

## Beyond the Choir – Bob Hamblett

Climate Change ISN'T *now* contested. Action IS. What stops people engaging in climate action? What spark will ignite them? What are the signposts?

To combat the media (mainstream and online) stranglehold on public discourse, the counter-argument has to be presented effectively and packaged in ways that reach beyond the choir – to those well-meaning, good-hearted people who support charities. But also to the pessimists who have given up trying, the downtrodden, the people in dead-end jobs, the people off-sick long-term, the evicted families in emergency accommodation, the single mothers in a Magna flat.

If they don't get involved they'll spiral down into addiction, ill-health and an early grave. So the message mustn't be of despair. And it must come with a route out – into community. The route out must be made easier, welcoming, accessible.

### **The Message**

Preaching to the choir is OK. But preaching turns everyone else off. The message has to be, indirect, subliminal, subtle, hitting their buttons. A picture is worth so much more than a thousand words. A visual image can suggest a future. When it comes to text, we must become masters of metaphor.

### **From GLOBAL to PLANETARY**

Act Local, think Global was the message in the 1980s. 'Global' is comfortable, re-active. Now we have to think PLANETARY (pro-active). Reason, inadvertently, got us into this climate predicament. But reason isn't the enemy (as the post-truth position might have you believe). We can't stop global warming quickly but we can take action to manage the change.

One way is to regard elements of the biosphere as INFRASTRUCTURE. Government and the biggest corporations understand infrastructure such as a rail network or an Electricity Grid. Re Rivers: The water companies manage infrastructure within watersheds. A River catchment is a hybrid infrastructure with dams, boreholes, pipes, sewers and treatment plants. It is also a place for farms and settlements. This human infrastructure sits on top of the natural infrastructure. To manage society we need to incorporate the wellbeing of natural (hybrid) infrastructures into decision making. Make them healthier.

### **The Medium is the Message**

If the deep message is: 1. We need to manage the Infrastructure, and Your Infrastructure needs You; and 2. that visual messaging is the most effective; and 3. that appealing to the emotions is key... then it is obvious that media that operate visually will be the most effective.

### **Political Dis-connect**

We have been telling ourselves that the upcoming generation really get climate change, and they do. But how does that translate into action? Democracy isn't taught at school. The Constitution is a mystery to most. National politics is seen a knock-about between media personalities. Local politics is mainly about complaining because it is underfunded. People don't see the political process as a way of delivering meaningful change. It was last summer easy for malign forces to focus that anger, and blame poverty on foreigners jumping the queue (how English!)\*\*

### **Signposts**

Building community needs signposts so people know where to join local networks, tackling real problems with real solutions. Networks build resilience in the human component of the hybrid physical infrastructure by creating and strengthening community. For this to work there needs to a flourishing

**communications infrastructure** that can reach the wider, as yet uninvolved population and strengthen existing community structures. CSI River Monitoring is one way in, but admission is tortuous.

**Politics (party/non-party) ...**

Nature Trusts as charities are forbidden from being ‘political.’ But their members have already taken a step into a semi-public arena and may well be activated. Human Health (in mind and body) has plummeted since 2019. Restoring human health via helping the Natural world is becoming a trope. This is called tapping the zeitgeist.

**... Local and Planetary**

Climate Change is no longer just happening to far-off Pacific islands. It’s come home with floods and coastal erosion. If Health of the Planet is made more local by eg Health of the Catchment, then those involved in Health charities might be activated. And everyone is a fan of the NHS. Crucially, it’s two-way traffic: The NHS is a climate issue, a hybrid infrastructure issue, a human/river issue. As are holiday lets and land tenure – you name it. Activism awakes!

**A humble suggestion:** Use anatomy-related images to bring the (external) hybrid infrastructure very close to home, i.e. into the human body.

<u>Infrastructure</u>	<u>Metaphor</u>	<u>Subliminal</u>
The Catchment	Kidney	Cleansing
The Forest	Lungs	Work
The Earth	Digestive System	Love**/Food/Metals
The Wildlife & humans	Heart	Soul** Communication
The Atmosphere	Immune System	Spirit**/Protection/Universal
The Sea	Birth	Rebirth**/Life cycles/Renewal

**Conclusion**

Activist organisations (SAS, Greenpeace, River Lim Action etc) are good at the publicity stunt, and media campaigns. Propaganda works.

Some people might choose to approach activating change by educating the electorate who will then make rational choices at the ballot box. With the imperfections and timeframe of the educational process, and the limitations of democratic structures, I propose an additional route – capturing the narrative, by using all the tricks of the advertising/propaganda trade. We have to appeal beyond the rational to the emotions. Not to do so is to enter the fight with our hands tied behind our backs. I hope the above might focus ways to do it.

\*Compare the sentences of 3 years for arson, attempted murder and attacking policemen with bricks, with those of 4 years for hanging a climate change banner over the M25. Peaceful direct action has been democracy’s cornerstone. No longer alas.

\*\*You don’t have to believe in, approve of, or have any opinion on these commonly held notions in order to use them.