

Invited Article

Radical Collaboration to Transform Social Systems:

Moving Forward Together with Love, Power, and Justice¹

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Abstract

This article summarizes a body of practice and theory that the author has, with colleagues, built up over the past 30 years through working, in many different contexts, with teams of diverse stakeholder leaders collaborating to transform the social systems of which they are part. It tells the story of the development, through first-, second-, and third-person observations recorded in a sequence of five books plus a guidebook, of an approach to social transformation that focuses on unblocking three innate human drives that are in permanent tension: love, power, and justice.

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Keywords

collaboration, system transformation, scenario planning, love, power, justice, multi-stakeholder processes

Introduction

Here is a hopeful story.

In November 2022, I went to Sharm El-Sheikh to participate in the 27th annual Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27 of the UNFCCC). The global climate crisis threatens all of us. It is a super-wicked challenge² that we must address at three levels: transforming our energy, industrial, food, transportation, and financial systems; transforming our underlying social, economic, political, and cultural systems; and, more fundamentally, transforming how we relate with one another and with our shared planetary home (IPCC, 2022).

Although everyone is threatened by climate change and so everyone has a general common interest in contributing to these system transformations, different people, organizations, and countries have different specific interests, capacities, understandings, and ambitions. Examples include the differences between subsistence farmers in Kenya and coal workers in Germany, between the governments of the U.S. and China, between corporations and activists, and between young students and middle-class retirees. To effect the necessary transformations, these stakeholders must find ways to collaborate—but this is not easy or straightforward.

In Sharm El-Sheikh, 35,000 people—government representatives, NGO leaders, businesspeople, activists, scientists, journalists—had come together from all over the world to advance these transformations. Everyone knew that they could not do much by themselves and that they therefore had to work with others—including with people they didn’t agree with or like or trust. Every day for two weeks they met intensely in hundreds of parallel meetings—panels, protests, workshops, negotiations, coffees, meals—to search for ways to move forward together. I felt the sense of community that environmental justice activist-scholar Michel Gelobter experienced at COP: “It’s like a big religious

² “Wicked challenges are defined in the systems science literature as challenges that are hyper-complex and multi-layered. They represent an assemblage of interlocked problems, where every problem is a symptom of another problem and the solution for one problem creates problems in other layers. They also involve many unknowns and they have longer and uncertain timescales. Super-wicked challenges have extra characteristics, including the fact that time is running out, those who cause the problem also seek to provide a solution, the central authority needed to coordinate solutions is precarious, and inefficient or non-existent responses are pushed into the future due to irrational discounting and ineffectiveness of existing paradigms and practices.” (Andreotti et al., 2023, p. 81, referencing Rittel & Webber, 1974 and Levin et al., 2012).

ceremony where tens of thousands of people of different faiths are all praying for the same outcome” (personal communication, 2022). The central open area for accredited delegates consisted of three enormous single-story prefab buildings, each containing long hallways of open-sided pavilions where meetings of all sorts ran all at the same time all day long, and so COP was also a sprawling, cacophonous, societal transformation bazaar.

I found this experience of being a tiny part of such a super-charged global collaboration to be both uplifting and overwhelming. After I had left the conference and had the space to reflect on it, I realised that it had enabled me to get clearer on a few simple things. The collaborations at the conference had produced progress—although not enough for us to be on track to prevent the worsening of the crisis. It is not probable that over the coming years we will succeed in getting on track—but if we can make wiser choices today, we can produce less suffering and more sustainability. Getting onto such a better track will require much more and much better collaboration—and such collaboration is possible.

Philosopher Moses Maimonides said, “Hope is belief in the plausibility of the possible, not only the necessity of the probable” (Abramsky, 2011). I am hopeful.

Here is the primary question I’ve been asking myself for 30 years: *What does it take to collaborate with diverse others to address the daunting challenges of our time?*

I am a practical practitioner: I facilitate collaborations among diverse stakeholders who are trying to transform the social systems of which they are part. I started doing this work in 1991 in South Africa during that country’s transformation from racial oppression to non-racial democracy. This transformation was not straightforward or easy because there were deep differences among South Africans in their positions, ideologies, cultures, and needs. I facilitated a one-year process called “The Mont Fleur Scenario Exercise” in which 28 South African leaders—Black and white, men and women; from the left and right and opposition and establishment; politicians, businesspeople, trade unionists, community leaders, and academics—worked together to chart a path to transforming their country.

The participants in this exercise contributed to transforming South Africa, and in particular to the unexpected (and contested) emphasis on fiscal prudence in the economic policy of the government of Nelson Mandela. In 2000, Trevor Manuel, a member of the scenario team who was by then the country’s first Black minister of finance (a position he held for 13 years) said: “It’s not a straight line from Mont Fleur to our current policy. It meanders through, but there’s a fair amount in all that going back to Mont Fleur. I could close my eyes now and give you those scenarios just like this. I’ve internalized them, and if you have internalized something, then you probably carry it for life” (Kahane, 2012, p. 12; this project and its impact are described in Gillespie, 2004; Kahane, 2012; le Roux, 1992; Segal, 2007. The underlying methodology, scenario planning is

described in in Kahane, 2012; Ramirez & Wilkinson, 2016; van der Heijden, 1996).

It was through this extraordinary experience that I discovered my vocation as a facilitator. Over the decades since then, my colleagues in Reos Partners and I have facilitated hundreds of such multi-stakeholder collaborations, in all parts of the world, at all scales, on all kinds of social transformations, including related to health, education, food, energy, development, justice, security, governance, peace, and climate (for case studies, see Bøjer, 2018; Freeth et al., 2023; Freeth & Drimie, 2016; Hamilton, 2014; Insulza, 2014; Käufer, 2004; Magner & Kahane, 2021; Reos Partners, 2023). Working in many extraordinary contexts has shown me the dynamics of social transformation painted in bright colours. I think that exactly the same dynamics are present in ordinary contexts—in families, organizations, communities—but there these are often painted in muted colours and so are harder to make out. The extraordinary has enabled me to discern what I hypothesize to be universal.

My 30 years of practical experience, from Mont Fleur to COP27, has given me many opportunities for trial and many opportunities for error, and therefore many opportunities for learning. I was trained as a physicist and then as an economist and so, as the joke goes: I lie awake in bed at night wondering whether what works in practice can really work in theory. This article explains what I am learning about what it takes to collaborate to transform social systems, both in practice and in theory.

Collaboration is becoming both increasingly necessary and increasingly difficult. This is because the challenges we face involve more stakeholders who need and want to be involved in addressing these challenges, including because they are more interconnected and interdependent and because they are less willing to defer to experts and elites. Division, fragmentation, polarization, demonization, and violence are also increasing.

In this complex and contradictory context, the conventional approach to collaborating is becoming increasingly ineffective. To address our challenges effectively, we therefore need an unconventional approach that my colleagues and I call “radical collaboration.”

Radical collaboration is a way of working together with diverse others from across a given system that fundamentally transforms—rather than only superficially reforms—that system, and does so with the requisite speed, scale, and justice. Radical collaboration differs from conventional collaboration in that it involves not only focusing on the good and harmony of the whole, but also embraces conflict; not only on agreeing the problem, the solution, and the plan to implement the solution, but also on experimenting a way forward; and not only on getting other people to implement the plan, but also on recognizing and stepping into one’s own role in the system (see Kahane, 2017, p. 2, in which “radical collaboration” is referred to as “stretch collaboration”). This approach is “radical” (from the Latin *radix* or root) in that it attends to the root of how we are and act as we work together.

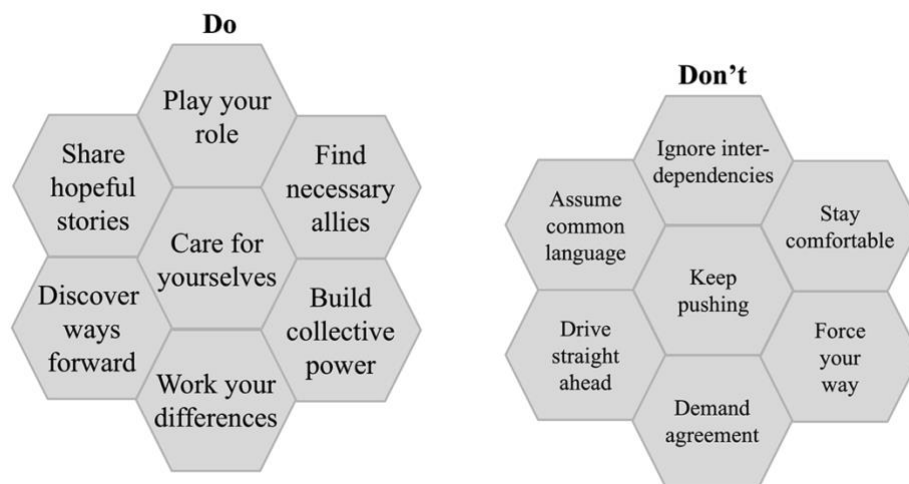


Figure 1. Seven practices for radical collaboration.

The specific reason I went to COP27 was to share the work of the Radical Climate Collaboration initiative. This initiative, organized by Reos Partners, the Climate Champions Team, TED Countdown, and Leaders' Quest, produced a publication entitled "Radical Collaboration to Accelerate Climate Action: A Guidebook for Working Together with Speed, Scale, and Justice" (Kahane, 2022). Reos conducted in-depth interviews with 36 experienced climate collaboration practitioners from across the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia, and then held 7 in-person and online sense-making workshops with the interviewees and others (65 persons in total) to iteratively crystallise the key findings. The guidebook presents the results: an integrated set of seven actions or practices ("dos" and "don'ts") for radical collaboration (Figure 1). We need to employ these practices to be able to transform systems far enough, fast enough, and fairly enough to adequately address climate change and other super-wicked challenges.

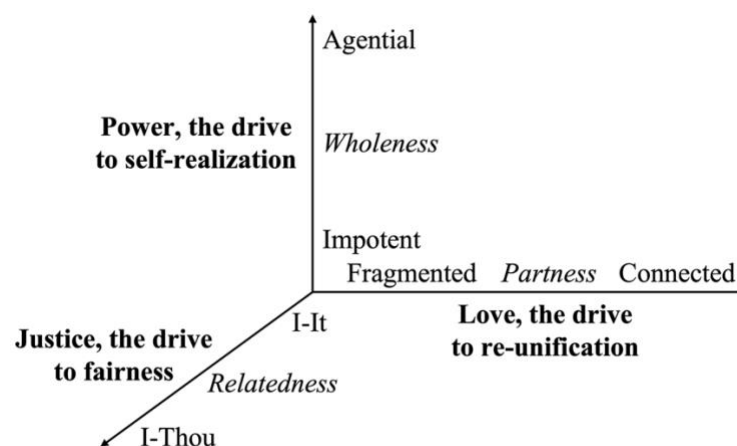


Figure 2. A theory of social transformation: the drives of love, power, and justice produce movement along the dimensions of partness, wholeness, and relatedness.

When we are employing these practices to enact radical collaboration to address such challenges, what is the root that we are tapping into? My theory is that we are tapping into three universal human drives: love, power, justice. We enact radical collaboration through working with these three drives along three dimensions of social space, just like we travel in three-dimensional physical space through moving side to side, front and back, and up and down (see Figure 2). This theory doesn't give us a recipe for social transformation: it gives us a map of the social territory we are in so that we can understand what is happening, and a basis for a set of practices for moving through this territory to transform what is happening.

Love

The first force that was driving what was happening at COP27 was the obvious one: most of the 35,000 people who participated (and the organizations and countries they represented) did so because they were concerned about the climate crisis and wanted to contribute to addressing it. Their shared concern was summarised in the slogan: “keep 1.5 alive,” meaning working together to limit the increase in the global average temperature of the Earth's surface to 1.5 degrees Celsius (United Nations Climate Change, 2022). Increasingly frequent and severe climate-related catastrophes around the world, including the recent disastrous flooding in Pakistan, were fresh in everybody's minds. Pioneering systems thinker Donella Meadows defines a system as “a set of elements or parts that is coherently organized and inter-connected in a pattern or structure that produces a characteristic set of behaviours, often classified as its ‘function’ or ‘purpose’” (2008, p. 188). The sense of community I felt at COP27 was because most of the participants understood that they are part of a global social-economic-political-technological-environmental-cultural system that is producing a dangerous set of behaviours and that they need to collaborate with diverse others to change these behaviours.

I call this first drive *love*. I am using this word as it was defined by theologian Paul Tillich, who wrote: “Love is the drive towards the unity of the separated” (1954, p. 25). Everyone is driven by such love—although they have different understandings of what it is that needs to be reunited (often they're focused on reuniting the smaller circles of their family or organisation or community). As fragmentation increases across many social systems, re-uniting the separated becomes both more difficult and more important. The participants in COP27, for example, had come together to heal the separations—to bridge the differences—between people and planet, between the Global North and South, between the U.S. and China, and between governments, civil society, and business. Love arises from the reality of interconnection and interdependence: that we are part of larger wholes. If one dimension of social systems is such “partness,” then love is the drive that enables us to move “side to side” between the extremes of the system being completely fragmented and completely connected (see Figure 2).

Love is the essence of collaboration inasmuch as collaboration involves people coming together into relationship. When the members of the Mont Fleur team came together in 1991 from across their apartheid separateness (the Afrikaans word *apartheid* simply means “apartness”) to look for ways that South Africa could heal its brokenness, they were, in this sense, driven by love.

It was not until 1997, however, that I grasped the deeper potential of love for social transformation. My colleagues and I were facilitating a workshop in Guatemala one year after the signing of the peace accords that ended the 36-year genocidal civil war between the government, military, and urban elite on one hand, and the guerrilla groups and rural Indigenous people on the other (Díez Pinto, 2004). The workshop was the beginning of a project that brought together leaders from across these societal divisions to contribute to implementing the accords. These leaders had been on different sides of the war and the room was thick with suspicion. Ronalth Ochaeta, a human rights investigator, told the story of having gone to an Indigenous village to observe the exhumation of a mass grave from a wartime massacre. When the earth had been removed from the grave, Ochaeta noticed a lot of small bones, and he asked the forensic scientist supervising the exhumation what had happened. The scientist replied that the massacre had included pregnant women, and the small bones were of their fetuses.

After Ochaeta told this story in the workshop, the room fell silent for a long time. Then the team took a break and afterwards continued with their work. In the years that followed, they collaborated on many national initiatives, including five presidential campaigns; contributions to the Commission for Historical Clarification, the Fiscal Agreement Commission, and the Peace Accords Monitoring Commission; work on municipal development strategies, a national antipoverty strategy, a new university curriculum; and many spin-off dialogues (Kahane, 2012). Through these efforts the Guatemalan team contributed, against powerful countervailing forces, to the uneven, halting, fragile transformation of Guatemala.

When researchers associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology later interviewed the members of this team, several of them said that it was the moment of silence that had enabled them to make these collective contributions. One of them said, “In giving his testimony, Ochaeta was sincere, calm, and serene, without a trace of hate in his voice. This gave way to the moment of silence that, I would say, lasted at least one minute. It was horrible! It was a very moving experience for all of us. If you ask any of us, we would say that this moment was like a large communion.” Another said, “After listening to Ochaeta’s story, I understood and felt in my heart all that had happened. And there was a feeling that we must struggle to prevent this from happening again” (Díez Pinto, 2004). In the context of Roman Catholic Guatemala, “a moment of communion” means that the participants experienced themselves to be, literally, part of one body. Ochaeta’s storytelling enabled the team to connect to one another, to their situation, and to what they needed to do.

This Guatemalan experience focused my attention on working with love as the essence of collaborating and provided the climactic end to my first book, “Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities” (Kahane, 2004, which drew on Käufer, 2004, and the draft text of Scharmer, 2005). When I shared this experience with facilitator Laura Chasin, she commented:

Your story reminds me of something I learned when my husband had a terrible accident. He was swimming in a lake and a motor boat ran over him. The propeller cut a gaping gash in his leg. We rushed him to the hospital, but the doctor said that the wound was too large to be sewn up. The only thing we could do was keep the area clean and dry. “The two sides of the wound will reach out to each other,” the doctor said. “The wound wants to be whole.” (Kahane, 2004, p. 127)

“The dialogues you and I are involved in are like that,” Chasin continued. “The participants and the human systems they are part of want to be whole. Our job as facilitators is simply to help create a clean, safe space. Then the healing will occur” (Kahane, 2004, p. 127).

Radical collaboration employs love by bringing stakeholders together in a clean, safe space and a structured, open process that enable them to meet, connect, talk, share, and unite. This dimension of radical collaboration is central to many multi-stakeholder social transformation practices (see, for example, Brown, 2017; Owen, 2008; Weisbord & Janoff, 2010).

Two of the seven practices in the Radical Collaboration Guidebook are practical ways to work with love. The first “do” is *Play Your Role*, which means working out your specific part or contribution to the transformation of a given system. This is crucial for effective action on climate and other complex challenges because many types of actors are taking many types of actions, and no one actor needs to or can do everything. The corresponding “don’t” is *Ignore Interdependencies*, which means doing what we want to do regardless of what others are doing and what is needed.

The second “do” is *Find Necessary Allies*, which means searching out the people with whom we need to collaborate to be able to play our role. Working only with the people we are comfortable with won’t get us far. To be able to act with speed, scale, and justice, we need to work with different and disruptive others (often including people we might see as opponents or even enemies) and to centre marginalized and impacted people. The “don’t” is *Stay Comfortable*, which means just working with the people we like and are like.

Radical collaboration must work with love. To avoid working with love is to ignore the reality of interdependence. Collaboration that does not tap into love will not transform social systems. But working with love is not straightforward. If love is “*the drive towards the unity of the separated*,” then what is the whole that is being reunited? There is no such thing as “the whole,” except in some irrelevant cosmic sense: poet Leonard Cohen wrote “Though it all may be one in the higher

eye, down here where we live it is two” (2012). Arthur Koestler’s idea of ‘holarchy’ is useful here: “every part (holon) of a larger whole looks, Janus-like, in two directions: it has a tendency both towards integration and towards autonomy” (Koestler, 1967, p. 48, as cited in Leicester, 2020, p. 30). For example, I am a holon in myself, and also part of the larger holons of my family, Reos Partners, Quebec society, and the readership of this journal. One of the reasons it is not straightforward to address climate change is that the drive towards the unity of the separated is taking place in contradictory ways in many different holons at the same time: not only the holons of all life on Earth or all humanity, but also those of individual countries, alliances, and organizations.

We need to work with love, but this is not easy.

Power

And working only with love is not enough to be able to transform social systems. The Beatles were incorrect when they sang, “All You Need is Love” (Lennon, 1967). The theory and practice I outlined in “Solving Tough Problems” (Kahane, 2004) were inadequate: I was missing something.

Ten years after the Guatemalan workshop in which Ocheata had told his story, I met with one of the members of that team, researcher Clara Arenas, who challenged the emphasis I had given in my book to love. “Do you know,” she asked me, that last week, the coalition of civil society organizations I am part of took out a full-page advertisement in the main newspaper here, saying that we would no longer participate in dialogues with the government? The government has said that a precondition for us participating in their dialogues is that we refrain from marching and demonstrating in the streets. But these actions are the main way we mobilize and manifest our power, and if dialoguing requires us to surrender our power, then we are not interested. (Kahane, 2021, p. 149)

What I was missing was *power*. Radical collaboration depends on the individual and collective power of the participating stakeholders who want to transform a system to prevail over those who want to maintain the status quo. Collaboration that does not harness power can not transform social systems.

At COP27, power was the second driving force. The bazaar-like cacophony I experienced was the sound of thousands of individuals, organizations, and countries each expressing their power through presenting, proposing, pushing, pitching, and protesting, and through doing this making agreements and deals with others to be able to make larger contributions collectively than they could separately.

Tillich defined power as “the drive of everything living to realise itself, with increasing intensity and extensity” (Tillich, 1954, p. 36). The essence of such power is power-to. The most common understanding of power, by contrast, is power-over, and when Stephen Lukes wrote his classic “Power: A Radical View” in 1974, he equated power with domination. But thirty years later, in the second edition, he revised his view: “It was a mistake to define power by saying that ‘A

exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests.' Power as domination is only one species of power" (Lukes, 2005, p. 12). Power-over is a subset of power-to.

Everyone is driven by power—although they have different understandings of what power needs to be used to do (often they're focused on their own power-to or that of their family or organization or community). Power arises from the reality of the identity, purpose, autonomy, ambition, and agency—the wholeness—of each and every holon. If a second dimension of social systems is such wholeness, then power is the drive that enables us to move “up and down” between the extremes of holons being completely impotent and completely agential (Figure 2). (Note that in this context “partness” refers to the fact that each holon is part of larger holons, and “wholeness” to the fact that each holon is a whole in itself.)

Philosopher and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his doctoral dissertation on the work of Tillich (King, 1955). King later said, building on Tillich's definitions of love and power:

Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change. And one of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites—polar opposites—so that love is identified with the resignation of power, and power with the denial of love. Now we've got to get this thing right. What we need to realise is that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. It is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our time. (King, 2002, pp. 185–187)

This statement by King inspired me to write my second book, “Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change” (Kahane, 2010).

Radical collaboration employs power when stakeholders are each able to assert their own animated and agential wholeness. The third “do” of radical collaboration is *Build Collective Power*, which means working together with other stakeholders to discover and enact ways to transform the system. This requires recognizing and bringing together the different types of assets that each of us can contribute—authority, money, technologies, ideas, followers—to grow our individual and collective capacities. The corresponding “don't” is *Force Your Way*, which means trying to get everyone else to do what we want them to do. When some powerful allies use their power over others—forcing things to be the way they want them to be, whether through imposition, exclusion, co-option, or divide and rule—they undermine the collaboration; if we push people around, they will be resentful and angry and will push back, and we will get slowed down or stuck.

Radical collaboration must tap into power. To avoid working with power is to ignore the obviously-important reality of self-realisation, self-centeredness, and self-interest. To avoid falling into the common do-good trap that produces results

that are merely “sentimental” and “anaemic,” systems change efforts must acknowledge and engage with—not deny or shy away from—this reality.

But working with power is not straightforward. When different people and organizations, each with their own purpose and perspective, try to collaborate, they usually—not exceptionally—produce competition and conflict. This is true in all social systems, including families, communities, nations, and globally. The practice required to work with power is the fourth one, *Work Your Differences*, which means working through or around differences. Our collaborators face different realities, opportunities, and constraints, and so have different positions, perspectives, and powers. This diversity can help us see more clearly and navigate better through complex and confusing terrain. The opposite is *Demand Agreement*, which assumes, incorrectly, that progress requires agreement.

We need to work with power, but this is not easy.

Justice

And working with love and power are also not enough to be able to transform social systems. The theory and practice I outlined in “Power and Love” (Kahane, 2010) were also inadequate: again I was missing something. And again it was Arenas who pointed this out to me when she told me:

I see a certain naïveté in your vision of a balance between power and love, in which things can be improved leaving everyone satisfied. How can that be? In a context of great imbalance or inequity, as in Guatemala, how can poverty be uprooted without some sectors of society being very dissatisfied? It is their economic interests which will be affected. I think that balance and satisfaction for all are possible in the realm of discourse, but not when you go down to ‘real’ politics in a context of enormous inequality. (Kahane, 2021, p. 153)

What I was missing was *justice*. Philosopher Nancy Fraser says: “Justice is never actually encountered directly. By contrast, we do experience injustice and it is through this that we form an idea of justice” (Fraser, 2012, p. 43). Justice, then, is the drive to reduce injustice: to increase fairness.

At COP27, justice was the third driving force. The people who are suffering and will suffer most from climate change—especially in the Global South, as well as marginalized and young people everywhere—are not the people who caused most of the change and have the greatest capacity to adapt to the change. This injustice has been at the center of climate negotiations since the 1992 signing of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which recognised the “common but differentiated responsibilities” of different countries (UNFCCC, 1992). Many stakeholders in the Global South are unwilling to collaborate with those in the Global North unless this injustice is properly addressed. The most difficult negotiations and the most important breakthroughs at COP27 were the agreements to bridge this gap by providing funds from the North to the South to

compensate for historical loss and damage due to climate change, and to enable “just transitions” away from fossil fuels to mitigate additional climate change (United Nations Climate Change, 2022).

Justice is required for collaboration to be able to transform social systems. Scholar-practitioner Rebecca Freeth sees justice as “both about how we navigate our way through social change processes (being conscious of unequal degrees of privilege, seeking parity of participation, and being willing to engage with our own outrage and that of others) and the direction in which we point our social change efforts (toward greater justice)” (Grillo, 2012). Transforming systems effectively requires key stakeholders to be comfortable with both the how and the direction of the collaboration. Stakeholders who think that they are being treated unfairly will not participate: they will not contribute their power to effecting transformation, or they will use their power to try to block transformation. Collaboration that does not tap into justice will not transform social systems.

Everyone is driven by justice—although they have different understandings of who is being treated unfairly (often they’re focused on how they or their organization or community is being treated unfairly). In 2010, I started a project in Thailand to deal with the violent political conflict between pro- and anti-government forces aligned to different political, economic, and regional interests. The organizers of the project had set up a series of meetings for me with leaders from politics, business, the military, the media, the aristocracy, and civil society. For three full days I sat in a bright windowless hotel meeting room and talked with these people one after another. I was bewildered by this experience of listening to a series of strong-minded persons giving me their views of this complicated conflict in a context and culture that were unfamiliar to me. But later I realised that what I had been hearing was simple: every single person had been trying to get me on their side by convincing me that they were right and their opponents were wrong—and, more specifically, that they were being treated unfairly and were the victims of injustice. They were not simply complaining to me: they were appealing to our common concern for fairness. This project inspired and is reported in my fourth book, “Collaborating with the Enemy: How to Work with People You Don’t Agree with or Like or Trust” (Kahane, 2017).

Justice arises from the reality that an unfair social system prevents people from participating as peers and that such unfairness produces a drive to transform that system. Futurist Willis Harman said that this drive is activated when people shift from seeing a situation as “unfortunate” to seeing it as “unacceptable” (personal communication, 1990). If a third dimension of social systems is the character of the relatedness among the holons, then justice is the drive that enables us to move *back and forth* between the extremes of being completely characterised by “I-It” relations and completely characterised by “I-Thou” relations (Buber, 2000).

Justice transforms systems so that more people can employ more of their power and more of their love. Tillich defines justice as “the form in which the power of being activates itself” (1954, p. 56) and “through which love performs its

work” (p. 71.). Justice does this through cultural recognition, economic redistribution, and political representation (Fraser et al., 2004, pp. 374–382). In moving from apartheid to democracy in South Africa, for example, the change in the social system included—albeit imperfectly—all three of these: recognition of the humanity and therefore the human rights of Black people, redistribution of economic opportunities to include them, and their representation in government.

Radical collaboration must work with justice. To avoid working with justice is to ignore the reality and consequences of injustice. But working with justice is not straightforward. Different people often have incommensurately different ideas of how to assess fairness and who is being treated unfairly. And it is difficult to transform social structures when the people who are benefiting from the status quo fight to maintain their power, positions, and privileges.

We need to work with justice, but this is not easy.

Integrating Love, Power, and Justice

Transforming social systems collaboratively therefore requires working with love and power and justice. All three of these drives are present in all social systems: they are ubiquitous, not rare or rarefied. Every day I feel all three of these drives within myself and see them throughout my news feed. If we’re trying to transform a social system and aren’t able to tap into and work with all of these drives, then we will find ourselves confused and frustrated. Trying to move through social space while ignoring some of these drives is like trying to move through physical space while ignoring gravity: we won’t get where we are trying to go and will probably fall down and hurt ourselves. To be effective, systems change efforts therefore must include both the awareness of and the ability to work with love, power, and justice.

All of the collaborative social transformation processes I have been involved in over the last 30 years have engaged all three drives. The Mont Fleur process in South Africa, for example, was driven by love to overcome apartheid separation, power to engage a broad group of leaders in realising the national transformation, and justice to rectify racial discrimination. The COP process, and the thousands of other climate change efforts to which it is connected, is also working with these three drives. This does not mean that these processes will succeed in transforming their systems, but only that this is the three-dimensional space within which collaborative (as contrasted to coercive) change efforts must navigate.

My colleagues and I presented the Radical Collaboration guidebook at COP27 to help collaborative change efforts on climate and related challenges work more intentionally and effectively with love, power, and justice. In a typical Reos systems transformation project, we create spaces and processes that engage love through convening and connecting actors from across the whole system, power through helping these actors learn-through-acting how to grow their individual and collective capacities to influence the system, and justice through creating

structures and agreements within which the actors can relate as fellow humans and peers (Kahane, 2021, pp. 149, 152, 155).

Working with love, power, and justice together is never easy because these three drives are in permanent tension. We can work towards greater love, power, and justice, but need to recognize that no neat, agreed, stable, ideal state is possible; in the *best* of all possible worlds, we have to live with plurality, volatility, conflict, and compromise. This was philosopher Isaiah Berlin's central proposition, which he summarized by quoting Immanuel Kant: "Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made" (Berlin, 1990, ii).

The fifth "*do*" of radical collaboration is *Care For Yourself*, which means attending to the human joys and tragedies of systems-transforming work. The corresponding "*don't*" is *Keep Pushing*, which means continuously demanding more of ourselves and others. A healthy movement towards a healthy future requires healthy people, and the way we show up affects what we can do. The journey is long and hard and we must acknowledge the uphill: many of our fellow travelers—especially those with less power and privilege—are suffering, traumatized, and frightened, torn between resignation and rage. We need to collaborate empathetically and fairly, recognizing that different collaborators face different realities and have different resources and constraints.

Because there is no static point of balance among love, power, and justice, we must create a dynamic balance. We need to move back and forth among these drives and to discover our way forward through trial and error. Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping offered an image for such movement when he described the transformation of the Chinese economy towards "socialism with Chinese characteristics" by saying, "We are crossing the river feeling for stones" (Heinzen, 2006).

The sixth "*do*" is *Discover Ways Forward*, which means employing love, power, and justice as each is needed, taking one step at a time, learning and adjusting as we go. In playing our roles, the way forward will rarely be clear or straightforward: it is not a highway, and we can't clear away the obstacles and make a straight road before we start. We must be prepared for confusion, crisis, failure, frustration, setbacks, and disappointment, and when these occur, pause, sense, and try something new. The "*don't*" is *Drive Straight Ahead*, which means deciding on a course of action and continuing on this course regardless of the results it is producing.

How do we create the love, power, and justice required to transform social systems? The good news is that we do not have to: every person has within themselves all three of these drives, and so we don't need to create them but only to unblock them. This crucial insight was given to me in 2017 by Jesuit priest Francisco de Roux, just after he had been appointed chairman of the Colombian Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition. My colleagues and I were facilitating a workshop of Colombian stakeholders who were working to transform their region through addressing its long-running violent conflicts. On the morning of the first day of the workshop, the participants

were tense: they had major disagreements about what had happened and what needed to happen. Some of them were enemies, many of them had strong prejudices, and most of them felt at risk in being there. But they had come anyway because they wanted to make a difference.

By the end of the day, the participants had begun to relax and to hope that they could do something worthwhile together. Then, when we all got up to go to dinner, de Roux rushed up to me, overflowing with excitement. “Now I see what you are doing!” he said. “You are removing the obstacles to the expression of the mystery!” De Roux was saying that enabling social transformation does not require creating love, power, and justice: it only requires removing the obstacles to the expression of these innate universal drives. De Roux’s perspective echoes approaches to personal and system development that focus on “capacity release” rather than “capacity building” (Stuteley & Stead, 2018, p. 112). The challenge these approaches present is how to release these drives and capacities not only in peaceful classroom or workshop settings, but also in the hurly-burly of COP events and ordinary business, political, and community life (Palmer, 2001).

The last of the seven “dos” of radical collaboration is *Share Hopeful Stories*. This means offering images of what is possible that help people find their way to move forward together. (The “don’t” is *Assume Common Language*, which means dictating to others how they must understand their reality and act on it.) People won’t move forward together without shared stories of realistic hope: they need narratives and maps about where they are, where they are trying to get to, and why it is important that they move (Wilkinson & Flowers, 2018). I can now see, in retrospect, that one role I have been playing in systems transformation is through telling such stories, both through reporting on my experiences and learnings from tough collaborations (as in this article) and through facilitating the co-creation of scenarios of better possible futures—the subject of my third book, “Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future” (Kahane, 2012).

The set of seven practices of radical collaboration provides an integrated approach to tapping into—to removing obstacles to the expression of—love, power, and justice. The seven “don’ts” are a recipe for an insular, competitive, rigid approach to addressing social challenges that cannot adequately address super-wicked challenges. The seven “dos,” by contrast, are a recipe for an inclusive, cooperative, responsive approach that has the potential to move far enough, fast enough, and fairly enough to adequately address these challenges.

Here, then, is the short version of my hopeful story. It is possible to transform social systems through radical collaboration. We do this through unblocking love and power and justice, and through feeling our way forward, towards a world with more love and more power and more justice. Making progress in this way is not straightforward or neat or easy, but it can be done. And it must be done: this is what it takes to address the daunting challenges of our time.

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