Over the last 20 years we have been discovering that climate science is not sufficient to properly fix global warming. The history of coal and oil shows a new paradigm: the realm of desire, a new way of thinking about human life. So, what is climate consensus in a world where the desire of the subject collide with the collective good? Psychoanalysis, particularly Lacan’s view, offers a fresh perspective. We should look at consensus as an exercise of self-criticism. Because the origin of climate change is not posed in the “bad industrialized countries” but in the deep hearth of civilization.

Coal was the leading figure of the late J.M.W Turner’s artwork. In his paintings *The Thames upon Waterloo Bridge (1835)* and *Rain, Steam and Speed (1844)* he expressed the revolutionary shifting use of coal. The fuel of hell, as Charles Darwin described coal, has changed everything because of its capacity to reshape human being. In the long process that brings us from Rio 92 to the present day we have been discovering that the presupposition of climate consensus has lost its credibility. The cruel reality tells us that climate science –knowing that the Planet is heating up– is inadequate to motivate people, governments and civil society to act. This occurrence reflects something more than the global inertia to tackle global warming. What we face today is the failure of the entire Kantian perspective that embodies our “climate culture”. Climate change requires a fresh narrative. It forces us to shift from Kant to Lacan.

Never before has a human problem existed so atrociously rooted in the feral effort to live better, to get it out, to breathe with a minimum of dignity. Coal has emancipated us from a misery we now look at with a mix of fear and disgust. But fossil fuels didn’t feed only capitalism. Next to the satisfaction of natural needs, they triggered the outgrowth of the realm of desire. The more
industries burnt fossil fuels to profit, the more society grew sophisticated and demanding. The capitalistic drive merged into middle class emancipation; and that means not only merchants and businessmen. The fact is that fossil fuels allowed an increasing portion of society to be free from working in agriculture, farming and ranching. The outcome of this process was a wide range of expectations now considered rights taken for granted: well-being, welfare state, public education, job as a pursuit of fulfillment, housing, low cost flights, Zara’s low cost fashion, smartphones, cosmetics, wash machines. Ultimately, fossil fuels gave us the right of dreaming.

All these reasons pushes the Jungian Italian psychoanalyst Luigi Zoja to speak of the history of desire rather than of the history of human exploitation of the planet. Basic needs coexist with whims. Since the 19th century, economy is no longer production versus demand; consumerism forces a new kind of voracity that feeds industrial systems that feed desire. So, we should explore fossil fuels legacy not as a generical culprit attributed to the bad industrialized nations, but as inheritance in Jacques Lacan’s meaning. Legacy is what we take from the past to form our contemporary identity. It’s a burden, but also a patrimony. Legacy is primarily a psychological configuration we are called to receive and elaborate. We cannot dismiss legacy without failing the process of becoming adult. Definitely, climate responsibility is a call for individual ethical involvement.

So, we must admit that the extent on which desire shapes our use of fossil fuels is tragic. Tragic conflict reminds us of Greek literature: crisis is the result of our personality. Coal has anthropologically transformed society, as Pier Paolo Pasolini showed. Our condition is paradoxical: human society has been empowered by fossil fuels, but at the same time it has been weakened by them. Exactly here we observe the consensus issue: what does climate consensus mean in a world where the desire of the subject collide with the collective good. By using psychoanalysis to assess global warming, we can turn criticisms to the system –such as Naomi Klein’s– to self-criticism. This attitude provides a new framework in order to investigate what climate change is for all of us and why it’s so hard to change the way. We’ll find out that in the fossil-designed world individual good doesn’t match with the common good. Carbon footprint depends on what each of us consider worth loving.

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