In Dialogue

The Navigation System, the Planetary Gardener, and the Prism:

Metaphors for Bringing the Future into Being

Sohail Inayatullah, Emma D. Paine, Otto Scharmer

Thirty-three years ago, futurist Sohail Inayatullah and MIT Senior Lecturer Otto Scharmer participated in a seminar focused on macrohistory at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa held by peace activist and futurist Johan Galtung. In the years that followed, each developed a body of work that provides an integrated theory and method that supports individuals, groups, and organizations to sense, vision, and co-create the future. Dr. Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) draws on and integrates empiricist, interpretive, critical, and action learning modes of knowing at inner and outer levels to cultivate transformative spaces for the creation of alternative futures. Dr. Scharmer's Theory U provides a framework and process for building essential leadership capacities needed to address the root causes of today's social, environmental, and spiritual challenges by shifting individual and collective consciousness from ego-system to eco-system awareness.

Recently the two came together in dialogue, joined by the Presencing Institute's Emma D. Paine, Editorial Coordinator and recent graduate from the London School of Economics, to explore the role of futuring in societal transformation. In the context of our current polycrisis, and drawing from a wealth of personal and

professional experience, the three engage in a multi-generational conversation about bringing the future into being.

> Invented in the late 1980s, Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) is a theory of knowledge and a methodology for creating more effective policies and strategies. The method broadens understanding of issues by exploring deep myths and new litanies, drawing on the points of view of different stakeholders and deepening awareness of how different stakeholders in a system construct problems and solutions. By mapping reality from the viewpoint of multiple stakeholders, organizations and systems can develop and implement more robust future scenarios. CLA had been used successfully with governments, corporations, international think tanks, communities and cities around the world.

> Theory U is an awareness-based change framework emerging from over two decades of action research at MIT with organizations, institutions and communities around the world. The framework integrates three intellectual and practice streams—action research, social and civil movements, contemplative and wisdom traditions—to provide a series of methods and tools that build individual and collective capacity to lead transformative systems change. Theory U guides learners through a learning journey that integrates the multiple intelligences of head, heart and hand to shift consciousness from an ego-system to an eco-system awareness. It supports individuals and collectives to sense into future possibilities and to ultimately act as a vehicle for bringing the emerging future into being.

Participating in the Dialogue

Sohail Inayatullah
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Emma D. Paine
Editorial Coordinator at the Presencing Institute and a Program Officer with the Institute's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Leadership Labs. She recently completed her MSc in Sociology and Human Rights at the London School of Economics.

Otto Scharmer
Senior Lecturer in the MIT Sloan School of Management and Founding Chair of the Presencing Institute and the u-school for Transformation.

Figure 1: Otto Scharmer (rear, centre) and Sohail Inayatullah (standing, right) with Johan Galtung at the University of Hawai'i, 1983.

Figure 2: Emma D. Paine, Otto Scharmer and Sohail Inayatullah in Dialogue, September 2022.

Going to the Mountaintop: The Macrohistory Perspective

Otto: Sohail, it is so great to reconnect with you. Thank you for making the time. For the readers, the last time you and I met—that was about 33 years ago at a seminar at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, with the peace researcher and futurist Johan Galtung. So I was a graduate student then, I think you were a post-doc or an assistant professor. The seminar was about macrohistory (Galtung & Inayatullah, 1997), which later turned into a book that you and Johan co-edited and co-published. So maybe that's a good starting point. What was that project about? What's the significance? What is macrohistory? And what can it teach us about the current moment we all are living in?

> Macrohistory is the study of social systems, along separate trajectories, through time, space and episteme, in order to make visible meta patterns of change, helping to discern which aspects of disruptive change are temporary and local and which are part of larger patterns. Macrohistory is based on the premise that these grand patterns can be used to gain distance from the present, to rethink the future and to help enact a different trajectory (Inayatullah, 2017).

Sohail: That seminar, I mean, for all of us, it was mind-blowing. I think it was unique. Most people looked at the details of history. And Johan helped us go deeper to say, "What are the meta patterns?" Not looking at it from within the traffic but going from the mountaintop to view. "If you go to the mountaintop, what do you see?" We investigated deep patterns of time from thinkers representing different frameworks (Islamic, Sinic, Western, Feminist, Gaian, Tantric). Once we finished the book, I moved to Australia and I would do presentations on macrohistory. I quickly realized that no one understood a word of what I said. People would say, "Well, that was fantastic." But there was this look on their faces. "We have no idea what he's talking about." Then when I started to have to present to communities, businesses, governments, [I considered,] how do I take the core insights of macrohistory in a way that can be helpful? I said: okay, within all this, what are the four, five key patterns? So that's what I started to teach everywhere. "Here are the four, five patterns, whether you are a student, you're running a large business, or running a country. Here's what you need to be alert to."

Otto: What you shared also reminds me, there *was* a mind-blowing element of that. Because what we did in that seminar was exactly what everyone in the larger intellectual community told you not to do—to go into the macro and meta, the meta-narrative. It was going to the mountaintop, exactly as you said. I also found something very intellectually liberating in that. You can navigate your own path of inquiry across these frameworks. With Emma, we have a co-interviewer here from the younger generation. Back then at the seminar, you and I were maybe her age now. I was talking with Emma before, and she made the point: what was the mood of the time? And the outlook forward—that might also be something interesting to reflect on. And how these macro insights and going to the mountaintop can be made relevant and practical for addressing the developmental challenges we are facing now.

Sohail: I think it's a similar time. We were together '87 to '90. And it was the same thing: fall of the Soviet Union, talk about genomics, computerization. There was a sense of disruption. A lot of people said, "Well, let's collect detailed data. Empiricism." But then there was this whole thing: "Well, what's the big picture? Where are we going next? What is next? What do we need to do wisely?" So, I sense that when we were there, we're very much in a similar time now. In terms

of our work, people keep saying, "Okay, give us a bigger picture. Where are we next? What are the next 30 years?"

Otto: So, when you then apply these patterns, what are the three, four patterns that you have found that are resonating with people's experience and making a practical difference? Helping them to see something different, craft different courses of action?

Sohail: Our futurist approach is very much like you say — you can't create an outcome in the future without going deeply into the present. With macrohistory, in terms of the cognition, I present first linearity, "the great rise of the West." Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer. That view of the future is progress, science and technology, meritocracy, education. So, I talk about that, and then ask organizations, "What's, in your organization, linear and progress-based?" Then I go, "Well, the weakness of the linear view is, of course, you're ahead, someone's behind. The strength is it creates a 'better' future. The weakness, is it always creates colonization and purism, because someone's behind, and they *deserve* to be behind." Thus, we get Calvinism, et cetera. Then part two is the cyclical. I go to Ibn Khaldun, who said, "Always expect decline, and decline's over three, four generations."

Then the third big pattern is Pitirim Sorokin, and pendulum. I always ask, what's the pendulum in your organization? The pendulum is important. Is it Obama to Trump? [That is] one type of pendulum. Religiosity to secularism? Another. In organizations, we always see centralization to de-centralization. Over-centralized? They hire one of the big five consulting groups. They pay them a million. They always say, "Decentralize." It works. Seven years later, too decentralized. They hire the same group. They say, "Centralize." Now, you see this in over a hundred or a thousand organizations—and in countries, you see as well, extreme one way, extreme the other way.

Then the last pattern: if there's linearity, cycles, pendulums, there's also this spiral: the possibility of transformation. Life is a cycle, but you can intervene to make it spiral. And the intervening comes from people called *sadvipras* who know how to serve, protect new ideas, and ensure that money keeps on flowing. Then I run something called the Sarkar game, [from] the Asian philosopher, P.R. Sarkar. In the game, I divide the room into four groups, people with tools, weapons, books, and money. The people with tools begin working together. The warriors come in and their goal is to protect. But, often, they start to kill. And intellectuals come to the room and say, "Here are the new ideas. We'll either help you kill, or help you innovate. Make a safer world, more peaceful world." And the capitalists come in. They could either use money to finance, peace, love, development, or to finance war, weapons. Watching this in an organization is fascinating. People straightaway get the four classes, and get that either you have incidents or moments that lead to transformation, or […] ones that lead to total civilizational collapse. Watching that in real time tells you straightaway in the organization what's possible.

Developed by futurists Joe Voros and Peter Hayward, the Sarkar Game is a role-playing activity based on the theories of social change of Indian macrohistorian and spiritual mystic, P.R. Sarkar. Sarkar articulated four types of embodied power: the worker (shudra), the warrior (ksattriya), the intellectual (vipra) and the capitalist (vaeshya, or merchant, depending on the historical episteme). A group, made up of members of one organization, is divided into four subgroups, each embodying one of the power types. The "game" invites each power-type group into an improvised role play in a specific sequence such that it allows the power dynamic between these types to unfold and become visible. The game is followed by a collective reflection period where players share experiences and learning about self and the organization in relation to power dynamics (Inayatullah, 2013).

Otto: I think that's so compelling to use these lenses in such practical ways in, say, in the example of organizations. I heard you in the first one, the linear, pointing out the shadow. The shadow being, "oh, there are people left behind and less developed, and they deserve it". So, there is that shadow of higher, lower, and so on and so forth. What are the shadows for the other three?

Sohail: Cyclical, the shadow is you do nothing. It's what we see in many parts of the world. There's the next cycle, the next cycle. So, you just sit there. You could sit there in bliss, but that doesn't create a politics of engagement. It creates a politics of patience, which is fine. But I think that's the dark side. With pendulum again, because there's no possibility of progress, you're stuck going back and forth. With spiral, that's kind of the solution. But I think the dark side is that it's so difficult to create a spiral. How to integrate linearity, progress? With cyclical, everything has its time. Those are two different worldviews, one of technology and one of nature. How do you integrate those? And that comes from, of course, spiritual transformation, but the dark side in spiritual transformation is the same as the dark side of progress. Those who are more integrated, more evolved, have better mantras versus those who have worse. It also creates its own hierarchy. So, each one is a tool that we should use, and know when to use it when it's appropriate.

There is one last pattern I use since I've done this book (Inayatullah, 2005) that comes from Kardashev, the physicist. The big thing that Kardashev tells us is the transition is not just nice, that we're all meditating and happy. The transition *has* to happen, or the only conclusion is the planet is destroyed from nuclear meltdown or climate change. And the only way out is to create this new way of thinking: that we're all human beings, and to have systemic governance structures that ensure one person, one vote or some way of inclusion. The solution is, for Kardashev, the transition to a planet that gets its energy form renewables and manages identity (beyond the fragmentation of the nation) and regulation through global governance.

Nikolai Kardashev (1932–2019) was a Russian astrophysicist known for his development of a hypothetical classification scale for civilizations—terrestrial and extraterrestrial—based on their technological ability to use available energy.
https://physicstoday.scitation.org/do/10.1063/pt.6.4o.20191216a/full/

I find that quite compelling, and it links to Sarkar's argument that we must make an inner jump. And we must have systems that support that.

Through Metaphor

Otto: With the fourth pattern, you really emphasized transformation and agency, or the possibility of agency. So now when you look at the current situation through that lens you just offered, I would say maybe one of the clear shadows there is maybe what's referred to as transhumanism. It's basically turning the world into a machine—AI for everything, including ourselves. Right? I think that's not just a faint possibility. That's a very real force, and that does deal with transformation. It does deal with, to some degree, addressing efficiency issues, energy issues and so on. But it is coming from a different place of, what is actually the essence of who we are and who we could become as human beings? So it's almost like a spiritual stance you take, right, in one direction or the other. I wonder whether it's more about inner development, or whether you basically solve all these issues by putting in exterior mechanisms. I wonder what your view on that is.

Sohail: If we go back, and I like using the macrohistory seminar we started with as foundation. I remember listening to one of Galtung's talks, and he was unpacking Stephen Hawking, secular genius physicist. He goes, "Yes, but at heart, he's Christian." I go, "What?" He goes, look, "Look how he sees universal history. It's very much the Christian template. There's always a crisis, and the crisis creates the new." And suddenly […] I felt an *aha*. Behind every way of thinking, there's a core narrative, a core metaphor, a core worldview. So, the other thing I do in all my work is Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) which people say is very much like your theory (Theory U). There's the data, the event, how we see something, the system around the event, the worldview and the metaphor. When I started to look at transhumanism, I said, "Aha. The key story in this worldview is a fear of death."

That's essentially it. And their key metaphor is man and machine united, but essentially it was around that fear. So that's kind of scenario one, AI and humans meld and solve world problems. The other extreme is liberal capitalism forever, which will create more and more inequity. Then there's this *back to green*. Somehow, we can go back to the past. We're going to make America great again, make Iran great again, make Russia great again. This is imagination of the past, which is always rooted in one grouping above, another below. So those

are the three that come up a lot and [the] fourth is I think where we're at: how you create this global governance and individual responsibility, beyond the nation state. It's really humans with technology with nature. Nature is not meant to disappear. We're meant to revitalize nature.

Emma: I like this format because it has been really fun to listen to the two of you. Starting with our jumping off point, just from the first thing, Sohail, you said you felt like these moments were similar—[30 years ago] and now—in the mood, in the approach, and in the frameworks that could be applied. I can't speak for the entirety of my generation, but when I hear that, I find it hard to imagine. If I were to encapsulate what a room with my generation might feel—in there would be a lot of collective despair about the future. Otto, in your recent article (Scharmer, 2022) you talk about the movement from denial to despair. And I think for a younger generation, collective despair already overrides denial.

So, hearing both of you speak, was there that sense then? And if so, how did you feel into it? Did it inform the frameworks you developed? In both Theory U and in CLA, some of the work is how do you feel into sadness and despair, and then you work with that. And secondly, now that this felt sense of depression does exist, what do you do with it? And how do you use possible futures when every indication shows a massive crisis that is real cause for immediate despair?

Sohail: I know when COVID hit and everything stopped, my daughter said: "Aha. So it is possible." She said, "My God. So, all the things we've been saying are actually easy to do." When COVID hit the elite, they shut everything down. You can change direction globally. That was quite powerful. If the desire is there, we can shift. That's one thing that went from despair to *it's possible.*

Then our role in futures is double. One is to analyze the movies, the leading edges coming out and say, "Well, why do they stay in dystopia?" Dystopias are emerging indicators, emerging issues. But the role is also to talk about possibility. What are movies that talk about a preferred future? That becomes a collective responsibility. At the level of inner work, [the questions are]: What I do in that process when we say here's the macro history, here are the scenarios? […] Who am I in that story?

This started 20 years ago when I was running a workshop for a disability group. And the CEO loved it, one vice president loved it. But [another] vice president spent the day attacking me and my colleague. We were uncertain of her motive. Was it us? The futures/innovation process? Was she afraid that she would be left out if the organization changed direction? Her comments started out as minor snide comments—they felt liked little edges, little cuts. By [afternoon] it became a full-on attack on us personally—how much were we being paid: "no one really needs the long term, we have pressing budget issues now."

Earlier, an hour before, I had said, "So what's your metaphor of your organization?" They said, "Oh, we're Cinderella." And I said, "So who's Prince Charming?" "It's government—government funding. We're always waiting, always waiting."

At that moment, I looked at the resistant vice president. I said, "Can you tell me what's going on?" I was anxious. I didn't know how to deal with the situation. She responded, "Can't you see? I'm the wicked stepsister." We all froze. I wish I had said. "Aha. Ok! Tell me what's a better metaphor for you to have your power. In the long run the wicked stepsister loses - what's a better personal narrative for you?"

From then, every workshop, every experience, we ensure that inner personal stories link to the broader narrative. The afraid self, the despair[ing] self, the optimistic self, who are these as architects within your own culture? Then we go through a process of saying, "What's the better story?" In a recent project with the Pacific community, once the narrative of a fleet of vakas—canoes—was created. Each person articulated their story—the wood polisher, the sail maker, the captain…

So that became the inner transformation. So much is macro history and how the world is changing, but all that is not so important until we find out *what's my metaphor?* What I learned from the wicked stepsister was, in every organization, let people tell their story as the future changes. What's the story of their life journey as a metaphor that takes it to where they wish to go? That's not denying the despair. That's sitting with despair, giving them macro historical tools. This could be a pendulum. This could be a backwards shift—we all don't make it and the planet collapses—or it could be the beginning of something quite transformational once your story very clearly shows what your role is in this.

Otto: I found that fascinating listening to you, Sohail. What comes up for me is that there is, yes, there's the story of the past. There is the story of the future. But then, most importantly, there is the story of self. Kind of like the story of now, right? And my own agency in these stories, particularly in the story of now. The example you gave is so illuminating, to move from, 'yes, you have all these structures outside of you,' to 'but you also have them within you.' You then spell them out and realize there's more than one.

And then you realize: I *am not* these stories. I *am not* these voices. I *have* several of them. Then where is my true agency and source of awareness? Who is the observer noticing that? The one who can reflect and navigate, who can align attention and intention? It's this deeper meta-level of awareness and its navigation that I heard is at the essence of the story you shared. That shift of consciousness from a silo- to a systems view, or from an ego-system awareness to an eco-system awareness, is also at the essence of all real transformation, right? COVID is a great example for that, as you said. It was very inspiring because we were able to shift collective behavior within weeks if we align attention and intention on the level of the whole, but usually that's not exactly what we are doing.

Agency and Collective Depression

Otto: Emma, if I come back to your question, I would just add two micro-observations towards what Sohail said before.

One is, I agree with the sense that there's a lot of similarity [between moments], because when we grew up, there was the sense that the end of the world was always 10 years out. It was nuclear. It was other things. That's nothing new. But I think there is also something that is different. I grew up in the '70s, '80s, in Europe, and there was a huge movement. It was very clear: environmentally, socially, and in terms of development, we are going to change this. That's kind of what took everyone to the streets. I think there was a collective confidence that we can, and we will, make significant changes happen. That was just kind of part of a normal air you were breathing.

If I ask questions today, let's say at a higher education institute such as MIT with my students, and ask them to describe the future—it tends to be dystopic. The focus on agency is then very much on shaping personal and group contexts, not on reshaping societal systems as a whole. Yet there is progress. The progress is about taking responsibility for your own agency. But then that agency tends to be limited to a smaller context, at least initially.

That's something that I'm noticing. So, the difference here at issue has to do with a sense of collective action confidence. Back then it was just there. It was much easier to access. It was a sense of possibility that was just in the air. Right now, what's in the air is a sense of collective depression. It has nothing to do with a personal condition. It's just kind of collectively there. And the way that I have found to best address this condition is through methods of embodied learning that activate personal agency in the now.

For example, we brought awareness-based social art practices into our learning environments, such as Social Presencing Theater. *Awareness-based* means that we provide methods, tools, and practices for noticing the different levels of our experience and of resonances that we have, and how we can make visible deeper structures of systems change through mapping them with innovative methods like our 4D mapping.[1] Through making these deeper structures and systemic barriers visible, we make them part of the strategic conversation.

You will not talk anyone out of the view that 2030 is actually not that bleak. You cannot, on a mere mental-intellectual level, address that sufficiently. You have to shift to a more whole-person learning mode that is also addressing the other sources of knowing. When you experience these things in the now, and when you experience your own agency on a personal level, then you can also activate the same kind of agency [in] other areas of your experience. That's what I learned

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[1] For a description of the 4D Mapping process from Social Presencing Theatre, see https://www.u-school.org/4d-mapping

from my students. It's almost as if, once they have moved the "switch" towards operating from a future potential, they can apply this capacity also to other areas of their work and life. That's exactly why we see personal transformation as a key gateway to systems transformation.

> Social Presencing Theatre (SPT) is a methodology, developed under the leadership of Arawana Hayashi, for understanding current reality and exploring emerging future possibilities through embodied practice.
> https://www.u-school.org/aboutus/spt

Emma: If I combine that with a little bit of what Sohail said about the COVID response, that suddenly it aligned with this thought of, "Oh, another world is possible,"—which is a phrase that a lot of abolitionist thinking and collective care writings use, and frameworks that look at different kinds of solidarity models.

> Abolitionist movements and collective care movements, including the mutual aid ecosystems which spread during the pandemic, centre on re-imagining and re-building our systems and societies (The Care Collective, 2020). As described by sociologist Ruth Wilson Gilmore, the aim of these movements is to "change how we interact with each other and the planet" (in Berger, 2014, p. viii). One call to action of these movements globally is 'another world is possible', a refrain that has a branch of its roots in the Zapatista movement in Mexico. The call to re-imagine and build aims to propel new economic and social models which address the vast ecological and human costs of the current system (Gilmore, 2022).

Looking at where another world was possible, there were some amazing examples that showed action can happen on a huge scale and quickly, or that we can collectively build and support. Mutual aid initiatives are one example here, of, "it's possible". But then also big examples, in terms of population and the amount of people who suffered, show seemingly the exact opposite. Another way of framing that might be that for many people the experience was "Wow, look what still didn't happen."

So, I think the compounded question would be then, who are going to be the ones to access these learning modes that Otto is talking about, these deeper change processes? The type of collective shift—who are the leaders in something like this? I mean, it can't be the same leaders within the same structures. Then, who is it, and what is that space in between accessing the action and creating the action?

Sohail: We ran one large workshop for 50 CEOs of a country's health system. We did this amazing vision, inspired. And then a message came from the Ministry,

basically saying, "Look, this is interesting. The Minister or so-and-so says he or she can't get elected on this vision. I get elected by building hospitals. Your vision is the end of hospitals: prevention, precision, personalized medicine, the home hospital. You're ruining my entire election campaign. This is not going to happen."

Then there was this sense of, "What do we do?" Because now we have this vision for 2030, 2040. Who would be the world's best? Everyone in the room knew it straight away. This is cutting edge. We could do it, linking science with spirit, with social change, Indigenous rights, environmental shift, new precision, preventive technology. We could make the model.

Once that message came in, I was first flippant. Someone said, they're upset. I said, "Just give them a bag and tell them to breathe into it. They're having a panic attack. Let them work it out personally." The director said, "No, Sohail, you're wrong. That's not how the world works. This anxiety and panic attack will destroy this project. That's how the world works. No re-election and this workshop is a total waste of time. Figure it out. You have three hours. Figure it out."

So, I said, "Okay, good. Let's go to action learning, open space technology." I said, "We have this vision. Who wants to act on it?" Ten people raise their hands. [I invited them to] go stand around the room, everyone walk around while you make a pitch why your new project will work. A new home hospital design, a new prevention design, whatever. Of those ten, [there were] three [where] no one was interested. Seven working groups met. They talked for 90 minutes, came up with their research design, their action design. The director—this was what blew me away—said, "I've heard everyone. All seven projects are funded."

Every group I work with, I say, "Look, I'll do your two days. I'll do your three months." But people are going to get excited. They're going to want a different future. They'll develop their own personal metaphor. Do you have pathways in your organizational system to support it? If you don't, the lesson everyone gets is what we're getting at the global level—for example, if the UN Security Council vetoes anything good—despair.

I can see at the planetary level that unless we change the UN Security Council veto system, we can't create another world. At the personal level, I always ask, "What re-design systems do we need to create that future you want?" And that's the double process that we have to have.

Emma: The second layer of that, in something like climate change, is that the people who are most affected now are not the same people normally in that "room." How does that process work when someone's individual agency for the future that they create through these exercises, which may be communally beneficial in some way, is limited?

Sohail: Let me then ask you then, to interrupt, what's your metaphor in that process? What's your story about yourself? If I said, Emma in these situations,

conflicting futures, idealism, messages, despair. What's your personal metaphor? Who are you there? So let me ask you in real time now.

Emma: Yeah. In that sense, I think I would be...In a way, I would be handcuffed to a place, to a bench or to a bus stop. And the bus is going towards someone else, and I can't stop it or get on it. Maybe I can save myself, but it's not enough.

Sohail: That's brilliant. Handcuffed to that sign that says bus stop.

Emma: Yeah. And the bus is moving. And there are other people on the bus too.

Sohail: Yeah. And you want to save them. Okay. So that's authentic. Now, given that you want to save them, given you want to help, what's the better metaphor for you?

Emma: I guess the better metaphor would be to talk to the person driving the bus. But then that metaphor, I can't quite see myself just driving the bus, because how can you? It's a huge difference.

Sohail: Are you the bus conductor? What's mid-range? Information booth? Or are you the bus? Do you want to do a transformer-car situation?

Emma: Yeah, in some ways.

Sohail: You're the bus taking people from the bus. Beautiful. You're the navigation system. You're the bus. The driver didn't work. So those are two. Which one feels right?

Emma: Yeah. In some ways, it would maybe be the navigation system, making a track.

But there are all the other people on the bus, and what if I take them somewhere they don't want to go. Or for several people on a different road, I might navigate the bus in a way that would be a problematic intervention for the people on the new road.

Sohail: You just shifted the metaphor. To a peer-to-peer navigation system. You just said, "Well I want to make sure it meets the needs of people on the bus," so now you're collecting their visions and stories and you are working with them to guide on the new bus.

Beautiful. That's it then. Emma's the navigation system. That requires spiritual intelligence, data, understanding of what the world says. That becomes your role in the next phase. And instantly now, you've shifted.

Then the next part is we ask you what support you need to become a navigation system? Is it better tools? Is it real tools? Actually, what do you need? That's something then you need to figure out.

There's a third part, which we won't do. Later tonight, put on some sacred sounds, whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, whatever, and allow the two to meet. Imagine the navigation system and that sacred sound, and a different self will speak, and say, "Aha, here's your new story." Let that self speak to you.

Futuring in a Polarized World

Emma: I wonder, both Otto and Sohail...when you're in a room, and if someone is at that point in their imagined future, [and they don't] take into consideration a general sense of anyone else's or the planet's future—their future is not linked to a collective future. When you run these exercises, if someone is saying, "I don't want this moving towards some sort of spiral," what do we do, and where do you move from there?

Otto: I would like to add a twist to that question and then give you, Sohail, the main part. One is a comment and the other one is a question. The comment is this. In your story, Sohail, what became apparent to me is the many more dimensions of a deep alignment and connection between our bodies of work than I was aware of before, particularly the way your interaction with Emma demonstrated that, embodied that so beautifully from the old metaphor and then the new one.

That's exactly the methodology we also use in embodied learning. The old one is sculpture one, where you're stuck[2]—your "stuck sculpture." The new one is where you lean into an emerging future possibility, but rather than verbalizing it, you do it with your body first, the feeling of your body, and also in a social context.

Based on that sculpture one-to-sculpture two journey, you let both sculptures speak to the current situation. It's the same methodological realm that you were also working with.

Now, turning that into the question. We saw the example of Emma. We saw the example and the cases that you shared with us before. But here's my question. I live in the US. It's a country that's basically falling apart. I think it's interesting because you see other countries going in the same direction. It's not an outlier. "Oh, it's just these crazy Americans." It's something you can see on a deeper level that is beginning to manifest in many other places too.

When you look at the toxicity of the interaction, particularly on the country or macro level, it is apparent that where the healing needs to come from. It must come from the roots. It will probably not start in [Washington,] D.C. It will start in all the villages and cities and smaller towns and regions and states and so on and so forth.

When you think about new, enabling civic infrastructures—and that is also a part of coming to Emma's question, who? Who is that made available to, these types of deeper learning environments that you cited that, in part, we have in other pockets of our experience? How can we make them most available? And how can we democratize really the access through new civic infrastructures of

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[2] For a description of the Stuck exercise described here, see https://www.u-school.org/stuck

engagement of co-imagining and co-shaping the future that currently we don't have? What have you, from your own experience, seen or learned? What's working there? What is your sense of what's possible? Because I think there's a whole big piece of enabling infrastructure that could be possible right now, that's not there. And because it's not there, Emma had to ask the question she put in front us.

Sohail: At one level, there's the core myth of the U.S.: expansion, manifest destiny. That myth worked and worked. It's reached its natural conclusion now. Continuing with that story leads to destruction of nature and probably the rest of the world.

So, option one is you use that expansion, that story, going into outer space. That's relatively safe, could lead to whole range of new products for everyone. Then the option two is, no, you just go expand out, and Trump is everywhere, what we're seeing in Brazil and parts of India. Option three is well, we're going to transform. We're going to transform our collective story.

We all know how hard is for a country to transform [its] collective story. My partner's from Serbia, we've tried to do work there, and there's a sense that "things won't work here" as the core story. So, we have a collective story that it *won't work here*. Then people of course go to individuality, because they remember colonization, the Austrian and Hungarian Empire and by Ottomans. "The goal is always to disrupt, not to create". Once that story is there, the issue is how do you change the collective story of where you are? That's the much tougher question. You do individual groups, yes. Person by person, yes. Of the research I've seen, you need 25% within your organization, whether you're a country or an organization who has a new story, a new vision, to make the shift.

[The] U.S. is in the middle of that. There's this story. There's two different stories going on. We're not sure which way it's going to go. We know there's a possibility of transformation, and we know very clearly there's a possibility of real collapse. I think everyone there feels it. So that's one way: the collective national mythology and how it's playing out in the empirical world. And how do we change that? What are the alternatives? That's what I want to focus on.

I'm not sure what the embodied transformation, in terms of societies where there's depolarization, is. I actually don't know that. What I know [is], it's coming up with a new national vision. I know it's getting that 30% leading the way. I tell people you don't have to convince everyone. The research is pretty clear. In a room full of people, you just need around 30% who are excited. around 30% just want purpose, around 30% want to be left alone to sleep, and then you're going to get 10% resistors. The voice of those resistors is critical.

In the U.S., the voice of that gang—if you want to call them racist, angry—they were allowed to magnify. That manifestation made it much worse. This goes back to another one of Emma's question, what happens when there's someone in the room who is actually...Someone asked me once, they said, "Can I use your

methods and tools to destroy other companies and people?" I'm like, "Excuse me?" They said, "Can I use…?" And I said, "It actually never occurred to me."

I know in the spiritual literature, before you start a new process, you actually accept the inner rules that this is to be used for the greater good, that there's an acceptance of the ethical framework that is then shared. This is not to be used for workshops to help secret agents better kidnap people, for example. You don't want to do kidnapping scenarios. It's actually the opposite, how to prevent illegal kidnappings.

So, I get clear in every situation what are my points where what I can say is appropriate or not appropriate, where I can influence and where I can't, I'm not going to hit my head against the wall—I know from the pendulum theory. I was working one city council, they're the green, help the homeless gang. There's a next election. A new mayor came, and he said, "There's going to be no funding for green and helping the homeless. That's out."

That group I met with, they said, "What do we do now? He's mayor for the next four years." I would just have tea and croissants for four years. You're not going to fight the pendulum. It's shifted. He's going to build tunnels and do all the highway stuff. He's got elected. This is democracy. The pendulum tells you it's shifted within your office. Make meaning, make purpose, do something valuable, but don't try to change the entire city vision. Macrohistory tells us you're on a dead end there. Wait. Start to create the new garden, the new possibility as this person does what he's elected to do.

They said, "Okay, that gives us hope, patience, and focus on what we can do." In your language, the people, they can feel it's not going to work. It's about not giving the agency when agency is impossible in certain situations.

The University of the Future

Otto: I do have one closing question. My closing question, Sohail, is to return where we started. So, we met in a seminar room in Higher Ed, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. And you are teaching at universities. You are a futurist. You innovate in Higher Ed institutions in addition to the work you shared with us, which is working with organizations and working with communities and with systems.

We live in a moment where education and Higher Ed is reconceived from just more of the traditional meta function, which is knowledge transfer, to the second meta function that all educational institutions are serving, or should be serving, which is helping the next generation to sense and shape the future. To co-sense and co-shape and co-create the future. As a futurist working in this space, what is your take on what the role of education in general, —but Higher Ed in particular—in society should be and how it should change in the decade ahead?

Sohail: I know when we were in that seminar, I was a researcher with the Hawai'i judiciary and I think by the end of it, I had graduated and was starting

to teach community college courses. Here in Pakistan, I played basketball a few days ago. There's a public court and I went on and started to play, played four or five games. At the end of it, this guy who was playing comes up to me, he says, "You're Dr. Inayatullah." And I was like, "Yes, who are you?" He says, "Oh, I took your course at the COMSATS (Commission for Science and Technology for Pakistan)."

He said, "I'm a scientist, I took your course 10 years ago." I said, "Oh wow. Great to reconnect." He smiled at me. He said, "I learned a lot from that course. What I learned was when you were in the room, you made all of us shine." So that's it. That's, to me, our role. Your role—the professor—everyone's supposed to look at him generally and he shines. Then I felt he said what I want to create—that our role is to make everyone around [us] shine. We do our bit and then quietly walk away and go to the beach and swim. So, to me, [that is] the role. If that role is done well, the structures and knowledge will follow. Education will be supported. If we stay in the old role, maybe MIT will survive—you guys at the top of the top, they will survive—but the midrange will disappear. We know that.

Otto: That's such a beautiful and powerful story and metaphor and also really another addition to our earlier conversation. What does it really take to address the current situation and in terms of possibilities? Emma, closing word. Over to you.

Emma: We were doing a series of practitioner interviews over the course of the last two years and our closing question was just: what is your heart beating for at the moment?

Sohail: The thing I'm trying to figure out is how will the interstate system change to lead to global governance? I can see the energy shift from fossil fuel to renewables. I think that's inevitable. Every group I meet, I mean we'[ve been] talking about this for 30, 40 years. What was small has now become big. I don't doubt it for a second. We're in the energy transition, it's going to happen. The second part I have a hard time seeing without bad stuff happening: the transition from the interstate system that was good [from the] 1950s to 2020s, but now it doesn't work. Is it multipolar? Is it real global governance? I'm not sure. My heart is beating for a resolution to that and I really don't know it. I can tell stories, but I really can't quite see it happening without more tough stuff happening.

Otto: I would add to these two transformations that you mentioned, governance and energy, two more. One is regenerative agriculture and how we relate to the land and our transformation there. And the other one is education and learning, which is basically how we relate to each other and to ourselves. If you take these four things together, the two you mentioned, the two I just mentioned and fast forward a few hundred years, if that is the future where we are going, coming back to the now, what is actually significant that happens today? I would say what is the most significant what happens today is where we have small

microcosms of where these four things with are coming together with our agency in really generative, co-generative places.

How to nurture and hold and amplify and allow these kinds of places to replicate? I think that's really what has my attention. That's why I am interested in these small communities. I am interested in the role of the future of Higher Ed because I think that's what society has universities for, to create these generative places. That's a little bit what we experienced in that seminar back then Sohail, right? What for me is interesting is it didn't take a whole entire institution, it was one place you connect with, and that can be enough to switch on something within you which then puts you on a track.

I think it is quite doable and probably the very smallest unit where the seeding is taking place. I think we are in a time of seeding this new civilization and the smallest unit where this seeding is happening of course is my own attention you could say. How I align my attention and my intention. But it really is in a social sense, it's small circles, small groups. It's the social field really. So how to see our own potential agency in beginning to develop these seeds, each in our own social context, in the form of new social fields and generative connections? I think that's something that I see already happening and that, if it's amplified in the right way, can really help us not only see but also sense and shape the path forward.

Otto: Many of these places are not just inside but at the edges of or outside of established institutions.

Sohail: Yeah, definitely.

Otto: They're around the edges. They're local. But as your story so beautifully demonstrated, they're also inside these institutions. So, it's the CEO who says, "No, we are not pontificating the big story of the future." But it's the seeds. What I heard you sharing in your story is that if you really focus on the seeds and make the seeds practical, that's what the CEO can fund with this budget—and in that story all the proposals were funded. So, if you do operate in the context of an old institution, there is a real skill to sense, see, attend to, and nurture the new, the seeds that are already there. And they're just as much available inside existing structures, as soon as the cracks of the old begin opening, when the old system is cracking and there's an opening to what actually is needed. These cracks are opening all over the place across all major institutions and systems as we know. And that's where the possibilities are.

Sohail: So Emma, we found Otto's metaphor, the planetary gardener.

Otto: Sohail, to close with that. What is your metaphor?

Sohail: No, you have to give me mine. We were together for 90 minutes, and many years ago. You have to knight me with a metaphor, the right one. I mean that guy at the basketball court said, "The person who helps others shine." I'm quite happy with that. That was very touching for me and I felt very comfortable with that.

Otto: I love that. The illuminator, the person who makes everyone around him shine.

Emma: I see it almost as a prism. It feels more than light. You're able to redirect that light. I think the light comes in and then you redirect it back out in the way that you would have with that multi-sided prism.

Sohail: I like that. So that title of the article is very clear: The Navigation System, The Planetary Gardener, and The Prism.

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