused rituals could be a valid approach to processing eco-grief.

I chose to focus on grief, as compared to anxiety, early on, before I even began research. Anxiety in general has been familiar to me my whole life, and from a basic definition combining climate, and anxiety: “a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome” (first result when googled “anxiety definition”), “climate anxiety” didn’t seem to grasp the emotional responses to the certainty of environmental loss and degradation due to climate change that has already happened, is currently happening, and will happen. In my lived experience in this western culture, grief seems far less discussed than anxiety. Even in casual conversation, people tend to talk about feeling anxiety much more than grief. Thus, I chose to focus on grief.

### **Academic Literature Addressing Grief Processes and Rituals**

There have been various works proposing different methods and frameworks for different types of grief, and for different goals for processing grief, and rituals are often used in these models (Bronna and Romanoff, 1998, Castle and Phillips, 2003). Sas and Coman (2016) discuss designing

personal grief rituals, and interviewed 10 therapists with expertise in grief therapy and rituals. Sas, Whittaker, and Zimmerman (2016) “propose a new conceptual framework for rituals of letting go that highlights temporality, visibility, and force,” and “propose novel technologies that better connect the embodied nature of letting go rituals to the process of digital disposal” based on interviews with 10 psychotherapists who use rituals of letting go in their work helping clients process loss. This is specifically relevant to my project because ecological grief is fueled in part by digital media (i.e. documentaries, reports, articles, photographs showing receding glaciers. etc.), and not just the physical events and changing climate that people experience. Also, so much of our lives are now digital.

### **Art, Performance, and the Absurd**

Two art movements that deeply inspired my project were Dada and Fluxus, and understanding them, even at a surface level, is crucial to my project. “Dada was an art movement formed during the First World War in Zurich in negative reaction to the horrors and folly of the war. The art, poetry and performance produced by Dada artists is often satirical and nonsensical in nature... Dada artists felt the war called into question every aspect of a society capable of starting and then prolonging it – including its art.”<sup>2</sup>

Fluxus is an international avant-garde collective or network of artists and composers founded in the 1960s and still continuing today...

Fluxus had no single unifying style. Artists used a range of media and processes adopting a ‘do-it-yourself’ attitude to creative activity, often staging random performances and using whatever materials were at hand to make art. Seeing themselves as an alternative to academic art and music, Fluxus was a democratic form of creativity open to anyone. Collaborations were encouraged between artists and across artforms, and also with the audience or spectator. It valued simplicity and anti-commercialism, with chance and accident playing a big part in the creation of works, and humour also being an important element.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/d/dada>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/fluxus>

In my project, I believe I am engaging with some of the principles of Dadaism, but instead of reacting to WWI, my project is in response to climate change. While the rituals are for processing grief, they are also a form of protest. I am skeptical of any solution to climate change that comes from the same society that created the problem. My project is inspired by the Fluxus movement in the way the rituals are written.

The Fluxus Performance Workbook, the fortieth anniversary edition (link to free pdf in bibliography) has a collection of events or scores, which is what the written format is called, from many different artists.

“Guddling About: An Ecological Performance Practice with Water and Other Nonhuman Collaborators” by Minty Donald is a recent project that most closely aligns with my creation of rituals. It provides scores (similar to scores used to guide Fluxus performances), of performances involving humans and bodies of water, and the theories and essays guiding the art (absurdist, reflective and generative). While Donald’s performance practices were not created with the intention of *processing* climate change emotions (but rather exploring more-than-human performance), the way she approaches the absurd and performance deeply inspired my rituals. The following are quotes from the article. I understand they are long, but Donald explains her project, and its relationship to the absurd in a way deeply inspired my project, and resonated with me, and I cannot do her wording justice. I am italicizing key points for emphasis:

Guddling is closely aligned with a cluster of contemporary art practices that *hinge around playfulness through valorising the absurd or seemingly pointless over the pragmatic, improvisation over planning, and somatic engagement over cognitive comprehension*. ... In both arts and geography practices the ludic is mobilized as a mode of being that infiltrates quotidian routines, or “the worknet” (Schechner 1993, 42), *unsettling or re-framing taken-for-granted behaviors and beliefs*. Playfulness is proposed as means of prioritizing the somatic over the cognitive... (594)

In Guddling, our ludic-but-sincere approach is an acknowledgment of the *absurdity of aspiring to be more than-human*. It is *intended to deflate human-exceptionalist assumptions of supremacy, which place humanity in a position of responsibility, or blame, for the other-than-human environment*. Acknowledgment of this absurdity is often missing

in some more direct, didactic, or moralistic eco-art and activist approaches, where calls to address specific environmental issues can serve to reinstate human-exceptionalist positions of responsibility and blame. (595)

The Guddling performances generally take the form of seemingly simple, naïve, and playful actions, which may appear foolish or futile, but which we undertake as earnest attempts to attend to human-water interrelations. *We perform “silly” actions, which do not appear to conform to the routine, taken-for-granted behavior of human adults within late capitalist systems, with serious intent. . . .* The unassuming style and modest scale of the public manifestations of Guddling can belie the involved negotiations and organization required to realize them. The complexity behind the Guddling actions is not made apparent in the public experience of the work, but is left intentionally understated. The actions are typically accompanied by only scant and allusive contextual or interpretive material, and accounts of our process are not included alongside the public performances. *We hope that those who witness or participate in the Guddling actions might experience them as poetic distillations that hint at complexity and intertwined relations. We hope that audience-participants will surmise, sense, or imagine complexities for themselves through engaging with the actions, rather than being guided by our narration.*

The Guddling scores are open source: we offer them freely to be performed and adapted by any human and other than-human collaborators. The Guddling performance scores owe a significant debt to the Fluxus artists’ event scores. Our Guddling scores adopt the concise style of Fluxus language. Like the Fluxus scores, they are propositions for playful actions that rarely have use value. (596-7)

The first Guddling action that we devised and performed was Water Carry, in collaboration with the Bow River in Calgary, Alberta.

*Water Carry (v.1)*  
*Scoop water from the Bow River with cupped hands. Carry the water in your hands as far as possible from the river. Stop when there is no water left in your hands.*

The absurdist rituals of my project are meant to bring the performer into the present, with curiosity and joy. As mentioned earlier, and to connect with Donald’s work, the goal is not to try and solve any specific environmental issues.

Another influential work is *Ecodeviance: (Soma)tics For the Future Wilderness*, by poet CAConrad. It contains many poems, some of which detail rituals the poet did themselves, and guidelines for the reader to create their own rituals. Many have earth-based elements.

## Methods

The process of this project was over a year long, and nonlinear. Research has been constant, as this field of the emotional impact of climate change is gaining more attention. To aid in my research for this project, I took the course *Ritualization--Religion, Body, and Culture* with Professor Kevin Trainor in the Religion Department (Fall 2021) to learn more about rituals. I made many different outlines, drafts, and mind maps. For over a year I would write down any ritual idea I had, in notebooks, random pieces of paper, and the notes app on my phone. I talked with anyone who would listen about my project.

For the video, in late February or March I asked in a 70-person group chat if anyone would want to be filmed doing absurdist rituals to process ecological grief. A few people responded, and I filmed two of them. I also filmed myself and my partner. To film, I checked out two cameras (Panasonic LUMIX GH5), with mics and tripods, from the film equipment room. In terms of directing, I explained my project to the few people who were interested. I shared the list of rituals, and asked them to choose whichever one they wanted to perform, and made sure to communicate that the rituals could be modified for accessibility, and the exact steps of the ritual were not as important as the vibe. I purposefully did not want to over direct, and tell the performers exactly what to do. I wanted them to have agency in the process, and have the organic emergence be captured. I struggled with SD card formatting, turning on the mics properly, and properly setting up the two cameras I used to shoot each scene, in terms of exposure, white balance, and ISO.

Using UVM's media lab, in Adobe Premiere Pro, I made multiple cuts of the video of the filmed rituals. I recorded Foley sound to add to the video footage. I met with both my advisors many times for feedback and planning. I cried and screamed and doubted everything. I reached out to Dr. Margaret Klein Salamon (of the Climate Awakening Project), looking to share my work, but



did not get a response. I reached out to Good Grief Network, and also didn't get a response. I am planning on reaching out to these people again, as well as Britt Wray, from Gen Dread.

## **Discussion**

### **Personal reflection**

This project has been difficult, and my most favorite project in college. There were the big picture contextual challenges: being one to two years behind my peers, and having fallen through the cracks of the Environmental Studies program; the pandemic, and all the isolation, grief, uncertainty, and anger and frustration that come along with it. There were personal aspects: executive functioning challenges, being a slow processor, not thinking in a linear way, perfectionism, and fear of plagiarism. There were content struggles: wading into the research on climate grief, feeling like every forest fire and extreme weather event in the news was validation for my project, seeing an increase in news about climate anxiety, even on the front page of the *New York Times*. In doing this project, I have had to constantly be thinking about climate grief. It has been tiring and exhausting, and I regularly felt frustrated with my decision to choose such a heavy topic, even though I am passionate about it. I enjoyed having way more artistic freedom to express myself, and believe that I was able to do my ideas justice. As an artist and a person, I wish I had had the opportunity to express my knowledge and ideas in nontraditional ways that showcased my abilities throughout my entire college experience.

### **Limitations, and Further Research**

Going into this project, I knew that it would not be as decolonized as it could be. Since my main motivation for doing this project was to help myself process the grief of being an Environmental Studies student learning about the immeasurable impacts of climate change, I did make a conscious choice to limit the focus of my research. I did not specifically research Indigenous

value systems, the disproportionate effect climate change has on Indigenous peoples, and how different Indigenous cultures process climate change emotions, as I felt it was beyond the scope of this undergraduate project to do with justice and respect. I also chose not to research rituals and grief in organized religions.

I wish I could have spent more time researching grief processing, especially embodied and somatic therapies in the field of psychology and beyond. And I wish I had more time to delve into absurdist philosophy.

In terms of the artistic method, I wish I had filmed more rituals, and more takes. In the future, I would love to focus on a sound/music component, as the emphasis of the video for viewers is visual and for performers, somatic. In addition, I have not added a description of what is happening in the video, for accessibility. As it is art, and based on written rituals, I am unsure if I feel the need to add this accessibility feature. I want to explore more accessibility in art in the future.

Reflecting on the research, I am realizing how all of my research is through the colonized white lens of traditional research, and peer reviewed papers. And to a large extent, this was unavoidable, as it was a requirement for the project.

### **Positionality in engaging with absurdist performance rituals in public**

These absurdist rituals are meant to be performed, ideally with a public aspect. Because of this, I want to highlight how the way I exist in and navigate through the world has influenced my approach to public performance.

I am a small, young, white woman (I identify as bi, and cis-ish, but this doesn't change how I am perceived) who is never perceived as a threat. Despite dealing with depression, anxiety, OCD, and receiving residential care, I am also still perceived as not mentally ill, and not disabled. Even when I had a crying panic attack one night on UVM campus, someone stopped to ask if I was ok, and needed anything, instead of, for example, calling the cops. Because I am a small white woman,

and have nice material things, people don't feel scared or threatened (physically, or toward their values) when I do things that differ from the norm, such as sing, hum or whistle quietly to myself, stop to watch the birds, arrange pinecones on the ground, dance enroute to places, smile to myself, walk barefoot, touch all the leaves on trees and bushes that I pass, or even freak out. Any behavior out of the norm is likely to be seen as "quirky." In addition, my ability to make small talk, and engage with others in a way that makes them believe we are in the same shared reality, gives me even more freedom to be authentic. Also, being in Burlington, Vermont, where having a hippie crunchy streak is normal, and most people are white, only adds to this privilege to act how I desire.

I detail all this to highlight safety when engaging in rituals that have a public and/or performance aspect, and to unfortunately suggest that those engaging in these rituals modify as needed for their own safety.

If you will be around others, prepare responses for if people ask what you are doing. Consider if you might:

- Ignore them?
- Simply say: "I am doing a ritual, and prefer not to be interrupted."
- Pause, and explain to them what you're doing

Any and all of these responses are valid. And will invite you and others to question what is normal behavior in society. If what someone is doing is not hurting anyone or anything (although property should not be treated as if it's as important as life), do you need to say anything?

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### ***Current movements/resources related to Climate Anxiety and Grief***

<https://www.goodgriefnetwork.org/>

- “10-Steps to Personal Resilience & Empowerment in a Chaotic Climate”
- where to join a Good Grief Network group, brings up a page where you can click to be notified about the next offering, also one for adults and one for parents
- “peer-to-peer support group,” processed based
- just emailed them, asking to volunteer/intern/work/collab, and shared my project idea

<https://gendread.substack.com/>

- Blog by Britt Wray, currently working on (yet another!) climate change response book “about mental health in the climate and wider ecological crisis (coming out with Knopf-Random House in 2022).”
- Wray has a PhD in science communication, and is currently a Human and Planetary Health Fellow at Stanford University

<http://boundlessinmotion.org/>

- Dr. Kritee Kanko is a climate scientist and Zen Priest. She founded Boundless in Motion and co-founded the Ecodharma Retreat Center
- the website provides articles, and links to sign up for programs, and a Buddhist perspective on grief processing