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Climate Anxiety on YouTube: Young people reflect on how to handle the climate crisis

Abstract: The material for this study is four YouTube videos that address climate anxiety published during the 2010s and produced by young people. The videos were analysed from an ecocritical perspective using a discourse theoretical framework and focusing on intermedial aspects. All of the videos inform about climate change and suggest activities that will help to reduce it. In the articulation of the climate crisis, the most prominent elements are heat and that the changes are happening very quickly. All of the videos articulate the fact that “we” caused the crisis. Generally, “we” includes all humanity, but it is sometimes meant to refer more specifically to people in highly developed countries or people interested in maintaining the status quo. The articulations of nature include elements such as justice and tranquillity. In a trope that often appears in the videos, human litter soils this idealised notion of nature. Cultural behaviours relate to overconsumption and, in one case, cities as threatening, monstrous machines. The videos also present alternative cultures and social behaviour in articulations of reaction and action in the face of the threat. Articulations of climate anxiety relate the condition to elements such as hopelessness and the feeling that it is too late. However, the condition can be cured by inducing hope. Even though the producers agree on the gravity of the situation, they do not generally include suggestions for radical change in their work. Instead, the message is that doing anything is better than doing nothing – even if the activity does not have any effect on the climate. Usually, the focus is on individual activities, but some of the videos also focus

on organised collective activities, such as demonstrations or joining a group of like-minded people. Even so, the goal of these proposed activities is often making people with climate anxiety feel better.

Keywords: climate anxiety, YouTube video, climate change communication, medicalisation.

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Climate anxiety became a well-known notion in Sweden in the late 2010s. The number of articles in the Swedish press that mentioned climate anxiety increased during this period, from 119 articles in 2010 to 3,730 in 2019.¹ These articles often had an alarmist tone. *Aftonbladet* (2018) reported on research showing that there was “severe climate anxiety” among young people, and several articles gave advice to parents on how to talk to their children about the “climate threat” (cf. Annebäck 2019).² On Swedish radio, climate anxiety was defined as a “revolving worry about melting ice, floods and forest fires” (*Kropp & själ* 2019). Relying on results from research, journalists reported that it was young people rather than older ones who were suffering from climate anxiety.³ The focus in these articles was, just like in *Aftonbladet*, expert advice on how to talk to children about the climate threat (cf. Bredenberg 2018; Falkirk 2019; Jewert 2019). By scrutinising how some young people themselves “talk” about the climate crisis, this article reverses the perspective.

This article presents an analysis of Swedish YouTube videos produced by young people during the 2010s. The analysis is guided by the following research questions: How do the videos articulate 1) the threat from climate change; 2) nature and culture in relation to this threat; and 3) reactions to and actions taken in response to this threat? The answers to these questions will provide an understanding of how the climate crisis is understood by the producers and possibly how they are reacting to the crisis. Of special interest are strategies that the producers suggest for dealing with the crisis and the effects of using medicalising terminology (such as the term anxiety)⁴ in descriptions of worries concerning the climate crisis. I argue that one of the important ways of understanding the effects of climate change communication (CCC) is investigating how people understand the climate crisis. This is especially notable when people themselves pass their understanding on to others. In line with this, the videos can be understood as *mediations* that is, interpretations of climate change constructed with the help of resources, that are provided in a social context (Säljö 2000, 66–67). According to this sociocultural theory, mediations create knowledge, which means that an analysis of the media used to express these mediations could provide an insight into the producers’ understanding of the crisis and how to handle it. The hypothesis in this study is that an intermedial analysis of the material will give a more complex and nuanced understanding of the media product than a single focus on the language-based modes. Hence, moving and still images and sound will be included in the analysis.

The article will start with an introduction to climate anxiety and CCC in a section that positions the study in two fields of research. Next, there is a description of the methodology and the material that are used. This is followed by the analysis of the three productions; specific attention is paid to the articulations of the threat, to nature and culture, and to reactions and action.

An Introduction to Climate Anxiety and Communicating the Climate Crisis

In a medical discourse, anxiety arises when the body is preparing to face a dangerous situation by mobilising extra energy – people experience this extra energy as anxiety. It is stated in *DSM-5* that “*anxiety* is anticipation of future threat”,⁵ which is different to *fear*, which is “the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat” (American Psychiatric Association 2013, 189).⁶ According to an official Swedish healthcare information site, anxiety is unpleasant and experiencing it is tough, but it is not a dangerous condition (1177 *Vårdguiden* 2020). However, reports in the media treated anxiety as a more serious condition. For instance, a leader of a church group for children told a local newspaper that “[t]oday so many children and young people have climate anxiety and it is not okay that they feel so bad” (Edstam 2019). Notions that are usually linked to contagious diseases appear in some of the articles, for instance a child psychologist who says that “even really young children can be infected by others’ worries” (Falkirk 2019). However, media reports also represented conflicting voices, such as the doctor who gave “a clean bill of health to those with climate anxiety [...] It is a healthy reaction to a sick situation” (Rapp 2019). These kinds of views suggest that climate anxiety can be something positive that can lead to change, because people become active and work towards change. They follow the logic that “the best way of reducing worry is [...] to do something” (Nilsson, Soxbo, and Sundh 2019, 12). In the analysis of the videos “to do something” will stand out as a prominent theme – activity is the cure for worries and anxiety caused by knowledge about the climate crisis.

CCC is a field of study that has developed during the last two decades (for overviews, see Moser 2010; Chadwick 2017). CCC is sometimes understood as communication that aims to change individual behaviours (cf. Brenthel 2016, 22). However, according to Moser (2010), the purpose of CCC should be more far-reaching than this. Apart from providing information about climate change, CCC should strive to achieve “social engagement and action” and to change social norms and cultural values (ibid. 38). Scholars have noted that CCC is difficult because climate change is “invisible, remote, abstract, global, complex, uncertain, and people see very little opportunity to affect it directly or meaningfully” (ibid. 43). How the messages are designed is also crucial; Moser stresses the importance of considering non-verbal, non-textual modes to keep the audience’s attention. The person(s) who deliver the message need to be trusted by the audience – they need to establish “the credibility of the information conveyed. Messengers give “‘seals of approval’ to information that an audience might otherwise have a hard time assessing as ‘right’ or ‘trustworthy’” (ibid). This study aims to provide insight into the producers’ understanding of the climate crisis and how it should be handled. In line with the work of the first wave of ecocritics, it explores what these videos can tell us about conceptions of a “natural world” and the current

climate crisis (Hiltner 2015, 1). The analysis will observe how the producers put nature, as a concept, to work in the videos.

Methodologies

In the study, I present different ways of articulating things like the climate crisis, nature, culture, etc. According to discourse theory (DT), an articulation is a temporarily established understanding about the world or a particular aspect of it (cf. Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). Articulations build on signs, or *elements*, in DT terminology, that in themselves are empty and without meaning. Signs achieve meaning contextually through their relations to other signs in a network – this is a *chain of equivalence* (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 110). All articulations are temporary establishments of meaning that circle around a *nodal point*, a “privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered” (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 26; see also Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 112). Nodal points are also called *floating signifiers* when they are especially open to different ascriptions of meaning (ibid. 28). Meanings are not fixed and articulations are constantly challenged and questioned. The examples of different representations of climate anxiety given above are examples of discourses, a professional medical and a mass cultural, that are competing within the domain of health. .

Analysing the videos from an intermedial perspective acknowledges the importance of each of the different *basic media*, i.e. images, auditory and written texts, and sounds, that are combined and integrated in the *qualified media*,⁷ the YouTube videos (terminology taken from Elleström 2010, 28). Each of the basic media could be interpreted in respect of their single semiotic modality (ibid. 36), and their content gives a new meaning to the qualified media because it is based on a synergetic mix of the included media. This means, in line with Elleström, that each medium has different capacities for creating meaning through its unique combination of modalities (Sternudd 2019, 144 with ref. to Elleström 2010, 29). The term *media product* refers to the videos (Elleström 2014, 86) and I use *producers*, to address the person(s) who has created them.

The Material

At the beginning of May 2019, I searched YouTube for videos in which the word *klimatångest* (climate anxiety) appeared in the presentation of the video.⁸ The search resulted in 44 hits.⁹ Given the attention bestowed upon climate anxiety by the mass media, the results seem low.¹⁰ One of the problems with the search method is that it only picked up textual occurrences. Because of this, the method excludes visual or verbal textual occurrences within the videos. The oldest video was from 2009 and there was an increase in the number

of videos made during the 2010s.¹¹ The criteria for a video being included in the study were that it had to be produced by young non-professional YouTube users, including vloggers and YouTubers ($n = 18$), by professional media ($n = 13$), by political organisations and NGOs ($n = 7$), or by climate change deniers ($n = 3$). Vloggers, YouTubers and professional media companies produced most of the videos. The study includes videos produced by young people who use several basic media in their videos (but excludes videos that only use the spoken word). As young vloggers and YouTubers produce the material, it reflects views of people that the media identify as victims of climate anxiety – young people.

Four videos corresponded with the criteria noted above:

- *Are You Curious Green?* (hereafter *Are You Curious*): 29:48 minutes long and produced by Nyfiken Film (Curious Film) (2010)
- *CLIMATE ANXIETY – 3 Lifestyle Choices that Reduce Your Effect on the Climate (Lifestyle Choices)*: 11:17 minutes long and produced by Therese Zätterqvist (2017)
- *Climate Control Part 3 (Climate Control)*: 10:12 minutes long and produced by Martina Fasen (2019)
- *CLIMATE ANXIETY: HOW TO CURE IT! (How to Cure It)*: 6:30 minutes long and produced by Sara Hallgren, Ångestkanalen (2019a).¹²

The videos represent a variety of styles. *Climate Control*, *How to Cure It* and *Lifestyle Choices* resemble material published on social media. In contrast to these, *Are You Curious* is more like a feature film.¹³ In the following section, the videos are separated into two groups (representing two qualified media styles): social media and film media. All of the videos have an educational approach in common; they want to educate, inform and induce activities. They all give advice on how to handle the climate crisis, in terms of both the climate and the personal anxiety.

Climate Control is the final episode in a series of three. In this episode, Fasen digs deep into the question of “why we feel climate anxiety” (Fasen 2019). She blends the social media genre with that of a TV feature, and includes interviews with an expert and with “people on the street”. Hallgren is a young Swedish woman who has created the YouTube channel Ångestkanalen (Anxiety Channel); she publishes videos on subjects related to her own mental distress (Ångestkanalen 2019b). Zätterqvist is a YouTuber who publishes vlogs on a variety of subjects, from how to grow avocados to testing products such as dried insects. *Lifestyle Choices* is one of her many videos that address environmental and climate-related issues. Zätterqvist’s channel has over 21,000 subscribers (Zätterqvist 2020).¹⁴

Are You Curious was made by students who participated in the course called “Climate and Change – using film as a tool” at Färnebo folk high school (ABFs film- & medienätverk 2011).¹⁵ Jens Holmberg, Gabriel Liljenström, Nadia Rask and Calle Wahlgren produced the video. The plot circles around the protagonist, Arvid, and his sister, who suffers from climate anxiety. As in a Bildungsroman, Arvid sets out on a mission to cure her. During

his travels, he meets different people who may be able to help him: a peace researcher, an activist, an artist and a priest.¹⁶ Now and then, an oracle appears on screens that Arvid passes, and the oracle gives him an overarching and philosophical perspective on climate change.¹⁷

The Analysis

The analysis includes content analysis (Rose 2012, 81–104; Lutz and Collins 1993) that I conducted with the help of NVivo, software for qualitative data analysis. In the content analysis, significant elements from the videos were coded using tags. Each tag includes elements that relate to a specific *theme* (or nodal points, in DT terms), for instance a sequence with a smoking chimney is coded with the tag #climate (because it signifies the emission of greenhouse gases), but also with #culture (because it is part of a socioeconomic activity). These themes are tentative floating signifiers that were organised in three sets, corresponding to orders of discourse and to the research questions: *The threat*, which includes #climate and #threat; *Nature and culture*, which, as well as the words nature and culture, also includes #power; and *Reactions and action*, which includes #sick, #resistance and #alternative. All of the videos were also analysed through a close reading informed by established analytical tools used for film and other visual arts (e.g. in; Arnheim 1974; Sonesson 1989; Marner 1999, 2009; Rose 2012; Bordwell and Thompson 2013).

* * *

The style and aesthetics in the social media videos differ from those used in the more traditional set-up of *Are You Curious*. To achieve their common educational intention, they all use different techniques to get and keep the viewer's attention and to package their message in an attractive format. The producers achieve this in different ways depending on the particular traits and conventions of the media they are working in.

The producers of the social media videos participate in the videos as hosts who are speaking directly to the viewer. Fasen and Hallgren combine these scenes with other material, while Zätterqvist appears in front of the camera throughout her video. All of them use a set of strategies to address the viewer in a way that resembles a conversation with a friend. These strategies include treating the viewer in a personal and informal way and appearing to be equal to the viewer. These features are most prominent in *Lifestyle Choices*; throughout the video, Zätterqvist is framed in a medium shot (see fig. 1),¹⁸ which resembles the usual distance and angle between people having a conversation AFK.¹⁹ The conversational character is also visually strengthened by the producer breaking the fourth wall by looking straight into the camera or sometimes by pointing out of the frame.²⁰ Hallgren also uses this technique when she urges the viewer to “wash less” or to “make sure that plastic is recycled”. The conversational character is also strengthened through textual means, which often have a casual, improvised style.

The emphasis on the personal take on the subject is, as in other social media products, a quality that seems to reduce the distance between the viewer and the producer. This strategy can make the producer more relatable for the viewer. One advantage of this non-elitist approach is that carrying out the producer's advice seems manageable. The commonplace atmosphere of the social media videos strengthens this aspect. Creating such an atmosphere is a clear goal in *How to Cure It*, and this can be seen, for example, in its subtitle: "Five environmentally friendly everyday tips". Most of the tips that the producers suggest are quite easy to carry out. The producers also package their serious messages in a light, entertaining style (see fig. 2). For instance, when Hallgren and Fasen illustrate their advice (e.g. for recycling) they speed up the tempo, which becomes reminiscent of the tempo of silent movies, and add ragtime music. Movements then look jerky and possibly amusing. The entertaining character is emphasised by Fasen when she chooses to categorise *Climate Control* as a comedy on its homepage (Fasen 2019). In *Are You Curious*, narrative and visual filmic means are used to capture the viewers' attention. The story follows the classic dramatic structure, with an introduction of the conflict, intensification, a turning point and a solution. In *Are You Curious*, Arvid guides the audience; his non-diegetic voice introduces the story, comments on it and drives it forward. As in Fasen's video, experts present their view on how to handle the climate crisis.

So far, the analysis has shown how resources available on YouTube set the stage for the delivery of the message: fundamental to this is constructing something resembling a personal conversation with the viewer by using elements such as closeness, equality and everydayness. This reflects Moser's emphasis on the credibility of the messenger. Changes that people plan to make to their lives and other types of effort are downplayed by being

Figure 1. Therese Zätterqvist in *Lifestyle Choices*.
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Figure 2. Martina Fasen delivering homemaker's tips.
From *Climate Control*.
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© Fasen 2019.

presented as easy to do and funny. In the film media, different, dramatic means are used to frame the message.

The producers base their educational messages on different sources. In line with Elleström's (2018) work, the grounds for the producers' approach to the problem and its solution emerge from the results of scientific research somewhere down the line. All of the videos refer to knowledge that has emerged from different experts in the field of climate change. Knowledge is important for climate control, judging from the opening credits in Fasen's video. She explains that her video will show how easy it is for a person to take control over their own effect on the climate. This statement is spoken while there is footage of a bookshelf, and when Fasen utters the word "control", an index finger appears and picks out one volume. Through this action, an intermedial chain of equivalence that connects knowledge with control (and activity) is constructed. With this montage, Fasen establishes a relation between control and books, which in the context relates to knowledge. In her video, Fasen uses a municipal climate adviser as an expert. During the interview, this adviser gives tips on what actions should be taken. No experts appear in *How to Cure It*, but Hallgren gives an "information reference" to the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC – in Swedish, Naturskyddsföreningen) on the video's homepage (Ångestkanalen 2019). The SSNC presents a Green Guide on its website with tips on how to be climate smart (Naturskyddsföreningen 2020). These tips have clearly influenced Hallgren. Zätterqvist refers directly to scientific findings: Wynes and Nicholas's article "The climate mitigation gap" (2017). In all of the sources used in the social media videos, the focus is on the behaviour of the individual. The different approach in *Are You Curious* leads to a different choice of experts. Compared to the social media videos, they represent different takes on the changes needed. Even though natural science evidence serves as a background to the experts' analysis and advice in *Are You Curious* (exemplified by melting glaciers and the expanding of deserts), their focus is on social and economic change. Their expertise covers various fields of knowledge: organisational consultancy, civil engineering, pedagogy and sociology; and activist, artistic and religious perspectives. The different knowledge that these sources represent has an effect on the articulations in the videos.

Articulating the Threat

Explicit representations of the threat posed by climate change are rare in the material. It is often referred to implicitly as a "big problem" (*Climate Control*) or "a complex question" (*Lifestyle Choices*). The people interviewed in *Climate Control* often refer to the media when they answer questions about the climate crisis. One elderly man says that he thinks that it is worse than in the films that have been [shown] about environmental destruction, and a teenage girl refers to "these video clips". When producers or interviewees try to clarify the

situation, they often use the word *heat* as a significant element. In *Climate Control*, one of the people interviewed mentions the hot, dry summer in Sweden in 2018. Heat is also a subject in *Are You Curious*. Arvid's sister often appears in the video as a non-diegetic voice and her utterances are coloured by panic. Her lines are short sentences or single words, uttered in a staccato. In a sequence in which Arvid is running around in a traffic junction, his sister says "Ocean! It will become warmer and warmer! The glaciers will melt!" In this scene, the producers construct an intermedial equivalence chain using audial and visual means: Arvid's bodily activity of running echoes the panic in his sister's utterances; global warming is connected to the footage of the junction and the traffic. Another example is a scene from *How to Cure It* in which Hallgren is explaining the importance of recycling. She says that if we are not going to reuse material, we have to dig deep into the ground to find new material. If we do this, we will release dangerous gases that will float up into the sky and create a thick layer of ozone. The sunbeams that get through this layer will bounce through the other layers, back and forth, and will heat up the planet. In the end, it will become a piece of coal, she explains. The *haste* with which the climate changes are happening is another worrying aspect that is emphasised in *Climate Control* and *Are You Curious*. "It is going downhill fast now", one of the people interviewed in *Climate Control* says. The producers of *Are You Curious* visually represent the urgency through Arvid's constant running throughout the video and his sister saying while he is doing this that there is "no time left".

Producers always relate the articulation of what *causes* the threat to human activity – more specifically to *our* activity. This articulation is established through statements such as we "are affecting the" climate, our way of life "is destroying our [...] environment" and we continue to live in this way because we are ignorant – and a discourse of a collective guilt is established. Judging from the identity of the people who make these statements, the producers and those interviewed, "we" are white people living in a highly developed country. In *Are You Curious*, the producers elaborate this further: the problematic lifestyle is connected to the "Western world" and is not only "ecologically unsustainable" but also "unethical". The oracle describes how humankind trusts the authorities and is hypnotised to believe that everything is fine, but we "are walking up against a steep slope and we will fall down". The priest states, using a Christian parable, that we, like Adam, have turned away from God and instead want to be God ourselves: "When we put ourselves outside our own life and want to rule it, then I think we are going wrong." She exemplifies this by referring to our mistaken belief in constant growth. The activist makes a different and a more individualised critical analysis of the threat. He grounds his reasoning on his view that many people are not listening to their inner voice, which is telling them that something is wrong: "People work too much, consume too much – that's the whole problem."

In this analysis so far, we have seen how the threat is articulated by relating it to elements such as heat and speed. When the causes of the threat are articulated in the videos, the results

show both consensus and different interpretations. They all agree that “we” are responsible for the threat, but when it comes to articulating who “we” are, there are differences between the social media videos and the film media video. The social media videos do not delimit who “we” are, but “we” implicitly relates to white people in highly developed countries yet explicitly includes all of humanity. The producers of *Are You Curious* identify that the causes arise from a group with an interest in maintaining the status quo for economic reasons. However, when it comes to who needs to change, this often includes all of *us*.

What will happen if we do not change? The social media videos do not answer this, apart from in Hallgren’s metaphor, mentioned above. However, *Are You Curious* gives us an idea of what will happen. In the video, the peace researcher, in addition to noting the consequences of global warming, such as the melting of the glaciers and so on, presents a global class perspective on the climate crisis. He concludes that the “climate change strikes those that are poorest worst” and that it will increase social conflicts, to which the privileged groups will react by using the police and military to keep the poor people away when they demand their rights. A montage illustrates his reasoning: shots of chimneys and smoke, followed by a military tank and a demonstration (see figs. 3–5). The narrative predicts war and chaos. The oracle, who does not have a class perspective, predicts that not “everybody will make it, but probably enough so mankind will survive – like so many times history”.

Figures 3–5. Stills from a montage in *Are You Curious*.

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Articulating Nature and Culture

In a final scene in *How to Cure It*, Hallgren displays the tips she has given as visual texts in footage of litter lying on the ground (see figs. 6–9). The footage consists more specifically of a shot in which the camera pans from an asphalt car park, goes over a street and ends in a ditch. The visual content does not illustrate the textual content of the video. The text “use less fabric conditioner” is written over the image of a cigarette butt, and the sequence ends by showing lots of litter in a ditch. *How to Cure It* also articulates the climate crisis using elements that relate to consumption and waste. Waste becomes not only a concrete environmental problem but also a nodal point in a climate crisis discourse about how we mistreat the world and the climate. Hence, recycling and picking up litter are easy ways to help resolve this. This is in line with how aesthetic and formal values are markers, elements of the articulations of the themes in the

Figures 6–9. From upper left:

1. Sort out (separate) household waste: Extracts & saves raw material & energy. 2. Wash less: Saves energy & money. 3. Do not use conditioner: Saves money/emissions of hormone-disturbing chemicals/elasticity of the clothes. 4. Put the lid on [the pot]: Saves energy & money. Stills from a montage from *How to Cure It*.

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© Hallgren 2019.

analysis. An example of this is how the producers often use the trope of climate change being connected with litter, that is, with something untidy and ugly. These equivalence chains mean that the solution also becomes quite easy – throw litter in the dustbin.

Nature is seldom explicitly addressed in the material, but the producers articulate it through other elements, such as a pot plant, which appears in one of Fasen's climate-smart tips: plant a flower. She explains that this "might seem meaningless [...]. However, the fact is that the nature of the earth does not consist of just one big plant– many plants make a difference."

In *Are You Curious*, animals, as non-human beings, are often carriers of elements related to nature. They become a contrasting culture. One example of this is how birds represent nature in a general way, as they become a contrasted living element. However, they also relate to abstract notions such as freedom, a nodal point in a political and/or societal domain.²¹ For instance, using a double exposure technique, seagulls appear on top of footage of climate protests at the end of the video. A more subtle example is the sequence in which Arvid presents his sister's climate anxiety. The scene opens with a shot of a turtle in a terrarium, and as Arvid tells the story, the camera pans over the terrarium and continues to where his sister is sitting in a corner with an open book on her lap (see figs 10–12).²² In this sequence, the producers establish a connection between the turtle, that is, nature, and the sister, who through this connection becomes a discursive element who is closer to nature than the other characters in the video.²³

In a programmatic scene in *Are You Curious*, nature, justice and aesthetics are interweaved in an articulation that

Figure 10–12. The turtle and the sister.
Stills from a montage in *Are You Curious*.
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includes the floating signifiers' art and nature. The artist explains: "In my art I want to create a more just world [...] a better world and a greener world." After this there is a sequence shot inside a greenhouse, with Arvid slowly walking around. In this scene, the producers join several basic media to create an intermedial representation of nature. For instance, they change the electronic music, which had dominated the soundscape up to this point, to a steady throbbing beat, with music played on a flute that creates a floating feel to the scene. In case the viewers are not getting the message, the artist's voice guides them, talking about the calmness and how the greenness affects people. In this sequence, nature is articulated as a calm and harmonious place. This articulation includes the colour green, which relates to nature and in this scene also to other elements: equality, rightfulness and something peaceful.

The producers of *Are You Curious* place the city, that made Arvid's sister sick, in opposition to nature. How that happened is not explained verbally, but how the city is visually constructed reveals some of its characteristics (see fig. 13–15). One important element is the city's architecture and urban design, which are the backdrop to Arvid's journey. The images of the city often depict a deserted place with no or few inhabitants. It is not designed for people to inhabit but for other purposes. The depictions of architecture often consist of endless, monotonous facades or of high buildings viewed from below. Building sites are a reoccurring image, which gives the impression that the city is expanding (something that in this context is worrying). However, the city also includes oppositional elements in the form of alternative sociocultural expressions. The producers use different depictions of architecture to illustrate their contradictory position. The experts live in buildings dating from the early

Figure 13–15. Image of the threatening city.

Stills from *Are You Curious*.

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20th century that differ in terms of style and building material from the rest of the buildings in the infectious city. The wooden house surrounded by streets, where the artist lives, is an example that captures this dichotomy.

Zätterqvist addresses cultural behaviour and its effect on the climate in a more concrete way. In her video, raspberry-liquorice death-skull sweets illustrate the 11 tonnes of CO₂ emissions produced by each Swede every year (based on Wynes and Nicholas 2017). Each skull represents one tonne. Through this transformation, from scientific knowledge about the effect of CO₂ emissions to sweets, Zätterqvist captures the conflict that is involved in the emission of greenhouse gases in highly developed countries. Even if people are aware of and acknowledge the climate crisis, the consequences of reducing a person's emissions include forsaking comfort and enjoyment. The CO₂ emissions articulated as death-skull sweets relate them to something that is lethal but also desirable. Zätterqvist accentuates this opposition when she introduces the death-skull sweet as a CO₂ symbol: she holds up a sweet close to the camera and then licks it in a sensual way (see figs. 16 and 17). "I wish I could eat it", she says. "However, I have already taken a bite and I should not eat any more" Through this act, the emission of CO₂ is related to overconsumption in general, implying that some things that people consume are not good for them.

In this section, we have seen that nature is mostly absent and the focus is on human behaviour and cultural expression. However, sometimes nature-related elements do appear, for instance when the threats relate to elements like oceans and deserts. In *How to Cure It*, the causes of climate change are related to throwing litter into a natural environment. By using this trope, which

Figure 16–18. Zätterqvist with death skull cadines as tonnes of CO₂ emission. Stills from *Lifestyle Choices*.

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© Zätterqvist 2017.

also appears in *Climate Control*, the solution becomes something that is easy for individuals to do – throw rubbish in the dustbin. In relation to this articulation, global warming becomes something that we, figuratively speaking, need to tidy up. There is a different articulation of culture in *Are You Curious*: on one hand, the city is threatening and unhuman, and on the other, alternative cultures resist the dominance of the city. In *Lifestyle Choices*, Zätterqvist focuses on cultural behaviour. Through the transmediation of CO₂ emissions to death-skull sweets, she manages to capture their effect on the climate as well as their tempting character – implying the problem with instant satisfaction and its lethal effect in the end (see fig. 18).

Articulating Reactions and Action

Climate anxiety is presented as the central issue in the social media videos. It is visually “shouted” using capital letters in the titles of Hallgren’s and Zätterqvist’s videos and in one of the questions in Fasen’s interviews. Despite this, climate anxiety is not articulated much in the videos, although they do give several examples of reactions to the threat from climate change. In *Climate Control*, some of those interviewed say that they do not pay very much attention to it, while others express feelings such as anger, worry, not feeling well and being upset. However, nobody identifies their reaction as anxiety. In *Climate Control*, the climate adviser says that people get anxious because they do not know how to act and/or feel that whatever they do, it does not have an effect. Hopelessness is also an element related to climate anxiety in *Are You Curious*. Arvid explains that the reason for his sister’s climate anxiety is lost hope, because she thinks it is too late to act. A fictional radio news broadcast in *Are You Curious* reports on “the outbreak of the [climate anxiety] epidemic in the country”, something that worries the Ministry of the Environment. Researchers and those working in healthcare are puzzled because so many have become sick “and the reason is still unknown”. As an answer to this, the sister turns up, saying “It is too late.”

In *Are You Curious*, the producers also use intermedial means to represent climate anxiety. In a scene that follows Arvid in the greenhouse, he seems affected by the condition. At the beginning of the scene, Arvid is standing on an empty car park, with his eyes closed. He screams. “No, no, no [...] this is what happens when humankind decides [...] asphalt, concrete and cars everywhere.” He starts running around in the car park, accompanied by sounds from sirens and a helicopter that is hovering above him. He falls to his knees and then gets up and starts running away. Again, his sister appears, saying “One, two, three, four, five degrees warmer [...] it is too late” (see fig. 17–19).

Although the concept that it is too late to do anything appears frequently in the material, all of the producers are eager to give hope. This is often related to doing *something*. As Zätterqvist puts it: “If you don’t do anything and just walk around with a climate worry – then it will stay.” Two ways of addressing climate anxiety are suggested: change your

behaviour, which often boils down to changing particular activities, or take action with the aim of changing political and economic systems. These alternatives represent, respectively, an individualistic and a collectivistic approach to the crisis.

When the social media videos suggest behavioural changes, they focus on things that are *easy* to do. Both *Climate Control* and *Lifestyle Choices* emphasise the importance of changing things little by little. Proposed activities and changes always relate to individuals. They can be very carefully explained, like in *Lifestyle Choices*, where it is shown how each tip reduces greenhouse gas emissions and illustrated that being a vegetarian reduces your carbon dioxide emissions by 0.8 tonnes per year. The tips vary and include significant lifestyle changes, such as becoming a vegetarian, and those that are easier to carry out, such as using “small amounts of washing-up liquid” and “save water” (*How to Cure It*). Advice about travel is common: work from home and spend your holiday at home or travel by train. Probably the easiest action that is suggested is cutting down on your transatlantic flights, saving 2.4 tonnes every time (*Lifestyle Choices*).²⁴ However, Zätterqvist also acknowledges

that it can be hard to change habits and behaviour. She emphasises this in what seems to be a debriefing section. She says that she does not want to give the impression that changing one’s lifestyle is an easy thing; work and children must be taken care of. After this, she activates the “step-by-step” discourse discussed above. Contrary to this, the activist in *Are You Curious* advocates changes that are more radical. People should live simply, get together, record some music and spend time with their family. On a more general level, the activist’s message is that humankind must think differently and start to imagine that another world is possible. The

Figure 19–21. Stills from the panic scene in *Are You Curious*.

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oracle stresses the importance of changing humankind's understanding of what economic principles it is possible to adopt, and the priest's hope lies in people of Arvid's age, who are conscious and creative. As Arvid puts it, maybe it is up to ordinary people like him and his sister. This theme also appears in *Climate Control*. Fasen states that to make a difference we must start with ourselves: we live in this world, so we are the ones who must change it.

Change must come from people, not from the established political system, according to the peace researcher in *Are You Curious*: resistance and change come from popular movements. He exemplifies this by citing "ordinary people" who make their voices heard through civil disobedience, strikes and so forth. Both *Climate Control* and *Are You Curious* advocate collective solutions to climate anxiety, but what this means differs between the videos. In *Climate Control*, the organisation has modest goals. The climate adviser suggests that people with climate anxiety should try to find like-minded people that they can share tips with. In a similar way, the priest in *Are You Curious* advises Arvid's sister to "join a group that share the same hope and start something". More elaborated articulations of organisations are also presented in *Are You Curious*: a radio news correspondent reports: "Millions of people are gathering just now in order to protest against the unsustainable world order [...] voices are raised to demand that government takes the situation seriously." The news ends with the words "hope still exists", and flying birds appear on the screen.

Giving the viewers some hope is important to the producers of *Are You Curious*. At the end of the video, the artist states that "everybody can have influence, everybody is important", and the oracle also delivers a hopeful message: "If more people are thinking in a special way, the thought will spread." In the last scene of *Are You Curious*, Arvid and his sister participate in a demonstration. Arvid explains that his sister has become curious about life again: "I think this is how it begins [...] the change." *Are You Curious* gives us some suggestions about what the change may mean. Elements that are important for this articulation are a *simpler life*, where people are *not lonely*, *liberation* from a commodity culture and being productive ("work and consume less"). By achieving these goals, people can become *creative* (e.g. "record some music"). An example of visual and audial elements in this articulation that allude to a simple life is the peace researcher making a fire in his tiled stove; the crackling noise of the fire is in the background. To stress that fire is a good thing, the producers use colour footage of the fire (even though a fire has a negative greenhouse effect). Articulations of reaction and action also use formal means and aesthetic judgements, as noted in the previous sections. Aesthetic values are also prominent in verbal utterances in *Are You Curious*. In front of a road junction, the guide exclaims: "It is so UGLY! We need something beautiful." This articulation is related to a critique of technical change and a positive view of a more human past.

In this last section, I have analysed the producers' way of articulating how people react to the threat from climate change and how they act in response to it. This analysis shows

that climate anxiety is mostly unarticulated in the social media videos, while the producers of *Are You Curious* elaborate it more. In *Climate Control*, people seem to have problems personally relating to the concept and it is easier for them to project climate anxiety onto others. *Hopelessness* and *hope* become important elements that define climate anxiety and the solution to it. An important element in the chain of equivalence that articulates climate anxiety is the idea that it is *too late*. Because people are facing a catastrophic future, people have lost hope. Hence, inducing hope is a prominent theme in all of the videos, and in what seems to be an attempt to do this, the producers present the solution as something that is easy to do. This is most prominent in the social media videos. Generally, though, the importance of doing something overshadows the effect of the action. If the tips are considered to be difficult by the viewer, the advice is to take it slowly, “step by step”. It is important to note in relation to this that the suggested solution to both the climate anxiety and the grounds for it, climate change, tend to be the same. In *Lifestyle Choices*, the importance of doing something is explicitly related to mental distress. The worry then becomes the major problem. One interesting aspect of the material is how aesthetic and formal values are markers, elements of the articulations of the themes in the analysis. An example of this is how the producers often use a trope that connects climate change with litter, that is, with something untidy and ugly. The solution is quite easy when these equivalence chains are used – throw litter in the dustbin.

Not all advice concerning treating climate anxiety/dealing with climate change has a focus on individual activities even if this type of advice dominates. Both *Are You Curious* and *Climate Control* give advice that includes collective activities. The cure for Arvid’s sister is organising herself, which is visualised by footage of her and Arvid participating in a demonstration. Judging by the news report on these kinds of manifestations, their demands were directed at the government, which is interesting in relation to the dominant discourse in the video: politicians’ incompetence regarding solving the problem. Nevertheless, the explicit result of the sister’s participation in the demonstration is that she becomes happy again. The tip regarding organisation that the municipal adviser gives in *Climate Control* is not as radical: join a group of like-minded people and share tips. I should also mention suggestions relating to collective/social change and lifestyle changes. These lifestyle changes include clear tips on emission reduction in *Lifestyle Choices* and more thorough but not so clear tips, such as the changes suggested by the activist in *Are You Curious*: “get together”, “make some music” and so forth.

Conclusion

In this section, I return to the subjects and themes that formed the point of departure of this study. I begin with the question: What has the analysis of the videos told us about the producers' understanding of the crisis? The videos articulate the climate crisis as something that is related to global warming and the emissions of greenhouse gases. Glaciers melting and the rising temperature of the oceans are noted in the videos as examples of the crisis. The climate crisis is related to human activities in all of the videos, but in different ways. Implicit and explicit issues related to lifestyle are the most prominent ones, but one video emphasises economic and social questions. With regard to the latter, those who are to blame for the climate crisis are a privileged elite that prosper because of the status quo. The different articulations in the videos of what lies behind the climate crisis seem to be related to the sources of knowledge that the producers had. The three social media videos use different types of knowledge to *Are you Curious*, the video that approaches the crisis with a broader narrative like that used in a standard film. They rely on sources that focus on reducing the individual's effects on the climate and promote activities such as recycling your waste and cycling instead of using your car. *Are you Curious* uses knowledge from fields such as sociology, religion and art. In this video, the suggested solution is mobilising collectively to create change. Another aspect of the conceptions of the crisis, seen in all of the videos, is urgency – because the problems are increasing very fast, which calls for immediate action. In addition, all of the videos show a determination to do something about the crisis. However, with climate anxiety as a perspective, the activities are more often about curing people's feelings rather than about affecting the climate.

The climate crisis is a nodal point around which the other elements or clusters of elements are organised. Two of these clusters are nature and culture. Even though nature often only appears in the margins and in the background in the videos (e.g. the above-mentioned glaciers and oceans), it does have a central position in the articulations of the climate crisis. Nature for instance appears as something that is covered with litter or as a backdrop for trapped animals. Nature is also constituted as harmonic and peaceful, the opposite to culture, which relates to elements like inhumanity and destruction. This division between nature and culture allows an opening for an anthropocentric positioning of humankind. Nature becomes something that is different to men and women: an Eden-like world that is being destroyed by them.

All of the videos present climate anxiety as an issue. However, with one exception (*Are you Curious*), none of them focus on the condition as a central subject. When a video mentions climate anxiety, it is related to elements like hopelessness and the idea that it is too late to take action. Even so, these concepts do not influence the presentations of the activities promoted in the videos. The presentations of the tips often emphasise elements

such as the idea that they are easy to do and are fun. The findings of my analysis is an example of how the medicalisation of individuals' inner experiences can be counterproductive. When the focus is on the well-being of individuals, the suggested activities are such that can make individuals feel better. The element of anxiety, with its references to psychology and medicine, can therefore also refer to something curable – that make somebody feel better.

Through the intermedial analysis, several important aspects of the videos are revealed. For instance, the elements related to the city, which functions as a metaphor for a destructive culture, are understood in these videos as forming a socioeconomic system. Footage of a monotone architecture with visually overwhelming buildings becomes visual moments in a critical articulation of today's (Western) society. Another example of the benefit of the intermedial perspective is how aesthetic aspects of the climate crisis are an important element in the articulations. For example, a city with an "ugly" cityscape and transportation system, and litter covering a ditch become elements in constructing the climate crisis and its effects.

In relation to research within CCC, this study shows the importance of choosing adequate notions for feelings and emotions that can emerge from knowledge about the climate crisis. A medicalising terminology can put the focus on individual recovery instead of on activities that will result in change. This is not a criticism of the producers of the videos, of course; they are influenced by individualising discourses and rely on sources (media and experts) that articulate how to work towards change within these discourses. The anthropocentric perspective in the videos can also be seen as a discourse that makes a division between humankind and nature on the one hand and the individual who feels separated from the rest of society on the other.

Final Remarks

Even though the results from this study cannot be generalised, because of the limited material used, some of the findings and problems could form starting points for studies with broader scopes. In this section, I will discuss some aspects that have been brought up in the analysis.

Who are "we"? In line with Westervelt (2019), I argue that the definition of "we" is important in representations of the climate crisis and in CCC. This is a crucial aspect for understanding the discourses used in the material. The question of who we are relates to the question of who is interpellated (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 41) by the videos. Judging from the people who make the call, the interpellated "we" are part of a privileged segment in a global perspective. If we consider the activities and lifestyle changes that the producers suggest, the interpellated belong to middle-class and upper-class groups. They can work and consume less and can deny themselves a transatlantic flight now and then. An intersectional look at the videos shows that although people of different ages are quite well

represented in the material (very much so regarding those interviewed in *Climate Control*), people of colour, those with disabilities and those from poor economic circumstances are not addressed. This seems fair, as people from these groups are generally not significant contributors to the climate crisis. However, this exclusion downplays the socioeconomic factors at play. This also has an effect on the suggested solutions to the crisis (cf. Leonard 2013; Moore and Rees, 2013; Maniates 2013, 262). If the advice only includes suggesting how individuals can reduce their negative impact on the climate, this is problematic, as the solution must include changes in production, transportation and farming on a global level (cf. Starke *et al.* 2013).

Several studies show that women are generally more concerned about the climate crisis than men are (i.e. Ojala 2007; 2015; Forchtner and Kølvråa 2015; Krangle *et al.* 2019; Wahlström *et al.* 2019, 9–19). The material used in this study reflects this gender imbalance: the producers of three of the videos are women, and in the fourth, the person who is suffering from climate anxiety is a young woman. Another gendered marker is that the brother in *Are You Curious* is a character with a name, while his sister is only referred to as the sister. Hence, she becomes a symbolic character, similar to the experts in the video, who also have a representative role in the narrative. It is also notable that the two characters who are the most forward looking and who predict what will happen are both men, while the women make comments on the present situation. As the guide says, “There is a *man*, he knows what you shall do and what is needed.” When the guide sends Arvid to a female artist, it is because “we need something beautiful”. One very concrete example of a gendered notion in *Are You Curious* is that Arvid is the one who is active, running around and putting things right, while his sister is passive. The statement made in the same video, that the crisis has been caused by the domination of “the masculine principle” is in line with this notion. In *Are You Curious*, women, represented by the sister, are articulated as being related to nature (see, for example, the “turtle scene”). The idea that men are active and dominate over the passive nature (and over women) is in line with a discourse with ancient roots (Merchant 2015). In this tradition, gaining knowledge through education is problematic for women, as their brains are seen as not capable of processing knowledge (Johannisson 1994). The producers of *Are You Curious* reinforce this prejudice. In contrast to Fasen’s video, literary knowledge in *Are You Curious* is not related to something liberating. Instead, knowledge about climate change is something petrifying that causes anxiety and a paralysed state: “She had read about the climate change and lost hope”, explains Arvid. In the material, articulations of the reactions to the climate crisis and the actions taken in response to it follow a gendered discourse: climate anxiety is a female thing, while taking action is something masculine. Even the advice that is given in Fasen’s and Hallgren’s videos relates to activities that are traditionally coded in female terms: clean and tidy up. In line with this, there is a section with tips for homemakers in *Climate Control* (see fig. 2).

If we look at the tips and advice given in the videos, the extreme discrepancy between how the producers describe the crisis and the advice they give is striking. The planet is burning – plant a flower. One climate psychologist describes this problem in the following way: “They call [the crisis] great and extreme and then they begin discussing minor individual changes” (Kali Andersson, quoted in Jewert 2019). One reason why this is the case is that a particular logic is being followed: when you are facing a crisis, the best thing to do is to act (and it does not matter what you do). This concept can be likened to a medical discourse in that climate anxiety is equal to a psychiatric diagnosis – a condition that should be cured. The focus then moves to how we can make the person with this diagnosis feel better (be happy again). Activities that create real change become secondary.

Anxiety as defined in *DSM-5* seems to be a reasonable reaction to the climate crisis – it means getting prepared to face a future threat. Problems arise when anxiety leads to avoidant behaviour and passivity (*1177 Vårdguiden* 2020). These problems align with a discourse that generally focuses on peoples’ individual feelings and well-being (cf. Füredi 2004). In many ways, the social media videos reproduce hegemonic discourses that are dominated by individualistic perspectives. The producers gain their knowledge from sources that represent these perspectives, such as SSNC’s list of “the easiest tips and cleverest advice for those who want to live climate smart” (Naturskyddsforeningen 2020). The importance of inducing hope is also a reoccurring theme in the videos. As the climate psychologist Frida Hylander says: “It is important to convey hope to the children” (Annebäck 2019). Hylander is a representative of the therapeutic discourse, materialised in a new profession – the climate psychologist.

However, as Roger Hallam, one of the founders of Extinction Rebellion, argues, historically important change has been driven by people’s wrath and feelings of injustice – not hope (Helsing 2019). If people suffer from climate anxiety, perhaps the best way to help them is to stop greenhouse gas emissions – not give them a placebo. In line with Greta Thunberg’s rationale behind having school strikes for the climate, perhaps individuals who have climate anxiety should ask themselves the following question: “Why should I be studying for a future that soon may exist no more, if no one does anything to save that future?” (Kuhn 2019).

End Notes

1. I used the database *Mediearkivet* (Media Archive), which includes articles from the vast majority of Swedish press articles from 1981 to the time of writing (Retriever 2019/2020). In the search, I used the word *klimatångest* (climate anxiety). The results showed that the word appeared for the first time in 1999 and then in 2004. In 2007, nearly one hundred articles were indexed by the database, and then there was a rise in the number of articles mentioning climate anxiety during the

following ten years. In 2020, only 882 articles had been published by 25 July, and this is probably because the media have been more focused on the COVID-19 pandemic this year. A brief search using similar terms, such as climate fatigue and climate fear, revealed that climate anxiety was by far the most common term used.

2. Quotes from Swedish sources have been translated by the author.
3. See, for example, Maria Ojala, who found that “in a group of late adolescents, environmental worry was negatively related to subjective well-being at a population level” (2007).
4. In Sweden, the tendency to use medical terminology to articulate “normal” conditions has been discussed by professionals in the field of psychiatry (see e.g. Ågren, Beskow and Ekman 2005; Johansson 2010, 270n59; Engström, Bremberg and Wikman 2019) (It is a contribution to research within the field of CCC and to research on the current medicalisation of individuals’ inner experiences).
5. *DSM-5* is an abbreviation for *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition. *DSM* is a manual for diagnosing mental disorders- The manual is published by American Psychiatric Association. It is recognised as the primary source for psychiatric diagnoses in the United State, but it is also recognised as an authority around the world.
6. Italics as in the original.
7. Qualified media are media that are “historically and communicatively situated, meaning that [their properties] differ depending on time, culture and aesthetic preference” (Elleström 2017, 672).
8. When a video is uploaded to YouTube, a webpage is constructed. This page provides information about the video, such as the title of the video, the producer and the category of the video. For this study, how a video was presented on a site was important for the identification of useful material.
9. I used Google Search because it includes the number of hits a search produces and allows a search for a combination of words. I did other searches using other word combinations, such as climate fatigue and climate fear, with few or no hits.
10. This impression is strengthened when compared to previous studies I have done on mental distress, such as self-injury and depression. In these cases, the amount of material has been quite overwhelming.
11. One a year from 2009 to 2013 inclusive; between two and five from 2014 to 2017 inclusive; eighteen in 2018 (one third of them were in news programmes produced by the Swedish TV station TV4); and six between January and April 2019.
12. The original titles are *Är du nyfiken grön?*, *KLIMATÅNGEST – 3 livsstilsval som minskar din klimatpåverkan* *Klimat Kontroll Del 3* and *KLIMATÅNGEST: SÅ BOTAR DU DEN!* Some variation regarding the video titles, who produced them and other information varies between the videos’ respective homepages on YouTube and in the credits in the videos themselves. I have tried to be as accurate as possible in this article.
13. The producers seems to have been inspired by Vilgot Sjöman’s *I Am Curious (Yellow/Blue)* 1967/1968.
14. Her video had many more views than the other videos in the material had (10,855 compared to the others which had between 35 and 313 views). The number of views was noted the same day I downloaded the videos. Notably, some of them were uploaded quite close to this date.

15. ABF stands for Arbetarnas bildningsförbund (the Worker's Educational Association), an educational association related to the Swedish workers' union and the Social Democratic Party, which cooperated with Filmcentrum Väst and ABF Media Lab during 2009 and 2010.
16. These people are quite well known in Sweden and participate in the video in the capacity of their role as a member of their profession or as someone who has a particular experience. The peace researcher is Stefan Vinterhagen, a sociology professor and chair of the Faculty of Nonviolent Direct Action and Civil Resistance at the University of Massachusetts; the activist is Ian Fiddles; the artist is Iranian-born Fateme Gosheh; and the priest is Lotti Shariff.
17. The oracle is Göran Hjort, an engineer, organisation consultant, pedagogue and writer.
18. In this study I use the definition of the frames that is presented in Bordwell and Thompson (2013, 190).
19. For the interpretation of the medium shot type of framing, see Panofsky 1953; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 124–129; Eriksson och Göthlund (2012, 66–67). AFK is an initialism for away from keyboard, for instance meeting someone in the flesh,
20. Cf. Messaris 1997, 21–24.
21. According to DT, a nodal point in discourses on a high social levels (such as that of society or nation) is a *myth* according to DT (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 39).
22. On the visual trope of a girl sitting in a corner, see Johansson and Sternudd (2015).
23. This conclusion is based on the visual rhetorical integration trope: nearness equals likeness and sameness (Marner 2009, 28).
24. The source for Zätterqvist's advice is Wynes and Nicholas (2017). Notably, she is not speaking about their most effective advice: have one less child. Maybe because it is too thought-provoking.

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