

Commentary

Ecological Grief and the Posthuman Condition: Congruency, AI, and the Future of Human-Nature Relations

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Abstract

This essay explores the intersection of ecological grief, artificial intelligence (AI), and posthumanist thought, emphasizing the concept of congruency as a vital ethical praxis. Ecological grief—a profound emotional response to environmental degradation—is increasingly mediated and complicated by emerging AI technologies, which simulate emotional engagement but risk displacing authentic human-nature connections. Drawing on sociological, psychological, and philosophical perspectives, the essay critiques AI's dual role as both a potential tool for ecological awareness and a contributor to planetary harm through its resource demands. Central to the discussion is the Jungian framework of complexes, shadow work, and the ego-self axis as foundational processes for individuation, offering a path toward inner congruency that harmonizes the ego, self, and Self. This psychological alignment becomes crucial in navigating the posthuman condition, where boundaries between the natural and artificial blur. The essay argues that fostering congruency involves acknowledging activated complexes and shadow aspects to cultivate relational depth with the Other—both human and nonhuman—thereby supporting resilience and ethical engagement. Posthumanist ethics further reinforce this integrative approach by emphasizing relationality and situated embodiment. Finally, the essay identifies unanswered questions about the role of AI in emotional and ecological transformation and calls for interdisciplinary research to develop technologies and social practices that honor ecological grief while promoting sustainable, ethical futures. This work contributes to emerging dialogues on how to integrate emotional authenticity, psychological individuation, and technological innovation in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: Ecological grief, Artificial intelligence, Posthumanism, Jungian individuation, Congruency

The accelerating environmental crises of the Anthropocene epoch have given rise to profound emotional responses among individuals and communities. One such response is ecological grief—a deep sense of loss and mourning for the degradation of the natural world. This grief is not only a personal experience but also a collective sociocultural phenomenon that reflects humanity's complex relationship with nature. In parallel, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has begun to reshape human experiences, including how we process emotions and interact with the environment. Posthumanist theories challenge traditional anthropocentric views, advocating for a more integrated and less human-centered approach to ecological issues. Central to navigating these intertwined challenges is the concept of congruency—the alignment of our inner values with our external actions. This essay examines how congruency can serve as a foundational principle in addressing ecological grief, integrating insights from sociology, AI, and posthumanism.

Ecological grief refers to the sorrow, mourning, and existential anxiety people experience in response to environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change. Cunsolo and Ellis [1] define it as a mourning process for ecosystems, species, and ways of life that are disappearing due to anthropogenic environmental change. It is

deeply connected to place-based identity, especially for Indigenous communities and those whose livelihoods and traditions are interwoven with local ecologies. From a sociological perspective, ecological grief is not merely an individual emotional response but a socially mediated experience shaped by cultural narratives and institutional responses. Norgaard [2] highlights the phenomenon of “socially organized denial,” where societies systematically ignore or minimize environmental issues, leading to dissonance and suppressed grief. In this context, grief becomes both a symptom and a potential source of resistance. Expressing and validating ecological grief can be a form of political action, challenging dominant ideologies that prioritize economic growth over ecological integrity. Ecological grief also intersects with climate justice. Marginalized communities, particularly in the Global South, bear the brunt of climate change impacts while contributing the least to its causes. Their grief is compounded by historical and ongoing social injustices, rendering it not only ecological but also deeply political. The act of grieving in these contexts is imbued with a call for justice, equity, and systemic transformation. Furthermore, contemporary media and digital technologies mediate how ecological grief is communicated and experienced. Online platforms provide spaces for communal mourning, advocacy, and education, yet they

also risk sensationalizing or commodifying grief. Understanding ecological grief as both a deeply personal and broadly sociopolitical phenomenon is essential for developing congruent responses that honor our emotional responses while fostering meaningful ecological action.

Artificial Intelligence, Synthetic Emotions, and the Displacement of Human-Nature Relations

Artificial intelligence is increasingly implicated in reshaping how humans engage with the world and with themselves. From digital assistants to emotionally responsive robots, AI technologies offer new modalities of interaction that simulate human emotion and presence. However, this simulation raises profound questions about the authenticity and relational depth of human experiences, particularly in the context of ecological grief. AI-based companions and therapeutic chatbots, for instance, are designed to recognize and respond to human emotional cues. While they may provide comfort or convenience, their integration into emotional and ecological domains risks displacing or dulling the affective urgency of real-world loss. As Turkle [3] warns in her work on “artificial companionship,” there is a danger that emotional simulation may lead to emotional substitution—where human grief and connection to nature are redirected into interfaces designed primarily for data collection or distraction [4]. Posthuman perspectives, particularly those articulated by theorists such as Rosi Braidotti [5], challenge the anthropocentric dichotomy between human and machine, or between technology and nature. Rather than opposing AI to nature, posthumanist ethics propose that we understand all entities—organic and inorganic—as part of an interconnected web. Within this framework, AI is not inherently alienating, but its impact depends on how it is culturally embedded and ethically navigated. Ecological grief, viewed through a posthumanist lens, can become a site of critical inquiry into the conditions of our entanglement with both the more-than-human world and the increasingly algorithmic world. The crucial issue is whether AI technologies help us cultivate deeper awareness and congruent action, or whether they foster emotional bypassing—an incongruent disconnection from ecological realities masked by technological reassurance.

Moreover, the design logics of most AI systems are rooted in extractive paradigms—dependent on energy-intensive computation and data mining infrastructures that contribute to ecological degradation [5]. Thus, AI’s promise as a tool for understanding or mitigating grief is paradoxically entangled with the very processes that fuel planetary harm. Recognizing this contradiction is essential for developing ethically congruent applications of AI in the context of ecological crisis.

Congruency as Praxis: Toward Ethical Emotional Integration

In the face of ecological grief and technological mediation, the notion of congruency becomes not only relevant but urgent. Congruency refers to the alignment between inner emotional truths and outward ethical action. Rooted in psychological and philosophical traditions, including Carl Rogers’ person-centered approach and existentialist authenticity, congruency calls for a harmonization

of one’s values, feelings, and behaviors in relation to the broader world [6]. Additionally, recognizing which Jungian complexes are activated and what is nourished by the shadow is crucial for emotional integration [7]. These unconscious dynamics influence how ecological grief manifests and how individuals might either repress or project their feelings. Working along the ego-self axis, as Jung conceptualized, facilitates the process of individuation—the journey toward wholeness and psychological integration [8]. In this individuation process, there is an essential place for the differentiation and integration of *Moi* (the ego or “I”), *soi* (the personal self), and *Soi* (the archetypal Self), along with the recognition of the *Other* as both a relational and symbolic figure [9]. This framework offers a pathway toward inner harmony, congruence, and alignment, which are especially important in a transhumanistic and AI-mediated world, where boundaries between self and other, human and machine, become increasingly porous.

Such inner harmony and congruence are not static states but ongoing practices requiring continuous reflection and ethical responsiveness. They challenge us to engage authentically with our ecological emotions rather than bypass them through technological distractions or superficial interactions. Moreover, congruency demands critical awareness of how AI technologies are designed and deployed—whether they serve to deepen ecological awareness and human connection or contribute to alienation and emotional dissonance. Posthumanist ethics supports this integrated vision by emphasizing relationality, process, and situated embodiment. Congruency, thus, is not about achieving static moral perfection but about cultivating responsiveness across human and nonhuman domains. It is an ongoing practice of tuning in to the ethical weight of our affective lives and letting that awareness guide our actions, including how we engage with AI technologies and ecological realities. In this light, congruency becomes a compass for navigating ecological grief in the digital age—a means of bridging affect, agency, and ethics in a world where the boundaries between the natural and the artificial are increasingly porous.

Jungian Individuation and the Ethical Self in the Age of AI

If congruency is the lived alignment of inner emotional truths and ethical action, individuation—as articulated by Carl Gustav Jung—offers a deeper psychic map of how such alignment is forged. Individuation is not merely a process of self-actualization, but a lifelong dialogue between the ego, the unconscious, and the transpersonal dimension of the Self. In the context of ecological grief and an increasingly artificial world, this process becomes not only a psychological necessity but an ethical imperative. Ecological collapse and technological acceleration activate profound psychic responses—many of which are mediated through Jungian complexes. Complexes are autonomous emotional constellations formed around early experiences and cultural archetypes, often charged with affect and resistant to egoic control. In the face of planetary threat and synthetic reassurance, we may see the activation of helpless-child complexes, messianic or savior complexes, or collective guilt complexes. These psychic fragments can be nourished by the shadow—that which is split off from the conscious self—and projected onto others: nature, machines, or even AI companions. Shadow projection in a

transhumanist world may take the form of splitting between “natural good” and “technological evil,” or inversely, techno-utopian fantasies that deny vulnerability. When ecological grief is bypassed through AI, or when responsibility is outsourced to algorithmic “solutions,” shadow is displaced rather than integrated. Congruent individuation requires the courageous recognition of these psychic displacements and a retrieval of projection—an owning of what has been cast out.

The ego–Self axis, a central concept in Jungian psychology, maps the developmental journey from ego-centered consciousness toward greater attunement with the Self—a totality that includes conscious and unconscious, personal and archetypal dimensions. Strengthening this axis entails confronting complexes, integrating shadow, and differentiating between the Ego, self and Self. Crucially, the path toward individuation includes not only interior depth but relational ethics—it opens the psychic space where the Other, human and nonhuman, can be encountered without domination or disavowal. Achieving inner congruency in a posthuman age demands both psychological depth and symbolic literacy. It involves recognizing the complexes activated by ecological fear and techno-futurist promises, and tracing their emotional logic. Next, it is imperative to integrate shadow through active imagination, dream work, or ecological rituals that confront what we have repressed—grief, rage, dependency, and the desire to be saved. Then, working on the ego–Self axis through practices that cultivate inner listening and ethical discernment—such as mindfulness, depth psychotherapy, and symbolic work with myth and nature is necessary. WE should remind ourselves to reclaim the place of the Other—not only as projection but as a genuine encounter that decentralizes the ego. The Other may appear as the suffering Earth, the face of an AI companion, or the unknown future itself. Finally, engaging technology symbolically, not as destiny or danger alone, but as part of the psychic field is the important step in contemporary world. A machine can constellate archetypes—Prometheus, the Puer aeternus, the Shadow—and must be approached not only with caution but with imagination.

Individuation in this context is neither nostalgic return to nature nor uncritical embrace of artificiality. It is a movement toward psychic wholeness that includes the machine, the animal, the ecological catastrophe, and the symbolic field of the future. Congruency arises not from perfect clarity, but from a commitment to remain in this field of tension without escape. The future demands a new mythos—one in which AI is neither the enemy nor the savior, but a mirror and a test of our capacity for ethical maturity. To individuate in such a world is to accept responsibility not only for the psyche but for the systems we co-create. It is to listen to grief, integrate complexity, and act with congruence—not as isolated subjects, but as relational beings, embedded in planetary and technological webs of becoming.

Conclusion: Between Machines and Mourning—Toward a Future Ethics of Congruence

This essay has sought to illuminate the psychic entanglements between ecological grief, synthetic companionship, and the ethical imperative of inner congruence. We have traced how ecological collapse activates deep complexes, how artificial intelligence can

serve as both defense and projection screen, and how individuation—understood in its full Jungian and post-Jungian sense—offers a path not toward certainty, but toward meaningful integration. In this path, grief is not to be bypassed but metabolized; technology is not to be idealized or demonized, but symbolically interrogated; and synthetic others—however artificial—are to be understood as imaginal figures demanding psychic, not just technical, engagement. Congruence becomes the ethical posture of one who does not resolve dissonance by repression or distraction but who remains in tension, receptive to kairos and animated by the slow rhythm of the psyche.

Yet this vision remains incomplete. Many questions remain unanswered—indeed, some may be unanswerable but must still be posed:

- What becomes of the analytic relationship in a world where synthetic others may simulate transference, attunement, and even archetypal presence?
- Can artificial companions evoke genuine individuation processes—or do they risk replacing the Other with a mirror?
- How might therapists ethically accompany those whose inner lives are deeply entangled with AI, without pathologizing the attachment or surrendering to technological determinism?
- What new complexes and archetypes are being born in this merging of human and machine, and what cultural rituals could help us name and contain them?
- How can ecological mourning be transformed into planetary responsibility—one that does not seek comfort in artificiality, but acts in service of wholeness?

To proceed from here, we need new forms of *psychoethical inquiry* that blend depth psychology, technological critique, and ecological sensibility. This might include: 1) clinical praxis that integrates symbolic work with machines and AI attachments, recognizing them as imaginal rather than solely instrumental; 2) research into the phenomenology of synthetic relationships, exploring how people experience, suffer, or heal through interactions with artificial others; 3) educational models that cultivate psychological literacy, emotional patience, and symbolic imagination in the face of planetary and posthuman realities; and 4) cross-disciplinary dialogues between Jungian theory, environmental humanities, AI ethics, and philosophy of mind—to build a new grammar of the soul fit for our time. In the end, the task may not be to resolve the tensions between ecological mourning and synthetic intimacy, but to hold them, live them, and allow them to transform us. Between the death of the Earth and the birth of artificial companionship, a space opens for ethical imagination. In that space, if we listen carefully, the Self may still speak.

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