

Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change



FEATURE ARTICLES

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MAPA: Co-Creating New Narratives for the 21st Century

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Three Horizons Meets Presencing for Inclusive, Just and Equitable Futures

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Editorial

Editorial Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change:

From Duality to Complementarity

Oliver Koenig, Eva Pomeroy, Megan Seneque, and Otto Scharmer

The act of writing an Editorial calls us not only to showcase the published collection of articles, placing them into a wider frame to orient readers, but also to step back and reflect on the time in-between issues. As a biannual journal the timespan of half a year flies by in an instant. Much like a newborn, the time from birthing the journal (Koenig et al. 2021) to raising it into its current “toddlerhood” has at times passed by more quickly than one would want. These inflection points, however, give us reason to pause and bring our attention to the current moment and our intention within it.

More than twenty years ago, Morin & Kern (1999) framed the emerging condition of our planet and time as one of polycrisis. Looking back just half a year one can hardly comprehend the accelerating pace of the “complex intersolidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrollable processes, and the general crisis of the planet” (p. 74) that they described. Against the backdrop of the ongoing Covid-Pandemic, the swelling Ukraine-Russia conflict has escalated to a full-fledged war, not only setting in motion new streams of forced migration in Europe but also affecting the global fuel and energy market, currency devaluations, economic inflation and global food supply chains, especially in relation to some of the already most vulnerable parts of the world

(Lang & McKee, 2022). In addition, the journalistic coverage of the war, at least in the global North and West, itself reveals the shadow consciousness of these regions—attentional racism—as conflict-born suffering in regions such as Eritrea, Afghanistan, Yemen and others slip away from the newsfeeds.

The complexity and multi-dimensionality of our existence is at odds with the way the human mind has been taught and learned to behave. Our minds tend to search for easy answers, including blaming others—particularly those in authority. Yet the polycrisis, as Swilling (2013) puts it, defies “reduction to a single cause” (p. 93). The problem is not easily located “out there”, it is nested and interwoven in the entire fabric and make-up of our global institutions and the socio-economic, ecological and cultural frameworks, structures and mind-sets in which they are embedded (Swilling, 2013). And it is we who embody and enact these frameworks, structures and mind-sets.

Two decades ago, in a UNESCO publication on the future of education, Edgar Morin stated that, “The difficulty of knowing our world is aggravated by our mode of thought” (Morin, 2001, p. 52). In order to comprehend the globality of this critical planetary era that we are in, he continued “we must hereafter conceive the unbearable complexity of the world” (p. 52), which demands that we:

...simultaneously consider the unity and diversity, the complementarities and antagonisms of the planetary process ...
Our planet requires polycentric thought that can aim at a universalism that is not abstract but conscious of the unity/diversity of the human condition; a polycentric thought nourished by the cultures of the world. (Morin, 2001, p. 52)

What can a single journal still in its infancy, and the emergent field of Awareness-Based Systems Change which it aims to serve, contribute to this daunting task? We believe our role is to partake in and co-shape the r-(e)volution of science and research, supporting the move from differentiation to integration, from binary to plurality, from dualism to complementarity.

To have adequate knowledge of the world in all its complexity is not just a matter of survival, as Lorraine Code (2020) puts it, but also one of obligation. What philosophers have framed as the act of “knowing well” can also be framed as a moral exigence to expand our knowledge base and integrate what formerly has been subject to epistemic oppression or exclusion (Dotson, 2014).

In so doing, one embodies a position of “epistemic responsibility” (Code, 2020) in the ethical process of trying to understand how humans attempt to know, understand and act in their worlds embracing their full diversity. This form of ecological thinking “can generate more responsible knowings than the reductivism of the positivist post-Enlightenment legacy allows ...and... can spark a revolution comparable to Kant’s Copernican revolution” (Code, 2005, 87). We believe the field of Awareness-Based Systems Change, and the journal in particular, are well suited to foreground and undertake such an endeavor, as the collection of papers in this, our third issue, will demonstrate.

As an inter- and transdisciplinary field, we take an integrative and pluralistic methodological and theoretical approach at the cultural cusps of: theory and practice, research and action, inner and outer, personal and systemic. As such, our task is inherently hybrid in nature (Bhabha, 1994). The work is to intentionally engage in processes of disassembling and reassembling the structural and cultural foundations and symbolic conditions of which we are a part. We undertake this work with the intention to create new, less restricting and more enabling narratives which can generate action confidence (Scharmer & Pomeroy, 2020; Pomeroy & Oliver, 2021) that leads to palpable systemic change. Doing so demands we create (third) spaces that simultaneously are nourished by and benefit from difference and which produce a multiplicity of meanings. To that point, Bhabha (1993) writes:

It is precisely in that ambivalent use of ‘*different*’- to be different from those that are different makes you the same – that the Unconscious speaks of the form of the otherness, the tethered shadow of deferral and displacement. It is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness (p. 117).

This is the theoretical and methodological space we aim to inhabit and evolve.

Contributions to This Issue

We see Awareness-Based Systems Change as an invitation, aptly framed by Tony Hodgson in the *In Dialogue* piece of this issue, as giving ourselves permission to simultaneously hold and live in a multiplicity of ways of knowing (drawn from the *Three Horizons framework*, Sharpe, 2013). The articles in this issue, individually and taken together as a collection, reflect this expanded epistemological stance.

The original and peer-reviewed publications of this issue provide deep dives into specific perspectives. As a group, they can be seen as an array or a journey intersecting and oscillating back and forth between the first-, second- and third-person perspectives (a) knower/s can inhabit in their search for meaning, all of which serve, and are needed to advance, the field of awareness-based systems change.

Taking as her starting point the self-reflexive and introspective first-person perspective afforded by autoethnography *Erin Alexiuk* explores the potential contributions of this method to systems analysis. Alexiuk interweaves Sauna-Stories as narrative layers to explore her family’s history as Finnish immigrants to northern Ontario, Canada. In doing so, she surfaces nuanced understandings of highly complex social and cultural processes, in particular the intergenerational and translocational processes of identity formation and its connection to land. This piece also draws connections and carves out opportunities for introspective work to advance systems change research, not

least of all by capturing and making visible the messy complexity of lived experience.

Moving from and being moved by her own first-person perspective of the effects embodied practices have had on her sense of feeling connected, *Daniela Lehner* invites the reader on a theoretical journey into relational terrain: the intersubjective dimension of the second-person perspective. Taking as her context the highly pertinent field of peace education she delineates the place and contribution of body and heart intelligence(s) to shift dualistic and binary modes of being and knowing towards relationality and interconnectedness. She argues that only by overcoming the various forms of separation that promote violent structures, and realizing the connective nature of all beings, can we start to embrace and learn what she frames as *imperfect* peace.

With her second article in the Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change *Melanie Goodchild*, continues to tell the/her story (Dibaajimowin) of the evolution of relational systems thinking as an Indigenous standpoint theory in its own right, which is presented in at least three ways. As a spatial nexus, relational systems thinking is a cultural and dynamic interface that enables emergence in the third and sacred space between differentiated but equal ways of knowing. As a standpoint, relational systems thinking helps systems change practitioners and scholars transcend binary and hierarchical thinking in order to embrace a complexity mindset, informed by Indigenous wisdom traditions. As an experience, relational systems thinking is an invitation into relational knowing through engagement with the net of relational stories and lessons representing the author's own lived experience of embarking on a journey of coming to know as she researches at the interface of knowledge systems.

The journey through perspectives is completed by *Sandra Waddock*, *Steve Waddell*, *Peter H. Jones* and *Ian Kendrick*. These authors take a third-person perspective that allows them to discern an integrative system of systems which they call Transformation (T-) systems. The T-system is both a heuristic frame and a practical organizing process to help socio-ecological systems flourish. T-systems are understood to be the totality of initiatives, people and organizations who are collectively seeking to transform a particular issue, in a given context. Drawing on the *Seafood 2030* initiative as an illustrative example, they describe passages of connection, coherence and amplification as discrete stages in T-systems evolution, involving processes to develop self-awareness and overcome disconnectedness in order to support greater systemic and transformative impact.

The articles featured in our innovation formats, *Commentary from the Field*, *In the Making* and *Discussant to In the Making*, and *In Dialogue* all illustrate and reflect upon the lived experience of moving away from dualistic approaches to knowledge creation to instead bring different knowledge systems into conversation with one another, i.e. shifting from duality to complementary. In the *Commentary*, Editorial Board member, *Shobi Lawalata*, writing from the context of Indonesia's considerable linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity,

provides an inspirational illustration of what polycentric, non-reductivist thinking looks like in practice. It is perhaps not by coincidence that “United in Diversity” is the organization that provides the context for this article. The organization’s work to support leadership capacity-building with Indigenous and grassroots community leaders in service of equitable and sustainable nature stewardship is underpinned by a collective intention to build infrastructures for complementarity. She points to the need to first recognize the existence of rigor in knowledge systems that have been subsumed by dominant colonial knowledge so that the two may be brought into dialogue to meet current challenges.

This issue’s *In the Making* continues the theme of holding plurality and illustrates the potential for emergent creativity that lives within it. *Renata Sbardelini, Daniele Almeida and Liliane Moreira Ramos*, share their action research initiative, the MAPA Social Innovation Lab, in which they engaged leaders from diverse sectors and positionalities to rethink a social model anchored in feminine-masculine duality in their home county, Brazil. Guided through a Theory U (Scharmer, 2016) based process, participants deepened the initial inquiry question, connecting them with the power relations related to gender, race, social class, economic class, and humankind’s relationship with nature. Through powerful, granular examples drawn from the five-day lab, the authors illuminate key moments of consciousness shift around the plurality of gender experience and the conditions that allowed this plurality to surface and co-shape new and multiple gender narratives. In doing so, they simultaneously illustrate the inextricable connection between personal and systemic.

As *Discussant to In the Making*, *José Romero Keith* picks up on this thread, identifying gender inequity as a “showcase” of the systemic workings of exclusion that makes visible the dynamics of systemic exclusion more broadly. Romero frames the MAPA Social Innovation Lab as a meeting of Paulo Freire’s (2018) emancipatory pedagogy and Theory U as a framework for awareness-based systems change. He points to the complementary of the two, as learning processes that share an ultimate goal for the generation of collective consciousness for social transformation.

The *In Dialogue* piece in this issue, brings together *Oliver Koenig, Megan Seneque, Bill Sharpe, Zahra Ash-Harper, Stefan Bergheim, Anthony Hodgson, and Asiya Odugleh-Kolev* to explore the links between Presencing and Three Horizons in the context of creating inclusive, just and equitable futures. The conversants explore what it means to avoid totalizing structures (however well intended), as we work with a plurality of perspectives in the kind of reflexive futuring processes that are contained in both the Three Horizons and in Presencing. This exploration around the nature and quality of structure required for authentic presence and for the emergence of collective insight from a plurality of perspectives, drew the conversants to the nature of structuring that love brings. *Ilia Delio* (2013), a scholar at Georgetown University who is bringing new insight into the work of Jesuit paleontologist, *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, talks about love as the animating force in the universe. She talks about the

‘unbearable wholeness of being’, which resonates with the earlier reference to Morin speaking about the ‘unbearable complexity of the world’.

The question of how to structure for love, while not always explicitly stated as such, can be seen as an undercurrent for several of the articles, and it connects through the theme of holding plurality of experience and perspective. More than a sentimental notion, love has been taken up by important critical thinkers of our time. For Adorno (2005) “love is the power to see similarity in the dissimilar” (p. 191). Bhaskar (2012) contends that love is “the principle of union behind all unions without which nothing could cohere” (p. 189) and that it is “the cohesive force in the universe, which makes it whole, and in your ground state that makes you coherent, strong, autonomous and whole” (p. 192, all of the above quoted in Hartwig, 2015, p. 207).

We began this piece with a consideration of the complex polycrisis of our current moment. Surely existence—and ideally flourishing—in this context demands of us action drawn from a plurality of perspectives, voices and epistemologies. Perhaps the role of love in structuring for plurality is to provide the motivation to stay with that which is different, complex and unfamiliar long enough to create the new narratives we, as individuals and societies, need. This is the role of what Bill Sharpe in the *In Dialogue* piece refers to as ‘existential convening’, which enables a deep mutuality of presence, where people are able to be fully themselves while being fully part of the flow of the whole.

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Commentary from the Field

Awareness-Based System Change for Elevating Education and Reshaping Development

Shobi Lawalata

*Associate Professor and Director of Academic and Learning Programs,
United In Diversity
shobi.lawalata@uid.or.id*

I was trained as a scientist in the field of biological sciences, especially in employing the tools of molecular genetics to investigate how branching events in nature's evolutionary history shape the diversity of life on earth today. I joined the field out of a deep sense of awe and wonder for nature's amazing web of diversity, of which my home of Indonesia is blessed with abundance: it is home to some of the earth's largest biodiversity on land and below water. But my years of field study brought me face-to-face with widespread environmental degradation and the marginalization of communities after communities in the name of development, especially those residing in and around valuable natural resources. Eventually these challenges become impossible to ignore, so instead of pursuing a traditional career in scientific research and academia, I decided to follow a

deeper calling to address these issues and began working with a not-for-profit foundation in Indonesia called United In Diversity¹ (UID).

UID works by convening diverse actors of society from across sectors—government, civil society, and businesses—and facilitating them through leadership capacity building processes to bring about transformative systems change, and create a peaceful, sustainable, and equitable Indonesia. What I’m learning from this work is that transformative systems change to address societal-level issues like deforestation, and its associated social injustice, is anything but straightforward. It involves many layers of shifts, from policy changes, behavioral changes, relational changes, and most profoundly, change in awareness of the people in the system itself—all of which needs to happen while balancing the needs of the many stakeholders involved, present and future.

This requires other skillsets in addition to what we are typically provided with through our education system. Two immediate gaps come to mind: For one, the pedagogy of today’s schools and universities revolves around logical reasoning and scientific inquiry as the only recognized way to generate knowledge and solve problems. While this approach has greatly benefited humanity for the past few centuries and will continue to yield important civilization-advancing discoveries, the reductive and analytical nature of the scientific approach could lead us to miss the bigger picture—the proverbial “missing the forest for the trees”. Without a way of seeing from the whole, we may arrive at ineffective or even harmful, although well-intentioned, solutions. Secondly, logical reasoning and scientific inquiry insists on employing strictly objective third-person perspectives, whilst ignoring first and second-person perspectives on the observer. But to adhere to this insistence is to risk missing out on one of the most powerful leverages for triggering deep systems changes: transforming the awareness of the humans within the system itself.

Awareness-based systems change has proven to be a powerful tool for our work at UID to complement the above limitations of the scientific approach. The “systems change” portion of the name highlights a broader and deeper way to understand and befriend the complexity that humans have evolved through our societal institutions and personal choices. UID translates this whole-system perspective in our learning processes through a number of ways: first horizontally, by recreating a microcosm of the system stakeholders through representation in the conversation. This includes, most importantly, bringing into conversation the voiceless stakeholders and those at the edges of the system with others along the axis of power so they can begin to see the system through each other’s eyes. Second, vertically, by investigating the link between the results that we see above the surface and the root causes arising from our own habits of thoughts and actions through a series of generative conversations with the other system stakeholders. And lastly, temporally, by examining patterns of

¹ www.unitedindiversity.org

behavior over time that might give a clue to the underlying system structure giving rise to them.

The “awareness-based” portion of this approach shines a light on a dimension very rarely explored in our schools and universities: that of the inner dimension of the observing self from which our thinking, being, and doing arise. In UID’s programs, this involves holding the space for a cycle of honest inquiry inward—whether through mindfulness meditation practices, journaling, or reflective inquiries—coupled with experiential learning activities that exposes our participants to new ways of seeing and experiencing the system, whether through immersion visits, embodied constellation exercise to manifest the system as a social body such as Social Presencing Theater (Hayashi, 2021), social arts, or generative dialogue with others in the system. These conversations can be challenging especially when they navigate cross-generational power imbalances and trauma—this is certainly true for the conflict over land use leading to the marginalization of local Indigenous communities---as one is brought to realize the extent of structural and attentional violence² we have inflicted upon others and ourselves. Yet these conversations can be the gateway to deep transformative changes in mindsets and relational qualities that truly shift the way the system operates as a whole.

Bringing Different Ways of Knowing into Conversation with Each Other

The logical reasoning and scientific inquiry that form the core of the pedagogical and approach in today’s schools and universities are arguably euro-centric in nature (Compayre, 2015). Yet, this approach is so ubiquitous around the globe—whether as artefacts of the colonial imperialist practices of old or as part of a country’s evolution along the modern development trajectory. One might argue that the imposition of this way of knowing as *the* universal standard of human development can be seen as a form of hegemony (Mayo, 2015): When we talk about a people being uneducated, we tend to mean that they have not been instructed in this particular euro-centric system of education, while failing to recognize that a people belonging to other cultures may receive education in *other*, equally valid ways of knowing and being.

Consider, for example, that the people of the *Adat* community of Kasepuhan Banten Kidul in West Java can name and cultivate more than one hundred varieties of rice that they grow in their fields. Or the fact that they know how to time their planting season according to the position of the stars in the sky, and using this system they have managed to achieve food security for as far back as

² Attentional violence, according to Otto Scharmer, is not seeing another person in terms of their highest future possibility. https://www.kosmosjournal.org/kj_article/collective-trauma-and-our-emerging-future/

their oral history goes. Or the *Bajau* sea farers of the Wakatobi islands in Southeast Sulawesi, who can name as many stars as a Western-educated astronomer, and have been utilizing this knowledge to navigate the oceans as far away as modern-day Thailand and the Philippines. Or the Balinese traditional irrigation governance system of *Subak* that adheres to principles of ecological balance, social cohesion, and spiritual harmony. Or the practice of *Sasi* of the Maluku people in Eastern Indonesia that governs seasonal harvests to allow fishes, trees, fruits, and other natural stocks to replenish. The list goes on; these are mere vignettes of Indonesia's Indigenous knowledge systems that I have had the privilege of learning about through my work³. And if the seven hundred plus Indigenous languages spoken in Indonesia (Eberhard et al., 2022) are any indication, there are many others still (and countless others around the world)—and they all hint at rich, advanced, and rigorous knowledge systems with plenty to offer to the development of human civilization as a whole, if we only had the humility to learn from them (Sillitoe, 2009).

Without bringing other ways of knowing into conversation with the *status quo*, we risk getting stuck in perpetuating the same outdated euro-centric worldviews and a development paradigm that is no longer serving the current moment in the journey of humanity. In fact, this development paradigm is threatening the very survival of these knowledge systems by imposing Western standards of “modernity” through “education” and “economic empowerment” onto their way of life (Escobar, 2011). But as with any complex problems, we cannot simply negate and cease all development. Instead, we can begin by recognizing the existence and rigor of these other knowledge systems, and bringing them into conversation with the logical reasoning, critical thinking and scientific inquiry traditions so we can situate them all within the context of our modern challenges, and rethink our approach to development.

The Path Forward

Through years of facilitating transformative changes in Indonesia, I can say with certainty that profound systems change is indeed possible. Although it might take us lifetimes to undo the centuries of hegemony in education and through the development paradigm (Schmelzer, 2016), I have witnessed how the framework and tools to help systems see and sense themselves can and do yield concrete, practical outcomes to our pressing challenges. One such example is particularly relevant, in which a prototype seeded in UID's leadership capacity building program in 2015 evolved into national-level policy change that recognizes the

³ Academic texts and other sources are available that further detail the Indigenous knowledge systems mentioned here. For example, Lansing (1987) discussed the Subak irrigation system (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/677758>). Meanwhile Haulussy et al. (2020) wrote of one example of Sasi implementation in a village of Maluku. <http://www.ijstr.org/final-print/feb2020/The-Sustainability-Of-The-Sasi-Lola-Tradition-And-Customary-Law-case-Study-In-Masawoy-Maluku-Indonesia.pdf>

existence of Indonesia's Indigenous peoples and their rights to steward their ancestral lands according to their knowledge systems⁴ (Supriyanto, 2021). To date, this has resulted in more than seventy-five thousand hectares of forests being recognized as ancestral land in the stewardship of almost ninety *adat* communities (Ministry of Environment and Forestry Republic of Indonesia, 2021).

And this is but *one* story, unfolding among many others from within UID's own body of work and from so many other practitioners of awareness-based systems change around the world. I see the fundamental role of this Journal to serve as a platform to make visible stories and inspirations of such examples from around the globe, that celebrate and learn from other ways of knowing and help light the way for rethinking education and development. For our own common future.

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⁴ I spoke about this prototype example more extensively in this TEDx GAIA Journey video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJNUaTBJDok>

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Peer Reviewed Article

Telling Sauna Stories:

A Role for Autoethnography in Systems Change Research

Erin Alexiuk

University of Waterloo (Canada)
ealexiuk@uwaterloo.ca

Abstract

Autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology that centers self in social and cultural analysis. Building on the emerging study of inner work in systems transformations, this article explores the potential contributions of autoethnography as a methodological companion to systems analysis. By layering excerpts from an autoethnography exploring my maternal family's history as Finnish immigrants to northern Ontario, Canada with conventional academic prose, I model what this approach might look like and discuss its relationship with established systems approaches. In writing this piece, my intentions are exploratory: what can we learn from those who study and practice systems change if they turned their gaze inward and revealed their journey for others to learn from? Using an autoethnographic approach, I surfaced nuanced understandings of highly complex social and cultural processes. In particular, a previously unexamined connection to ancestry and cultural identity emerged through sauna stories told by female relatives and my own introspection into a life-long relationship with sauna bathing. The partial, dynamic narratives resulting from this work better match our incomplete understandings of complex systems and can even transform the lives of those engaged in systems change.

Keywords

systems change; inner work; autoethnography, complex-systems; Finnish-Canadian sauna

Introduction

The systems change field has grown alongside widespread efforts to grapple with the urgent need to build planetary resilience and address complex challenges (for example, Scharmer, 2018; Senge, 2006; Stroh, 2015; Westley et al., 2006). My introduction to this field was through the study of resilience in complex social-ecological systems and regime shifts to explain systemic change (Gunderson & Holling, 2002; Holling, 1973; Westley et al., 2006). I then turned to social innovation to explore emergent solutions to social problems that “ultimately shift resources and authority flows, social routines and cultural values of the social systems that created the problem in the first place.” (Westley et al., 2017, p. 4). Propelled by the knowledge that transformative systems change was possible, I nonetheless felt that something was missing in how I understood systems change.

As the systems change field has grown, a tacit consensus has emerged around the need for inner work to effectively intervene in, and ultimately transform, complex systems. In a recent review of relevant literature, Steidle et al. (2021) concluded that “personal transformation creates positive conditions for the advancement of social change” and that it is “an integral part of most long-term, sustainable, positive social change” (p. 4). Similarly, Norris and Blakeman (2021) recently characterized social innovators as “being in the learning business” (p.2) and identified learning as the core activity in successful social change processes. This journal seeks to expand on research in this emerging field, introducing transformative practices and lifting-up processes of co-inquiry, thereby providing a space to explore how inner transformations relate to broader social change. Within both practitioner and academic circles, inner work is increasingly recognized as an important element in understanding and shifting social systems.

The subjective dimensions of self at work in systems change processes are, however, seldom revealed in our scholarly writing. First-person accounts demonstrating how inner work is connected to systems change are rare. Disciplinary conventions outlining acceptable forms of knowledge production and representation deter exploration beyond their borders (Guttorm et al., 2021). As Koenig et al. (2021) explain, dominant onto-epistemological positions and associated methodologies “stem from an overt western and colonializing focus on rational thought” (p. 2). Connecting how research is conducted to the way in which representations of lived experience are communicated, Yoo (2017) succinctly explains, “the way in which we present our research indicates the kinds of knowledge we value” (p. 2). My hunch that something was missing had thus turned into a moral imperative to change my research practice.

Systems change organizations are moving quickly to provide opportunities for changemakers to engage in inner work. These opportunities are often structured as facilitated learning journeys, immersive convenings, and engaged practitioner networks (for example, the Getting to Maybe Residency at the Banff Centre, the Presencing Institute's u.lab, and the Wolf Willow Institute's programming). Through various entry points, these programs support changemakers as they engage in inner work to enhance their ability to navigate complexity, develop systems leadership skills, and ultimately increase the impact of their change work.

As systems change researchers, we too should attend to the inter- and intra-personal scale by engaging in inner work. First, systems change researchers are often engaged scholars and our research is intimately tied to our practice. Accordingly, our scholarship will be more useful, relevant, and applicable if we actively engage in the field, including action and community-based research of inner work processes (Bradbury, 2015; Etmanski et al., 2014). Second, approaches to transformative systems change tend to focus attention on the global scale and, aside from the accounts of key actors, nuanced descriptions of intra- and inter-personal transformation processes are rare. With increasing interest in inner work across the field, this gap remains an important area of study.

This article explores autoethnography as a complementary methodology for systems change research. As the study of self (*auto*) in culture (*ethno*), the approach is a promising complement to the abundant work on macro-scale transformations dominating the literature. Diving deeper, the iterative shift between the personal and cultural, continual critical reflexivity, and focus on perspective and purpose within autoethnographic research resonates with several aspects of systems change research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Maydell, 2010). I offer the perspective of an emerging scholar entering autoethnography, my learnings to date, and an unexpected pathway to systems awareness that presented itself along the way. In doing so, I aim to contribute to the nascent body of literature exploring the role of individual transformation to social change at higher scales. Specifically, five learnings for systems change researchers will be discussed throughout the paper:

1. Autoethnography evokes inner work at every stage of the research process as both a method of inquiry and disciplined practice of introspection.
2. Creative writing serves systems change research by enacting a commitment to communication and dialogue rather than expert-oriented knowledge production.
3. By capturing the full, messy complexity of lived experience through evocative narratives, readers can more readily convey the universal significance of their work.

4. Releasing the constraints of conventional academic prose enables humility, vulnerability, and empathy in our research, practice, and writing.
5. An iterative shift between the individual and macro scales of analysis cultivates a more nuanced understanding of complex social and cultural processes across scales.

This article includes excerpts from an autoethnography on my maternal family's history as Finnish immigrants to northern Ontario, Canada to model an autoethnographic approach. An unexpected outcome, recovering an ancestral connection to the Finnish sauna, emerged as a case in which autoethnography mirrored the results of engaging in inner work. This finding points to the need to further explore the role that autoethnography can play in systems change research.

Before proceeding, I must clarify that I have never visited Finland and my sauna knowledge comes primarily from the older women in my life: my mother and aunts. I write as a learner and claim no expertise in these areas aside from the knowledge of my own experience. I ask your forgiveness for any inaccuracies within, and patience with my attempt to provide a look into my early process. I offer this work with the hope that it is useful to those who are beginning to chart their own pathways to systems awareness and explore creative expressions of that journey.

Finnish Settlement in Northern Ontario, Canada

My mother's grandparents immigrated to Canada from Finland just before Finnish independence (1917), and the end of the First World War (1918). Like many Finnish immigrants of the time, they settled on Anishanaabe lands in the Robinson-Huron Treaty Area in Northern Ontario near *N'Swakamok* (Sudbury). My *Mummu* (Grandma), Raila¹, was born in Canada in 1918 to parents who were from southwestern Finland, likely near the town of Laitila. My *Pappa* (Grandpa), Antti, was born in 1919 to parents who were from northern Finland. Beyond this, I've struggled to find linkages to my maternal ancestors in Finland. Like many others, name changes at immigration entry points and spotty family history have made it difficult to trace anything beyond vague arrival dates, pieced together from birth order.

"Pappa was born here, but his sister was born in Finland," my aunties say.

When I first had the opportunity to visit southern Sweden – about 350km from Raila's parents' home – I came to understand why so many Finnish immigrants had settled in Northern Ontario. The landscapes were strikingly similar. The familiar granite outcroppings punctuating the boreal forest woven

¹ Names changed to maintain anonymity.

between countless lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands enabled Finnish settlers to successfully establish homesteads in the Sudbury area (Saarinen, 2013). In their history of a rural Finnish community on the outskirts of Sudbury, Tapper and Saarinen (1998) explain, “the desire to own land and to farm were strong motivating forces...empty-handed Finns mined the stumps and stones...for root crops and pasture to support dairy and beef herds” (p. 5). Putting myself into my great-grandparent’s shoes, I imagined a similar feeling of familiarity – a continued rather than disrupted relationship with the land.

Approximately 20,700 Finnish immigrants arrived between 1901-1918, representing a third of the Finnish-Canadian population (Government of Canada, 2020). Like many others, my great-grandparents settled in a *pesdpäikat* (nesting places or Finntowns) along what would become known as the ‘sauna belt’ in northern Ontario around Lake Superior (Nordskog, 2010; Saarinen, 1999). Today, saunas are one of the most recognizable cultural symbols of Finland and their importance to rural Finnish-Canadian communities cannot be understated. Saarinen (1999) explains:

For Finns in North America, no matter how poor they were or how humble the building, it was the sauna that gave them stability and a link with the past that was almost as necessary as food or shelter. In rural areas such as Beaver Lake and Wanup, it became part of a circular farmstead landscape featuring a house, barn, hayshed, ice shed, milk house, woodshed, tool/implement shed, root house, outhouse and garage. (p. 248)

Indoor plumbing and electricity were often slow to come to rural communities. Here, sauna was just as much about carrying on a cultural tradition as it was about practicality. One afternoon, my aunt described what saunas were like growing up in the 1950s and 60s.

“Mom [Raila] made a big meal and you sauna’d and had supper and the family got together,” she said, “Till I was like, eight [late 1950s], we had no inside facilities. Dad built the house, but he was too busy working up [north], or he wasn’t home, so he never put [plumbing] inside. So, other than a quick sponge bath, we washed in the sauna.” (Personal communication, June 18, 2018). On further reflection, she described how the sauna was also a place for visiting and storytelling, explaining that “it was the thing to do when somebody put their sauna on... we sauna’d all over the place!” (Personal communication, June 18, 2018).

This is how I was introduced to sauna: as a social bathing practice shared among family and occasionally among friends. Through autoethnography, I realized that the ubiquity of saunas across North America – in health spas, hotels, gyms, etc. – had diluted my understanding of the ancestral bond I shared with the practice. Only through purposeful awareness well into adulthood did I come to recognize an unbroken link back through my maternal lineage to Finland. My perspective on sauna transformed from a very practical one – bathing – into a deeper understanding of how sauna had worked in my family as

a form of cultural continuity. These surfaced linkages are explored throughout the article as: a way to connect with the land; an embodied, spiritual practice; a routine bathing practice; a doorway to cultural roots and institutions; a space for cultivating inner wholeness; and a central figure in our family history.

The Sauna at Great Mountain

Antti was an avid moose hunter. As a young man, he hiked south from Lake Panage just west of Sudbury, Ontario after hearing about the good hunting there. On subsequent trips, Raila would accompany him to help prepare and pack out meat. In the late 1950s, with a dream and some savings, they decided to build a hunt camp in the remote area known as Great Mountain Lake. That winter, Antti skied to Great Mountain Lake and applied for a land use permit to build at the base of the mountain.

A small cabin was built first, by hand, from the towering white and red pines along the shoreline. During moose hunting season, they put up a temporary sauna using a plastic tarp to keep warm.

“That’s how important sauna was to them” my aunt explained.

In later years, Antti and Raila built a larger camp to make space for their growing family. When the larger camp was finished, the original cabin was converted to a sauna. Antti still hunted in the fall, but the summer months made way for younger family members to experience camp life. Some would canoe in from the nearest lake with road access. A lucky few would evade the rough, full day of paddling and portaging by flying with supplies in a bush plane.

The camp itself was simple and functional: an aluminum-sided, one-room building built back from the lake with a wood cookstove, a few cupboards, kitchen table, and lots of open space. Foam pads, sleeping bags, clothes bags, and – depending on the year – a crib or two for babies and toddlers would fill-up the place.

“Up here” explains Wilkins (1997), “they’re called camps” (p. 68). Describing Finnish camp life in Northern Ontario, Wilkins (1997) goes on:

The place is a spit in the eye of the late 20th century. No electricity, no indoor facilities, no double glass. And yet in its Luddite charms—solitude, sauna, unviolated riverbank—...[the] family would seem to have found much of what they need to know of paradise. (p. 69)

And paradise it was. Our family camp sat about 100 meters in front of the stark, white, quartzite face of what we called Great Mountain. The 400m wall of rock reached up from clear, sapphire blue water like the mountain lakes of the Canadian Rockies.

The sauna building had two rooms – the sauna and the *pukuhuone* (dressing room). The *pukuhuone* was for changing, relaxing, and storing anything else that needed to stay by the lake, but away from the critters. It had a window into the

sauna, where a kerosene lamp would sit on the sill after the sun went down, shining light into both rooms. A door separated the *pukuhuone* from the sauna. Walking through, a long *penkki* (bench) spanned the width of the room about halfway up the wall. A second, lower *penkki* held the *tynnyrin* (wash basins) and enough space to sit if you wanted a gentler sauna. The *kiuas* (sauna stove) sat in the far corner with a large *tynnyrin* attached for heating water. A window looked out to the lake across from the *kiuas*. Sitting on the top *penkki*, the rough, hand-hewn logs rub history against your back.

Together, the camp and sauna stood as proud but subtle representations of Finnish heritage in Northern Ontario. It was an intimate, family place connecting us to both to the land we know as home and the one my great-grandparents left behind.

Inner Work for Systems Researchers

Most social change training involves what Norris and Blakeman (2021) refer to as *informational* learning – introducing new tools, strategies, processes, or knowledge to improve a changemaker’s practice. Emerging programs that invite practitioners to engage in inner work are responding to a growing understanding that complex systems thinking tools can be introduced in such a way that prompts a shift in one’s modes of reasoning. From a transformative learning perspective, Mezirow (2012) defined this work as:

...the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference²...to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (p. 75)

Similarly, Scharmer (2018) describes a problematic blind spot that, when left unexamined, hinders our ability to imagine new patterns across a system. In their examination of social innovations across history, Westley et al. (2017) describe a “sensitivity to initial conditions” (p.7). These starting conditions, which can include the inner condition of the innovator, have been called *prophetic*. The imprint of their influences can be traced throughout the trajectory of the innovation and continue to shape its future. As Westley et al. (2017) explain, “an innovation’s basic DNA—the values and hopes of its earliest architects and advocates—may be easy to obscure but are very difficult to eradicate” (pp. 7–8). Awareness of our innermost selves not only illuminates our patterns of thought and behavior, it also guards against unwittingly seeding our change work with the DNA of the current system. Furthermore, while inner work may remedy the blind spot, applying these newfound understandings to guide

² Mezirow describes frames of reference as the structures of belief, assumption, and/or expectation upon which our patterns of thought and behaviour are based.

more productive and quality relationships, and ultimately the broader system, completes the approach (Scharmer, 2018; Stroh, 2015). Inner work for social change is therefore situated at the interface of transformative systems change and personal introspection – the vulnerable state of acknowledging, reflecting, and navigating the uncertainty of complex situations. This is an uncomfortable, yet productive, space for many changemakers.

Despite the benefits, barriers abound for social innovation researchers looking to engage in inner work. Perhaps most apparent is that the academic life rarely affords the time (or funding) to engage in multi-day retreats. Moreover, inner work retreats are generally targeted at practitioners rather than academics, often carry hefty price tags, and are highly competitive. For many graduate students and early career researchers, the added cost of therapy or coaching to guide inner work is financially inaccessible on top of tuition and student debt. Additional barriers include taking time away from demanding research and course schedules and overcoming the stigma of accessing mental health services (Forrester, 2021). The question becomes, how do we weave inner work into our research practice?

Autoethnography: A Methodological Companion for Systems Change Researchers

Autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology that centers self in social and cultural analysis. Just as inner work responds to the gap in understanding the self in systems change work, autoethnography fills the gap left by the erasure of personal identity, voice, and experience from dominant research conventions (Douglas & Carless, 2013; Ellis et al., 2011). Many autoethnographers employ the method to investigate what Ellis et al. (2011) refer to as an *epiphany*, moments that interrupt life's expected path and force us to re-assess how we make sense of the world. These are the “events after which life does not seem quite the same” (Ellis et al., 2011, Chapter 2, para. 2) and can also be viewed as the *disruptive dilemmas* Mezirow (2012) identified as initiating a transformative learning process. Similarly, useful insights may emerge by applying an autoethnographic lens to the personal transformations that can occur while engaging in social change.

The history of autoethnography is generally discussed in the context of an increasing interest in, and appreciation for, personal narrative and reflexivity as part of an ethical, politically and historically situated, subjective, research practice (Adams et al., 2015; Douglas & Carless, 2013; Ellis et al., 2011). Disrupting the long-standing dichotomy between art and science, autoethnographers embrace storytelling, use literary and narrative techniques, and draw attention to the aesthetics to create evocative narratives (Adams et al. 2015; Ellis et al. 2011). Autoethnographers also attend to the relational aspects embodied by the method, particularly between researcher and reader (Ellis et al., 2011). Adams and Manning (2015) identify the primary assumption of

autoethnography: “(general) culture flows through the (specific) self ... writing about the self is simultaneously writing about cultural values, practices, and experiences” (p. 352). Therefore, an autoethnographic approach generates a comprehensive understanding of the self in relation to the social and cultural at multiple scales for both narrator and reader.

Describing her process for coming to know autoethnography, Scott-Hoy (Ellis & Scott-Hoy, 2012) explains:

I become sensitive to the social tones, the moods and feelings that colored daily life, the worldview and cosmos that shaped action and interaction. I begin to look at myself, to try and take off my “colored” glasses and observe the impact different personal and cultural lenses have on what we see. (p. 352)

Through the autoethnographic gaze, the particularities and nuance of an event are analyzed in all their complexity through a practice that sparks critical reflection, evokes connection, advances social justice, and contributes to well-being. In so doing, the tangled inner worlds is surfaced in service of cultivating a more equitable, just, and sustainable outer world. As Ellis and Bochner (2000) explain:

Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 739)

Autoethnographers often use a process of systematic sociological introspection (Ellis, 1991, 2008) to examine one’s own lived experience and construct autoethnographies. The approach engages sociological and cultural analysis to bring meaning to events by way of articulating a narrative truth. Readers experience the autoethnography and relate it to their own lives *as if it were true*. This disciplined practice of introspection in relation to social and cultural forces gestures toward a resonance between established autoethnographic and emerging inner work approaches. Thus, an invitation surfaces for social change researchers to consider adding the method to their suite of systems approaches.

Bricolage for Recovering Wholeness

During my graduate career, I began to think seriously about my audience and representation. Who will read my work? How am I representing people (and myself) in my research? How does my communication style influence my potential contributions to the world? So-called soft skills – including empathy, vulnerability, and communication – are increasingly acknowledged as necessary to produce effective contributions and support impactful change work. However, there is very little scholarly discussion (in journals or the hallways) devoted to

cultivating these skills, as described by Scott-Hoy (as quoted in Ellis & Scott-Hoy, 2012).

I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to explore the wonderful literature available and to share others' theories and ideas and those ideas have enriched my thought processes. But I feel sad that some people may have been put off by the jargon and complexity. What have we as feeling and thinking members of communities missed out on, because we have alienated others who wanted to contribute? (p. 139)

My first autoethnographic study, of which excerpts are included in this paper, explores my maternal family's history as Finnish immigrants to Northern Ontario, Canada. After struggling to write amidst an unfamiliar metropolitan landscape in southern Ontario for some months, I craved connection to a place where I could be in relation to my Finnish heritage. In June of that year, I secluded myself at a remote, water-access camp on the shores of Lake Penage outside of Sudbury, Ontario. Separated from the familiar comforts of daily life and brought into the new routines necessitated by limited solar power, no running water, and patchy cell service, I found it easier to also separate myself from my usual writing habits. I made a point to sauna every day to further immerse myself in my early memories.

Chopping and carrying firewood, tending the fire in the *kiuas* (stove), enjoying the *löyly* (steam), and jumping in the lake layered an embodied, spiritual aspect to my day. I allowed myself to experiment with a different approach to writing: from memory, with the voices of my family recounting events. I drew upon both historical facts and anecdotes absorbed by growing up in northern Ontario.

It was during that trip that I first read Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner's chapter on autoethnography in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods* (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). An unsettling barrage of thoughts and feelings followed - excitement, doubt, relief, fear. Thankfully, I wrote through the discomfort and, in doing so, had initiated a necessary bricolage that continues today.

Bricolage is a process whereby previously disconnected elements are brought into relationship to form something new. Westley et al. (2017) describe the process of bricolage as essential to successful social innovations that can create a "coherent, consistent, and stable pattern of interaction" (p. 7) – a new, stable system state. I observed a process of bricolage occurring in real time as elements from my own life crashed together: culture, family, narrative, research, systems change, and more. Through autoethnography, I had stumbled into a sense of wholeness that had irrevocably changed my perception of the outer world and a deeper awareness from which I could ground my perspective. This interplay between iterative transformations of self and broader system change is at the heart of nascent inner work for changemakers.

Doing Autoethnography

Creative Writing

Although often solely conceptualized as a research product, the writing process is recognized as a qualitative methodology in its own right (Colyar, 2009; Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Approaching creative writing as a method of qualitative inquiry involves “discovery, a way of finding out about yourself and your world...a way of nurturing our own individuality [giving] us authority over our understanding of our own lives” (Richardson, 2000 p. 35). Creative writing draws attention to the relational aspects of the writing process, both with others and within oneself. By attending to form and the final written product as a means of communication, the gaze turns outward to the relationship with the reader and their important role in meaning-making. From this perspective, *how* something is written is a fundamental consideration in communicating research (Yoo, 2017).

Creative writing also turns the mind inward and can help develop a deeper relationship with oneself (Colyar, 2009). As Richardson (2000) explains, “what you write about and how you write it shapes your life, shapes who you become” (p. 36). Specifically, creative non-fiction provides a structure for developing one’s voice outside the homogenizing influence of traditional academic discourses, avoiding the tendency of conventional academic discourse “that snaps us back towards writing as a means to an end, towards finalizing the text to meet the deadline, to signing off and letting go” (Dewsbury, 2013, p. 150).

Creative non-fiction, and autoethnography more broadly, attract criticism from those who remain deeply committed to the norms of academic writing (Sinner, 2013). As Smith et al. (2016) explain, “when the word fiction is linked in any way to the word research the work in some quarters may struggle for legitimacy” (p. 64). When evaluated against conventional criteria, creative non-fiction has been met with “suspicion, even hostility, and questions are raised as to whether it constitutes proper research” (Smith et al., 2016, p. 64). Writing against these norms from an autoethnographic perspective, Art Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) explains, “I would be pleased if we understood our whole endeavor as a search for better conversation in the face of all the barriers and boundaries that make conversation difficult” (p. 748). These perspectives highlight yet another alignment between systems thinking and autoethnography; systems change research is ultimately about the potential for change brought on through communication and dialogue rather than expert-oriented knowledge production.

I first experimented with creative writing after going sauna (Figure 2). I was curious about what would happen if I purposefully abandoned the artificial boundaries between myself and my writing. I was inspired by the anthology of sauna stories submitted in a writing competition to the Thunder Bay Finnish Canadian Historical Society compiled by Warkentin et al. (2005). Reading the

submissions, recognizing my own experiences in texts, and then reading the editors' scholarly analysis, I was struck by the richness within.

She grasped the thick door handle and gave it a firm tug. The door snapped open and the room flooded with heat. She took a deep breath, carefully filling her nostrils with the sweet scent of cedar. Climbing up to the top *penkki*, her skin tingled as her pores began to open. The room was small, with the *kiuas* in one corner, a shower in the other. It was a barrel sauna, the curved walls encouraging air flow and movement.

She took the ladle in her hand, scooping water from the cedar sauna bucket. Using the long handle, she poured the water over the rocks resting on top of the *kiuas*. The water cracked and hissed as it hit the rocks. A deep rumble came from the heart of the *kiuas*. She sat back, waiting for the *löyly* to roll off the roof and towards her body. Taking a deep breath, the *löyly* showered her in silky heat, slowly wrapping itself around and releasing sweat from within. She shut her eyes, feeling the heat and relaxing into its embrace. She sat like this for several minutes. And then she reached for the ladle again.

Figure 1: Creative writing excerpt: going into the sauna.

Casting a broader net around the messy complexity of lived experience through creative non-fiction calls writers to attune to emotion in their work and invites readers to draw meaning from their own perspectives. The adventurous aspects of creative writing allow a certain freedom from rigid disciplinary discourse and, in doing so, introduces humility, vulnerability, and empathy to our writing. Although my journey to this style has been – and continues to be – uncomfortable, I believe it is more suitable for the systems stories I seek to tell by offering a narrative, rather than literal, truth as described by Bochner and Ellis (2016).

Memory Work

Memory plays a central role in the autoethnographic research process. Bochner and Ellis (2016) refer to the systematic examination of memory as memory work and describe the active and ongoing nature of the method:

...it is personal, political, emotional, and relational...a destination, a place we inhabit or revisit in order to question and reflect on the meaning of the past...My research into the past requires me to dwell awhile in the space of memory, urging memory to speak.
(p. 252)

Memories point towards the broader socio-cultural themes ripe for analysis in autoethnography and ethnographic studies more broadly. They stand as

gateways to understanding our lived experience and can help point us to a broader understanding of how and why we live the way we do.

Some personal memory data collection exercises are recorded as text in straightforward ways. For example, Chang (2016) recommends developing an autobiographical timeline to chronologically represent the major events that occurred throughout the course of the study period. Similarly, Chang (2016) also recommends recording annual, seasonal, weekly, or daily routines as these routines often yield insight into the socio-cultural contexts within which they are practiced.

I tested Chang's method one afternoon while on my writing retreat. I took notes on an activity I had done countless times before: starting the sauna (see Figure 2). Upon reflection, the exercise revealed several layers suitable for further analysis. First, I used Finnish words for the sauna stove (*kiuas*) and water barrels (*tynnynri*). My mother's first language was Finnish and she passed on several words, especially sauna words, through everyday use. I also noticed that my notes occasionally employ a shorthand like that used by my older Finnish relatives and neighbors (ex. I put gloves). I grew up surrounded by people whose first language was Finnish and now notice parts of their speech patterns in my own casual writing. Engaging various autoethnographic research methods revealed a rich Finnish cultural background that I embodied but did not actively engage with.

12 noon - Sauna goes on

1. Go in the wood shed, avoid the spiders – I put gloves.
2. Little bit of kindling, little bit of birch bark, one big log. All dry. Mix of soft and hardwoods to start.
3. Into the *kiuas*, light it up. Stove pipe damper open, *kiuas* damper halfway.
4. First light doesn't take, didn't put enough birch bark. Try again.
5. Fill-up the *tynnynri*, make sure the window is open a crack.
6. Wait 15 minutes and check to make sure the fire's caught...

Figure 2: Field notes on a routine: starting the sauna on a day in June.

Other forms of memory work focus on recovering what Bochner and Ellis (2016) refer to as emotional truths. This type of memory work can lead the researcher to vulnerable, emotional spaces and are often experienced as strong memories. Strong memories are experienced in the present *as if* they were happening in the present. And yet, over time, “memory selects, shapes, limits, and distorts the past” (Chang, 2016, p. 72). Herein lies a key take away: while we

can record our memory as it is now, “it is knowledge *from* the past and not necessarily knowledge *about* the past” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 253). Memories are constantly in flux and often reflect both the context and motivations that prompt remembering (Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

Sauna Stories for Systems Awareness

A full account of Finnish-Canadian sauna culture, history, and contemporary practice is well beyond the scope of this work (as a start, I recommend Warkentin et al., 2005). In this section, I offer a brief overview of Finnish-Canadian sauna practices and a glimpse into my own emerging understandings.

One of the first lessons I learned was that, as the descendant of Finnish immigrants in Northern Ontario, my sauna experiences are quite different from those practiced in Finland today. However, the fundamentals remain roughly the same: rocks are heated on a stove (often heated by wood) in a small room with good ventilation to a temperature of between 80-100 C. *Penkkis* are arranged in two or more levels to suit the various comfort levels of sauna bathers, with the top *penkki* being the hottest. The traditional Finnish sauna is a ‘wet’ sauna, as opposed to the more popular ‘dry’ saunas found in health spas, swimming pools, or gyms that often carry the warning – *do not throw water on the rocks!* Instead, the very essence of Finnish sauna is *löyly*, the water vapor that rises from the *kiuas* when water is thrown on the rocks (Warkentin et al., 2005; Kailo, 2020, Kaitila & Saarinen, 2004; Nordskog, 2010). Time spent in the sauna ranges significantly between individuals, but an average session (or round) lasts 5-20 minutes. Rounds are interspersed by quickly cooling off with a swim, shower, or simply at room temperature. In the winter, some sauna bathers will roll around in fresh snow or dip into a lake through a hole in the ice!

I have also come to understand that some of our rules around sauna are much more relaxed than in Finland and humor is often woven into the experience, particularly when introducing non-Finns to sauna (Warkentin et al., 2005). The popular plaque that hangs in our family sauna – as it does in many others – is written in Finglish, a combination of Finnish and English adopted by many Finns in the sauna belt. The last line is one of my favorites:

If yuu ket tuu hot, ko chump in ta lake!

Unique construction techniques (particularly of the sauna *kiuas*) are also common. Where rounded rocks are typically preferred for use in the sauna (Warkentin et al., 2005), my aunt and uncle sourced drill cores from local mines for their *kiuas*. My uncle welded the *kiuas* himself with the drill cores in mind. When it was ready, he packed the drill cores tight around the fire box, thinking that the greater surface area would give them more *löyly*. It remains the hottest sauna I’ve ever been in.

Many still look to sauna for deeper meaning. Kailo (2020) describes its value as a “spiritual matrix of healthy, connected living” (p. 141) and a potential antidote to the current ecological crises. In this way, sauna holds value as a

pathway for developing and maintaining a connection to the land. The four elements – earth (firewood), air (*löyly*), fire (in the *kiuas*), and water (thrown from a dipper) – are all present in the sauna and help to reinforce sauna as a holistic experience through embodied interconnectedness. Furthermore, preparing a traditional wood-burning sauna, especially at a camp, requires very direct land-based activities – cutting firewood, fetching water, lighting the *kiuas*, and tending to the fire. These all work in consort to shape a direct connection with the land.

The sauna is also viewed as a restorative place that promotes holistic well-being. This is perhaps best understood through *löyly*, the steam or vapor that rises from the *kiuas* when water is thrown on the hot rocks. Warkentin et al. (2005) explain that *löyly* is far more than the thermodynamic reaction transforming liquid to vapor. Although directly translated to “steam” or “heat”, *löyly* is etymologically related to the words spirit, life, breath, and soul (Warkentin et al., 2005, p. 13). Kailo (2020) describes a common practice that has persisted through time in which sauna bathers throw *löyly* with “our hopes at the same time, or throw a message to ancestors or deceased relatives and friends” (p. 149). From a physiological standpoint, a regular sauna regime has been shown to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, high blood pressure, neurocognitive diseases and even eases symptoms of the common flu, rheumatic arthritis, and headaches (Laukkanen et al., 2018).

Growing up, we didn’t discuss the spiritual, cultural, or even health aspects of sauna. But, thinking back, these things were always present. Whether it was my dad throwing a big *löyly* for our recently deceased neighbor, cutting and gathering firewood for the sauna as a family, or learning Finnish sauna words when I was young. It was as if these clues were left as a trail for me to follow if and how I needed them.

By examining my family’s history through autoethnography, I realized that sauna is not only a place for washing – though it is! – or something that makes you feel good – though it does! It can also be a practice for cultivating systems awareness. Purposefully engaging in sauna as a reflective practice, I am developing a deeper understanding of myself in relation to family, place, and cultural experience. The familiar rituals relax my mind and open space to attune to the broader system. In the language of awareness-based systems change, I surfaced a culturally-grounded practice for cultivating deep awareness that, in turn, has increased my ability to better relate to the social field. What follows are the immediate ways in which this deeper understanding of self has shown up in my systems work.

Autoethnography for Systems Change Research

Our writing as qualitative researchers, particularly those writing from subjective, transdisciplinary spaces, need not be as restrictive as academic conventions dictate. It need not contribute to the further contraction of our creative spirit. I've begun to ask myself, what would an academic paper look like if it were written from the heart? Will I lose legitimacy as a scholar if began to report my findings with love? With honesty? With creativity?

Figure 3: Journal entry.

When I read that Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe autoethnography as "action research for the individual" (p. 754), resonance with my experience leapt from the page. Through my exploration of the method, I uncovered ways that *I already knew to* "...know and feel the complexities of the concrete moments of lived experience..." (Ellis & Scott-Hoy, 2012, p. 128). Looking inward, I was able to access the deeply personal experiences that gave rise to nuanced understandings of highly complex social and cultural processes at work. I now have a sense of ancestry and cultural identity – previously unexamined – from which to ground my perspective.

Claims of narcissism and self-indulgence are perhaps the most common critiques of autoethnography (for example, Anderson, 2006; Freeman, 2015). In the face of the undeniable need for action across a range of complex issues, passionate changemakers need a solid rationale for expending scarce time, energy, and resources on inner work. Within the field of systems change, practitioner engagement and philanthropic investment backed by mounting research are pointing towards inner work as a crucial practice to develop. For example, the Wellbeing Project – co-created with Ashoka, Esalen Institute, Porticus, Impact Hub, Skoll Foundation and Synergos Institute – defined wellbeing as "an ongoing personal journey towards wholeness and connection," (Severns-Guntzel et al., 2020, p. 22) and concluded that attention to inner wellbeing carried tangible increases in changemaker efficacy at the individual, organizational, and sectoral scales. Woiwode et al. (2021) describe the need to explore the inner dimensions of sustainability transformations as akin to examining mindsets and paradigms, one of the strongest leverage points from which to affect systems change (Meadows, 2008). When left unexamined, our uncritically patterns of thought and behaviour act as barriers to seeing and sensing novel patterns across a system (Scharmer, 2018). The individual work of shifting consciousness can seem trivial when confronted with the challenges of our time. However, I found the paradox of slowing down in the face of such urgency much easier to reconcile once I had experienced a shift in my own research practice as a result.

Cultivating Deep Systems Awareness

We sat in the sauna at Great Mountain. My cousin leaned against the arm rest in front of the *kiuas*. I sat beside him on the *penkki*. Surrounded by hand hewn logs, our shared history was laid bare.

“We can actually sit in a sauna built by our Pappa,” he said. “I want to come back and take my kids”.

Figure 4: Journal entry.

The turning point in my research came when sauna surfaced as a central character in our family history. As Warkentin et al. (2005) explain, “[Sauna] is a quasi-religious bond between the old and young generations and even the future generations” (p. 5). It is, put simply, a “symbol of belonging” (Warkentin et al., 2005, p. 5). This process of seeking belonging, or coming to belong, can be understood in relation to the process of introspection described in both the autoethnography and awareness-based systems change literatures (Ellis, 1991, 2008; Scharmer, 2018). Reflecting on his own introspective journey into his past, place scholar Yi-Fu Tuan (1999) explains,

The search for ancestors and the old homestead, for cultural heritage, for things that are reassuringly fixed because they belong to the past, becomes a hobby as well as a serious attempt at discovering one’s identity; this is so not only with the old and the middle aged but even with the young. (p. 5)

Bringing about these insights required cultivating a space to open myself to a deep awareness; a space where I could work on upgrading my “skills to sense and to see” (Scharmer as quoted in Goodchild, 2021, p. 88). For me, this space opened when I was attuning to place, ritual, food, the land, family, and season, all working together to cultivate a multi-sensory sauna experience. In this way, understanding sauna as a practice to cultivate deep awareness is a continuation of a long cultural history of bring greater well-being into our lives.

A Settler’s Relationship to the Land

“I’ve felt a pull to visit Great Mountain” I told my friend, “where my mom’s family spent a lot of time when she was younger. I grew up hearing their stories and I’ve always wanted to go back as an adult. It’s almost like I need to go back”.

“It sounds like your ancestors are calling you” said my friend. Her words gave me pause—my ancestors. I had never thought about my ancestors, not really. I had always thought about ancestors as something other people had, not me. I’m too disconnected, too far removed from the people and places that make up my history. I didn’t even know my great-grandparents names.

Figure 5: Journal entry.

I have had the profound honor and opportunity of learning from and with Indigenous colleagues from across Turtle Island in what is now known as Canada. I believe part of why I have been able to develop and maintain close relationships, engage in ceremonies, and speak candidly about my relationship with the land is the cultural background that grounds my relations. Writing about the similarities between Finnish sauna and Indigenous sweat lodge ceremonies, Kailo (2020) shared advice she received from several Elders in her work with the Cree, Abenaki, Ojibway, Montagnais and Mi’kmaq Nations:

the only way to avoid the pitfalls of cultural appropriation and the tendency to project ideas of exotic otherness onto Indigenous groups was to be grounded in one’s own culture—to feel pride about one’s own far-reaching cultural roots and institutions.
(p. 141)

This journey opened a doorway to my cultural roots and institutions, with sauna as my entry point.

As I write this, I hold a tension that continues to surface discomfort. I am the descendent of Finnish (maternal) and Ukrainian (paternal) immigrants to Turtle Island. My great-grandparents, and all who came after, benefitted from broken treaty promises, legislated racial discrimination, and cultural genocide implemented through Canadian government policies. The saunas that I hold so dear were built on Indigenous lands. As I reclaim my cultural identity, I simultaneously work with Indigenous colleagues to ensure the continuity of Indigenous languages, cultures, and self-determination in the face of ongoing colonial violence. Holding this tension is a reminder that there is always another scale of analysis for systems thinkers to consider. My story exists in relationship with all others.

Conclusion

This article explores autoethnography as a complementary methodology for systems change research. Responding to the need for first-person accounts of transformation at the individual scale, this work contributes to the nascent body of literature illuminating the role of inner work in systems change at higher scales. While acknowledging barriers and critiques that question the validity and value of both inner and creative work in the face of urgent challenges, purposeful

explorations of the subjective dimensions of self are surfacing important insights for systems change processes.

As a methodological approach, autoethnography evokes elements of inner work at every stage of the research process, introducing a disciplined practice of systemic introspection. Relinquishing the constraints of conventional academic prose and introducing creative writing enacts a commitment to communication and dialogue rather than expert-oriented knowledge production. It follows that the humility, vulnerability, and empathy required in creative writing may also inform how systems change research is conducted, contributing to “the need to transform science and social science itself” (Koenig et al., 2021, p. 2). The iterative shift between the individual and macro scales of analysis coupled with evocative narratives that convey the messy complexity of lived experience work to cultivate a more nuanced understanding of complex social and cultural processes at higher scales.

Bochner (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) summarizes the challenge for autoethnographers: “Our writing is not simply academic; it’s personal and artistic too...our goal is to extend the borders of legitimate scholarship to matters of practical, moral, aesthetic, and emotional importance to human well-being” (p. 80). Beyond this, several interrelated arguments exist for bringing creative writing, particularly creative non-fiction, into our practices, including generating accessible texts, opening novel entry points for reflection and dialogue, and inviting a broad readership into relationship with the research. Furthermore, the ways in which autoethnography can mirror inner work processes carry important implications for systems change researchers for whom costly retreats, coaches, therapists, or other engagements are inaccessible. Finally, the practice of creating partial, dynamic narratives of the research process not only aligns with our incomplete understandings of complex, adaptive systems, but the practice itself can prompt a transformation in the lives of those who engage in the approach.

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Peer Reviewed Article

Relational and Embodied Epistemologies in Peace Education

Daniela Lehner

Alpe Adria University Klagenfurt (Austria)
daniela.lehner@aau.at

Abstract

In this contribution, I am exploring from a theoretical perspective, relational and embodied epistemologies in peace education. The question that guides me: How can we create an individual and collective transformation of our worldviews and perceptual habits towards peace? I argue that the complex challenges, the dividing structures of our time, and the various forms of separation that promote violent structures, ask for (new) forms of being, knowing and acting that are based on interconnectedness. A relational understanding of life is crucial for peaceful and caring ways of living. I believe that especially dualistic and binary modes of being and knowing need to be transformed towards relational epistemologies. Therefore, I try to approach relational and embodied epistemologies combining Indigenous, phenomenological and feminist ideas. I discuss embodiment as a possible approach to describe the intertwining of self and world, including the intelligence of the heart, as a form of presence to sense deeper levels of perception. I end the paper with a feminist pedagogical approach of care.

Keywords

embodiment; peace education; Indigenous education; interconnectedness; care

Introduction

We are in a state of polycrisis (multiple crisis visible through wars, climate change, species extinction, pandemics, social inequalities) with complexities that ask for new ways of feeling, imagining and thinking about our world (Wintersteiner & Peterlini, 2021). With the current societal shifts, old structures and patterns are breaking down, and new approaches of being and living arise. The imperial, capitalist and neoliberal logic of endless growth, consumerism, commodification, and the western lifestyle of separation, disconnection and otherness are no longer serving our societies (Brand & Wissen, 2021). At the same time authoritarian regimes, ideological agendas and violent conflicts are rising. Our fundamental structures have been significantly disrupted and are in a state of transition. We do not know yet where it will lead us. The crucial point is that we cannot any longer only learn from the past but we must learn “from the future as it emerges” (Scharmer, 2008, p. 7). As Einstein famously noted, we cannot solve problems with the same level of consciousness or mindset as we created them (Scharmer, 2008, p. 168).

The postmodern turn was crucial to deconstruct the modernist episteme and especially the dominant hegemonic discourses of truth. At the same time, as Bayo Akomolafe (2020) highlights, the postmodernist position still circles around the anthropocentric and misses the interconnectedness of life including other living beings and the environment. We need to go further and start to integrate, not only differentiate. We are in a time “to recognize interconnection in everything from pollution to politics to persons” (Hart, 2014, p. 5). We are realizing that the world is not just dead matter but a living universe that exists in interdependence and integration at every level of being (Hart, 2014). As a planetary community, we can create (new) future imaginations and emerging possibilities.

As a peace researcher and educationist located in Austria, I constantly wonder how education and learning can help to create peaceful societies. By peaceful societies, I mean not only peace between humans, but also peace between humans, nature and the cosmos. When I think about my life, among other things, I could experience changes in perception about myself and the world through embodied practices such as dance, different forms of breathwork, systemic constellation work or guided meditations. Especially the Hero's Journey process from Paul Rebillot (2017) and the MA Program in Peace Studies in Innsbruck gave me the possibility to experience embodied methods. Through feeling embodied, I feel more connected to others, the world and myself. These are of course not only feelings of joy but also feelings of pain and despair, which might be one of the reasons why it is sometimes more pleasant to feel less embodied. Another reason I think lies in the division of the world into *res cogita* (things of the mind) and *res extensa* (substances or matter) based on Rene

Descartes' thoughts which created a hierarchy of mind and body and human and nature. In this worldview, understanding happens through dividing, separating, compartmentalizing and analyzing, as well as atomism and reductionism. The organic interconnectivity of the world is separated into small pieces. These epistemologies have partly colonized our ways of thinking and feeling and our educational systems. Embodied and holistic forms of learning and knowing are marginal in educational institutions. Learning and knowing is separated from our senses and from our lifeworld's (Selby, 2002, p. 78). Scharmer (2008) describes that we are facing various forms of separation: the social separation of self from the other, the ecological separation of self from the senses, and the spiritual separation of self from self (Scharmer, 2008, pp. 99-100). I believe these separations are (amongst others causes), a reason for seeing so much violence in our society.

In this text, I want to explore both relational and embodied epistemologies, and their potential for peace education. I think that relational and embodied approaches to living and education can be one way to heal the many separations we are facing. The question that guides me: How can we create an individual and collective transformation of our worldviews and perceptual habits towards peace? The second paragraph is a short introduction to peace and peace education to form a relational understanding of peace. In paragraph three, four and five, I engage with embodied and relational epistemologies from Indigenous, phenomenological, feminist and educationalist perspectives. The last paragraph, concluding thoughts, will end the paper.

Peace and Peace Education: A Short Introduction

Peace Studies is a diverse and interdisciplinary field that engages with peace and conflict in our societies. Especially within liberal understandings of peace, the relationality and contextuality of peace is often forgotten. The Innsbruck School of Peace Studies formulated a transrational peace philosophy based on different perceptions and interpretations of peace in history and culture. It is summarized as the five peace families: energetic- focus on harmony, moral- focus on justice, modern- focus on security, postmodern- focus on truths and transrational- the larger concept of the four. These peace families aim to systemize various understandings of peace. The idea of some static or one-sidedness of peace is rejected in favor of relational and processual understandings of peace combining the aesthetical and the ethical dimension of being (Dietrich, 2012). The starting point of the Innsbruck peace philosophy was the *Call for Many Peaces* drawing on Gustavo Esteva and Ivan Illich's critique of development and economic growth. "Against the homogenizing, modern, capitalist trends that impose the idea of one worldwide peace as a regulatory ideal, Wolfgang Dietrich posits a multiplicity of often competing and contradictory small, concretely lived and relational peaces" (Echavarría Alvarez & Koppensteiner, 2018, p. 2). Transrational peace philosophy aims to address "the human being in all her/his faculties" and acknowledges that "peace and war

rise and fall in human consciousness” (Echavarría Alvarez & Koppensteiner, 2018, pp. 4-5). Especially the energetic understanding of peace that builds on embodied, spiritual and Indigenous traditions, highlights the need for relational and embodied understandings of being and peace. This also includes transpersonal aspects of being and knowing (Dietrich, 2012).

It is important to highlight the various interpretations and understandings of peace. Even or especially peace, if it ignores the context, can be a form of epistemic violence that replicates the colonial power pattern (Cruz, 2021, p. 279). There is not only direct, structural and cultural violence as Galtung (1990) highlights, but also the violence of knowledge and science: epistemic violence. “Knowledge is intrinsically linked to the naturalization and legitimization of both visible and invisible forms of violence” (Brunner, 2021, p. 197). Epistemic violence has its theoretical roots in the work of Michel Foucault and the post- and decolonial thinkers like Said and Spivak. Especially colonialism as the violent exploitation of the Global South by the Global North is a form of violence that oppressed various forms of knowledge as Santos' (2014) concept of *epistemicide* highlights. Peace as decolonial practice is understood within its unique locality, which means that it is crucial to constantly negotiate peace. A single peace narrative can be violent and might end up in dogmatic and oppressive forms of the one single truth. Peace is relational, plural and local, and there are various experiences and interpretations of peace (Dietrich, 2012). Muñoz (2006) describes peace as *imperfect* to emphasize the processual, conflicting and imperfect nature of peace.

Peace Education is the educational theory and practice to create peace and constructively engage with conflicts. Peace educational theorists and practitioners assume that attitudes and behavior can be positively influenced through education and peace can be learned. A second basic assumption is that through educational processes it is possible to promote participation, wellbeing, reduce *othering*, develop democracies and create forms for nonviolent interactions and conflicts. Peace education addresses issues, such as how to overcome violence and war, empower people to deal with conflicts constructively, and how to promote a culture of peace on all levels (individual, societal, collective). For this, it is important to raise awareness against violence, to perceive and transform violence in all its historically and socially changing forms, to counter it preventively, to break through the escalation dynamics of conflicts and to learn how to deal with conflicts constructively at all levels (Gugel, 2011, p. 150).

There are various approaches in peace education. There is critical peace education that focuses on the knowledge required to question dominant violent unequal structures like racism, patriarchy, coloniality or capitalism including self-reflective tools to question these violent structures and one's own privileges (Bernhard, 2017). There are approaches and methods that encourage skills for peaceful living like for example, Active Listening (Rogers, 1995), Nonviolent Communication (Rosenberg, 2015), Theatre for Living (Diamond, 2008), World

Peace Game (Hunter, 2014) and methods for conflict transformation like for example the Elicitive Conflict Transformation (Echavarría Alvarez & Koppensteiner, 2018). There are educational approaches towards planetary and ecological consciousness (O'Sullivan, 2002), that promote a change in perception or awareness towards more peaceful ways of living. Approaches that stress the importance of changing epistemologies and habits are rather marginal in Peace Education.

Wenders and Zournazi (2013) stress the need of a creative revolution to transform perceptual habits that reinforce separation and violence to change our habitual ways of seeing that alienate us from each other and a sense of belonging. For this we need different ways, stories and imaginations, different ways of seeing the world and understanding peace. The recognition of peaceful acts and moments that already surround us, lead to awareness.

Quintessentially, peace is the imagining of a different world, but a world that already surrounds us- it is the making and unmaking of ritual and tradition in our everyday lives in-as-much as it is holy and sacred. It involves becoming aware as the philosopher Martin Buber would put it. This becoming aware is a special kind of observation or of looking at the world that involves compassion, grace and care. The everyday and the holy involve a care toward the future, this care involves an ethics that is founded in the relation between the infinite and the everyday (Wenders & Zournazi, 2013, p. 4)

What kind of awareness or special kind of observation allows us to look at the world with compassion, grace and care? How can we be aware of the whole? Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2005) describe, for an awareness of the whole, we need a shift in the “seer” and “seen”, a subject-object duality where we understand ourselves as separate, detached observers of the world. Living systems are not static like machines and can never fully be understood by division or in their separated parts because they are constantly changing and evolving. When we start to perceive from a more holistic viewpoint, we see ourselves in relation to others, the world and its things. Kazuma Matoba (2021) notices that sometimes we feel connected and can relate to the world, other times we feel separated and outside of it. A crucial question Matoba asks: “Are we witnessing the world?” (p. 60). Do we feel interrelated with the world and other beings? How do we activate the deeper sources of knowing? I think that embodiment, the intelligence of the body and the heart are crucial to experience interconnectedness and thus to enhance forms of living that are more caring and peaceful. This also includes a social field perspective that combines the individual, social and relational reality creation (Scharmer, 2008). There are various approaches that highlight the interconnectedness and awareness of self in relation to the living world. In the next three paragraphs, I try to get a first look of some of these approaches building on Indigenous, phenomenological and feminist perspectives.

Tracing Relational and Embodied Epistemologies

The invitation of the next three paragraphs is to bring different knowledge systems together, so that those involved in transformative work can learn together as we seek to bring about the shifts we seek. Goodchild (2021) (with Senge, Scharmer, Roronhiakewen, Longboat, Longboat, Hill & Deer), for example, combines Indigenous epistemologies with systems thinking theory “to attend to a deeper level of consciousness” and “a place between epistemologies” (Goodchild, 2021, p. 80). This dialogical way of sharing knowledge could be seen as a pluriversal approach as developed by Latin American thinkers like Arturo Escobar (2020). As Tyson Yunkaporta (2019) highlights Indigenous knowledge which is often connected to non-linear ways of knowing and a knowledge that comes from the lively world has been oppressed through colonial invasion. Still the knowledge endures because people carry parts of it and these parts reflect the pattern of the whole system. (Yunkaporta, 2019, pp. 18-19). There is of course not a unity of Indigenous or aboriginal ways of knowing. Still I will use the terms Indigenous knowledge or Indigenous intelligence to describe perspectives that highlight the connection of knowledge to place, land, body, heart, soul and spirit. “These are ancient paths of Dreaming etched into the landscape in song and story and mapped into our minds and bodies and relationships with everything around us: knowledge stored in every waterway and every rock” (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 25). In this sense, knowledge is the recognition of patterns which can be found in a stone and also in our own bodies. It is a form of knowledge that attends to deeper levels of our consciousness, which Scharmer describes as the resonance of a social field and a space between the subjective and the objective (in Goodchild, 2021, pp. 88–89). We sometimes need to uncover and connect to the knowledge of our senses to access the experience of interconnectedness and the living authentic whole (Goodchild, 2021, p. 93).

Scharmer (2008) developed the Theory U process as a social change methodology to create a shift from ego-system to eco-system awareness that combines mind, heart and will. The social field, as a “collective body of resonance” (p. 438) is the space where we can connect to future possibilities, not only individual possibilities but also collective ones. We can tune into the social field through *presencing* like sensing, co-sensing and redirecting our attention towards something larger, and at the same time stress the importance of sharing and hearing individual stories based in lived experience, in order to enable new narratives to start to emerge, from which a different meta-narrative of the future becomes possible in the present. The social field is like “a shared medium that literally connects us with all other human beings on the planet” (Scharmer, 2008, p. 438).

What I see rising is a new form of presence and power that starts to grow spontaneously from and through small groups and networks of people. It’s a different quality of connection, a different way of being present with one another and with what wants to emerge. When groups begin to operate from a real future

possibility, they start to tap into a different social field from the one they normally experience. It manifests through a shift in quality of thinking, conversing, and collective action. When that shift happens, people can connect with a deeper source of creativity and knowing and move beyond the patterns of the past (Scharmer, 2008, p. 4).

The social field includes the visible – our actions, what we say and do and the invisible dimension - the place from which our actions emerge. The term *field structure of attention* describes the linkage between these visible and invisible social dimensions (Scharmer, 2008, p. 10). “The field structure of attention concerns the relationship between observer and observed. It concerns the quality of how we attend to the world” (Wilson, 2017, p. 11). When we listen empathically, for example, our perception shifts:

We move from staring at the objective world of things, figures, and facts into the story of a living being, a living system, and self. To do so, we have to activate and tune a special instrument: the open heart, that is, the empathic capacity to connect directly with another person or living system. Empathic listening is a skill that can be cultivated and developed, just like any other human relations skill. It’s a skill that requires us to activate a different source of intelligence: the intelligence of the heart (Scharmer, 2008, p. 12).

The notion *seeing with the heart* might sound sentimental or poetic, yet it rather leads to an embodied and affective form of sensibility or awareness that is different from a pure cognitive awareness or analytical knowing (Scharmer, 2008). Hillman (1981) describes the feeling quality of the heart as the ability to perceive the more subtle and metaphorical qualities. Also sense perception is connected to the feeling quality of the heart, like for example the Greek understanding of sense perception that is related to “the Greek goddess of the senses or the organ of Greek sensation, the heart, and the root in the word - that sniffing, grasping, breathing the world” suggests (Hillman, 2014, p. 40).

What is it to “take in” or breathe in the world? First, it means aspiring and inspiring the literal presentation of things by gasping. The transfiguration of matter occurs through wonder. This aesthetic reaction, which precedes intellectual wonder, inspires the given beyond itself, letting each thing reveal its particular aspiration within a cosmic arrangement (Hillman, 2014, p. 40).

The intelligence of the heart, with its sensing and feeling quality, is a form of knowing that connects easier to the whole and in general to other living beings.

Opening the heart means accessing and activating the deeper levels of our emotional perception. Listening with the heart literally means using the heart and our capacity for appreciation

and love as an organ of perception. At this point, we can actually see with the heart (Scharmer, 2008, p. 149).

Formenti and West (2018) who research transformative educational processes, argue that too “much research in education is sanitized and anaesthetized, as if researchers, participants, or readers were disembodied, decontextualised minds” (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 9). The heart and body in social science are the stories and voices of breathing and feeling people that are not distant from their work. Drawing on Bateson (1972), they describe that the intelligence of the heart is love, truth, beauty and grace, a perception that is more than just seeing. It is a meeting between the inside and the outside. “For the attainment of grace, the reasons of the heart must be integrated with the reasons of the reason” (Bateson, 1972, p. 108).

Knowing through the heart as affective and empathic knowing highlights our interconnectedness and the interpersonal, intrapersonal and transpersonal aspects of relationality (Koppensteiner, 2018, p. 69). Senge emphasizes the need to find ways to rediscover our capacity to connect and love that which is rooted in our emotional experience. Interconnectedness consists of moments where we experience beauty, where the distant observer the *you* becomes one with the phenomena. For this, we have to highlight the potential of lived experience (Goodchild, 2021, pp. 87-91). The lived experience is embodied, sensual and bound to time and space— it is the experience of being human. In the next paragraph I try to describe the intertwining of self and world through our condition of being embodied and the body’s capacity to interact with the living world. This idea of body and embodiment seems crucial to me for relational and embodied epistemologies.

Embodiment—Intertwining of Self and World

Ricardo Dutra Gonçalves and Arawana Hayashi (2021) argue that the especially complex challenges of our time ask for embodied intelligence and a language for our embodied experiences (p. 35). There lies transformative power in “our very ordinary embodied presence (...) embodied knowing is core to our experience of the world” (p. 37). Drawing on Netzer and Rowe (2010) embodiment, imagination and intuition “open learners to multiple ways of knowing and develop in them, experientially, the capacity for reflective awareness of self in relationship to a larger scope of being in the world” (Netzer & Rowe, 2010, p. 125). From a phenomenological perspective, embodiment and sensibility are crucial dimensions of perception, awareness, knowing and being. The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty was in search of an ontology and epistemology that connects experience and perception of the subject with/through its embeddedness in the world. Especially in one of his latest works, published posthumously in 1968, called *The Visible and the Invisible*, he started to draft his ideas based on an ontology of the sensible and the flesh (*la chair*). In this work he is trying to twist the dichotomy of an autonomous self and an autonomous world and moved from

a phenomenology of perception towards a phenomenology of being (Collins, 2013, p.48).

What is crucial in Merleau-Ponty's thoughts for relational epistemologies in peace education is the condition of embodiment as the intertwining of self and world. Our embeddedness/embodiedness and world presence is crucial to connecting to a larger whole. The world communicates with us through our bodies: "Merleau-Ponty is not referring exclusively to the materiality of the body (though in many ways the human body is emblematic of the flesh), but to the ontological fabric of the world" (Trigg, 2012 p. 144). Sensing is one possibility to create a "pre-objective and pre-subjective contact with the world, self and other" (Waldenfels, 2008, p. 131). Feeling and sensing our body can transform our perceived separation of self, world and other and create an experience of interconnectedness. Bodily sensations are never pure but they are our way to experience the world. What is perceived is always perceived as a certain form or figure against a background. The body is our expression of our existence in the world. Our involvement and existence with and in the world is always the precondition of our experiences. We sensually discover and respond to a world, to which we belong. (Moran, 2000, p. 422). Sociality does not start from isolated individuals but from inter-corporeality and inter-affectivity as Fuchs (2017) highlights. As embodied beings we can get an intuitive empathic understanding for each other through bodily resonance. Emotions are shared through inter-corporeality, they are not only mental (Fuchs, 2017, p. 196).

Our body, flesh and skin opens us up toward the world and makes us vulnerable and sensible. "[...] the lived body is unendingly exposed to foreign influences, and because of this remains vulnerable. Sensitivity and vulnerability are inseparable" (Waldenfels, 2008, p. 133). This implies a being that is in touch with the world, open, vulnerable and to some extent alienated. Like a state of empty presence that opens up for the mysteries of the world. It asks for an engagement with unpredictability and being able to let go of controlling every moment through pre-given concepts and expectations (Waldenfels, 2008). In this state, we are in resonance with the collective and in touch with ourselves. The ego awareness that wants to hold on to pre-given concepts, old stories and patterns, opens up for something larger. This can also be a transpersonal dimension (Walch, 2011). Indigenous educational approaches recognize a "knowing Center in all human beings that reflects the knowing Center of the Earth and other living things" (Cajete, 2010, p. 1130).

At birth, humans come new yet recycled through the elegant cycles of metamorphosis, transformation, and regeneration that form the basis for all life on Earth. Indigenous peoples view the body as an expression of the sensual manifestation of mind and spirit. Death and the body's ultimate decomposition into the primal elements of earth, wind, fire, air, and water mark the transformation of one's relatives and ancestors into living landscape, its plants, animals, waters, soils, clouds, and air (Cajete, 2000, p. 21).

The consciousness and experience that we are connected to a larger whole can heal the connection of mind, body and spirit. Rituals, dances, music, stories and other arts-based and embodied approaches can encourage these healing processes (Cajete, 2010, p. 1130).

David Abram (1996) who combines phenomenology and Indigenous knowledge, to explore the body's capacity to interact with the living world, highlights that we have to unlearn some of our habitual ways of seeing and hearing and realize the reciprocity of our senses and the sensuous earth. From a deep ecological understanding, our environmental disconnection is related to our emotional disconnection (Macy & Brown, 2014). Heike Pourian (2021) who is part of the *sensing the change* project, describes that we have to remember how to sense and feel again to recognize our feelings (Pourian, 2021, pp. 156-158). For Gregory Cajete (2010) "deep healing occurs in which the self "mutualizes" with body, mind, and spirit" (Cajete, 2010, p. 1130). They all call for an integral ecology, a call to all of us as we learn what mutual co-existence asks of each and all of us. Feminist writers like bell hooks or Audre Lorde describe this as a call to love and freedom living together. Care could be a central aspect to follow this call. Care might be the concrete expression of relational and embodied epistemologies.

Relational and Embodied Pedagogies of Care

Feminist writers like Audre Lorde or bell hooks see the embodied, affective and sensual aspects crucial for a systemic change towards justice and politics beyond the patriarchy. Lorde (1984) challenged in her essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," patriarchal and Western understandings of the erotic and especially the sensuality of women. She blurs the boundaries of the political, the sensual, the erotic and creativity. She writes, "erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (Lorde, 1993, p. 53). The erotic is the power connected to our expression, voice and feelings. When she writes about the erotic, she means a deeply sensual, affective and embodied form of intuition and power. "For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing" (Lorde, 1993, p. 54). bell hooks builds on the insights of Audre Lorde and creates a pedagogy of sensitivity, care, love and freedom.

For bell hooks the presence and voice of everyone in the classroom is crucial and must be acknowledged. She encourages teachers and students to show up as their full and vulnerable selves and share their stories in the classroom. She describes the classroom as an open learning community that is not built on individual competition but collective care for each other. For her, a love ethic and the emotional engagement in the classroom is central to empowerment (hooks, 2003). She defines love as a powerful and affective force. "To truly love we must learn to mix various ingredients- care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication" (hooks, 2001,

p. 5). hooks was constantly criticised for being a too passionate and emotional teacher. The so-called objectivity was seen as an unbiased standpoint at the university, but it was rather a safe place to not really engage with the students. Teachers can be facilitators of emancipation if they show up as embodied beings. This also includes caring for the emotional well-being of the students. With care for students, it is also possible to engage with fears and conflicts.

Bozalek, Zembylas and Tronto (2013) formulate a political ethics of care as a critique of the individual rational human actor as the center of morality and create relational ways of knowing the world. A political ethic of care starts from the understanding that all beings need care. “Ontologically, the ethic of care sees humans as vulnerable and relational beings, who have needs to give and receive care throughout their lives and whose lives are entangled with the more-than human” (Bozalek et al., 2013, p. 3). The entanglement with the more-than human is an important aspect to highlight an ethical approach that considers all living and sentient beings. “Caring values include democratic values such as responsiveness, responsibility, respect for alterity and diversity, and peaceful resolution of conflicts.” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 120). For educators the metaphor *web of relationships* can help to connect and teach from a more interconnected and embedded viewpoint (Selby, 2002, p. 83). “Inspired by the metaphor of the web, they have called for intuition (the ability to be immediately sensitive to the whole), synthesis, the sharing of subjectivities, and relational sensibility to be accepted as equally valid ways of knowing” (Selby, 2002, p. 88). This implies a “reclaiming of emotion, subjectivity, bodily sensibility, intuition, empathy, caring and compassion, love, and relational and spiritual sensibility as means of knowing” (Selby, 2002, p. 88).

Hart (2014) engages with two ways of knowing, one is categorical which means to know the world through abstraction and separating. “In a sense everything is reduced to parts, the lowest units that are differentiated, named, catalogued” (p. 6). The second form of knowing is contact. “Its style is direct, relational, embodied, and recognizes wholes and connections. Awareness through contact enables a broader view, one connected with the world and the body, scanning for changes in the environment” (p. 6). This form of knowing listens for metaphors and the implicit. “Knowledge through contact is evolving, implicit, and indeterminate since it always exists in relationship to something else and is not ever fully graspable” (p. 6). He calls for an integrative mind that includes contemplation, empathy, beauty, embodiment and imagination (Hart, 2014).

Lange (2018) builds on Hart’s integrative mind and Barad’s ethics of entanglement to enrich transformative education or an understanding of transformation through ontologies of relationality and connection. Knowing in Barad’s (2007) understanding does not come from distance “but rather from a direct material engagement with the world” (p. 49). Barad calls the capacity for action performativity, which means that knowledge is created and “emerges from intra-acting with other humans and other life forms embedded in the same reality, not as discrete entities interrelating. How we engage with other species

or a class of human learners will automatically shape the doings of these beings” (Lange, 2018, p. 293). We are entangled in the unfolding of life through our embodiment. This means as educators we have to encourage approaches of learning in which embodiment and care gain in significance (Taylor, 2017, p. 428). We can soften the boundaries “that have been put into place with regard to theory and practice, mind and body, brain and body, self and other, reason and emotion, human and nature, human and animal, male and female” (Taylor, 2017, p. 427). Embodied ways of knowing acknowledge our connection to place and to the larger world.

Drawing on Gregory Cajete's (2000) work on Indigenous education, the relation to place, land, nature, earth, and planet is crucial. Not only the observation of nature but also the participation as a sensual being with intimate expressions of care for the land is central. “As we experience the world, so we are also experienced by the world” (Cajete, 2000, p. 20). Everything in nature and the world as large has something to teach us and from birth to death, we are in a constant relationship with nature and the world. Indigenous education is the restoring of community knowledge to a good life (Huaman, 2011, p. 248). Indigenous intelligence as Anishinaabe scholar Dumont (2002) writes, is the use of knowledge in a good and meaningful way. This means that the intelligence of the mind needs the intelligence of the heart, “the connectedness and relationship with everything else” (Dumont, 2002, p. 20). This form of knowledge leads towards a responsibility to the present and seven generations into the past as well as into the future (Dumont, 2002, pp. 20-21).

Concluding Thoughts

In this contribution, I have tried to highlight the potential for relational and embodied epistemologies in peace education. Peace education builds on the premises that peace can be learned and that we can create peaceful societies. Perspectives on relationality or embodiment are marginal in peace education and therefore it is crucial to build on Indigenous, phenomenological and feminist perspectives. Peace is relational and asks for an awareness of relationality that needs our mind, our bodies and our hearts. If we learn to perceive, feel and sense ourselves not only as part of the world but as interwoven, entangled and embedded in/with this world, our relationship to the living can change towards more caring modes of being. I think approaches that highlight our embodied entanglement and involvement with and in the world, teach us new ways of interacting. These intersecting points are grounded in our bodies, in the context and the land. Only by realizing the connective nature of all beings, we can start to embrace and learn *imperfect* peace.

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Peer Reviewed Article

Relational Systems Thinking:

The Dibaajimowin (Story) of Re-Theorizing "Systems Thinking" and "Complexity Science"

Melanie Goodchild

Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation & Resilience
m2goodchild@uwaterloo.ca

Abstract

This paper extends the analysis begun in Goodchild (2021), with suggestions for engaging with the spirit of *relational systems thinking* as a dynamic interface theoretical model. It is a perspective offered to help systems change practitioners and scholars transcend binary and hierarchical thinking, in the sacred space between worldviews, to embrace a complexity mindset informed by Indigenous wisdom. It is not about the *what* of deep systems awareness, but the *how*.

Keywords

Indigenous; systems thinking; relational

Introduction *Gidinawendimin*

Anishinaabekwe indaaw (I am an Anishinaabe/Ojibway woman). *Waabishki Ogichidaakwenz-anang* and *Waaba-anang Ikwe indigoo Anishinabemong idash* (is what am I am known by the spirits in Ojibway). Melanie Goodchild *indizhinikaaz zhaaganaashiiong/ingikeniogoo gaye* (is what I am called in

English/is what I am also known by). *Mooz indoodem* (I am moose clan). I am the daughter of the late Delaney Goodchild from Biigtigong Nishnaabeg First Nation (Anishinaabe) on the shores of Lake Superior and Melinda Jones from Ketegaunseebee/Garden River First Nation (Anishinaabe) on the shores of the St. Mary's River.

I honor the lands where I am currently writing, my mother's traditional territory at Ketegaunseebee (Garden River) First Nation. It is in accordance with Anishinaabe protocol that I introduce myself this way, so you know "who I am, to whom I am connected, and where I come from so that those listening to me will know the origin of my teachings (Geniusz, 2009, p. xv). I am descended from peoples and lands that were colonized by the French and British empires to build the imperial Nation now called Canada. The relationship between Indigenous peoples and the state has "remained *colonial* to its foundation" [emphasis in original] (Coulthard, 2014, p. 6) and so I have been engaged in a process of *decolonization* (see Smith, 2012) since I was 13 years old to pursue *Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin* (the good life), "a unifying and transcendent concept that, when activated, contains the past, present and future of Good and respectful approaches to life" (see Debassige, 2010, p. 16). Settler-colonialism "fractured the bonds" that tied me and other Anishinaabeg "to tradition and culture and language and spirituality" (Wagamese, 2008, p. 18). This was accomplished through dispossession of our homelands and justified by the Doctrine of Discovery⁷ and Terra Nullius and subsequent assimilationist policies, such as Indian Residential Schooling. My father attended residential school in Spanish and my mother attended Roman Catholic Indian day school in Garden River. Decolonization for me then is an ongoing process of *healing the fracture*.

In this introduction I have respectfully acknowledged the land where I live and work, told you of my ancestry that positions me as an Anishinaabe person, Indigenous to Turtle Island (North America), claimed my genealogy to locate me within my family, and situated myself as a member of a colonized Nation (Parter & Wilson, 2021, p. 1085). I also have privilege and wealth as a member of a first world country. These "obligatory accountabilities" begin to establish the elements of an Indigenous research paradigm and 'relationality' requires that you know about me before you can begin to understand my work (Wilson, 2008). My positioning as an AnishinaabeKwe (Ojibway woman) as shared above is the foundation of my "relationally responsive standpoint" with *ethical, relational, intellectual, and operational processes* (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020) drawing upon my "unique spiritual makeup" as an Ojibway woman to fulfill my obligations and accountabilities as a researcher, knowing and respectfully reinforcing "that all things are related and connected" (Wilson, 2003, p. 175). In *Anishinaabemowin* (our original way of speaking) we say *Gidinawendimin* (we

⁷ See more about the Doctrine at <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/18-01-22-Dismantling-the-Doctrine-of-Discovery-EN.pdf>

are all related to each other). While I introduce myself as an individual, my individuation is relational, the story of my journey as a scholar arises from how I explore “what it means to be in relation with others. Knowing how to be in good relations – to be a good relative to all that is” (Cajete, 2015, p. 151). In this essay I am in relationship with the spirit of an evolving Indigenous standpoint theoretical framework called *relational systems thinking*, and my methodology is the *dibaajimowin* (story) of my current understanding. It is a perspective to help systems change practitioners and scholars transcend binary and hierarchical thinking, to embrace a complexity mindset, informed by Indigenous wisdom traditions.

Relationality

As Dr. Gregory Cajete (2015), a Tewa Indian from Santa Clara Pueblo, eloquently explains:

Because Indigenous views of the nature of reality build on relationships – reality is wholly interrelated – knowledge emanating from an Indigenous worldview has to be understood relationally. Nothing exists in isolation or can be understood apart from all its relationships. Here is where the metaphors come in: they help us talk about intricate and complex relationships – things we simply cannot convey through linear, verbal expressions. Organizing and using Indigenous knowledge requires that we understand the metaphorical world and how it shows up or manifests in many settings. (p. 207)

And Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson writes extensively about *relationality* and *relational accountability* in his seminal work, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (2008). He says that there is a common thread linking Western research paradigms, which is that knowledge is “seen as being *individual* [emphasis in original] in nature,” which is vastly different from the view within Indigenous paradigms where knowledge is seen as “belonging to the cosmos” and we humans are only the “interpreters” of that knowledge (p. 38). We individual humans then do not own or possess knowledge. Instead, in the Anishinaabe philosophy of coming to know, knowledge resides in the land and knowledge is progressively revealed through experience on the land (Davidson-Hunt & Berkes, 2003). “An Indigenous paradigm comes from the foundational belief that knowledge is relational.

“Knowledge is shared with all creation” (Steinhauer, 2002, as cited in Wilson, 2008, p. 56). It is not just a relationship between humans, which is anthropocentric, but a relationship with all of creation, “with the cosmos; it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge ...you are answerable to all your relations when you are doing research (p. 57). Indigenous research paradigms are then “clearly a more-than-

human practice” (Bawaka Country et al., 2015, p. 274) and “we relate to animals, plants, weather, geology, songs, dances as kin. They make us who we are, just as we make them who they are” (p. 275).

So ultimately, relationality is also about our relationship to the land and all our kin, a spiritual connection. To hear the messages of Country, of *Shkaakaamikwe* (our earth mother), we “need to attend with great care to the world,” for “to hear these messages, you have to be attentive and open. You need to be alert to the world in all its complexity. The messages that animals, plants, winds send may be heard by humans or they may not” (Bawaka Country, et al., 2015, p. 275). Wilson’s (2008) friend Peter talks about taking people out onto the land so they can experience this connection themselves, to tap into the frequencies of the land as some Elders I know describe it. Speaking about the idea of ‘space’, Peter says, space is a distance or relationship between people. So, his friend who is Tongan and grew up in New Zealand says the Maori, “when they do ceremonies, it’s to eliminate the space between people.” And the space between people “is Kapu, is sacred, and you go through a ceremony and respect each other’s space.” Peter goes on to say that he thinks the Indigenous concept of place is that there is that same kind of relation between humans and our environment. “So the distance or relationship between ourselves and the environment is sacred, and so you do ceremonies to bridge that space or distance” (Wilson, 2008, p. 87). That is how *relational systems thinking*, the focus of this essay, is explored, as a model for *bridging the distance* in the sacred space between worldviews. It also builds upon the notion of *ethical space* (see Ermine, 2007). In my doctoral dissertation (forthcoming), I explore more in-depth Nakata’s (2010) *cultural interface* and *research at the interface* (Durie, 2005, p. 306) to harness the energy from two systems of understanding to create new knowledge that can then be used to advance understanding in two worlds.

By reducing the space between things, we are strengthening the relationship that they share. And this bringing things together so that they share the same space is what ceremony is all about. This is why research itself is a sacred ceremony within an Indigenous research paradigm, as it is all about building relationships and bridging this sacred space... there is no distinction made between relationships that are made with other people and those that are made with our environment. Both are equally sacred. (Wilson, 2008, p. 87)

Wilson (2008) draws attention to the work of Ray Barnhart and Oscar Kawagley who talk about ‘complexity theory.’ It is what most Indigenous scholars go through all the time notes Wilson. Complexity theory “provides an emergent system that melds the ‘formal’ and Indigenous knowledge systems” (p. 44). One of the great strengths that Indigenous scholars bring with them is “the ability to see and work within both the Indigenous and dominant worldviews” (p. 44). This complexity mindset is what *relational systems thinking* (see Goodchild, 2021) taps into. My *Indigenist research* (see Wilson & Hughes, 2019, p. 7) on

decolonizing systems and complexity science led to a unique Indigenous “complexity pattern of thinking” (Wulun, 2007, p. 395), an innovative pathway to challenge and perhaps change the narrow paradigmatic assumptions of the conventional, or Western, approach to systems thinking and complexity.

Wilson (2008) says that as part of their white privilege, dominant system academics are usually not bicultural. There is “no requirement for them to be able to see other ways of being and doing, or even to recognize that they exist. Oftentimes then, ideas coming from a different worldview are outside of their entire mindset and way of thinking” (p. 44). Wilson concludes, “the ability to bridge this gap becomes important in order to ease the tension that it creates” (p. 44). Bridging the gap in a good way, in the sacred space between worldviews, and the sacred space between human beings and the land, is the purpose of *relational systems thinking* as an Indigenous standpoint theory.

I can say that the wisdom of the Elders and our natural surroundings is looked upon as a living teacher and life itself... Our people have used these since time immemorial which is why it is understood as a living culture. In our modern times the people must learn how to apply and use these teachings, how to live them in the midst of all the distractions of the modern culture. (Nabigon, 2014, p. 34)

What Is “Systems Thinking”?

Any discussion of Indigenous Knowledge systems is always a polite acknowledgement of connection to the land rather than true engagement. It is always about the *what*, and never about the *how* [original emphasis]. (Yunkaporta, 2020, p. 17)

While many studies and papers explore or critique the how and why of engaging with multiple ways of knowing, this paper presents *relational systems thinking* as a theoretical model to address the *how*, as lamented by Tyson Yunkaporta (2020). *Relational systems thinking* (see Goodchild, 2021), is a stance, a complexity-relationality mindset or complexity pattern of thinking, anchored in Indigenous worldviews, that can aid scholars and practitioners in generating the conditions for innovation and systems transformation. My dear friend and colleague Peter Senge often says to me, we should be able to explain ‘systems thinking’ without using the word ‘systems’. Systems thinking is a lens on the world that understands natural and human endeavours are bound together “by invisible fabrics of interrelated actions” (Senge, 2006, p. 7). The Elders might say those invisible fabrics and interrelated actions are spiritual energies. Is there a song instead, a poem, a piece of art, a landscape perhaps I wonder, that teaches us the principles of complexity and systems thinking? This has been the focus of my scholarship in studying *complex adaptive systems* (see Zimmerman et al., 1998) from an Indigenous perspective.

The term ‘systems’ was initially associated with operations research and optimisation techniques, says Dias (2008). These techniques embodied the ideas of interconnected entities and their interactions, and also the notion of system boundary, which provides limits and constraints. These approaches were “strongly computational in nature and hence highly reductionist” (p. 202). Systems thinking evolved and broadened, to include areas not covered by reductionist approaches, which are now called ‘hard’ systems methods. New systems approaches have been called ‘soft’ and are not intellectually easier than those of the ‘hard’ variety, says Dias. On the contrary, “they are seen as tackling important problems that defy facile quantification rather than using well defined methods to solve relatively trivial problems” and further they recognize “the *socio-technical* [emphasis in original] nature of systems, with human involvement being taken into account of, not only within the problem being studied, but also in the qualities of the problem solver and his or her interaction with the problem” (p. 202). Thus, “everything needs to be seen as a *process* [emphasis in original] involving its environment rather than as merely an isolated product” and “closely associated is the phenomenon of temporality, because all processes take place in time and involve *feedback* [emphasis in original]” (pp. 202–203). Dias argues that soft systems are important to engineering, because while engineering is based on science, “it is practiced in society, with sociological considerations crucial for design and decision-making” (p. 203). When I first encountered both hard and soft systems thinking, the underlying holistic principle resonated with me; it was familiar.

The biochemist Lawrence Henderson (1878 – 1942) was influential through his early use, says Capra & Luisi (2014), of the term ‘system’ to denote both living organisms and social systems. From that time on, “a system came to mean an integrated whole whose essential properties arise from the relationships between its parts, and ‘systems thinking’ the understanding of phenomenon within the context of the larger whole” (p. 64). The root meaning of the word ‘system’ derives from the Greek *syn* + *histanai* (‘to place together’). So, to understand things systemically “means literally to put them into context, to establish the nature of their relationships” (p. 64). Hence the notion of *relational systems thinking* is re-prioritizing the relational aspects of doing systems awareness work. “The emergence of systems thinking was a profound revolution in the history of Western scientific thought” says Capra & Luisi (2014, p. 65), however the principle of *irreducible wholeness* (p. 10) has for generations been reflected in the ceremonies, languages, customs, cultures, stories, and teachings of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island (North America), and around the world. This “new way of thinking” (p. 65) in the West is in fact a very old, ancient, and wise way of thinking that has been protected and nurtured by Indigenous peoples despite cultural genocide and assimilationist policies that forbade speaking the very languages that encode our complexity pattern of thinking and systems awareness.

Quantum theory was formulated during the first three decades of the twentieth century by an international group of physicists who realized that their

basic concepts, their language, and their whole way of thinking were inadequate to describe atomic phenomena. The paradoxes these scientists encountered “are an essential aspect of atomic physics” and they had to realize that “they arise whenever one tries to describe atomic phenomena in terms of classical concepts” (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 69). Once this was perceived, “the physicists began to learn to ask the right questions and to avoid contradictions, and finally they found the precise and consistent mathematical formulation known as quantum theory, or quantum mechanics” (p. 70). The coherent worldview that emerged from this revolutionary change in Western concepts of reality is called “the systemic view of life” by Capra & Luisi (2014), who also conclude that this “ecological view” is grounded in spiritual awareness – connectedness, relationship, community, and belonging as the essence of spiritual experience. “Thus it is not surprising that the emerging systemic and ecological paradigm is in harmony with many ideas in spiritual traditions” (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 70) they conclude. In chapter 13 of their book, the authors discuss the parallels between the basic concepts and ideas of physicists and Eastern mystics arguing that various spiritual traditions provide “a consistent philosophical background to our contemporary scientific theories” (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 70). Is it any wonder then that Western physicists F. David Peat and David Bohm became friends with Indigenous thinkers Leroy Little Bear and Sa’ke’j Henderson or that I, a systems geek, have become friends with Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer? David Bohm, says physicist F. David Peat (2005), began to develop what he called the implicate (or unfolded order). Bohm (1981) argued that while the classical physics of Newton described what could be called the surface of reality, by contrast, quantum mechanics “has forced us to move to deeper levels of perception of the world” (Peat, 2005, p. 140). Reality according to Bohm, in its deepest essence, is not a collection of material objects in interaction, but a process or a movement, which he called “the *holomovement* [emphasis in original] – the movement of the whole” (Peat, 2005, p. 140).

So, the stable forms we see around us are not primary in themselves but only the temporary unfolding of the underlying implicate order. “To take rocks, trees, planets, or stars as the primary reality would be like assuming that the vortices in a river exist in their own right and are totally independent of the flowing river itself” (Peat, 2005, p. 140). My colleague, Blackfoot scholar Leroy Little Bear often says the only permanence is change, or constant flux. Energy waves are spirit. Nothing is inanimate so we say, all my relations. In this worldview everything is related, and kin, holistic, not reductionist. The problem I have found with conventional Western-based hard and soft systems thinking is that systemic processes are often seen/sensed and then described in English, the language of the colonizer. English is noun-based and therefore has an anthropocentric bias, a tree is a thing, not a relation. My friend and colleague Tiokasin Ghosthorse (Lakota) and I have recorded radio shows and webinars speaking of this ‘nounification’ of our thinking by English. Indigenous languages are process, context, land and verb based. As Leroy has often said, in English it’s like one picture frame of 35mm film, while in his language Blackfoot, the show

goes on (Arizona State University, 2011). With its heavy emphasis on nouns, English creates dichotomous thinking, and that has led to hierarchical thinking that has historically positioned science as good/superior and Indigenous wisdom traditions as bad/inferior. In fact, mainstream science throughout its modern history, since its formation in the 16th century, marginalized different ways of knowing, labeled various types of knowledge systems as folk wisdom – becoming a “sworn enemy” of all superstition, including shamanism, holism, sacral phenomena, spirituality, occultism, etc., says Wråkberg & Granqvist (2014, p. 91). They conclude that many surely find “reflection on the incongruity of holism and reductionism a waste of time” instead preferring to spend their time conducting “normal science” (p. 92). This compartmentalization of knowledge and disciplines still goes on in universities like mine so I must navigate that terrain. Like generations of Indigenous scholars before me, my work has been an effort to revitalize *Anishinaabe gikendaasowin* (our original ways of knowing) and *Anishinaabemowin* (our original ways of speaking) so that I can progress Indigenous, holistic ways of seeking wisdom.

Relational Systems Thinking

A central insight of systems theory is that once we see the relationship between structure and behaviour, we can begin to understand how systems work (Meadows, 2008). According to Meadows, a ‘system’ is a set of things – people, cells, molecules, or whatever – interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behaviour over time. We human beings are complex systems – our own bodies “are magnificent examples of integrated, interconnected, self-maintaining complexity (Meadows, 2008, p. 3). Meadows concluded that modern systems theory, bound up with computers and equations, hides the fact that “it traffics in truths known at some level by everyone. It is often possible, therefore, to make a direct translation from systems jargon to traditional wisdom” (p. 3). With a systems perspective “one enjoys the multi-dimensional dynamic flow of circumstances and comes to accept, if not enjoy, paradox” (Anderen & Björkman, 2017, p. 51).

We have people now who are very clearly among the best scientists who are willing to agree that there are limits to the knowledge that science can have about nature. We’re reaching a place in which there’s ever wider agreement that poetry gives us as much information about our relationship with the universe as telescopes do, and that those two strains can live together and complement one another harmoniously. Those two things can happen, and that’s actually not dissimilar to my culture, which asserts that on the one hand there are dreams and visions and on the other hand there’s a responsibility to maintain a clear vision of reality. Those two streams of thoughts and reactions have to live cooperatively together. (Mohawk, 2008, p. 49)

Indigenous community is a ‘complex adaptive system’ that has ‘emergent properties’ that form an Indigenous community’s social, cultural, and ecological expressions in unique ways. And Indigenous communities are ‘human living systems’ (Cajete, 2015). In 2021 we (me along with Diane Longboat, Dan Longboat, Kevin Deer, Rick Hill, Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer) co-wrote and published “Relational Systems Thinking: That’s How Change is Going to Come, from Our Earth Mother” (Goodchild, 2021) in the inaugural issue of the Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change. The article was an attempt by me as an Anishinaabe doctoral candidate in Social & Ecological Sustainability at the University of Waterloo to “negotiate the politics of knowledge construction” (Bishop et al., 2021, p. 197) and walk my talk. Writing the article was a project of “discovering the beauty of our knowledge” (Smith, 2012, p. 161) undertaken to decolonize systems thinking and awareness-based systems change. In ‘delinking’ from a typical trajectory for writing an academic paper, using a Haudenosaunee two-row visual code (see Figure 1), I took up a ‘decolonial path’ (Mignolo, 2011, cited in Bishop, Vass & Thompson, 2021, p. 195). The two-row visual code demonstrates how “Indigenous epistemology is all about ideas developing through the formation of relationships” (Wilson, 2008, p. 8). It was a rhetorical device for me to invite readers into a space and place where two streams of thought live cooperatively together, as the late John Mohawk, Turtle Clan of the Seneca Nation, described.



Figure 1: Two-row visual code, featured in Goodchild (2021)

This paper extends the analysis begun in Goodchild (2021), with suggestions for engaging with the spirit of *relational systems thinking* as a *dynamic interface theoretical model* (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). Universities are elite institutions which reproduce themselves “through various systems of privilege” (Smith, 2012, p. 132) and many Indigenous scholars feel the pressure to “comply or leave” (Bishop, 2021, p. 370) rather than doing battle with the “repressive character of methodologies” in the “western scientific establishment” (Matsinhe, 2007, p. 840). In Goodchild (2021) I did the hard work of finding and then sharing the Haudenosaunee two-row visual code “as an act of defiance” and “to increase complexity” (Bishop, 2021, p. 368). Encountering the disenchantment of the world in the academy, I was “pushing back” with the enchantment of Indigenous ways of knowing (Herman, 2016; Matsinhe, 2007). Rather than exploring a Western notion of systems awareness and complexity, the rationale for *relational systems thinking* as a model comes from Indigenous knowledges, Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, a process of decolonial knowledge-making (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 124). I am practicing cultural fluency as Dr. Dan Longboat calls it, as I am not Haudenosaunee.

To embrace “sophisticated Indigenous ways of knowing,” (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009, p. 55) scholars and practitioners need a complexity mindset and *relational systems thinking*, as a dynamic interface and theoretical model for reasoning in the *sacred space* between ways of knowing. This is not the *what* of deep systems awareness, but the *how*. The interface is dynamic because it situates “the life worlds of contemporary Indigenous people in the dynamic space between ancestral and western realities” (Yunkaporta & McGinty, p. 58).

We, as Indigenous academics, need to have a long think about our position at the intersection between Indigenous and Western systems of knowledge, and about the intersection itself as it is constituted in the academy, and as it emerges in conditions on the ground in communities. There is much work ahead to conceptualize the intersections differently, to re-theorise them in all their complexity, and to find better methodological approaches for negotiating them. (Nakata, 2006, p. 274)

Is it possible that *relational systems thinking* offers a relational, methodological approach for negotiating these intersections? Based upon various talks and presentations inspired by the initial article, I began to develop a theoretical model and visualization of the *relational systems thinking* standpoint for deep systems awareness (see figure 2).

RELATIONAL SYSTEMS THINKING

A dynamic interface **theoretical living model** for reasoning in the sacred space between ways of knowing



Figure 2: Relational Systems Thinking Theoretical Model.

This visual representation of *relational systems thinking* as a dynamic interface living model, represents the most current version which will continue to evolve as a living model that comes from living cultures. This model privileges Indigenous and local place-based knowledge (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). I offered this diagram in various presentations to introduce *relational systems thinking* as a model for systems awareness in the third space. The two-row wampum is a living treaty, a way for distinct peoples to live together in peace, that each nation will respect the ways of the other. The central metaphor of *relational systems thinking* is the two-row wampum belt. It is a Haudenosaunee teaching and metaphor of “relatedness” (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020, p. 8). The third space is the sacred space between the two vessels of the wampum belt. “Your intellectual process in relationally responsive standpoints,” says Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth (2020), involves “engaging with and negotiating cultural metaphors that can express, structure and inspire thinking and learning processes” (p. 7). The river of life nourishes all of life, and the two strains of thought that Mohawk (2008) spoke of earlier, is represented here in the two-row wampum belt. This model invites scholars and practitioners to inhabit the space between, to take *relational systems thinking* beyond an intellectual exercise, to inform practice and “open up and celebrate third spaces in our everyday lives” (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006, p. 405). This model was developed through collective wisdom as I shared versions with many different audiences throughout 2021 and often in response to clarifying questions, I edited elements.

Since the publication of the paper, there has been significant uptake of the idea of *relational systems thinking* and I have been immersed in an embodied experience of ‘sensing from the field’ (Scharmer, 2016). In fact, I can identify the first moment in which I sensed that the spirit of *relational systems thinking* was about accessing optimal flow states for reasoning with a *relationally responsive standpoint* (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020) in the space between

worldviews. A colleague gifted me a copy of a beautiful book called *Deer & Thunder: Indigenous Ways of Restoring the World* by Andean Elder Arkan Lushwala (2017). In it, Lushwala explains how ancient peoples understood the importance of having an inclusive mind and how they trained themselves to combine feminine and masculine ways of interpreting reality:

... which allowed them to follow their heads and their hearts simultaneously. Like any other common man, for many years I used reason to eliminate contradictions, to protect others and myself from the unpredictable wildness of our world, from how dangerous it felt that much of reality seemed different from how I was or how I believed the world should be. But through a life of ceremony my eyes have been washed into a deeper vision, and I can now practice a way of reasoning that does not take sides but instead allows two opposites to dance together until the face of a third presence starts showing up. Today I engage my heart to feel into what wants to be born from the union of the opposites and stand at its service, like a midwife, ready to catch and hold the future with respect. (p. 104)

A “relationally responsive approach seeks dialogue, synergy and innovation in the respectful interaction of diverse systems” (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020, p. 10). I was invited to be the keynote speaker at a 50/150 Legacy Event for the federal department of Environment and Climate Change Canada. I offered a talk on *relational systems thinking* as a theoretical model to help bridge the gap between Western science and ‘Native Science’ (see Cajete, 2000). The event was very well attended and well received. The analytic reports of the webinar showed that there were 1,026 unique page views of the live event, from three countries in 72 cities. Afterwards, in a debrief with core Indigenous staff who initially invited me to speak, they thanked me for offering them and their colleagues a way to *ethically navigate* the intersection of different worldviews. This they said, would help them to do their jobs, of addressing environmental issues such as climate change within a system that may contain elements of cross-cultural misunderstanding. In that moment, I sensed a shift in my relationship to the spirit of *relational systems thinking*; it offers a way of reasoning that taps into, rather than denies, the “tension and creative synergy” (Coates et al., 2006, p. 395) at the intersection of foundational beliefs.

For the past year and half, I have been in deep relationship with the teachings offered by my co-authors, human and non-human, including the idea of sacred space, that our relationship together, between Indigenous peoples and others, exists in the *space in between*, talked about by my Uncle Dan Longboat⁸.

⁸ Dan Longboat from Six Nations of the Grand River, is my spiritually adopted Rakenonhá:a (Uncle, my). He is a dear friend and brother of my Uncle Blaine Loft of Tyendinaga Mohawk

This current essay, a *bagijigan* (offering) (Doerfler et al., 2013, p. xv) is my *dibaajimowin*, my story of being in relationship with the spirit of *relational systems thinking* and exploring the patterns of its teachings. This story is my birthright so no-one has authority over how I work with stories. This is an important teaching taught to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson by Stó:lō author and poet, the late Lee Maracle (Simpson, 2017). “Words carry the power of creation – we create ourselves with stories” says Anishinaabe scholar Jill Doerfler (Doerfler et al., 2013, p. xx). *Dibaajimowin* is my methodology for searching for knowledge, and it embodies my own “learning and healing,” and this knowledge is “transferable” (Absolon, 2011, p. 105) as my writing aims to “transform systems of knowledge production” (p. 106). This is a significant departure from conventional scholarship in that *dibaajimowin* represents *Anishinaabe gikendaasowin* (our original ways of knowing) thus “does not need to be defended – it just *is*” [original emphasis] as Herb Nabigon, brother of my late Uncle Lambert Nabigon, asserts (Nabigon, 2014, p. 33). It is through living our teachings that we become who we are, and each person’s path will be different says Herb, and “it is not our job to judge another person on their path, but to try to be helpful and loving to them in all ways. Even if that means there are times of confusion. We learn from those teachers also” (Nabigon, 2014, p. 34).

Dibaajimowin: Decolonial Knowledge-Making

Let me tell you a story. *Aadizookaan* are traditional legends, ceremonies, sacred stories. *Dibaajimowin* are ordinary stories, personal stories, and histories. Each type of story is grounded in *Anishinaaba-izhitwaawin*, our Anishinaabe (Ojibway) culture, teachings, customs, and history (Geniusz, 2009, p. 10). Within these stories are *gakiikwe’inan* (teachings) (Eleanor Skead, personal communication, January 2020) that come from a place of spirit, offered to us from the land, the sentient landscape where we live. This entire essay is the *dibaajimowin* of my evolving relationship with the spirit of the teachings offered in “Relational Systems Thinking” (Goodchild, 2021). I extend my gratitude to you if you entered a relationship with that paper already. My dear friend and colleague Tyson Yunkaporta, who belongs to the Apalech clan in far north Queensland, Australia, says in his brilliant book *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (2020), that the stories shared about Indigenous knowledge in settings like conferences or journal articles must offer insights into the problems we are experiencing in the world today, not merely “formulaic self-

Territory. Blaine was a dear friend and brother of my late father Delaney Goodchild, and after my father passed to the spirit world, many years later Blaine and I connected through Dan. As a brother to my dad, Blaine became my Uncle, and as a brother to Blaine, Dan became my Uncle. In the Mohawk language Uncle means ‘he who looks after my mind.’ That is the brief *dibaajimowin* of how this AnishinaabeKwe (Ojibway woman) has the honour of kinship with two Mohawk Uncles. In Anishinaabemowin they are Nimishoomeyag (my father’s brothers).

narratives and cultural artifacts as a window for outsiders to see into a carefully narrated version of their past, and the view is one-way” (p. 16). Tyson and I have recorded several podcasts and webinars of our *yarns* (see Barlo et al., 2020; Barlo et al., 2021; Hughes & Barlo, 2021) on yarning as relational methodology. When the Haudenosaunee knowledge keepers, Diane Longboat, Dan Longboat, Kevin Deer and Rick Hill, and Western systems thinkers Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer shared their teachings with me to write an article, it was a process of *bagijige* (making an offering) (Doerfler et al., 2013) to contribute to the field of systems awareness and transformation. The transformation needed is nothing less than saving Mother Earth from anthropogenic destruction. As Uncle Dan stated:

Now looking at prophecy, we talk about this idea of the two-row wampum belt, the Europeans and Indigenous peoples, or how any people that come to North America, and our relationship together exists in the space in between. It is the sacred space, those principles of peace, friendship, and respect, that becomes the sacred way that we work towards one another, but the idea behind it is that we are both sailing down the river of life together. And our responsibility it to help one another, but more specifically, the river of life is in danger right now and there will be no more river of life. So, it behooves us now to utilize our knowledge together to work to sustain, to perpetuate, to strengthen the river of life. Why? So that all life will continue. And at the end of the day any social innovation or systems stuff should be all about the continuation of life and however we understand it to be – not just human life but all of it, for this generation right to the end of time. (Goodchild, 2021, p. 84)

I first met Peter Senge during a convening of the Academy for Systems Change in Whistler, BC in April of 2019. I first met Otto Scharmer during the Executive Champions Workshop (ECW) in Stowe, VT in August of 2019. During that workshop Otto presented a model he created about the civilizational shift from ego to eco, on upgrading society’s operating systems (see Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013; Scharmer, 2018). The model analyzes evolutionary societal change from operating systems (OS) 1.0 to 4.0. At that time, I was not familiar with Theory U or that model, however something struck me as he presented it, on a few flip charts under the meeting tent in the field in Vermont. Operating systems are reflected across several systems, health, learning, farm/food, finance, and governance. OS 1.0 is characterized as input and authority-centric, 2.0 is output and efficiency-centric, 3.0 is stakeholder and customer centric, and 4.0 is generative eco-system centric. To illustrate from the model for instance, the health system under OS 1.0 is traditional doctor/centric medicine while under OS 4.0 is salutogenesis: strengthening sources of wellbeing. As I listened to Otto explain the model, it occurred to me that the descriptors of the various systems described as OS 4.0 accurately described our ancient Anishinaabeg systems. I

worked up the courage to raise my hand and offer this observation, “Otto, it seems to me that what you describe in this model, for OS 4.0, that’s what we Indigenous peoples had here on Turtle Island (North America) before contact. We already had those until they were disrupted at contact [by settler colonialism]”. At the break after that session Otto approached me and asked if we could connect and have a cup of tea/coffee later to chat about this reflection. And then Peter approached me and suggested that we three might wish to “write a paper together.” As a junior scholar in Western systems theory, I was honored. I found my mob, kindred spirits who were as interested in ‘decolonizing’ systems thinking as I was. Immediately, both Peter and Otto accepted the *gift* (Kuokkanen, 2008) of Indigenous wisdom that I offered.

The relational process provides built-in mechanisms for increasing connectedness and responding to authentic relationships (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). As I wrote the first article (Goodchild, 2021), I was in relationship with the sentient landscape of the thundering waters, now called Niagara Falls. As a visitor to that territory, I asked my Uncle Dan for assistance, to join my doctoral committee as an external advisor. When he heard I was writing a paper with two systems thinkers, Peter and Otto, he said “well you better talk to our systems thinkers too” (personal communication, October 2019). “Wisdom awaits those who walk with their Elders. Our Teachings, our Ceremonies, and our Elders are the repositories of this knowledge, which has been with us since the First Sunrise” (Anderson, 2002, p. 304). And so, we had tea together, the Haudenosaunee Intelligentsia and me, at the Gathering Place in Six Nations on December 23, 2019. Peter and Otto had never met Diane, Dan, Kevin, or Rick when the article was published. I sat in dialogue with Peter and Otto on various occasions at MIT in October of 2019 and then with the Haudenosaunee Elders in Six Nations. As I read my notes from these series of conversations, I began to sense something special, that they were all talking about the river of life and that the river is now in jeopardy, only they were using different ontologies and epistemologies, different worldviews to tell their stories. I was positioned, to listen to their stories, stemming from their respective sophisticated systems of knowledge (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009), at the cultural interface, a “complex knowledge interface” (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 124) and share those stories via the two-row visual code, a form of praxis for inhabiting the space between.

Battiste & Youngblood Henderson (2009) describe the relationship between Eurocentric knowledge systems (EK) and Indigenous knowledge systems (IK) arguing that IK is “more than the binary opposite of EK” (p. 7). I concur, that is why *relational systems thinking* builds upon the notion of the space between epistemologies, or the *cultural interface* (Nakata, 2010), the *dynamic interface* (which builds on Nakata’s notion of the cultural interface) between Western curriculum knowledge and Indigenous knowledge (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009), or the third way, to focus on the *interface* between Indigenous knowledge and other knowledge systems to generate new insights, built from two systems (Durie, 2005). It is a matter of ‘space’ rather than ‘place’. Building on cultural

theorist de Certeau, the third space that *relational systems thinking* opens up, may be described in the colonial context - “where the dispossessed have no choice other than making some ‘space’ in a ‘place’ now owned and controlled by colonizers” (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006, p. 399), in this case Universities. Building further on Bhabha’s ‘third space,’ it is in essence, “the fissure between ostensibly seamless and stable places” (p. 400). What is key here is that “Everything happens in between” (p. 400) and the third space is “a radically hybrid space” (p. 401). Bhabha “shifts away from conceptualizing cultures as binary or dualistic and he is interested in what is created in between the coloniser and the colonized... hybridity is the third space that enables a new position or expression to emerge” (p. 404). The third space unsettles, to use Bhabha’s terms (1993, cited in Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006, p. 407) is “neither one nor the other.”

Australian Aboriginal scholar Martin Nakata (2006), who writes about the discipline of Indigenous Studies and whose work I have referenced throughout this essay, approaches the concept of intersections between different knowledge systems as an opportunity to “pursue inter-subjective mapping of our many relationships” (p. 267), as opposed to interrogating sites of apparent intersection. Nakata⁹ is Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Education and Strategy at James Cook University. He is a Torres Strait Islander, holds a PhD in Education, and is recognized internationally as one of the leading Indigenous academics in Australia. He points out the limitations of “Indigenisation” in the academy, “which has concentrated on carving out a separate domain” which in some ways is “antithetical” to our own traditions which are holistic. Our traditions he observes, “have not been closed systems” (p. 269). “Indigenisation” as a strategy is “flawed thinking” (p. 270):

What is needed is consideration of a different conceptualization of the cross-cultural space, not as a clash of opposites and differences but as a layered and very complex entanglement of concepts, theories and sets of meanings of a knowledge system. (Nakata, 2006, p. 272)

Too often Nakata (2010) says, the interface between Indigenous knowledge systems and Western scientific knowledge systems (Islander and scientific in his case) is a “contested space where the difficult dialogue between us and them is often reduced to a position of taking sides” (p. 53).

Let me be clear about this. In universities, the great mediator between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understanding is not us, is not Indigenous people or academics, but the ontology of Western

⁹ The asteroid 7547 Martinnakata is named for Professor Martin Nakata in recognition of his role promoting and sharing knowledge of Indigenous astronomy. He was the first Torres Strait Islander to complete a PhD in Australia. Learn more here <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/sundayextra/the-year-that-made-me:-martin-nakata,-1980/12599062>

knowledge systems. It is the established disciplines, their knowledges and practices that mediate meaning, which interpret the Indigenous world to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students... All knowledge that is produced about us and all knowledge that we produce ourselves is added to the Western corpus, and thereby gets reorganized and studied via the disciplines of Western knowledge. (Nakata, 2006, p. 271)

Like Arkan Lushwala (2017) Nakata (2006) does not advocate choosing sides, instead he says that explorations at the interface of different knowledge systems is much more representative, “a tangled web of where we are caught up ...than the constant reduction of complexity to simple oppositions that posit us in ways that confine us to either/or options” (p. 272). His thinking is like *relational systems thinking*. And the goal of Indigenous Studies, he concludes, is “one that generates knowledge for us” (p. 273). And that is a key difference between ‘indigenizing’ scholarship for Westerners and generating knowledge for us: we have deep intellectual traditions but given the current state of the planet, “We do not presume that our knowledge practices can deal with the complex effects of inter-related practices occurring at a global scale” (Nakata, 2010, p. 55). We also need to jump into the river, the space between the ship and the canoe, to address the unsustainable practices of our time at a global scale. It is worth quoting Nakata (2010) at length here as the content is crucial to my story:

Like me two generations ago, Islander children growing up in the Strait today are the inheritors of tradition and inheritors of a world greatly changed over the last few generations. As I was, so they are witnesses to ongoing change. Their identification as Torres Strait Islanders is multiple, often tied to more than one place, group, time and to nation. Historical accounts tell them of disruption and change; academic analysis tells them of boundaries, dissonance, and loss. Island stories and the way they deploy traditional knowledge concepts and language, tell them of continuity with old knowledge and practice in changing times and tell them something of their history that may not appear in others’ accounts of us.

For children to confidently know their marine environment and take charge of their futures requires knowing and working with two knowledge systems. These knowledge systems can be viewed as irreconcilable on cosmological, epistemological or ontological grounds as they are most often described through the international discourse on Indigenous knowledge. Or they can be viewed in terms of their entanglements, synergies, and the shared conversations that can occur around the common interests explored through them. [emphasis in original] (Nakata, 2010, p. 55)

Science, says Nakata, “can be used as another weapon for Islanders to wield in our own interests” (2010, p. 56). And that is precisely how I view conventional systems thinking re-theorized through this and other Indigenous standpoints, as tools that we can use to uplift our communities. It is up to us Indigenous scholars, says Nakata, to “develop a wider discourse that relates these two knowledge traditions for our own purposes” because as he points out so clearly, we live “at the interface of different knowledge systems” (2010, p. 56). Whenever we fall back into an us/them logic, argue Carey & Prince (2015), we risk an “unwitting re-inscription of the binary logic that the cultural interface should help us overcome” (p. 274) which they argue McGloin (2009) sometimes does in her analysis of the cultural interface. The labeling of ‘whiteness’ for instance actually teaches “what amounts to a rejection of self – a self that only exists in its imperialist inflection” which is “irresponsible” (Carey & Prince, 2015, p. 275). I concur, the end point of decolonizing work is not to make white people aware of their ‘whiteness’ and its privileged social location, that is not an end-point in itself. It’s about their healing too.

Conclusion: Complexity

What’s needed are
 eyes that focus with the soul.
 What’s needed are spirits open
 to everything. What’s needed
 are the belief that wonder is
 the glue of the universe and
 the desire to seek more of it.
 Be filled with wonder

(the late Anishinaabe writer Richard Wagamese, 2016, p. 105).

Soon after the first article was published, I was invited to share it with a Systems, Sustainability and Social Justice class at Presidio Graduate School in California. The class was assigned the article to read, and students prepared a haiku based on its content. Here are a few of those poems:

Two boats, one river
Teachings on the way forward
Lie within, the past
 – Corinne

Decolonizing
These systems, maps, and language
To see we are one
 – Will

So much to unlearn

What a brutal path we took

Thanks for publishing

– Jacqueline

Wisdom in action

Mother Earth healing spirit

Help us change the world

– Justine

Interconnected,

Indigenous practices,

Unite all beings

– Haley H

Two-column approach

Confronting my habit of thought

in the concrete

– Spencer M

Presencing, the state we experience when we operate from our minds, our hearts, and our will fully opened, may result in us connecting to reality from a much deeper place, from the source of emergence says my dear friend Otto Scharmer (2016). *Relational systems thinking* Indigenous standpoint theory proposes that that emergence is *mashkiki* (medicine) and that inviting the medicine to flow in the space between worldviews is healing. It is letting the medicine flow at the interface where two bodies of water come together. It's the interaction of opposite systems such as fresh and salt water, seen as "a magical source of creation" (Yunupingu et al., 1993, cited in Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009, p. 58). Thus, I would characterize presencing and emergence as a magical source of creation, a space and place where poetry and telescopes (Mohawk, 2008) nourish our sense of wonder.

Complexity science challenged the Newtonian perspective in the West that all can be explained by the careful examination of the parts. Complexity science is not a single theory – it is the study of complex adaptive systems, the patterns within them, how they are sustained, how they self-organize and how outcomes emerge (Zimmerman et al., 1998). *Relational systems thinking* is an Indigenous standpoint theoretical framework that may enhance the many other theories and concepts within the highly interdisciplinary field of complexity science. Complexity science resonates deeply with many of the Elders, knowledge keepers and language speakers I work with, because it seems to resonate with our holistic ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies. Within systems thinking and complexity science, the West revitalized for itself what we have practiced intuitively for generations: relationality. We have a kinship system that is not human-centric. As Potawatami scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer wrote, "we don't have to figure out everything by ourselves: there are intelligences other than our own, teachers all around us" (2013, p. 58).

To practice *relational systems thinking* and tap into our sense of wonder and our complexity mindset, to transcend narrow self-interest, involves a tremendous amount of "inner work" (LaFever, 2016, p. 418) to release mental models (Senge, 2006) that no longer serve us.

The one overall phenomenon that leads to an increase in mental complexity is when our existing assumptions about the world turn out to be insufficient or wrong. As long as our assumptions, our mental models of the world, our world view or epistemology is confirmed, there is no need to change it or make it larger and we do not grow much. But when we have to reconfigure our model, our world view to match reality, we grow. Especially, if we have to revise several assumptions at once and the pain causes us to thoroughly deal with ourselves and why we held a wrong or too simplistic assumption. (Andersen & Björkman, 2017, pp. 53–54)

My recommendation to you as you do this inner work is to ask your “invisible helpers” (Nabigon, 2014, p. 29) to interpret your dreams and your visions, to help you understand whatever emerges on this inner journey. “The inner environment is sacred because it owes its existence to an environment that is not physical in nature” (Stonechild, 2016, p. 73). Ask the *manidoog* (spirits) to guide you. Go out onto the land. “Ceremony is not just a ritual: it is a living encounter with Creator and the Spirit. All the rituals in the world will not take a person to ceremony because we need to go to ceremony through the heart” (Nabigon, 2014, p. 33).

Even if at times one might be tempted to side with the more pessimistic view of the incommensurability of modern, Western, and Indigenous epistemes, I am convinced that the first step in encountering this complex question must consist of a willingness for transformation... this would inevitably bring with it the need for critically examining our current assumptions and presuppositions. (Kuokkanen, 2003, p. 270)

In common with the ‘soft systems’ described earlier by Dias (2008), *relational systems thinking*, helps us “*reflect on* [emphasis in original] the world in an integrated, systemic way” (Dias, 2008, p. 212). Be filled with wonder, make room for telescopes and poetry to dance together as you sense into the emerging future. Returning to relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) as a researcher, the importance of relationship must take precedence. In this essay I am in relationship with the spirit of an evolving Indigenous standpoint theoretical framework, and my methodology is the *dibaajimowin* of my current understanding. From a Western perspective my analysis would have broken everything down into its smallest pieces, a linear logic, but in that you are “destroying all of the relationships around it” (Wilson, 2008, p. 119). In contrast, I presented here an analysis of the whole, an intuitive logic, my journey of coming to know. It is a *harmonizing* account of the relational lessons I have learned (Bishop et al., 2021). Within Indigenous ways of knowing, we do not differentiate among the sciences, to separate history or mathematics or complexity science, “nor to take the physical away from the mental. The Anishinabe world is a unity of all things. We acquire knowledge from many sources: dreams, visions, the natural world, listening, observing and feeling the world around us” (Anderson, 2002, p. 304).

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Peer Reviewed Article

Convening Transformation Systems to Achieve System Transformation

Sandra Waddock

Boston College
waddock@bc.edu

Steve Waddell

Bounce Beyond
swaddell@bouncebeyond.global

Peter Jones

OCAD University, and Flourishing Enterprise Institute
pjones@ocadu.ca

Ian Kendrick

Bounce Beyond
ikendrick@bouncebeyond.global

Abstract

Transformation (T-) systems are innovative collections of initiatives and efforts geared to bringing about a flourishing socio-ecological system in a given context.

They comprise of the totality of initiatives, people and organizations who are collectively seeking to transform a particular issue or geography in a common direction, when they attempt to align their efforts for greater effectiveness, as a result of that growing identity and self-awareness. This article explores the concept of transformation (T-) systems, and how they can become impactful organizing frames for change agents. Another innovative type of entity, the Transformation Catalyst (TC), works to connect, cohere, and amplify the work of actors and initiatives, who generally work independently, into coherent T-systems. We use evolving work in the sustainable seafood arena to illustrate these ideas.

Keywords

transformation system; system transformation; transformation catalyst; system change

Introduction: Transformation as a Field of Practice

A few years ago, a UN staff leader with whom I was meeting closed her office door purposefully behind us. As we sat down, I [Steve Waddell] realized that she wanted to have a difficult conversation. She explained that they were organizing a scenarios process, and some people suggested that one scenario should be the collapse of civilization as we know it. She wanted to know whether I thought that including it was a good idea. I felt all the anxiety she had even asking such a question. The UN, trying to project order and being representative of the world order, was actually considering ultimate failure. I asked her if she thought that was a feasible possibility. If it was, it should be included, I asserted. I did not, however, press her to actually answer my question there and then.

A few years later, such a possibility has only increased. The speed of systems change efforts is being out-paced by galloping environmental degradation and combusting societal fabric. Much better approaches are needed to address the scale and complexity associated with transformation. In effect, we need to transform our approach to transformation.

Today's transformation strategies are paradoxical. On the one hand, they are dominated by the very status quo institutions that have produced the current crises amidst unparalleled manufactured-financial wealth and human-technological capacities. On the other hand, deep transformation efforts depend on under-resourced, fragmented and marginal efforts that generally focus on reducing the bad rather than really moving into evolutionary potential.

An effective transformation in transformation efforts must build on the visionary, while recognizing reality. One reality is that system transformation is incredibly hard. Efforts inherently involve fundamental change in awareness,

mindsets, institutions, power, performance metrics, practices, and goals. Such transformation is difficult to accomplish because it involves shifting foundational aspects of a given system or organization, including how purpose is defined, what the mindset (or paradigm) of actors in a system is (Meadows, 1999), and which performance metrics are used (and how) to assess systemic effectiveness (c.f., Waddock & Waddell, 2021a).

A second reality is that the status quo is enforced by deep systems that are formidable transformation barriers. Deep systems challenges¹ must be addressed in most, if not all, systemic transformations if they are to shift a system towards what we here define as wellbeing-oriented socio-ecological systems and economies in a flourishing natural environment. Although these deep systems can be categorized and named variously, one summary is:

1. **Narrative Development:** Co-emerging shared visions of socio-ecologically flourishing and values of a commonly envisioned future that are jointly articulated and popularized in contrast with today's GDP-focused visions associated with extractive and exploitive actions.
2. **Creating Collaborative Capacity:** Integrating and using key strategies for transformation to work together effectively as a system. Four strategies identified in earlier work involve individuals, groups, and initiatives working for transformation by: (1) doing change entrepreneurially, (2) co-creating change collaboratively, (3) directing change from within existing institutions and systems, and (4) forcing change through pressure tactics (Waddell, 2018). Current processes encourage competition between change efforts.
3. **Holistic Metrics:** Developing holistic national accounts, project, and organizational metrics that assess the performance and effectiveness of the whole system evaluation and moving beyond currently narrowly-focused metrics.
4. **Governance and Organizing:** Evolving new forms of governance and organizing that support the emergence and success of systems transformation. Corporate and government policy change can be helpful for change, but their fundamental power structures need to support transformations rather than the status quo.
5. **Transforming Finance:** Shifting finance and the financial system to be supportive of systemic transformation. Financial power in the current

¹ To determine what these challenges were, the second author conducted interviews with about six dozen transformation agents asking, "What are the impediments to making your transformation efforts even more successful?" In addition, he reviewed reports proposing action with the same question in mind (e.g., International Panel on Climate Change and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), then synthesized the results into the six deep system challenges below.

system is central, and its status quo is core to impeding the commonly aspired social equality and flourishing of all life.

6. **Innovation Systems:** Focusing entrepreneurship and other creative endeavors towards life - and flourishing-affirming innovations using a new logic oriented towards socio-ecological flourishing. Current innovation systems reinforce economic inequalities and generate huge environmental problems such as electronic and chemical waste.

Changing these deep systems is clearly beyond the power of any one initiative, and requires a coherent and connected group effort. A third reality is that unparalleled transformation assets exist in the form of many, many change initiatives focusing on issues, geographies, sectors, and/or stakeholder groups. Transformation knowledge, skills and processes continue to blossom with a growing cadre of systems change agents. And a fourth reality is that the support/pressure for transformational change is growing as the familiar unravels at an increasingly alarming pace and status quo people and institutions become increasingly self-critical.

Change efforts increasingly recognize the need to change systems. But they too often do not integrate a systems perspective in their own collective organizing. New approaches to accelerating transformative *systemic* change at scale are needed. To make a contribution to the development of such approaches, we introduce and explore in depth the idea of the transformation (T-) system as an innovation with the potential to enable system participants to act more effectively towards system transformation in this context of complexity and what are known as wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Introducing Transformation (T-) Systems

Achieving transformative depth and dealing effectively with the six deep system challenges requires the intensive collaboration of actors, programs, and initiatives within and across whole systems. Without such integration, efforts will easily undermine each other and be too weak to truly challenge or shift incumbents, which is, after all, the goal of system transformation.

Transformation (T-) systems are defined here as the collection of people, programs, projects, and entities (hereafter “initiatives”) working towards generally the same transformational aspirations. Forming previously disconnected initiatives into empowering transformation *systems* that work collectively, while maintaining their independence towards similar aspirations, is a high leverage action toward greater coherence and systemic connection.

T-systems already exist around geographies including political - or bio-regional ones, issues like climate change and racial injustice, particular change strategies like social entrepreneurship and benefit corporations, and/or sectors such as fisheries or health care. Current T-systems, however, are still generally weak and under-organized as most interorganizational relations have been in the past (Brown, 1980).

The fragmentation and separateness of most existing change efforts is the phenomenon that ecologist Paul Hawken called “blessed unrest” (Hawken, 2007). While there are many initiatives—in 2007 Hawken claimed a million to two million—oriented generally towards socio-ecological justice and flourishing, they lack transformative capacity in part because they tend to work independently of other initiatives with related aspirations. Consequently, they not only miss potential synergies, but potentially undermine each other. Such fragmentation and disconnection of actions and actors, exists at multiple scales—globally, of course, but also regionally, locally, and in the context of different sectors, industries, and around political and economic policies. By co-developing transformation systems, initiatives can accelerate transformation, which requires tools, processes and structures for initiatives to shift attention to making their collective transformation system effort more powerful. Such work requires developing shared aspirations (narratives), transformation systems financing, new approaches to innovation, collaborative and other capacities across initiatives, holistic metrics that measure key systemic changes and impacts, and organizing how the system is governed. In other words, using a T-systems approach, initiatives can cope better with the deep challenges that system change efforts face.

Implicit in Hawken’s idea of blessed unrest is a set of values associated with what are now being called wellbeing, life-centered, or regenerative economies that inform the desired socio-ecological transformations. Waddock (2020) synthesized six core values from a vast literature associated with what gives life to systems (with others supporting them possible, of course): stewardship of the whole; collective value (Donaldson & Walsh, 2015); cosmopolitan-localist governance (Kossoff, 2019); regenerativity, reciprocity, and circularity; relationality and connectedness; and equitable markets and trade (for more details, see Waddock, 2020). Generally speaking, values supporting flourishing socio-ecologies are at the heart of T-system organizing efforts.

Non-directive yet intentional narratives, e.g., using these values, can cohere support in the direction of wellbeing or flourishing life that enables initiatives to connect more explicitly than would otherwise be the case. These types of ideas can help orient participants toward a collective transformative potential, including developing a vitally important shared narrative or set of aspirations. Overarching narratives help them align efforts so that they can overcome the fragmentation problem that prevents actual systemic change. The process of becoming aware of and aligning with other initiatives doing similar work involves developing “T-system consciousness”: thinking together about what actions are needed to enhance the collective transformative potential of otherwise “independent” actors. Recognizing themselves as part of a T-system means that actors can enhance the effectiveness and impact of initiatives and programs transformation work because they can align their work in new ways and with that of others for greater impact towards their shared aspirations. Here we are interested in T-systems that emphasize life-centered/wellbeing economies

fostering flourishing in the context of harmonized relationships between humans and the natural environment.

T-systems are distinguished from other transformation organizing forms by their comprehensive scope. They include and transcend more traditional organizing approaches: initiatives, organizations, partnerships, collaborations, networks, and movements. Actors using strategies of directing change (transforming from the inside), co-creating change (collaboration), forcing change (acting as a warrior on the street), and doing change (collaborating across traditional boundaries) are all part of a T-system (Waddell, 2018). To effectively develop T-systems that can accelerate transformation requires its own development approach. A systems and transformation mindset is needed, including awareness of the whole, stewarding rather than directing, listening deeply for connection, synthesis, appreciation of emergence, comfort with ambiguity-paradox, curiosity, and an experimenter-learner stance.

The Context of Systemic Change: Complexity and Wickedness

As is increasingly recognized, system transformation takes place in a context of appreciating what, for short, we call wicked complexity or complex wickedness—a combination of systemic complexity (Anderson, 1999; Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Capra, 2005; Conklin, 2006; Waddock et al., 2015) and wicked problems (Batie, 2008; Churchman, 1967; Jones, 2014; Rittel & Webber, 1973). Industry, geographical, sector, or issues-based social-ecological systems are by definition complex adaptive systems (Capra, 2005; Mason & Mitroff, 2010), with many actors and moving parts with unpredictable dynamics along with complexly wicked issues that they are facing. When transformational change is on the agenda, such systems are also likely to be filled with wicked problems. Wicked problems are dynamically interacting issues and problems with no identifiable beginnings, endings, or ready solutions. The combination of wickedness and complexity brings uncertainty, unpredictability, dynamism, pressures from multiple sources in different directions; it brings differences of opinions about the nature of the system, its issues, and what should be done to achieve transformation (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Loorbach, 2010; Van Tulder & Keen, 2018; Waddock et al., 2015; Westley et al., 2011).

Systems with these characteristics can never be fully understood, predicted, or controlled, which is partly why transformation is so difficult, especially when initiatives are not explicitly aligned with each other. It is also why developing shared narratives—aspirations or collective understandings—is vital because such narratives provide guidance around the collective desires of actors in a system, i.e., purposes (Waddock & Waddell, 2021a), without imposing control. Nonlinear dynamics result in the unpredictability of efforts, yet some degree of coherence can be achieved if actors are brought together in new ways, learn about each other, co-develop shared agendas and aspirations, and establish

holistic metrics that enable them to determine whether they are achieving their aspirations or not. That is exactly the point of developing system awareness of actors participating in a T-system.

Transformation by its very nature encompasses major shifts in key aspects of a given system, e.g., shaping the paradigms of mindsets of key actors (Meadows, 1999), redefining purposes, including creating ongoing co-created processes toward betterment, and developing new metrics against which performance is measured (Waddock & Waddell, 2021a). The global seafood industry gives us one example of a particularly large, supercomplex system that is attempting to transform. A leading change program in the industry is the *Seafood2030 initiative*, which states its goal as “designing the future of sustainable seafood.” A key partner in its work is the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions (the Alliance) and its Global Hub, which are “Leading collaboration in the responsible seafood movement.” The Global Hub comprises 101 business, NGO, government, and academic members² with an even greater number of initiatives, programs and projects. With a focus on European, North American, and Japanese markets, the scale of the systems transformation is daunting. Not only are there many production system actors, there are many initiatives working to realize a sustainable seafood industry. Over the past couple of decades, a large number of transformation initiatives have evolved and achieved significant success. To fully realize the demands of the seafood system transformation, however, requires a dramatically higher level of coordinated action toward system change than the way transformation is currently being approached. It is not simply doing more of the same transformational actions, but developing the T-system itself so it acts with much greater coherence and produces innovations hub members demand.

Although a transformation system is defined by shared aspirations around an issue, sector, and/or geography, its participants have many ideas about what to do and how to do it. How can such scale, complexity, and wickedness be dealt with in ways that advance systemic change towards the desired outcome? Early stage transformation catalysts (TCs) are evolving with the goal of bringing effective T-systems into being. Discussed in depth elsewhere, TCs take a whole systems approach by paying attention to developing the T-system around their issue and/or geographic focus (Lee & Waddock, 2021; Waddock & Waddell, 2021b). In other words, TCs actively work to connect T-system participants so that *they* can identify and shape their understanding of their collective work, and design it more effectively. The TC does not do the work, but rather creates the enabling or operating environment and infrastructure for T-system participants to powerfully engage with each other and improve their transformative impact as a T-system. Here we explicitly discuss how system participants can greatly enhance the power of their T-systems, recognizing the role of the TC in helping to enable the collective effort to evolve.

² As of December, 2021

Defining and Developing Transformation (T-) Systems

In this section we discuss three clusters synthesizing six activities that be used to develop T-systems: connecting, cohering, and amplifying. Developing a T-system means co-developing the awareness and identity of individuals and initiatives as participants in a T-system (connecting), so that they can align their efforts (coherence) and act independently yet with shared aspirations (amplifying) (see Table 1). Connecting involves two activities: seeing and sensemaking. Cohering involves the two activities of action planning and co-creating transformation capacities. Amplifying involves two activities as well: implementation of the action plans as experiments with ongoing evolution and learning, and developing transformation infrastructure to ensure the future of the T-system. We explain each of these activities below. What is key is developing T-system awareness that leads actors to convene in new ways (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). By developing collaborative guidance and learning-oriented communities of practice around shared issues (Wenger, 1998), actors collectively build T-system potential for co-emerging a flourishing emerging future (Scharmer, 2009).

<p>Connecting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing: Co-development of partners' understanding of the dynamics, structures, participants, and relationships in their transformation system. This understanding is the basis for powerful collaborative action. • Sensemaking: Initiatives develop broadly shared understandings, visions, narratives, documents, and images of the (current and changing) transformation system and/or issues that need to be dealt with in that system, as well as shared aspirations and goals. <p>Cohering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing action agendas: Bringing together transformation system participants to jointly identify actions to strengthen their collective impact and address deep systems challenges that typically impede transformation. • Co-creating transformation capacities: Support the emergence of needed capabilities to co-create transformative leaders, metrics, communications, change and action strategies, structures, and resourcing. <p>Amplifying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation: Co-create processes to aid implementation of action plans. • Developing transformation infrastructure: Supporting the emergence of transformation systems' infrastructure, including the capacity to connect, cohere, and amplify, and developing as transformation catalysts for their own transformation system.

*Table 1: Key Steps in the Formation of Transformation Systems.
Source: Adapted from Bounce Beyond.*

Domain boundaries for a given transformation system can be geographical (e.g., political, bio-regional), sectoral (e.g., seafood, healthcare), and/or focused on a social-ecological issue (e.g., water access, social protection). Transformation

initiatives in a T-system are constituted of all initiatives with similar agendas. Mostly, they tend to have varying, but generally weak understanding of other system participants, structures, and dynamics. Because T-systems include all initiatives within their boundaries that are pushing in a similar direction, they transcend and include partnerships, networks, and movements associated with a transformation imperative (Geels & Schot, 2007; Selsky & Parker, 2010; Westley et al., 2011).

The core assumption underlying the formulation of the T-system is that creating change agents' awareness of their collective efforts as a system can greatly accelerate transformation (Senge et al., 2004; Torbert, 1996). Developing a T-system's effectiveness is achieved through a series of steps and deliberate efforts. Figure 1 illustrates the general dynamic, moving from State A of disconnected efforts to State B of connected and more coherent efforts, where the arrow represents the shared aspiration inherent to an effective T-system. Coordination of effort occurs with small groupings of a T-system's participants when interests tightly intersect, guided by shared narratives, desired capacity building, and loosely held governance structures.

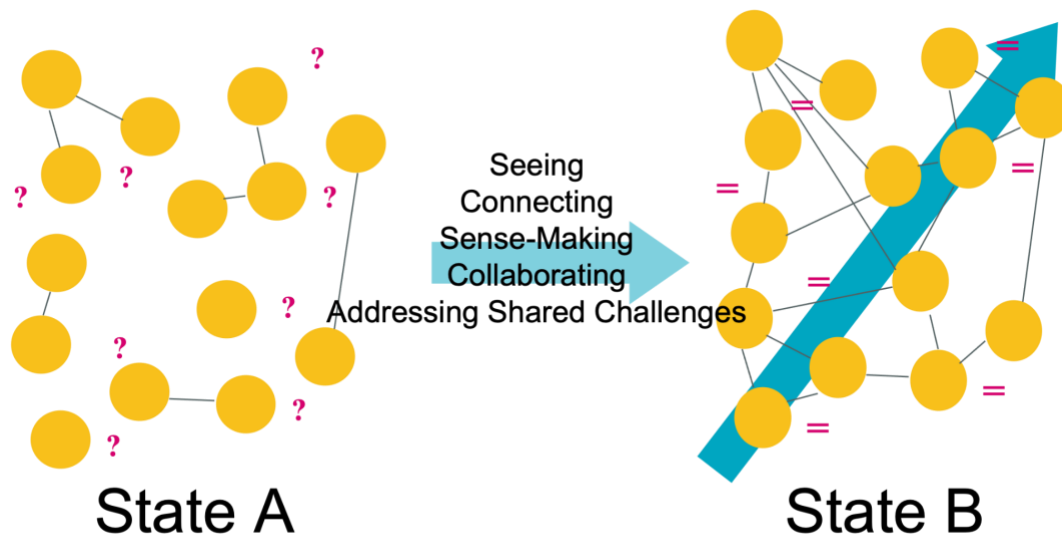


Figure 1: Emerging a Transformation System. Source: Bounce Beyond.

This figure shows in State A the disconnected and highly fragmented state of a generalized system's transformation initiatives prior to efforts to organize them into a transformation (T-) system. State B illustrates a hypothetical emergence of a system in which initiatives have been organized into a T-system, in which they are now connected to others with similar agendas, with the arrow representing the directionality of their shared agenda while still allowing for initiatives' independent action.

Connecting

Connecting involves two sets of activities that enable system participants to understand who is in the system, doing what, where, and why, what the dynamics of the system are, and how actors can (potentially and actively) relate

to each other. One activity is called seeing, and it involves mapping and stakeholder identification processes that develop a shared understanding of the system dynamics, structures, participants, and their relationships for the whole T-system. This type of understanding is a basis for potential shared or independent yet aligned transformative aspirations and actions. Sensemaking involves enabling system participants and initiatives to co-develop broadly shared understandings, aspirations, visions, narratives, documents, and images of the future, and of their T-system and its issues that participants can work on to bring transformation about.

Seeing

A key element of defining a T-system, and often an initial step, is “seeing” or understanding the system, defining its boundaries, and identifying its participants with respect to a particular geography, sector, or issue through system mapping and stakeholder identification. “Seeing” involves learning who is doing what, where, and how (Crane & Ruebottom, 2011; Mitchell et al., 1997). This process of seeing the system is iterative as a T-system develops (Van Tulder & Keen, 2018), because of porous system boundaries, which are likely to change over time with various actors entering or leaving the system, and sometimes even redefining what the system is, because living systems are by definition dynamic. Mapping processes help system actors *see and identify* themselves as a T-system and create potential “tie[s] that bind” Ties are important because that identity is needed to mobilize effective action (Crane & Ruebottom, 2011), although T-systems emerge around particular geographies, sectors, and issues rather than as an organization. Stakeholder identification, analysis, and seeing the system can be accomplished through a variety of mapping processes.

Mapping helps system participants understand the whole system, its participants and their connections, dynamics, and a variety of other aspects so that they can begin to identify as a transformation system (Jones & Bowes, 2017). In a sense, maps provide a “Gestalt” or holistic picture that helps patterns emerge, at least when not side-lined by overly rational analysis (McGilchrist, 2019, 2021). In *Bounce Beyond*, we have identified 17 mapping methods with different purposes to date. For example, Figure 2 is a product of webcrawl mapping for the Seafood T-system, a method that is particularly valuable in the early stages to identify a system’s participants and their connections. The map is of websites and their hyperlink connections where one website contains a link to another website. In this seafood map each node (486) represents a website; the size of the node and website name is proportional to the number of links. There are about a dozen key hubs implementing a particular transformation strategy, surrounded by their participants. Such maps reduce what can seem like overwhelming complexity and scale to present a few avenues of approach,

energy is and help participants define the system. The seafood example shows a relatively well-organized system that suggests bringing together those from a dozen or so nodes to advance their T-system's power should be feasible. This map was done before the Alliance developed its Global Hub in 2021, so the structure can be anticipated to be even better organized today.

Such maps are only one output of system mapping methodologies, which can include synthesis maps, causal loop maps, influence maps, and numerous others (Jones & Van Ael, 2022), such as social network analysis about individuals' connections and value network analysis about roles and exchanges in a T-system. Mapping provides, in effect, a system organizing device. People can see their transformation system in a way that supports discussion about how to strengthen it. Such methods provide platforms for system participants to co-create and design more effective ways to intervene in and change the system, when transformation is needed, especially when appropriate principles and methods are used (Jones, 2014).

Sensemaking: Creating Shared Understanding

Sensemaking processes are vital for initiatives to align with each other for effective action (Schildt et al., 2020). Sensemaking, as used here, is a process whereby participants organize and articulate a common understanding of their T-system by elaborating a mental model, a frame of reference. Sensemaking creates a basis for advancing a shared narrative, e.g., about future aspirations, and messaging around shared aspirations and action strategies, and begins to co-emerge aligned actions that help overcome systemic challenges that might otherwise impede progress toward transformation.

Sensemaking is helpful for understanding how mental models are formed in the multiple units of analysis in a complex T-system. For the organizational social system, Weick's (1995b) theory informs the construction of mental models of future effective behavior developed from learning and experience. Klein's model of sensemaking (Klein et al., 2006a, 2006b) illustrates how mental models are framed and re-framed by self-assessment of experiential data. In T-systems development, the mapping and visualization processes can begin to emerge in new—and hopefully agreed—ways. Generating shared understandings can involve interpreting what is happening in the system and creating mental models, paradigms, and shared narratives about their meaning as well as interpreting a system to generate shared understanding (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2020). Shared narratives help T-system participants begin to shape common, more coherent agendas (Weick, 1995a). Participants can then see where there are issues in their T-system that need to be addressed, for example, gaps, duplications, overlaps, and missing pieces, and can work to resolve any conflicts that have emerged. They can work on reducing differences in perspectives, aspirations, and agendas; where that is not possible, they can attempt to align their efforts while accepting differences, working on the challenges of governing and organizing the whole system.

Numerous visioning and futures processes are available to enhance sensemaking and visioning, including appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, 2001) and Theory U (Scharmer, 2007; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). Such group processes help T-system participants connect their collective aspirations and co-develop strategies and action plans (see Coherence) for moving forward. Such approaches bring together key actors around a given issue, in a given field, or a shared set of problems to share their concerns, insights, and collectively envision a shared future. Senge called this process “getting the whole system into the room” (cf. Senge, 2006; Kahane, 2012), ensuring that all needed voices are present and heard, which depends on good mapping.

For example, Seafood 2030 created a virtual sustainability forum called “Designing the Future of Sustainable Seafood” in 2021 to address how the T-system might collectively work more effectively as a “sustainable seafood system”. They were meeting the “blessed unrest” challenge (Hawken, 2007): the fragmentation, relative small size, and therefore limited impact of many socio-ecologically oriented initiatives.

Further, Seafood 2030 used a Three Horizons (3H) process (see Figure 4) (Curry & Hodgson, 2008; Sharpe, 2015; Sharpe et al., 2016) for understanding transitions in the socio-ecological systems, in a context where the future is uncertain and complexity can be overwhelming (Sharpe et al., 2016). Like many similar processes, 3H aims to honor and include all voices, and show their relationships in terms of the current reality (H1), the desired future (H3) and pathways to realizing it (H2). It is a process to graphically describe what Scharmer calls the emerging future, and illustrates which initiatives are working towards that future (and which are not) (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013).

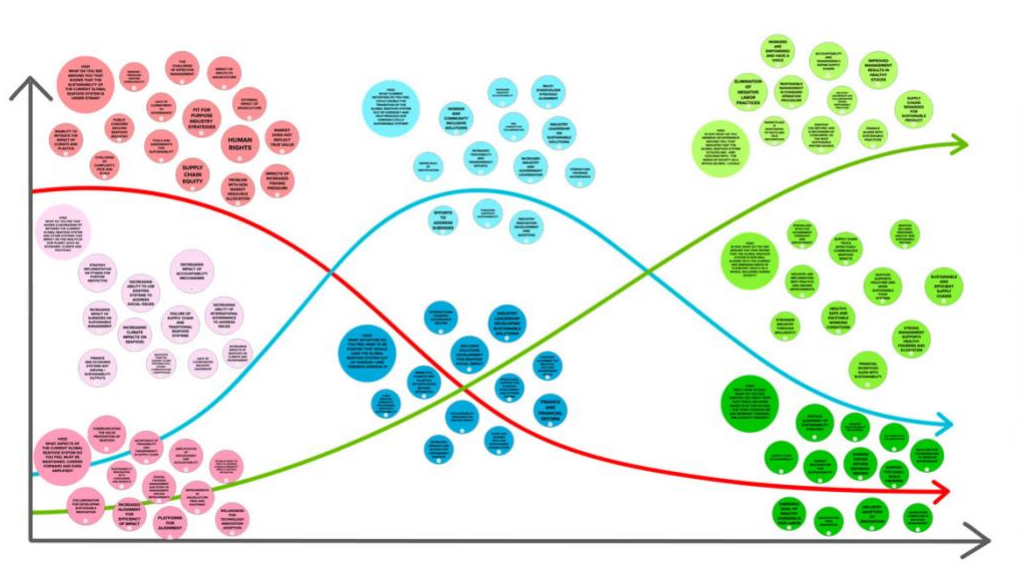


Figure 3. Three Horizons Map for Sustainable Seafood.
Source: Seafood2030 and Bounce Beyond, 2021.

In the Seafood case, about two dozen people from different parts of the T-system responded to a survey and participated in the development of the Three Horizons view of the seafood T-system. Highlights include:

- Horizon 1 (H1) or the current system is characterized as a coordination failure of the global seafood system caused by overwhelming complexity; failure to internalize key social and ecological costs including labor, ecology; lack of tactical accountability within seafood’s sphere of influence; and lack of strategic coordination outside its sphere of influence.
- Horizon 3 (H3) or the desired future is characterized as an industry strategy driving an aligned seafood system that respects and evolves with ecological, social, and economic needs; and empowered workers and communities supported by industry.
- Horizon 2 (H2) or current initiatives fostering transformative change, i.e., the T-system, is characterized as industry leadership of the system that supports and drives adoption and development of innovation in the system to run and change the system; and collaboration and alignment on governance, industry and government cooperation, human rights, and communities.

In these highlights, the focus on “industry” is notable. This framing arises because the T-system orients around the seafood industry, which is seen as a major supplier of protein. In the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the intersection is among several SDGs, including 2 (Zero Hunger) and 14 (Life Below Water). Of course, if Seafood’s T-system had been framed around just the latter, the Three Horizons process would have produced very different results, so the focal questions are important.

The major surprise for participants in this work was the central definition of the H2 (T-system) task of “innovation in the (seafood) system to run and change the system.” This emphasis suggests that despite decades of work to transform the system, efforts are falling significantly short. The industry needs not to simply get better at current efforts like certification, but rather to invent whole new approaches to system organizing, that, of course, raises big issues of governance, power, structures, and collective action, and argues for building an effective T-system.

Once participating initiatives in a given system are known, a key step for T-system development is creating T-system identity and awareness. What is needed is bringing key actors together in new ways so that they can begin to cohere their aspirations, and plan joint and independent actions. Then they can identify actions to strengthen their T-system, thereby enhancing the power of their collective efforts (Waddock & Waddell, 2021b) in the cohering process described below.

This broadening of participation can involve new rounds of a 3H process. The initial round involved only a couple of dozen people, and new rounds broaden ownership and might bring new insights to continually develop and update the 3H outputs.

Cohering

Cohering involves two types of activities: action planning and co-creating transformation capacities. Developing action agendas involves bringing together T-system participants virtually and face-to-face to identify collaborative actions to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of the systemic change efforts. Co-creating transformation capacities means supporting the development of capacities, skills, and capabilities needed to effect system transformation, including developing appropriate leadership skills, metrics, communications, change and action strategies, and how resourcing is accomplished, among other possibilities.

Developing Action Agendas

One of the biggest challenges to T-systems emergence is cohering the relationships among initiatives that strengthen their collective T-system power. Here it is important to emphasize the action in action agendas. Activities of cohering and of amplification, discussed next, are not “once and done,” but rather iterative and evolving as experiments start, initiatives get implemented. New understandings and different actions emerge—and things change as needed for effectiveness. Cohering can be thought of as moving along a spectrum from competition to integration. Responding to the goal of developing collective T-system power and identifying actions requires communication, cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and, in some cases, integration. The exact form of interaction depends on the particular context and opportunity for increased T-system power.

Coherence can emerge through shared initiatives focusing on different aspects of transformation when they work in alignment, create shared language, or use resources collaboratively. Co-creating documents, including research, and building internal capacities within and across initiatives can be helpful ways to generate coherence. The need for shared communication and the value of shared data access obviously leads to questions about technology platforms. Leadership in development of such connective infrastructure can be a critical contribution and important capacity development activity. For example, the Alliance provides a digest for all members to share information about their activities. The Seafood 2030 webinars aim at helping system participants better understand the need for transformative change, and how to organize a T-system. Other virtual exchanges provide for development of a three-year set of activities to support coherence.

Sometimes good ideas for collaboration arise in convenings, but go nowhere because people return to their own initiatives and become immersed in the

demands of their particular initiative. Creating a function that keeps such ideas on track can be valuable and can include developing communities of practice (Snyder & Wenger, 2010; Wenger, 1998), task forces, and other shared organizing structures. It can also include generating shared financial resources to support work groups to implement their ideas.

In the seafood T-system, actions arose from the need to build identity with the T-system for seafood, because the whole system is simply too large and complex for most participants to relate to in their day-to-day work. Two types of actions emerged from this recognition:

1. Working in sub-systems: Initiatives' work is organized around particular "problems" in the seafood system, including fisheries management, illegal fishing and supply chain transparency, fair labor, and finance.
2. Developing T-system metrics: Currently there are no metrics for the performance of the T-system or the subsystems. Action and assessment are guided by initiatives' goals, company goals, and public goals like the SDGs. Developing metrics for the *collective power of the change efforts* as represented by the T-system means that metrics could include assessment of actions to strengthen the T-system holistically.

Co-Creating Transformation System Capacities

Developing the power of a T-system includes both capacity of the T-system as a whole to function, and the capacity of its participants. Although definition of these capacities requires further work, there is good reason to believe that they are similar to the competencies identified with Global Action Network (GANs) operations (Waddell, 2011). GANs are an organizing innovation that arose with the end of the Cold War and an increase in multi-stakeholder action. They are global, multi-stakeholder change networks including, e.g., Transparency International, the Forest Stewardship Council, the Global Water Partnership, and the Global Reporting Initiative. The eight competencies needed to evolve successful GANs seem relevant for developing transformation systems' competencies and we apply them to T-systems here:

1. Leadership: How to develop collaborative leadership with other initiatives? For example in Seafood, how do initiatives and individuals in them act if they are going to support development of the T-system rather than be in competition with each other, which has been described as a shift "from ego-system to eco-system" leadership (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013)?
2. Structural Development: How to construct ongoing flows among initiatives in support of transformation and effective T-Systems? To the extent that there are subsystems in Seafood, like fisheries management, illegal fishing and supply chain transparency, fair labor, and finance, how can links be established among actors in their sub-domains? Importantly,

what overarching linkages are needed to connect them all at the T-system level?

3. **Measuring impact:** How to measure one initiatives' contribution and the collective impact of a T-system? E.g., in Seafood, what are the best holistic metrics to evaluate the overall system, as well as individual and sub-system contributions to the overall? How can national accounts metrics like GNP, project impact metrics, and organization/business success metrics be aligned in support of the transformation goals?
4. **Change:** How to develop the knowledge, processes, skills, and tools necessary for transformation work? E.g., in Seafood, many participants come from either a natural science or business backgrounds and yet are expected to undertake big systems change initiatives, which is not their skill set, initially at least.
5. **Communications:** How to create robust interactions and effective communications among initiatives aiming to work in a T-system collaboratively and communicate them externally when necessary? In Seafood, the Alliance has recently introduced a digest for exchanging news among members. At the time of this writing, it is developing a collaboration mapping platform so members can find each other based on needs and offers.
6. **Learning Systems:** How can initiatives develop their individual learning systems with T-system collaboration in mind? In seafood, there are a growing number of virtual and face-to-face forums associated with major industry conferences. Sophisticated "ecologies of learning" (Snyder & Wenger, 2010), including a variety of exchange mechanisms, are required.
7. **Policy and Advocacy:** What should be done to support the emergence of initiatives so they can act as powerful T-systems? If, for example, Seafood is to achieve its goals of a sustainable seafood system by adopting industry-wide sustainable practices and products, what policy shifts are needed, and which actors need to get involved in advocating for them? How is strong advocacy for change maintained, in the face of inertia and initiatives tendency to develop a niche that can easily sink into a new status quo?
8. **Resource Mobilization:** How to shift funders and economic models to accommodate initiatives within a T-system to work more collaboratively to effect transformative impact? How can for e.g., the Seafood T-system and its participants garner sufficient funds and access the skills external to it, at a scale to truly realize the transformational goals?

Amplifying

Amplifying also has two sets of activities: implementing action plans and developing transformation infrastructure. These activities are core aspects of catalyzing significant change, again recognizing the iterative and interactive

nature of implementing action agendas. Implementation is often helpfully framed as “experiments” to emphasize the newness of the type of action and the importance of learning how to work together, as well as the need for ongoing experimentation. Infrastructure development addresses the need to build a T-system’s on-going ability to connect, cohere and amplify. Amplification enables participants to address the six deep challenges generic to transformation introduced at the outset. They can then move forcefully when “leverage points” and “tipping points” arise.

Implementation

While keeping in mind the need for continual development, T-system development activities can move into an implementation stage with the question: what actions can strengthen the collective power of the relevant T-system? In Seafood, the connecting and cohering activities revealed the existence of a long-standing T-system with adequate support for moving forward. It also revealed several core challenges: the complexity of the system, collective dynamics of different actors, and insufficient focus. These challenges combined with an orientation towards incremental rather than transformative change, as well as system fragmentation, create significant inertia. Core tasks that (at this writing) system organizers see need to be done over the next three-year period to bring about the desired transformation and T-system include:

1. Developing a narrative that drives a systems approach to seafood transformation.
2. Designing specific processes to bring diverse stakeholders together in new ways.
3. Working subgroups or “arenas” of activity that define strategic pathways forward and enable participants to bring strategic foresight to their own initiatives/sectors.
4. Bring representatives of the subgroups together to form a collective sense of the overall T-system that can be shared in the subgroups later on.
5. Create an action plan for the system that encompasses measurement, evaluation metrics, learning, and research (synthesized with the acronym ‘MERL’) that can guide actions, support system participants learning from each other, and help improve the functioning of the overall T-system.

Developing relationships within the T-system means that systemic changes can be catalyzed through the implementation of action agendas, though Seafood has not yet moved to this stage. But consider some of the possibilities here. Synergies can be readily identified among actors implementing different parts of the action agenda, developing their own insights, and sharing them with others. Actions can be co-designed by groups or individual initiative with an understanding of how they affect the overall T-system. Learnings can be more readily shared when the common agenda exists, reducing redundancy and accelerating innovations and experiments that work—while recognizing the

unique contexts of each sub-part of the system. When T-system participants can identify high leverage points and possible tipping points, they can move together (or in subgroups) towards mobilizations to propagate needed change.

Developing Transformation Infrastructure

As T-systems evolve, a demand for supporting infrastructure also grows, to support the continual development and evolution of the system. The five activities previously discussed will be actively engaged in an ongoing way. Since the structure, dynamics and participants in the T-system are always changing, mapping and updates must be done at intervals; moreover, as new participants are engaged in the T-system process, they have roles and views that also must be engaged to create co-ownership and understanding. For example, Seafood work first focused on the T-system in general, and is now focusing on four particular issue complexes (including fisheries management, illegal fishing and supply chain transparency, fair labor, and finance), recognizing that the activities must be repeated within each of these as a subsystem of the whole.

Elsewhere we have written about the emergence of transformation catalysts that can organize such activities in an ongoing way (Waddock & Waddell, 2021b). From what we have witnessed in working with Seafood, it appears that as T-system recognition grows, so does the recognition of the need for developing transformation capacity specific to the given system. Thus, part of the activity associated with emerging T-systems is responding to the drivers for a transformation *catalyst* that can steward the ongoing action geared towards transformation within the system. Central entities, such as Seafood 2030 and The Alliance, become likely candidates to take on this activity—which is a catalyzing rather than a “doing” function. In other words, the transformation catalyst’s responsibility is to ensure that the activities of seeing, sensemaking, action planning, co-creating transformation capacities, and implementation are carried out *by system participants*.

Discussion and Limitations

The concept of a Transformation System as discussed above is relatively new, and the framing is still emerging across discourses and uses. Our orientation is very similar to field-building (Hussein et al., 2018), but has a broader engagement challenge and a more specific transformation mission. Approaching transformation through the lens of developing T-systems can greatly enhance the potential for system change outcomes. But there is a catch to note. Creating identity and coherence as a T-system emerges through collaborative work by participants in the system, not by a centralized authority or senior board group. System participants are member leaders in their own specialties as well as in the broader social system context; they are engaged to openly disclose, to become both self and system-aware, to commit to co-create a common aspiration. System leaders are called to framing work, to identify the strengths and opportunities in

their system lie, going through a type of collaborative journeying process similar to the well-known Theory U process (Scharmer, 2009). The T-system is convened with participant-leaders in similar process to the more recent u.lab⁴ process. Actors need to be able to shift their own planned activities when observations of the system as it changes increase the transformative power of their T-system as a whole. That requires leaders and participants willing to put aside their competitive side (which is strongly nurtured by the current system) in favor of a deeply collaborative and co-creative approach

These approaches emphasize stewardship of the future rather than immediate success. They also raise the core deep system challenge of creating new collaborative capacity, in particular to forward shared narrative development, the types of metrics needed to evaluate whole systems, and new ways of governing systems that are likely still to emerge. The amplification process requires new linkage among initiatives, ongoing experimentation with action agendas, and a willingness to “live” in uncertainty some of the time. While these challenges represent opportunities for transformative change to happen, they also can provide obstacles to change—and limitations to the potential for transformation.

T-systems provide an opportunity for greater systemic and transformative impact. With T-system awareness, participants shift from a focus on immediate project outcomes to a broader situation awareness that seeks to address the opportunities for connecting and enhancing a more collective, shared T-system to accelerate outcomes collectively desired across participants in the system. In the process, participants can gain insights in how to work collaboratively with others and move into the flow of transforming whole systems, including tackling some of the tough challenges associated with innovation and, particularly, financing transformation. Obstructionist tactics or even simple short-sightedness, inability to envision the system, or conventional competitive mindsets can get in the way of building the shared aspirations and common theories of change that are shared for leading a common agenda for transformative change. Hence these behaviors can be limitations to change—and their prevalence in today’s competitive dynamics makes finding participants to act in these new ways difficult. In that context, nurturing whole system awareness and individual capacities to, in a sense, “let go” of control are needed.

Conclusion

We find that transformation systems are prevalent today; whether recognized or not, people working for transformation are system participants in T-systems as

⁴ The u.lab program developed by the MIT Presencing Institute convenes a voluntary network for large-scale coordination of multiple systems change initiatives, convened within locally-organized groups using a Theory U design process. The approach is a change management method approach and course, incorporating the theories of presencing and collective impact.

they advocate and organize for system-level change in particular geographies, issues, and sectors. By *recognizing and identifying themselves as part of a broader transformation system*, people can connect, cohere, and amplify their efforts collectively to become more effective in tackling major systemic challenges. Though understanding of T-systems needs further development, we believe that developing T-system power and participation holds promise for accelerating transformation journeys.

Transformation requires significant change at multiple levels, that is, from what are known in the transition literature as niches (small innovative spaces) to regime and landscape (whole system) levels (Geels & Schot, 2007). For sectors like global seafood, the required huge effort can be greatly aided by forming T-systems built on shared aspirations (new narratives and theories of change) that inspire participants. Connecting, cohering, and amplifying T-system initiatives can play a critical role in attaining the scale needed to transform whole systems. Doing so can help identify key leverage points for change that emphasize the value of focusing effort on a particular point in a system to realize a desired change (Meadows, 1999). Effective T-system participants can also better recognize “tipping points” that enhance the timeliness of actions (Gladwell, 2006; Westley et al., 2011) and provide guidance about where to place effort.

T-systems present a vehicle that supports addressing the inherent transformation qualities of scale, complexity and time-horizons. Developing T-systems, however, requires that transformation agents shift their attention from particular efforts within a T-system, to the T-system as a whole. Perhaps the biggest challenge is developing commitment to deep collaboration and systems awareness, and successfully arguing the need for systemic transformation. We are still in the early stages of understanding how to develop T-systems.

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In the Making

MAPA: Co-Creating New Narratives for the 21st Century

Renata Sbardelini

Suindara Radar e Rede
renata.sbardelini@suindara.net

Danielle Almeida

Diaspórica consultancy
danielle.diasporica@gmail.com

Liliane Moreira Ramos

Federal University of Espírito Santo–UFES
liliane.ramos@edu.ufes.br

Abstract

This article presents the MAPA Social Innovation Lab and elaborates on the elements of the process that influenced and/or led to the construction of new narratives based on a plurality of views and multiplicity of people from different social classes and in different positions of power. It addresses the short period during which the lab itself was held, the tensions that arose on account of the characteristics / particularities of the group's participants, and the breadth and complexity of a co-constructed narrative. The social innovation lab was held in 2019 and was based on Theory U. It consisted of 37 leaders invited to rethink a social model anchored in the feminine-masculine duality starting from the central question: What does the new narrative of feminine and masculine values for the 21st century look like? We present three central principles that underpin the process and, from the point of view of a movement still under construction, we consider important issues for developing a MAPA experience as well as the limitations and possibilities that became (and have become) evident over the course of our MAPA journey.

Keywords

social innovation; Theory U; feminine and masculine values; plurality; multiple knowledge systems; vulnerability

Introduction

Argentine philosopher Enrique Dussel (2014) proposes elements for contemplating Latin American society from a decolonial, epistemological point of view, meaning a view that recognizes the Eurocentric and universalist nature of modern political and economic systems and that seeks to shape new possible worlds from a political process of liberation that reveals the pluriverse: a diversity of historically invisibilized concepts, models, mental structures, and historical and transcendental arrangements. In 2019, the MAPA Social Innovation Lab was created and held in Brazil as a space to co-shape a new possible world from such a point of view.

The MAPA Social Innovation Lab was conceived by Renata Sbardelini, founder of the creative consulting firm Suindara Radar e Rede. The impetus to create MAPA came from Sbardelini's felt sense of a need to explore the "pain related to being a woman in today's world." She felt that her own experience of this pain was more than personal, and that creating a space to explore the theme further would serve a broader community. Initially, she conceived of the project as a space for exploring female identities, values and narratives, but later reconceptualized it to include a broader understanding of gender as a cultural construction that permeates the dynamics of relationships with others, with nature, with work, with consumption, and as a way of being.

From this vision, Sbardelini proposed that the objective of the Lab would be to reimagine the current social model anchored in feminine-masculine duality using three questions as a springboard:

- What constitutes feminine and masculine values in the 21st century?
- What is the relationship between feminine and masculine values that guides our behavior and the individual and collective decisions we make?
- What do the new narratives of feminine and masculine values for the 21st century look like?

The name MAPA (map) was chosen because its meaning goes beyond the idea of a graphic representation of a territory: the concept of map also contains creative power that connects individuals, territories, and realities; "open, it is connectable in all its dimensions, dismountable, reversible, susceptible to receive constant modifications" (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1995, pp. 20-21).

The MAPA Social Innovation Lab took place August 2019. The journey lasted five days and was based on Theory U methodology for social innovation (Scharmer, 2007, 2018). There were thirty-seven participants in the lab, the limit suggested by the facilitator so that the development of the planned activities could happen with enough time for exchanges, speaking and listening. The participants were hand-picked based on relevant areas of action for the proposed discussion, such as political change, environment, communication and culture, technology and innovation, social entrepreneurship, and education. Within these areas, MAPA Social Innovation Lab chose to work with leaders with a recognized track record in their fields, areas of influence and/or activism and who influence and produce content in and for their institutions, communities, and for society at large.

In this article, we seek to identify key elements of the five-day process that helped create the opportunity for a collective construction of new narratives to emerge from a heterogenous group consisting of individuals who come from different social classes and spaces of power. We point to three key elements: opening with vulnerability, group plurality/heterogeneity and opening to multiple knowledge systems. The first two are part of the lab design and the third is an element that emerged from the group dynamics. We suggest that the first two elements created the conditions for the third element to emerge.

Methodology

The reflections presented here are based on the direct experience of two of the co-authors, Renata Sbardelini, who first came up with the MAPA Social Innovation Lab and, by extension, the MAPA Project, and Danielle Almeida, both leaders during the five-day laboratory, and on the process analysis of the third co-author, Liliane Ramos. Ramos' analysis draws on the "Sistematização" internal

document, intended to be a written record of the MAPA Social Innovation Lab activities. It was written by an anthropologist who worked for two years with the Suindara team on planning the lab and witnessed the lab's activities specifically for organizing its record. The document includes participants' comments during the MAPA Social Innovation Lab process, transcribed from the audio and video recording of all activities, and observational input from both the anthropologist and from Renata Sbardelini. It allowed us to go back to key moments throughout the five-day journey to draw out relevant themes. All participant quotes included in this article are drawn from the "Sistematização" and are shared here with their permission.

The sense-making—or data analysis—was carried out from an interpretive ethnographic perspective (Geertz, 1989) that privileges the meanings that the actors attribute to the situations experienced, acting reflexively on social processes and managing their consequences. In the specific case of this work, two of the co-authors participated directly in the process analyzed, which includes a subjective relationship with the object of the discussions presented. We believe that this relationship, once made explicit, did not constitute an obstacle but their participant status enhanced the analysis, as Geertz believed.

The three key elements presented in this article emerged from the sense-making discussions among the authors, who sought answers to the following question: what were the fundamental aspects of the process that generated engagement of the participants with the lab proposal, creating the opportunity for a collective construction of new narratives to emerge from a heterogeneous group of individuals from different spaces of power? For this purpose, the confluence of the visions of the three co-authors, who assumed different perspectives in the realization of the lab (in the case of Sbardelini and Almeida) or had an external view of the process (in the case of Ramos), was enriching. The "Sistematização" document made it possible to return to the specific comments expressed during the lab by participants, and to draw conclusions from these about the relevance of various elements to the process. The group met six times over the course of four months to review the Sistematização data and draw out key themes.

Certainly there were many planned and emergent aspects contributed to the results generated in the lab. We chose to highlight the three described here because we feel they offer insight into the challenge of creating conditions for the group's openness and engagement with the lab's objectives, allowing, through the process, the participants to build on and deepen the complexity of the initial questions raised.

Perspective on Feminine and Masculine Values

From the beginning of the MAPA Social Innovation Lab planning, the lab organizers conceptualized gender as a culturally constructed identifier, with qualities and functions defined by interpretation of the nature of bodies, which is developed neither naturally or impartially, thereby reinforcing masculine

domination and authority (Butler, 2003, p.37). Simone de Beauvoir (1989/1949) stated that no woman is born a woman, she becomes a woman. As such, a differentiation process takes place that does not happen in a horizontal and balanced way, but is expressed on the level of actions and ideas through an apparatus of power. In this sense, according to Marilyn Strathern (2006), to transform this apparatus it is not enough to compare people defined by their gender from a vision of supposed intrinsic qualities. It is necessary, rather, to understand how these qualities relate to social conventions, so that these conventions can be changed.

In conjunction with the theories of de Beauvoir (1989/1949) and Strathern (2006), we understood that this cultural process transcends individual relationships between men and women. A masculine bias when interpreting social space can be identified with the constitution of the modernity thought itself, as Sorj (1992) pointed out, and this bias is expressed through dualisms like individual/social, public/private, mind/body, rational/emotional and nature/nurture(culture). Nevertheless, Sori stresses that this bias does not assume, in today's terms of behavior, a universal content or rigid forms. From this interpretation, Western culture is recognized as essentially patriarchal, wherein elements like war, hierarchy, valuing growth and controlling reason permeate everyday life and interactions, including the leadership models pursued in government, business and even social action (Bhat & Sisodia, 2016). It is also a Eurocentric culture, which invisibilizes particular concepts, mental structures, and historical arrangements of the global south (Dussel, 2015).

Muraro and Boff (2002) have proposed that it is possible to reshape coexistence through a balance between the feminine and masculine values that reverberate within us as individuals and in our relationships with others and with nature. In this reconfiguration, it is crucial to recognize a heterogeneous manifestation of feminine and masculine values and of their impacts in different social groups (Rosaldo, 1995). Only in this way do we avoid the risk that, in seeking to transform existing systems, we establish new conventions of control and power (Eisler, 1988), limiting our understanding of a social model to simplified dualities.

When we, the MAPA Social Innovation Lab, opted to address the feminine and the masculine in terms of values, we sought to take a critical look at the prevailing logic of these cultural processes and structures of power, to recognize their underlying historical development, and to create space for building new narratives that could transform the structures of prejudice, inequality, and power asymmetry. It was then decided that men would also be invited to the dialogue.

Brazil is among the five countries with the largest gaps in gender inequality in Latin America. In 2019, when the lab was held, Brazil ranked 95 out of 155 countries surveyed for the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2018). The scenario of imbalance between men and women in the country produces significant social injustices in political and economic participation. In

2019 the labor market participation rate for women was 54.5 %, while among men it was 73.7 %. In addition, in Brazil women receive, on average, 77% of the value of men's income. In 2020, Brazil had only 14.8% women parliamentarians in office in the lower chambers, the lowest rate among South American countries (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2021). The *We Need to Talk to Men* report pointed out that 81.2% of men and 94.8% of cisgender women consider that there is a lot of male chauvinism in Brazil, and more than 50% of the participants believe that there is a lot or extreme inequality of rights and opportunities between men and women in the country (UN Women, 2016).

The female and male values were summarized in three key social symptoms to be addressed during the lab, presented on the first day of activities as context:

1. **Gender Gap:** despite all the progress made by women since the mid-twentieth century, there are still notable gender gaps. For example, according to the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2018), to date there is still a 32.0% average gender gap that remains to be closed. The largest gender disparity that informs this gap is in the area of political empowerment, and gaps also remain significant in economic participation and opportunity. The report projections indicate that the overall global gender gap will close in 108 years across the 106 countries covered in this report.
2. **Gender Identity:** the construction of gender identity is associated with imprisoning stereotypes for both men and women. The *We Need to Talk to Men* Report (Brazil Country Office of UN Women, 2016), pointed out that “the place of men” in society is still largely built on heterosexuality, the culture of the hero, the role of the provider, being a strong worker and emotionally reserved, group strength, and virile capital; and “the place of women” is still largely constructed from the role of the caretaker, purity, beauty, and fragility.
3. **A Polarized World with a Power Imbalance:** Our worldwide value system remains anchored in the polarization of a binary culture. In this system, polar opposites often associated with male/female, such as public/private, society/individual, rational/emotional, science/spirituality and man/woman, fight for positions of control and power. According to psychologist and mythologist, Murdock (2013), our task is to heal the internal split between masculine and feminine that produces these polarities, welcoming the tensions that arise from this process. This would be a delicate balance, that demands a subtle integration of the feminine and masculine aspects of oneself. That would reflect on the re-balancing of social relations, as well as in the balance of life on earth.

Based on personal experience, the data about gender gap and gender identity, and the proposition of Murdock (2013) and Muraro and Boff (2002) that it is possible to reshape coexistence through a balance between the feminine and masculine values, described above, Sbardellini hypothesized an explanation of the current scenario as a starting point for the lab. She proposed that the root cause of these symptoms may be the historic rupture of a holistic view of the feminine and masculine archetype, when masculine archetypes overshadowed feminine archetypes and came to shape the power structures that guide society and consequently our model of the world, extending to business, government, education, marriage, religion, family.

Lab Format and Structure

The MAPA Social Innovation Lab was an action research project, a methodology that starts with a collective problem and then collectively pulls in participants who represent the situation being researched as co-protagonists to engage in building knowledge and changing reality (Thiollent, 1985; Peruzzo, 2016). We were particularly influenced by socially critical action research as described by Tripp (2005, p. 14), a type of action research that starts from the recognition that in society there are one or more dominant systems that produce injustice, which demand transformation at different levels.

There is no single way of applying action research, and the field has drawn from different theoretical sources and has undergone extensive methodological development (Bradbury, 2006). The MAPA Social Innovation Lab used Theory U, developed by Otto Scharmer (2007, 2018) as its action research methodology. Theory U is based on the idea that the quality of change generated by any intervention is a function of the level of awareness of the people involved. It emphasizes the intelligences of mind, heart, and deepest will to support individual transformation and sensing into the future that wishes to unfold.

As an awareness-based method for changing systems, Theory U is practiced by recognizing leadership's blind spot—the source of our thoughts and actions—and developing processes “to build the collective capacity to shift the inner place from where we operate” (Scharmer, 2018, p.10). The emphasis is on promoting a transition from ego-system awareness (silo view) to eco-system awareness (systems view). There are three main stages to the process, each with a particular focus and set of practices.

The initial stage is that of *sensing*, creating spaces for “suspension and wonder,” a suspension of judgment, deep listening and the incorporation of other ways of seeing/perceiving the world and of understanding problems. The second movement is *presencing*, a combination of the words “presence” and “sensing” to denote a process of individual and collective connection with common purpose and future potential. Finally, there is the stage of *realizing*, in which the agents of the journey explore, as a group, possibilities for action, aiming at the co-construction of a shared future that wants to emerge (Scharmer, 2018).

Given the complexity of the guiding question of the MAPA Project, we realized we needed a methodology that could seize the sparks of the future, but also enable participants to visualize the system and perceive themselves as part of that system in order to co-create new narratives for it from within. The MAPA Social Innovation Lab took place over five consecutive days (August 12-16, 2019) from 8:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. every day. Save for August 14, the lab was held at Serviço Social do Comércio (SESC) facilities.

MAPA Program Schedule	
Day One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating a landing strip • understanding the MAPA starting point • opening up the collective experience of the Lab participants
Day Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delving deeper into understanding feminine and masculine values as a contemporary collective phenomenon • guest futurist presented: "Gender Identity, Where does the Future Point to?" • researcher and consultant presented: "The Feminine from an African Descendant Matrix" in counterpoint to the Eurocentric view of the theme • specialist in study of new masculinities presented discussions on gender from a masculine perspective • psychiatrist who pioneered in Brazil the work with transsexual people presented a scientific view on the studies of gender identity and sexual orientation
Day Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • journey to Rio Silveira Indigenous village to experience perspective on men/women, feminine/masculine through the Indigenous cosmovision.
Day Four	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • returned from the Rio Silveira Indigenous village to hear voices from the field and for sense-making, identifying emerging insights and preparing a draft of new narratives
Day Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dedicated to identity, to reflecting on what the week's experiences meant personally, professionally, and socially for each participant-leader • prototyping of next steps from a point of view applied to reality.

Figure 1: MAPA Program Schedule.

Holding a Space for Competing Narratives

The MAPA Social Innovation Lab experience built on the initial questions shaping the lab and expanded them, leading to the creation of multiple narratives around gender and gender values. In this section, we identify three key elements of the Lab process that led to this outcome and allowed multiple

narratives to emerge. Two of these principles—opening with vulnerability and group plurality/heterogeneity—were part of the process design. They are highlighted here because they were considered key conditions for the third principle, openness to multiple knowledge systems, to emerge spontaneously from the dynamics established by the group itself. As mentioned above, the comments shared here are drawn from the Sistematização and are shared with permission of the participants. Because gender identity and sexual orientation identity became a central theme of the lab, we share these identifiers. Participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Opening with Vulnerability

The first principle, opening with vulnerability, was crucial for creating a bond with participants and facilitators. The MAPA Social Innovation Lab's guiding questions emerged from the resonance of Sbardelini's personal restlessness in the collective context: a reflection on what is feminine that she has carried throughout her life and that led her to project her questioning of social relations more broadly. As Sbardelini reported in an article for the Brazilian edition of Marie Claire magazine, where she was invited to talk about the MAPA Social Innovation Lab:

The MAPA project is born out of a pain. From a wound associated with my feminine. When my mother became pregnant, she had a strong depression, which lasted until I was nine years old, which made her unable to be with me in the intensity that a child needed for bonding. This brought me the constant feeling of loneliness, abandonment, and not being loved. Later on, I understood that the wound in my story was also a collective wound, and one of the ways I found to dialogue with this pain was to start designing a project in which I could understand and help find solutions for being a woman in today's world (Sbardelini, 2019).

In the initial contacts to invite the lab participants, Sbardelini chose to speak openly about those points in her trajectory that had led her to reflect on the role of women in the world. MAPA participants connected with this in two regards. Like Sbardelini, many immediately recognized the importance of the proposed theme because it spoke to issues they deemed important and that merited urgent discussion. Second, Sbardelini's openness was seen as an invitation to build an empathic bond. Sbardelini's *acknowledgment of her own vulnerability* and the construction of the Lab's initial questions out of the *resonance of her individual vulnerability in the collective sphere* contributed to trust building. Already on the first day of lab activities, Sbardelini kicked off the lab summarizing the motivations for the process that she had shared with the participants. As recorded in the Sistematização document, this opening had an emotional tone. Sbardelini addressed a moment in her childhood when she knew for herself that what made her happy was to make others happy, and then a second feeling, which unfolds through her trajectory as a woman, an experience

from which she also inherited deep pain. The wound that forged her feminine side gave her the need to think of a project that worked with women as a collective (Sistematização, p.6).

This personal and human connection was fundamental because it inspired the participants' openness to the process from the recognition of their own places of pain. On the first day, when the participants introduced themselves in the plenary, their speeches reflected this openness. Aline, a White woman, explicitly recognized the identification with pain mentioned by Sbardelini:

It was through entrepreneurship that I started my healing journey, allowing myself, forgiving myself for being a woman. (...) Also understanding that we have the same pains, I place myself at the disposal of the universe to try to help in this mission so that men and women can live together in peace (Aline).

Carlos, a Black man who works in the outskirts of São Paulo, added complexity to the pain associated with the imbalance between female and male values, adding the perspective of race and economic class:

I connect romantically with everyone, but in practice, what moves me is to be alive, to be here, to be able to share. And what drives me, in fact, is life. This year is my 30th birthday, if I were to talk about a label, it is "bandido". The label issue has always bothered me, taking me out of my place. One of the reasons we are here, I believe, is that even labels need to be signified along with the narrative. When we talk about feminine and masculine, we already understand this gender barrier that we still have. We are learning to listen to each other, as men and as women, and all those who don't understand themselves in the body they inhabit (Carlos).

The presentation of the participants in their vulnerabilities, continuing the movement started by Sbardelini, was a fundamental aspect for the sensing stage (Scharmer, 2007), promoting the opening for the recognition of the other and the genuine listening to the different worldviews. As Camila, another participant, synthesized in an activity still on day one,

We cannot build from scratch, we need to build from the pains that led us here, they are the ones that will lead us to a forward movement, of impulsion and reconstruction (Camilla, White, woman).

Opening with vulnerability also meant opening to vulnerability, which shaped the atmosphere or culture of the lab and helped create the conditions for multiple narratives to be spoken and heard. At the end of the first day, Joana, an artist and White woman, proposed to the group the importance of committing to a "first person" narrative. She reflected that "our narratives are being co-constructed more from a general narrative and less from an intimate narrative" and called on the group to let the "raw and naked construction of a personal

narrative" emerge. Opening with vulnerability legitimized that, since the beginning of the activities, the participants could bring their personal experiences to the discussions. This characteristic of the process accentuated the heterogeneity of the narratives and paved the way for the deepening of the discussions based on the recognition of the complexity of the issues raised and their impacts on different realities.

Group Plurality/Heterogeneity

As reinforced in the invitation and in the opening of the process, there was not just one pain, but pains, plural, to be acknowledged. Therefore, MAPA's social lab adopted the practice of intentionally choosing participants based on a second principle, that of *group plurality / heterogeneity*. This element was crucial to the setting up of the playing field: in order for the lab process to potentially transform social structures, different points of view had to be represented and expressed during the process. In addition to ensuring points of views from representatives in different fields, such as political change, environment, communication and culture, technology and innovation, social entrepreneurship, and education, we were keen on guaranteeing a true diversity of racial, gender, age, class, and socioeconomic social markers since social differences are structured by these markers and, therefore, the proposed discussion would be ineffective in the absence of such.

The representation of women was essential due to the motivation of the lab and the underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision making spaces (Gender Gap Report, 2018); the representation of Black people because they make up 53% of the Brazilian population, who also occupy few places of power and decision making (IBGE, 2015); the representation of Indigenous people to aggregate the knowledge of native peoples; and the representation of transgender people because they broaden the perspective of gender vision in Brazil, the country with the highest number of murders of transgender people in the world (Transgender Europe, 2021). Other groups considered relevant by the curators were not represented, such as people with disabilities and refugees, because, within the limit of the number of participants, they favored having more than one voice per group, especially from the most overlooked and undervalued groups in society.

There was also an attempt to minimize the power relations. This was manifest by the care taken to establish the necessary conditions for each leader's participation. For example, although there was no remuneration for participating in the lab, participants from low-income groups were consulted at the time of the invitation about the need to receive an allowance, since suspending their economic activities for five days could mean a significant reduction in their income and put their survival conditions at risk. This allowance made it possible for those in this situation to participate in the process and have their voices represented.

There was also a concern to avoid reinforcing possible contexts of domination that could derive from the professional positions occupied by the participants, which included leadership positions in recognized private and social institutions. To this end, as Sbardelini recalls, participants were initially asked not to define themselves through their job titles. One of the sponsor's representatives, for example, introduced herself saying: "I am from Natura, I work there in the areas of innovation, marketing and sustainability," deliberately omitting that she held a senior vice-presidential position.

Brazil is a socially diverse and complex country, so the objective of having different points of view represented was not, and could not be, to come up with a comprehensive representation of all existing social segments. Although we looked predominantly at pre-defined groups, the intent behind the search for plurality and heterogeneity was to set up a baseline of several worldviews and experiences woven together through radically different personal and professional contexts. The group's principle of heterogeneity pressed upon the MAPA Social Innovation Lab precisely to enable a field in which alliances, connections, and historical and cultural divergences could be made explicit, allowing the participants to be moved by and respond to whatever emerged. Through heterogeneity, the lab was dynamically ripe not only for the pursuit of cognitive knowledge, but—most importantly—for dramatizing the pluriverse of its constitution, what we call the *opening to multiple knowledge systems*, the third structuring principle of the MAPA Social Innovation Lab.

Opening to Multiple Knowledge Systems

Over the five-day immersion, participants learned of the several nuances inherent to many mobilizing issues, such as the concept of gender and the feminist movement, the interplay and tension among gender, race and class, the questions that pervade transgender identity, the perspective of masculinities and our relationship with nature, and also confronted the tensions surrounding such issues.

A turning point occurred on the second day of the lab. After the presentation of specialist Dr. Alexandre Saadeh, a psychiatrist who works with the transsexual population, the specialist guests who had been slotted to speak next sensed the discomfort of Rodrigo, a transsexual man, and relinquished spontaneously part of their lecture time so that the transsexual leaders would have the chance to be heard.

Rodrigo and Sabrina, a transgender woman, explained how problematic it was that they were not given an opportunity to talk about their own experiences and worldviews on the official lab agenda. Rodrigo began:

It's just that I have been deeply bothered by the fact that you talk about us with me here and with Sabrina here. Even more after yesterday, when we talked about the importance of speaking in first person. Why tolerate our silence? Why tolerate us in the

margin? This seems like a small thing, but the consequences of this are fatal. When some people look at me, or at people like me, I wonder how they think, "will there be gender in the future?" But I go to the bathroom and people remind me that this gender exists. So, this future will only exist if we are alive, and it is difficult.

Sabrina emphasized the importance of listening to direct personal experiences to fulfill the lab's goal of building a new narrative from plural perspectives:

The main point for me is that we are telling stories and we need to be careful. Not only to be careful that these stories are correct, but that they are also complete. (...) So, the story that would have been told here if it didn't have my presence and Rodrigo's would be a story that would have talked about the future, would have talked about institutions, but would not have had a first-hand view which is what we are trying to bring here. Concrete, tangible experiences, from people who experience this and not just people who have studied it from a neutral or academic point of view.

This emergent aspect of the process reinforces that a truly participatory process presupposes the right and ability of people to express themselves on issues and decisions that affect them and intend to disseminate knowledge about them (Bradbury, 2006). This pillar is important for liberating "the muted voices of those held down by class structures and neo-colonialism, by poverty, sexism, racism and homophobia" (Bradbury, 2006, p.10). Although the organizers of the lab were aware of this principle, the episode pointed out blind spots and allowed, in fact, the emergence of what we call the opening to multiple knowledge systems, for a few reasons.

Firstly, a cisgendernormative and heteronormative bias was identified that neither the lab organizers nor the other participants had identified or perceived as negative. Rodrigo's interjection and the subsequent opportunity given to express the pain that the situation had provoked and reinforced enabled other participants who had not initially been affected by the situation to recognize the oppression of cisgendernormative and heteronormative social roles, to recognize themselves as protagonists in such oppression, and to pull back the veil on their own privileges. On the fourth day, Roberta, a White woman, spoke about this feeling in a plenary report to the group:

I still feel a lot of shame for being able, from day one, to access the amount of prejudice I still have inside me and the times I was completely complacent and omitted. My shame is because I always had a choice. Maybe my role here is this insignificance, and I think I owe it to all of you who have been insignificant and irrelevant in so many forums, so I think that's where I fit in.

Secondly, it was the group itself that autonomously reorganized the speaking spaces in conjunction with input from the guest speakers present; neither the

facilitators nor Sbardelini played any part. And it was not by chance that these guests who embraced Rodrigo's remarks were a Black woman, Gabriela, and a Black man, João. As Gabriela recalls, both recognized the importance of being able to raise one's voice as a way of claiming places of power since both work to claim and reclaim spaces of power in their daily activities and activism. Right at the beginning of his presentation, Gabriela emphasized:

In many spaces, Black people, trans people, gays, lesbians are present, but not in all spaces are they given the floor. Speaking is an important process to build society, and while few can speak, society will always continue to be formatted by a few. We are talking about individual pains, but we are also talking about a collective that has suffered systematic violence, that has experienced a high femicide rate, that makes Brazil the country that kills the most trans people and I find it worrying that this is not a *collective pain*.

João also highlighted the importance of including Rodrigo's and Sabrina's experiences in the ongoing process:

We need to go beyond the impression that we need to overcome or ignore some things. some things can't be ignored or overcome. so if we use with or from maybe it's better. So, when we think about pains it is with those pains and not *beyond them*.

The emphasis on representativeness addressed by Gabriela and João allowed all lab participants to become aware of the elements that make up the very system that had provoked Rodrigo's discomfort. Once again, the group was able to experience the social microcosm in which subaltern groups develop their own strategies for occupying spaces of power and for offering mutual support.

At the end of this day, the lab participants reported in plenary their perceptions and feelings about the episode and described the new dimensions that the episode brought to the recognition of individual and collective pains: "We are talking about the first person, but no one has commented whether it is the first person singular or plural," said Marcos, a heterosexual White man. José, a gay White man emphasized the change of perspective that the experience brought to the discussions:

We need to understand that there are discussions about coexistence and there are also discussions about survival in this process. As long as we need to talk about the level of survival of certain groups, which I think is the issue of pain, then we cannot give ourselves the privilege of discussing only coexistence (José).

It bears noting that, though the participants had taken a first step in this direction following Sbardelini's very personal opening talk, it was only after the powerful statements made by Rodrigo, Gabriela, João, and others that it dawned on participants that their personal pains, representing collective pains, could in fact be heard. It was only at this point that the most privileged of the group

began to force themselves to recognize their own blinders, to face a short-sightedness that had thus far not been brought to their attention (and certainly not in such raw expression), and to accept that unintentional violence was committed by virtue of their privilege.

Co-Creating New Narratives

Questioning the world and our model of society based on the question "What are feminine and masculine values in the 21st century?" showed us that it is impossible to make a direct leap towards one new narrative. Rather, we need to open to a multitude of narratives that take into consideration nature, various social causes, struggles, corporeities, historicities, cultures and experiences that coexist in this same time and space. To build multiple narratives it is crucial and urgent that we acknowledge and denounce the many forms of domination and construction of inequalities that act and impact on our personal and collective relationships; only then might we start to draw and live and tell stories focused on the dignity of each and every person and/or collective. As Fricke (as cited in Brydon-Miller et al., 2003) proposes, this was a process that sought to stimulate personal commitment, with individuals being subjects of their history and the social contexts on which they depend. Inevitably, this became a multidimensional process that welcomed struggle and uncertainty, which makes action research more energizing and full of possibilities (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Through the MAPA process, the group built on and deepened the complexity of the initial questions raised concerning masculine and feminine values, connecting them with the power relations related to gender, race, social class, economic class, and humankind's relationship with nature. Instead of co-creating a single narrative for the 21st century in response to the initial questions, the lab led to the group's identifying the need for multiple narratives.

The MAPA Project has also shown that, in this moment of anguish and uncertainty aggravated by Covid-19, a process of deep-diving into our dark depths and unknown shadows as individuals and as a society is critical so that solutions can be co-designed based on recognition of privilege and suspension of prejudice and judgments. It is a search, as Dussel (2014) proposed, for a change of attitude toward the demands of life on Earth, forging a space in which cultural differences are put into relationship dialogically and creatively to transform the structures of domination and power. The process implemented by the MAPA Social Innovation Lab, based on carefully cultivated spaces, intentional design, with the needed time for preparation and the curation of the participant group (both the heterogeneity and the individuals' positions as leaders), pointed out, as presented, important elements for this. Some blindingly clear lessons were learned: the process must be collective and heterogeneous; conflict and acknowledging vulnerabilities are the paths to structuring a network of care and respect; and we must build together whatever we wish to share as a value.

As Bradbury (2006) pointed out, action research, as an emergent, evolving, and educational process, urges us to observe its practical and lasting

consequences. After the five days of collective immersion, MAPA participants spontaneously connected through a group messaging app, naming the group called MAPA Lovers, and indicated their willingness to build a network of dialogue, solidarity, and strategic agency based on the supportive community that had been formed by the shared MAPA Project experience. The group remains active at the time of writing. In addition, the group's reflections related to power relations of gender, race, social class, economic class, and humankind's relationship with nature were systematized by Suindara in the open-access publication upon which the findings in this paper are based, and in a documentary with the record of the process (both available at projetomapa.net). Finally, in 2021, Suindara developed an online course, via WhatsApp, a literacy in ten themes that emerged from the Lab, called MAPA E-learning: Narratives for the 21st Century. The course is aimed at all hierarchical levels of companies and organizations, and relied on the participation of eight leaders who were in the lab as presenters and guest experts in the classes. The goal is to expand the reach of the knowledge field produced in the MAPA lab and the positive impact.

A new future is emerging, and the MAPA experience convinces us that this desirable future can be built with many hands, be spread by many different voices, and be based on freedom, empathy, compassion, respect, plurality, and affection.

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Discussant Commentary

MAPA Social Innovation Lab:

Working at the Intersection of Theory U and Freirean Pedagogy

José Romero Keith

InovAAcción

jose.k.romero@harvard.post.edu

Introduction

The purpose of this commentary is to support and build on the article MAPA: Co-Creating New Narratives for the 21st Century (Sbardelini et al., 2022), by placing the work within a broader theoretical and practice perspective, and surfacing an as-yet unseen intersection of two seminal works of transformative change, thought and action. MAPA seeks to construct a new gender narrative for the 21st century through a social innovation lab. To explore the guiding question, “*what do the new narratives of feminine and masculine values for the 21st Century look like,*” the authors applied the Theory U (Scharmer, 2016) method to identify blind spots and, from there, activate innovative thinking and co-creation in the service of new gender narratives. They built a pluralistic action research group and examined key gender issues including masculinity, gender identity, and intersectionality.

Gender inequality is a global matter that is riddled by the symbolic and physical violence of patriarchy (Bourdieu, 1998). It takes different cultural forms through history and geography, but its main characteristic is the exercise of

masculine, physical or symbolic violence, a historic generator of inequality towards women (Lerner, 1986). In the context of these catastrophic global trends (including climate change, COVID 19 pandemic, and the global economic recession.), a new civilization is being born. Just as many dysfunctional values are dying, new possibilities for gender equality are emerging. The challenge is to allow the old toxic patterns to die, while injecting energy and enthusiasm into our humane and sustainable desired future. This is the intention declared and embodied in the MAPA Social Innovation Lab.

During my review of the MAPA findings, a curious situation occurred: I felt a deeply erudite but invisible presence in the conversation. Although he was not mentioned explicitly, it was as if Paulo Freire, the renowned Brazilian educator, was participating in the dialogue. In my perception, MAPA participants, Otto Scharmer and Paulo Freire engaged freely and with astounding synchronicity in a significant conversation

The intention of this paper is to unveil Freire's hidden presence in this argument, to make his work and thinking visible, and to posit possible dialogues with Scharmer that enrich the MAPA process into the construction of the new gender narrative.

Shared Intention: Transforming Consciousness

Scharmer and Freire see their ultimate goal as the generation of collective consciousness for social transformation. As we can see in Scharmer's matrix of social evolution, he explores four fields of attention: habitual, egoic, empathic, and generative (Scharmer 2018, pp. 34-36). Each field demands shifts in mindset and awareness in order to evolve from ego-centered habits to a collective consciousness that serves the entire system.

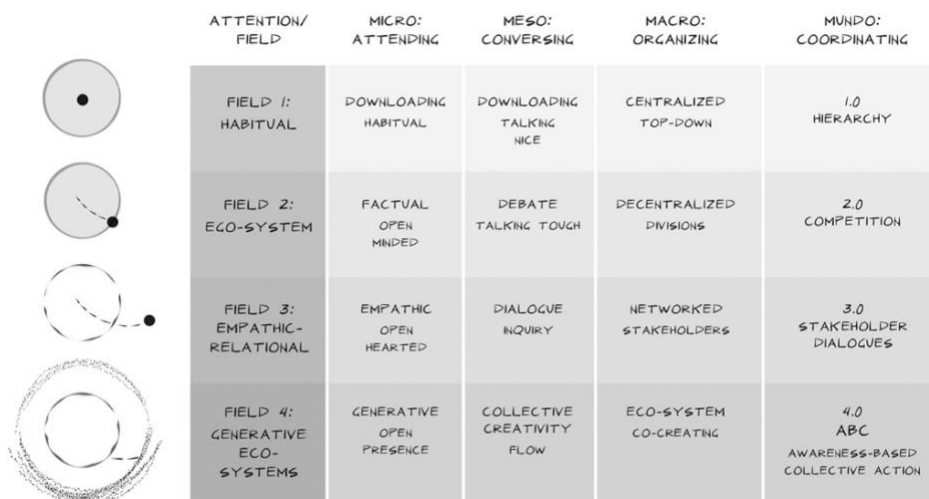


Figure 1: Matrix of Social Evolution (Scharmer, 2018).

Theory U provides both process and practices that build the capacities of individuals and collectives to operate from deeper fields of attention.

Freire journeys through four similar stages:

1. “Intransitive awareness,” in which the oppressed internalizes the oppression of the oppressor. *Intransitive awareness* exists in a colonized world where the “culture of silence” rules.
2. “Naïve transitive awareness” is a functional acceptance of the system as “is.” There is a recognition that social systems can be improved, but structurally things are fine as they are.
3. “Critical transitive awareness” is a critical posture towards the present and a recognition that change is needed. As a result, the realm of possibility appears.
4. “Critical consciousness” is a level of awareness in which the visualization and construction of the emerging future becomes not only necessary but also possible. (Freire, 1976, pp. 52–101)

In both works we see consciousness centered as the key force of transformative change. Each provide nuance to the developmental journey to deeper levels of consciousness. Scharmer’s contributes to an understanding of this journey at various levels of scale, while Freire addresses the dynamics of power that must be transcended to arrive at an emancipatory consciousness that fuels transformative change.

In terms of gender equality awareness, MAPA can be seen as moving through four stages, reflecting both Scharmer and Freire’s methods. First, MAPA found a gender reality plagued with dualities such as masculine/feminine, objective/subjective, and logical/intuitive, all sustained by culture and habit, or what Freire calls the *culture of silence*. For Freire (1977, pp. 206–207), in a culture of silence, human beings are understood as beings of adaptation, adjustment, and passivity. There is a naïve and false understanding of reality. The *being for oneself* gets lost and becomes the *being for others*.

In stage two, as they identified blind spots, the MAPA group entered the phase of discovering themselves bound by an institutionalized patriarchy. Through group dialogue, they became aware and critical of the various forms of violence experienced by individuals in the group (Sbardelini et al., 2022, pp. 114). In stage three, they critically questioned the ego boundaries that imprison them, often disguised as expressions of empathy (pp. 114–116). This specifically happened with the conversations relating to who gets to speak for and about transexual experience. Finally, in stage four, they engaged in the emergence of a new future where a discussion of vulnerability, pain, plurality, and multiple knowledge took place.

One surprising point of convergence between Freire and Scharmer can be found in the space of “dialogic empathy.” Scharmer claims that communication and relationship-building finds its breakthrough point in level three of listening—

empathic—which move us from ego to eco awareness and vision. This is where the subject/object relationship transforms into a subject/subject fusion. For Freire (1977, pp. 101-102), dialogue is truth, it is the true word, it transforms the world, it is where humankind meets; it is an existential demand, a true creative act, an act of deep love, of courage, of commitment with humanhood.

Empathic dialogue is the building block of change in both Freire's and Scharmer's work, allowing the reconstruction of relationships so that they can move from vertical, habitual, and ego driven behavioral patterns, to empathic and communicative, to, finally, generative collaboration. The comments and exchanges shared from the MAPA Social Innovation Lab illuminate the transformative potential of empathic dialogue, here in the context of constructing new gender narratives.

Freire's Unique Contribution: The Relevance of Culture

Perhaps Freire's greatest contribution to social transformation can be found in the field of deep cultural understanding and its relationship to social change (MacKenna, 2013).

For Freire, the only way to liberate oppressed populations and activate them into political action, is by decodifying cultural blind spots. Decodifying is the art of decoding cultural symbols, understanding their hidden meaning, evolving into critical thinking and political action (Torres Novoa, 1979). In this sense, rural peasant culture and cosmogony need to be decodified, so that political transformative action becomes possible. This is where he proposes his classic five-step method that has deeply influenced social movements throughout Latin America and Africa, resulting in new national alphabetization processes, and increased popular education (Freire, 1986).

Freire's Decodification Process	
Step 1	Deeply understand historical and cultural context (<i>unidad epocal</i>).
Step 2	Define generative themes (<i>temas generadores</i>) within a given culture that define the cultural milestones or priorities and, when touched, explode with energy and meaning;
Step 3	Understand resistance to change (<i>situaciones limite</i>) by exploring the hidden cultural frontiers that reproduce self-generating cultural habits. How does the power of "habit" operate in such a way that it reproduces itself?
Step 4	Decodify through images, i.e., go beyond words, black and white, and written language. Enter the arena of "image and art" to recognize, decodify, and rebuild action.
Step 5	Discover significant dimensions (<i>dimensiones significativas</i>) that highlight possible action.

Figure 2: Decodification (Freire, 1977, pp. 112-125).

Regarding the parallels between Freire and Scharmer, the Freirean method can be profoundly useful in the "co sensing" movement, or the phase of systemic construction of knowledge. Scharmer (2018) describes co-sensing as stepping out of one's own "bubble" and immersing in the perspective and experience of others as it is through these experiences that the seeds of the future become known (pp. 84–85). The understanding of culture is a fundamental part of this movement in Theory U, although it is not explicitly addressed within the framework. Providing a process to dive into culture in order to construct a systemic and holistic vision of the topic or area undergoing transformation, is a distinct contribution and enhancement Freire can make to Theory U.

The Theory–Practice Dilemma

Scharmer and Freire once again converge in their view that the gap between theory and practice is perhaps the greatest challenge of modernity. While there are a myriad of theoretical solutions to the great problems of our times, we see few concrete, sustainable solutions. I understand their approaches to this predicament or bridging theory and practice through three main axes.

The epistemological axis: Freire understands that a dialectical relationship between theory and practice begins with practice. As you explore reality, practice generates knowledge which, in turn, informs practice; the spiral moves in a dialectic and evolutionary way. When you add the component of social justice, the theory-practice dialectical solution takes you into the search for a new world. For Scharmer, the theory-practice relationship can be summarized as a core principle of his work, drawn from Kurt Lewin: "you cannot understand a system *unless you change it* [emphasis added]" (Scharmer, 2016, p.18). One could claim that Freire is a bit more orthodox in his demand that knowledge-generation starts with practice. Scharmer is more flexible, open to beginning with either theory or practice, as long as the dialectical "reflective practitioner" flow gets rolling.

The methodological axis: In Theory U, Scharmer connects three main movements in the process of awareness-based social change: "co-sensing," "presencing," and "prototyping". Simply put, a clear intention for systemic social change is coupled with a process to explore and gain deep knowledge of social reality and self, as a means to cultivate effective social action. Freire "decodes" false or naïve consciousness into new learning. Only then does he tackle the challenges of social transformation. Decodification means transcending the colonized oppressed mind, the culture of silence; new learning captures the demands from reality; social transformation is derived from the critical view engendered by ethics and social justice.

The historical axis. The structure of social reality in a given moment determines the pace and possibilities for social change so the analysis of the historical context within which social change is desired asks the question, *what change is possible and under what conditions?* Scharmer (2018) locates this phenomenon in his understanding of the *social field*, where the quality of our collective being together can be nurtured and fertilized like the earth itself,

yielding more generative and health-supporting results (p. 15). Freire's approximation to Scharmer's social field is what he calls "history," stating that in history, one does what one can do and not what one wants to do (Freire, 1983, INEA).

In nurturing new gender narratives, the MAPA Social Innovation Lab traverses the theory-practice arena, generating important prototypes such as the online gender course that was collectively developed. Much new learning is happening already, but this powerful space needs to be energized further. Whether the MAPA group enters into further action research on gender equality, evolves the theory of gender values, or implements prototypes, all efforts can be enhanced by increasing awareness of the nature of the contribution and its relationship to the wider context of awareness-based systems change – here discussed through the lens of Scharmer and Freire's work.

Closing Remarks

The MAPA group constructed a decolonizing theoretical framework and applied the principles and movements of the Theory U methodology to shape an awareness-based systemic change journey. They crafted a journey into the construction of consciousness through empathic dialogue, the integration of a pluralistic working group, the integration of Indigenous (Guarani) culture, and the recognition and revision of their Western colonized gender culture,. In their effort to advance in the construction of new gender narratives for the 21st century, they embodied the intersection of Scharmer's Theory U and Freire's emancipatory education. Going forward, I invite the authors and those working in this space to strengthen the Scharmer–Freire dialogue, incorporating culture to transformational change and advancing in the relationship between individual and collective consciousness, to evolve into a holistic, integrative and dignified vision of gender equality for the coming century.

José Romero Keith is founder and main consultant at InovAAAcción, a consulting firm which operates from Mexico City www.romerokeith.org. He received his B.A. from Harvard University. He went on to receive his MA and Ph.D. in sociology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM. He worked for United Nations agencies for 16 years, especially UNDP and PAHO-WHO. His area of expertise is capacity development and learning, applied in the field of public health and sustainable development.

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In Dialogue

Three Horizons Meets Presencing for Inclusive, Just and Equitable Futures

Oliver Koenig, Megan Seneque, Bill Sharpe, Zahra Ash-Harper, Stefan Bergheim
Anthony Hodgson, and Asiya Odugleh-Kolev

Leaving no one behind lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Increasingly, we recognize that issues of inclusion and social equity are interrelated global desiderata in mitigating the effects of the climate crisis and that “ensuring inclusiveness, equality and equity means approaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in an integrated manner” (Together 2030 Global Advocacy Working Group, 2019, p. 2). Inclusive approaches hold the potential to counter neoliberal and neoclassical understandings of development. Socially just and inclusive societies are safer and more stable and thus support conditions for socially, ecologically and relationally balanced growth (Brand et al., 2017; Pouw & Gupta, 2017). But, as of yet, realizing attempts to enliven this overlapping space have remained limited (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). Finding socially and ecologically sustainable solutions are not related to political will and action alone. They also require a collective ability to co-create and convene spaces for genuine transdisciplinary cooperation and participation across the full spectrum of human diversity and difference in order to address the question

“what type of society [do] we want to live [in] and who [is] the ‘we’ [...] answer[ing] that question” (Abbott et al., 2017, p. 815).

A number of models have emerged to shape these kinds of exploration. Three Horizons (Curry & Hodgson, 2008; Sharpe, 2013; Sharpe et al., 2016) and Presencing (Senge et al., 2004; Scharmer, 2016) are two models that have developed initially in two distinct Communities of Practice.

Three Horizons is a simple framework that supports people to structure conversations about change and develop their own role in shaping the future in a reflexive way. Within the plethora of futuring and foresight approaches it falls within what is considered a ‘pathways practice’ as it attempts to deal simultaneously with complexity and agency, in a highly accessible format (Sharpe & Hodgson, 2019). *Presencing* is founded on an impetus to explore what it means to lead from the emerging future, which came from a recognition that most existing learning methodologies rely on learning from the past, while our significant leadership challenges seem to require connecting with and learning from emerging future possibilities.

Interested in the commonalities, synergies and potential for collective learning that could result from bringing these two domains of work together, Oliver Koenig, Bill Sharpe and Megan Seneque formed a small holding team. Initial explorations quickly led to the idea to invite a small but diverse group of people who would share that interest to deepen our understanding of the two practices. The particular focus drawing the group together was an interest in exploring and illuminating how these practices can contribute to creating conditions for inclusive, socially just and equitable futures. Participants in the conversation were invited to both bring in their unique understanding derived from their own personal and professional experience and, most importantly, to engage in the dialogue as a shared space of collective meaning making, bringing to the space their own deepest questions and issues that they themselves are most struggling with in relation to the topic. The following is an abridged version of the dialogue that followed.

Participating in the Dialogue

Zahra Ash-Harper

Independent Creative Director of Inclusion; pioneered the inclusion practice approach ‘Producing Inclusion’.

Stefan Bergheim

Co-founder of the Centre for Societal Progress, Frankfurt; currently working with Futures Literacy Laboratories.

Anthony (Tony) Hodgson

Co-developer Three Horizons and Founding Trustee and Lead Researcher of H3Uni.

Asiya Odugleh-Kolev

Technical Officer, Community & Social Interventions, Department of Integrated Health Services, WHO, Geneva; leads community engagement for quality essential health services.

Megan Seneque

Research Associate of the Susanna Wesley Foundation, Roehampton University and Associate of Presencing Institute; currently working on a number of UN SDG Leadership Labs in diverse countries globally.

Bill Sharpe

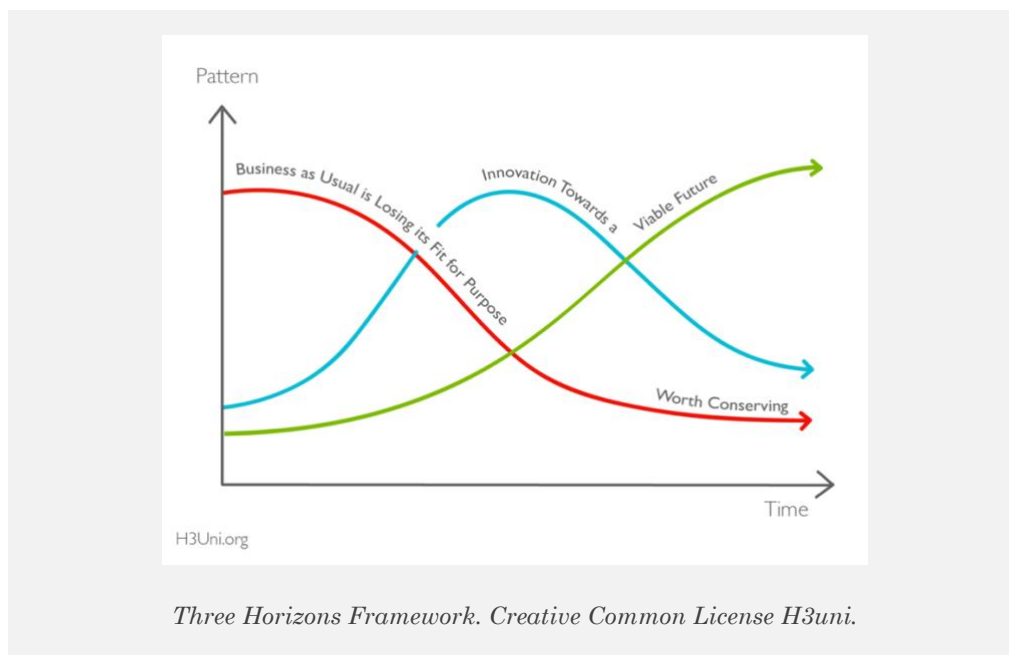
Pioneer of the Three Horizons approach; Affiliate of International Futures Forum, H3Uni, and Leaders Quest.

Dialogue Facilitator**Oliver Koenig**

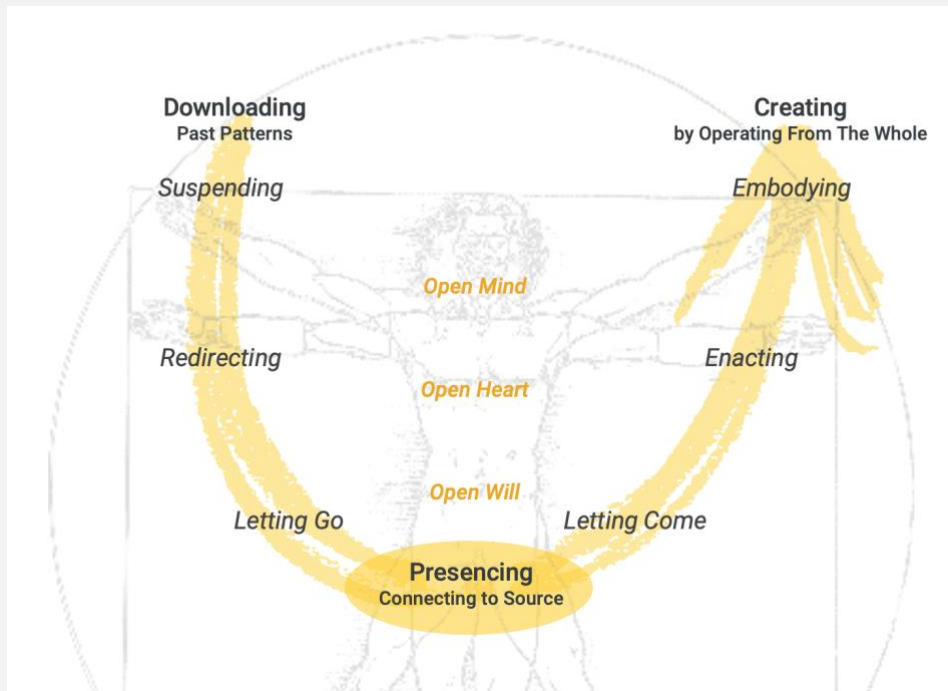
Professor for Inclusive Education and Inclusion Management, Bertha von Suttner University in St. Pölten.

Setting Questions and Intentions

Oliver: We would like to invite you to go back to the moment you received the invitation to take part in this dialogue around connecting the practices of Three Horizons and Presencing and what they can offer our work in the context of inclusive, socially just and equitable futures. What is it you believe could make a difference to our collective understanding?



The Three Horizons framework acts like a map, helping people to see where they are, where they want to be and how to get there. It uses three lines each representing a pattern of how things are done in a particular area or field and how these patterns of action develop over time. It charts Horizon 1, the dominant way things are done today that show signs of strain and lack of fit to the future; Horizon 3, our visions for how we want things to be in the future; and Horizon 2, the innovations we can establish to help make our desired future a reality.



*Presencing, CC License by the Presencing Institute - Otto Scharmer.
www.presencing.org*

“Presencing is a blended word combining sensing (feeling the future possibility) and presence (the state of being in the present moment). It means sensing and actualizing one’s highest future possibility - acting from the presence of what is wanting to emerge” (Scharmer & Kaufer 2013, p. 19).

Zahra: For me this dialogue had already begun before the invitation was actually sent out. Bill and I had already come to an understanding that we wanted to continue exploring some of the things that we had started to realize through our project on equitable futures. When the invitation actually came, I was amazed by how clearly it set out our intentions, which made me feel both confident but also respected in terms of my practice. I'm struck by the honesty

and vulnerability that comes from people who are consciously thinking about transformation and about relational connections. The question that I'm really interested in at this moment, is how some of the techniques that we've developed and some of the values that accompany it can be utilized in what feels like quite a wartime preparedness: a time in which we're really going through something and where we're having to soldier and bring an amount of resistance and resolution in how we're putting forward this ambitious work. Actually, it's a hard time to be doing this work. People are tired and running on low reserves and working from the trenches of themselves and from society. I'm interested to explore how others are doing that in their practice.

Zahra Ash-Harper and Bill Sharpe co-led on the project “Towards Equitable Futures” for Watershed, an independent cinema and creative technology center in Bristol, UK. The project was funded by the UK National Lottery and explored, amongst other questions, “*What are the community behaviors that welcome difference while bonding us together?*”¹

Asiya: This whole concept of soldiering and trenches and reaching our breaking point resonated with me. I think I've reached my breaking point multiple times during my life. Professionally, I have worked in large organizations with ‘legacy’ ways of working, in which the vision they hold is not in line with how they are set up to operate. The ways of thinking about our work and ourselves and how we work on ourselves is also a legacy of our history: being aware of where we've come from, where we need to go and where we are. This whole notion of health and well-being - as in being whole in a holistic sense and not parts of ourselves -- is a question that I struggle with. When I look at the Three Horizons in light of where I am, who I am, what I'm doing, where I'm going and where I would like my current organization to go, there is something about the human soup in which all of this structuring is taking place which needs to be more intentional. For me, spirituality comes into this, not in a religious sense, but through the multi-dimensional nature of human life and experience, that somehow there is something about who we are in our essence, which is connected to something bigger than us, which is connected to nature, which is connected to consciousness. And that, through contrast, tells us something about what we don't want and what we do want. I'm holding that it's a question of choice. So how aware are we of the choices that we're making, that will take us into a certain kind of future?

Bill: A psychologist colleague of ours, Maureen O'Hara who worked with Carl Rogers, said, with these methods that you use, you set up a field of consciousness

¹ <https://www.watershed.co.uk/studio/projects/towards-equitable-futures>

in which something emergent can manifest. I've been on this journey to bring that into the world of existential convening: where it's the whole person in the whole system. So there's a deep question I am holding about what makes it appropriate and safe to use a structure, so that it is truly enabling of this deep mutuality of presence, where people are both able to be fully themselves while being fully part of the flow of the whole. I'm always looking for that because that's when we're most deeply ourselves. Whether it's in a football team or being in love, or anything that brings you into a flow together, there is that deep resolution of being fully yourself and being fully part of the whole. That to me is what being a whole system and whole person is all about, and also where structure comes into it. Since I *do structure*, my deepest question is what makes it safe and appropriate to bring this structure into the issues of inclusion and equity and fairness and their lack - that's the question I hold most deeply.

Tony: I think there are two things that strike me: one is something one of my teachers said: “humanity can only evolve through shock learning” and another of my teachers: “the problem is that we're all sleepwalking into the future”. Consciousness is not, in its proper senses, on the agenda. This literally led to my interest in what I now call anticipatory learning: that there are properties of awakeness that access the future in ways that our rational mind is incapable of, even though we need the support of that rational mind. For me Three Horizons was an attempt to give our minds permission to live simultaneously in three worlds. The world of happening, in the sense of “we're not in control, get used to it”, you could loosely associate with the idea of a Horizon One. If things go on the way they are, we will end up where we're going, which is quite scary. Horizon Two is where our consciousness and awareness are not kidding ourselves: we grasp the challenge. The Third Horizon is beyond consciousness: the possibility of creative and, if you like, spiritual access to domains that are not on the formal cultural agenda. This is what I now like to call cosmic ecology and terrestrial ecology. All of those things clearly have to be deeply informed by oneness and inclusion.

In its broadest sense, Anticipatory learning can be referred to forms of learning that include and use the future to stimulate a reconfigured model of itself and its environment to inform present actions that will increase surviving and thriving. Moving this idea forward Anthony Hodgson is interested in what constitutes second-order anticipatory systems. For him these are systems that include both the observer as agent as well as the act of exercising choices amongst possible pathways. He is also interested how far a system is able to adapt its behavior by incorporating informations and images of an anticipated future which go beyond simply projecting informations from the past, hence the importance of reconfiguration.

Stefan: Tony used the term anticipatory learning - that's the field I'm trying to navigate and which I don't really understand yet. I know many people are navigating it and saying, "I don't really know what this is about and how to define it." But that's part of new things emerging: you initially don't know what they are. That relates to what I really wanted to talk about: What kind of words and terminology do we use, and what do they mean? Are we clear, what they are? Do we continue to explore what they mean to us? And the second aspect is: who feels attracted by the words we use, like for example, "awareness." Who are we inviting or who feels invited by that signal word? The other thing is: when we do work with different types of people who have different views, or put in Futures Literacy terminology, "different images of the future," different underlying assumptions and different conclusions will come up at the end. What do we do with them if we don't like those conclusions? If they're not in line with our own values, if they're not what we want this project to do? Are we okay with that? Do we get into a fallback position of trying to control the outcomes? I'm just raising the issue here as my question.

Futures Literacy is the skill that builds on the innate human capacity to imagine the future. It allows people to better understand the role that the future plays in what they see and do. Being futures literate empowers the imagination, enhances our ability to prepare, recover and invent as changes occur.²

Megan: Stefan that so resonates with me. I immediately become resistant when I see something that is a way of seeing, a way of organizing, a methodology or an approach that is taking on a colonizing nature. I'm a South African and I know that I have a natural resistance to things that I see as totalizing in some way: it provokes a reaction, or resistance of another kind. So, I hold Theory U lightly. That's not to say that I don't believe that the work of Presencing IS the profound work of our time. I get extremely resistant to methodologies that become fixed frames: "you have to do it like this." To your point, Stefan, I'm so tuned into power, the language of power and power relations, I feel them in my blood. And I do it myself. There is no innocence here. My contribution, I would hope, is an integral awareness. Because the invitation for the work of plurality, diversity, whatever word - it's flourishing each of us. The deep irony is that the only way that we can flourish the whole is by flourishing each one of us in all of our diversity. It's not about controlling outcomes or directing, it's using approaches, tools, practices, and methods in response ways, joining people where they are. And for me, autonomy is absolutely critical. People need to make choices, they need to be given permission. We can only create the enabling conditions that

² <https://en.unesco.org/futuresliteracy>

invite them to turn up and be fully present and become fully human together. That's what I bring: a wholehearted rigor, because I think that's what it requires, because we don't have easy answers, thank God. Otherwise, we would contribute to the very problems we are seeking to address.

The Tension between Roles and Authentic Presence

Stefan: Where I would like to dig a bit deeper was the mentioning of legacy. All this transformation and transition work, it's all linked to legacy. It could be our habits, our laws, our structures, or buildings like skyscrapers. It's all part of our legacy. From the Futures Literacy world, the legacy that is under-explored is up here in our minds, the assumptions that we have. The images that we have of the future are based on underlying assumptions that also have a source. They determine how we look into the future and what we do in the present. We can see skyscrapers; we can read laws. But the legacies in our minds are much harder to make visible. The other thing I always struggle with is how to get the whole person into a conversation. I observe individuals coming to conversations not as people, but in their official roles. People are being hired and paid for performing a certain task or a role in an organization. As much as I love to see the person and as much as maybe the person loves to be there as an individual, they have that baggage. They have to have that baggage and we need them to have that baggage. If there were no roles and tasks, hardly anything would function. The challenge is a paradox: we want ourselves, the *people* to show up, but how can we all do that?

Tony: Around the end of last century, I helped some colleagues set up a kind of think tank called International Futures Forum. We gathered people from diverse backgrounds to look at the question of how we make sense of a world that we no longer understand and don't control. We tried to develop a culture, which was a bit like the saloon bar in a western, where you can only come in for a drink if you check your weapons at the door. We have a culture which suppresses authentic presence. We're all so preoccupied with a role that we've been given that we don't even realize we've been given it. So I think it's very interesting when we ask people: "Who are you?" They usually say "I am a doctor" or something else. The identification is with the role. It's always been a challenge for me in facilitating to somehow draw out of myself very inadequately as much authentic presence as I can to try and signal to at least someone in the group I'm working with: You can be yourself here. I don't know whether you find that kind of a challenge as well.

IFF is a registered charity which aims to enable people and organizations to flourish within complex, messy, seemingly intractable issues, building competency for thriving in complexity and capacity for transformative innovation through a community hub, events, workshops, tools, processes, training and other online materials.³

Oliver: When I look at the question that Bill has brought to the fore, of finding ways of connecting the structural dimension, we could put the structural dimension as being something that is held within different kinds of roles. The existential dimension is what Zahra and Tony referred to as forms of authentic presence. We could see roles also as part of the baggage - as the legacy. A part that is very important, because without them hardly anything would function, which you could reframe as being the central quality of the First Horizon. But being stuck within the roles and the parameters of the role, is just reinforcing us to stay in the Downloading mode. So embracing this idea of “supporting systems to see and sense themselves”: when have we been given and taken up a particular role? When have we incorporated these roles as parts of ourselves? You can see a role and you can identify with that role and ask what it is that is enabled through that role, but also what is being suppressed through the roles I've taken on?

Bill: I have a thought that's been bubbling for a few minutes. And it starts with the word “paradox.” I'm finding this conversation quite helpful, it has given me a sudden sense of liberation: you can use structure in ways that can either be enabling or totalizing. I'm now very acutely aware of the nervousness I felt as Zahra and I were building the process, that simply by introducing familiar tools, I might overlay authentic presence with something that was restrictive. In fact, we had to talk that through in the context of “life needs some structure.” First Horizon structures do have roles, that's how they're maintained – I know who the doctor and who the shopkeeper is. The Third Horizon is when we reassert the primacy of relationship and its creative power to bring in something new. I like to contrast the patterned integrity of the First Horizon with the creative integrity of the Third where you step out and manifest something of yourself in service of the life of the whole. Zahra, you've been the most clear about the need to occupy space: that your discipline is to encourage people to occupy their own space. In doing that, you are also surrendering to that, and surrendering to the whole in service of it. What we've got to do is be acutely sensitive that we are living a paradox.

³ <https://www.internationalfutureforum.com>

Zahra: Thanks, Bill, it's really good to go back to some of the things that we were thinking about because I was reflecting when the question of roles came up, that that actually was something that was really acute in our work together: the overwhelming responsibility that people carried into the room. When we first started designing, I often used to think about how to include the people I perceived as having the least structural power in the conversation well and equitably. But we first had a big stumble when the person with the most power was not able to bring themselves, their whole selves, in, without the responsibility of having to speak for the organization, or all the responsibilities they hold within. It forced me into a very new dynamic: being in service of that.

What we ended up doing was assigning new roles and responsibilities for “care” within the structure. We assigned people with partners in order to support and be aware of another person with some real attention, so people didn't end up getting lost in that process. It was very edifying for people but also forged strong relationships and creative partnerships that took on a life of their own. I think it's very interesting thinking about roles because often we like to simplify. But actually, the pluralism and the inclusion that I really enjoy, is how to hold the complexity and who is holding that role at different times. There were times when Bill was nervous of a certain sort of process and I would hold the responsibility for the complexity and the faith in that process, faith that things would be okay, because we had each other's backs.

For me, this conversation is very much like that. There is that question of what happens if we don't always agree, or what happens if we don't come to the same conclusions? For me, the deep respect and affinity for pluralism that holds that together is care. And we haven't mentioned love yet. I think it is important that I say very frankly that the conversations have inspired feelings of complete love for the minds and the spirits and the intention and accountability that I'm hearing. It makes me feel safe to know even in vulnerability, there's that compassion.

Megan: Do you know what that sparks for me Zahra? We often joke and we say that no method is facilitator-proof. What we mean by that is that our authentic presence is our primary diagnostic tool, but we have so dialed down ourselves as an organ of perception. It's not just relating to roles, it's relating to how we've over-privileged particular ways of understanding, ways of speaking, ways of expressing ourselves, forms of knowledge that we've forgotten actually -- just being authentic. I was chatting to someone last night and we said that being authentic has a tonal quality. We spoke about tone. There's something for me about the whole embodiment piece. We don't come in with only our analytical capabilities and our intellectual understandings, our knowledge base, whatever that might be. We come in ourselves as fully vulnerable, whole human beings. That's the nature of the work. I mean, that IS the work. Knowing that uncertainty that sits with it is part of what it means to be human. To the extent that we can do that we will end up with others who do the same.

Asiya: What's coming up for me is, is this question that we all have multiple roles. I remember when I became a mother in my late 40s. And suddenly, that took me into a completely different role. That changed my role and my relationship with everyone else around me. As a woman there are moments in life where you are totally reshaped. It was only through the practice of regular introspection, and methods and tools for self-inquiry and self-compassion that took me within myself. Embodiment became about recognizing that I have a mental body, an emotional body, a physical body, and that they're all interconnected. I think integrating all of the various parts of myself, all of the roles that I've played in my life, not seeing the differentiation between my personal and professional, that there is some kind of wholeness that I have come into and a realization: "I'm not different in different places," which allows for an expression in the way we structure our relationships, our workplaces and our lives that gives rise to authenticity. There's something to be said about taking apart and building back together again: the taking apart has to be multi-dimensional and intentional.

Authentic Presence as a Structure for Plurality

Megan: Something that's still sitting with me is the nature of the structure. We're constantly talking about structuring for emergence. Structure and life are actually mutually interdependent. It's the *nature* of the structure that we're talking about. For me structuring for emergence, and the responsiveness, alertness and vigilance that is required in giving people the choice, is a structure of co-enabling connectivity. We're doing work at the moment in the UN context in Francophone Africa. My French is not wonderful, but I start by this sort of self-deprecating way of using humor, speaking a bit of *franglais* and then there's a sort of amusement, and it immediately sets a tonal quality.

In deep dialogue work, David Bohm talks about tonality and tone. It requires being present because that itself is part of the structure. What enables people to let go of formal roles in professional contexts is a permission to bring whatever other dimensions of themselves they choose to bring. I'll never tell someone that they need to be authentically present. I mean, imagine if I say now "Stefan come on, step up and be authentically present." Good luck with that one. When you are authentically present, it provides a structure of another kind and I'm deeply curious about the nature and quality of that structure. At different points we could take up different roles, but what we lean into and learn is that there are allocated roles, just like there are allocated leadership positions. When you are creating dynamic living organisms, ecosystems of the kinds that we are creating, different roles emerge.

Oliver: I loved the image that you created Asiya, about this process of disassembling -- about taking apart and putting things back together. If I take that image and project it onto the template we are holding, I would say the taking apart is part of finding and dwelling into this feeling of presence, or the

left side of the U in Theory U (Scharmer, 2016). And the putting back together part is the right side. Seemingly there is the question of *what* is being put together. That struck me, because that's one of my big questions: this idea of deconstructing and reconstructing structure, as represented in the work of Horizon Two. That can only come fully into life if it's been generated by a deeper vision, which can neither be urged nor forced upon. The nature of the Third Horizon is beyond consciousness, something that is not yet on a formal cultural agenda. The question I'm holding is about the nature of experiences we need to engage in that truly move us beyond what is and not into mere projections of aspects of the past. What becomes very clear is how much the language and ideas of Theory U and those of Three Horizons have to offer one another in terms of complementary perspectives.

Asiya: There's something about structure that is always there: it's not an empty space or a vacuum. So, what is it that is present? And what is the layering that we do that supports the emergence of a structure which is disempowering? I think deconstructing and restructuring is about going back to something that was always there.

Stefan: You're describing the structure first, making it visible, so that we can really talk about it: What purpose does the structure serve? What do you see, what do I see? Is that what you mean? It's always there. It's not a blank page obviously.

Zahra: Both of the things that you've said have resonated. It comes back to this notion of a structure, and this feeling of what is oppressive, what is enabling, what is safe and what is appropriate. I saw this piece yesterday, "The Meaning of Zong" at Bristol Old Vic⁴, about a group of enslaved people of African decent and the eventual demise of slavery, it was called. It's obviously quite an activating subject matter for people. And to be watching it in the Bristol Old Vic, which is quite a White institution and the audience was predominantly a White audience. The show is interestingly pitching this work in a place, I would say, of entertainment. There was laughter, there was irreverence. Now the appropriateness of that structure is then influenced by the tone of the structure. For me, I nearly left about 20 minutes in. I reflected whilst still in the show: I felt so uncomfortable within the assigned structure of this work, as well as within the content of the work, and with the audience attending. I was really feeling a deep discomfort about the order, the timeliness and the tidiness of this conversation.

In Bristol, there is a very deep connection to slavery because we built the boats. We pushed them off into their journeys. There has been a huge financial return in the city. Bristol Old Vic is a building that is very much a product of slavery in lots of ways. So it's a very interesting little microcosm that's folded into itself, to

⁴ <https://bristololdvic.org.uk/whats-on/the-meaning-of-zong>

look at this notion of appropriateness of structures as they deal with togetherness and content. For me, in that moment, I had to reflect on what was the thing that was making me feel most uncomfortable. It was not the subject matter, because I've watched and experienced a lot of things around slavery. For me it was the fact that the conversation needed to have a tone of empathy, seriousness and recognition of the subject matter in the city where that hadn't been had. Therefore, to make this leap towards entertainment around this subject matter just felt really inappropriate. It took me a while to realize that it was not the production that I was uncomfortable with -- it was the way the audience related to it. I asked myself, 'Where can I pitch myself in regards to that discomfort?' I decided I needed to honor the production and my discomfort by getting to the end of it and experiencing it. I tried to be really honest in conversation when we went back out into the intermission and at the end. I ended up staying a lot longer than I thought I would because actually the support of the people in that conversation was very interesting now.

My gut instinct told me a lot of the White audience members that I tried to engage in that conversation didn't really have much to contribute, because they were more comfortable accepting the structure that was given to them, accepting the freedom to have a bit of entertainment in that space, and to use the subject matter in this way as the privilege of buying a ticket allows them. I was attempting to stimulate conversation about the structure and tone of the piece; they wanted to go home and have a good sleep, and move past it. Whereas for me, I went home and was up until about two, just reflecting on and trying to find my place in the world again. So this returns me back to this notion of what's the point of inclusion. We are all one, but we're not all having one experience of the same subject matter. For me, if they had done a screening for people of difference, for invited people to come into a safer space to explore that subject matter, it would have given me a more direct route to my own experience. I think that that's the need for inclusion. It's thinking, yes, there is equity to be had, but that equity doesn't require the same solutions for everybody.

Megan: I was recently part of a group hosting a conversation around racial justice in the context of the Methodist Church in Great Britain (*see Seneque et al., 2021 for the broader context of the racial justice initiative in the Methodist Church*). We used narrative as a structure around inclusion and invited three stories that were very different. We were reflecting afterwards on that transition from listening deeply and to hearing narratives of others. The structure, the narrative structuring, which is what we intended, didn't hold for the small group conversations. The conversation immediately went into problem solving mode: how do we solve the problem of racial justice? The tonality changes everything. The moment you then want people to feel that they're not really in a position to make a comment because they are White and they haven't actually had an experience of what it means to be a Black person -- it didn't enable the kind of mutuality that you're talking about, the tonality which also provides structure. People felt unable to tap into their lived experience in some way. That's the thing

about polarity. Inclusion is not about a pendulum swing of ‘then we privilege this or that.’ We are actually trying to navigate as we learn how to be fully human together. This is the space and it's not easy. So it's really about that tonal structure and paying attention to that in an ongoing way, so not designing and hoping that it will land, but actually tuning in and being responsive. Creating that environment, structuring and restructuring constantly. Tuning into what is the impact of that structure for me – and noticing that – was quite profound.

Anthony: What is striking me more and more, is the extreme oddity of exclusion. You know, if we try to solve the problem of inclusion, we've failed to notice that it is odd that we are having this problem. I know that's a rather extreme view, but I'm just trying to practice lateral thinking. I'm just trying to tune into this around what is the most compassionate starting point in all this. It seems to be a hell of a lot further back than our institutional cultural structures permit.

Shifting Organizations by Structuring for Presence

Bill: There's a term that's got some currency recently - Theory of Change - and I loathe it. What is your theory of change? What's your theory of history? What's your theory of art? What's your theory of research? If you had one, it would cause you endless grief. Making the distinction really clear might help around structure. A set of paintbrushes is not a theory of art, fortunately, because if it were, it would completely destroy the artist. I tried to think about Three Horizons not as a theory of change. It's a tool for inquiring into change and inquiring into power and oppression, and what's holding the current structure in place. I think there's some way of articulating this difference, and that the structures that we found we can use, like dilemmas and horizons, are enabling because there are tools for bringing some of these questions of “who am I” and “who am I in relation to others” into view without prescribing how we meet them creatively.

Asiya: I think the biggest challenge in our organizations, particularly our public sector organizations in health and education, but across all sectors, there's very limited opportunity to create the spaces for a different way of thinking and working. Because that's a societal structure that itself needs to be reconfigured in a way that supports this inquiry and questioning of “why are we here”? And what is it that we're contributing to? In my own experience within my own team, for example, we've been trying to figure out a way to maintain connectivity and a sense of belonging from the beginning of the pandemic. When it came that we couldn't meet face to face, the question was, “how do we continue to connect with each other in a virtual environment”? We put in place check-ins, and a grounding practice at the beginning of meetings before we talk about the work.

We've been doing this for over two years. A few weeks ago, we had an inflection point where one of our members wanted to opt-out of the check-ins and groundings and join for the business part. This led to a re-think about what it is

that we're trying to do. Our manager actually prioritizes creating safe spaces where people can express themselves and that is something that he has a strong value for, so he invited all of us to speak about what's working, what's not working, how are we feeling about it. The fact that we were able to have this conversation is unusual. It came to a point where everybody expressed their voices. It's necessary for all the voices to feel that they're safe to really say what they think, even if it lands in a way that is unsettling. And then it's how we deal with that. What it's turned into now is a shift away from an artificial kind of "Now we have our check-in." This morning's meeting was the first meeting where it seemed to flow. It was a beautiful kind of flow, and had a very natural feel, but it had to be artificially created to get us there, and there had to be rupture points. It wasn't a smooth process but through that it got us to a very different place.

Stefan: In my understanding, Asiya brought in the logic of large organizations in general, not just public. I see the same patterns also in for-profit corporations. It's all over the place. I was smiling when you mentioned the check-in, which I often see as being misused as getting more quickly to the outcomes that support the existing structure and the ways things are. Is it helping us move faster? Then you can go ahead. It's not about questioning the underlying structures. Reflecting on it, I made some more peace with that during the last 20 minutes or so.

Because we do have those "Guardians of the structure" in the organizations and they need to be there. We all agree that we need structure. We also need the Guardians to watch out that the structure stays in place. They're in a powerful position and they have no interest in the structure being dismantled. They watch for the outcomes. They set up the project proposals in a way that it's quite certain that the outcomes of that project will maintain the structure as it is and leave no room for emergence. But maybe the real emergence is in-between projects. It's not inside the project, but with the people who then have a conversation after the project and before the next one and then think what might the next project look like. Within the Three Horizons, that could be where the real change then happens: there are fewer of these kinds of proposals and projects and more projects that support emergence. That makes me calm down a little bit and not be so anxious that it has to happen in this project. Maybe it happens on the path to the next project. Accept the structure the way it is. Prepare the ground for some emergence, but don't be disappointed if it doesn't happen in that project and don't push it. Don't overextend those Guardians of the structure because then they're not going to invite you back into the room.

Centralizing Love in Change Work

Zahra: A new inquiry has started to flower in me around this notion of "who's not in the room"? It links back to this notion of satisfaction with the structure and the usefulness of the structure as it's formed, and then how you grow and dismantle or deconstruct the structure to be useful in allowing something new to

emerge. I think that naturally comes up when you allow more people into the room. That is an interesting notion for us to consider; who do we feel is missing from this conversation, and how might we invite those people to join a furthering of this conversation. I think extending that circle, naturally, uncomfortably, respectfully, but also into an area that currently isn't, would be a really good inflection point. And just to finish and bring it back to this production. The thing I took away most definitely was that the weakness of the production was that it continued to adhere to the structures that created itself. But what was also coming out it in its most beautiful moments, was the love between, the love that enabled enslaved people and other people to come together and try to end slavery. The vulnerability of the moment and in themselves enabled them to find love together, but these moments were incidental and accidental.

We love each other by accident. It is a vehicle that allows us to talk explicitly in semiprofessional and professional spaces about the humanity that is attached to love. Actually, the more we focus on dismantling things, and we don't focus on finding that common ground, which love can premise, the further away from the achievement we get. If we were putting it simply, if we really want to achieve inclusion, centralizing love and the chaos that that brings is often a much more humane way to do it than to try and organize it too much.

Megan: This brings me back to the spiritual dimension. There is a scholar from Georgetown University, Ilia Delio, a Franciscan in the Faculty of Science and Religion. She's written a book called "The Unbearable Wholeness of Being" (Delio, 2013) reworking the philosophy and work of Teilhard de Chardin. In short it says when we as humanity rediscover the power of love, it will be as though we discovered the power of fire for the first time. I think because we've so seemed to romanticize the notion of love, we've forgotten that it is actually the animating force of the universe. All the post-humanist philosophers, the Bayo Akomolafe's⁵ of this world, are taking us in this direction of the structuring that love brings. And it's a complete reconfiguration of our understanding of love.

Asiya: Can I just reflect on that and clarify? What I was talking about - this fundamental aspect - that there is something in this space. I think love is that space. Love is what is there fundamentally, and our legacy and our history has influenced how we perceive and experience love. This separation from us as beings of love is what we're trying to get back to. I think loving each other is fundamental. It's our natural state. We need to reconfigure our understandings and perceptions of love fundamentally.

Bill: I've constantly come back to wondering what I'm doing working on these structural processes, with Tony. And I always think of them in this mode of a

⁵ <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/about> Bayo Akomolafe is a post-humanist, post-colonial scholar, philosopher, writer, activist and Executive Director of the Emergence Network

tool, leaving open the possibility that people can bring in their own practice. A totalizing methodology would be a theory that would somehow pull in all these different things and put them in a place and say, that's what they are. That would be the opposite of what we want. Whereas a set of paintbrushes allow you to paint a picture, the loving space is one that in and of itself makes it possible for people to bring in their uniqueness and bring themselves into relationship with others - this idea of mutuality. What we haven't used up until now is the word 'truth' alongside love. This has been a journey for me. I used to work on problems that could be seen in a detached way – what Tony and I call cognitive convening – where what is true is what is least personal. But since some work with conflict, and then being in deep dialogue with Zahra, I've gradually moved into this domain of existential truth, where what is true is what is most personal – what you stand for. This dialogue and all this work has convinced me that these thinking structures are adequate for inquiry into the existential truth, the personal truth, just as much as for the “out there” cognitive truth. What we're all exploring is the quality of love, which, if we practice, embodies that. There is a way of holding these things, if they are held with love, to hear the truth that is existential in the other person within the shared structures. If we really tried to embody that, as you put it 'to hold it lightly,' they are adequate to that inquiry, and they improve it.

Asiya: I think it varies from context to context. In organizations, where structures are enforced, and power is enforced, I think there's something about transitioning to these open spaces. In order to do that, you have to introduce ways of creating those spaces. And I think that is what I struggle with, because working with people who want order and who want to move through an agenda, you've got to give them something that keeps them with you, but then takes you a little bit further into opening up the spaces in different parts of the organization. We tend to look for expertise outside of the organization to tell us what to do. Whereas in fact, we ourselves have to take on the responsibility and accountability for shifting ourselves. That requires contriving some experiences, to allow people to have that embodied experience of what that difference is that we're looking for.

Tony: I tried to introduce some of our methods that Bill is familiar with to our local community here in Scotland, to deal with what became fashionably called the climate emergency. Everything you guys say tells me why it didn't work. The conundrum is how does anyone get a taste of a different way of experiencing where they're at that opens up the kind of the inner and outer door to changing the capacity to act in a more transformative way? There are ways of putting people in predicaments, facing them with challenges, just as Oliver and friends have put us in a kind of challenge here. There's a method and a structure here of dialogue. I guess, Oliver, you've got some sort of guiding principles in the way you like to enable these things to happen.

What we could do is eventually extract and formulate your guiding principles, enshrine them in law, and make them compulsory. I believe that's what you are

calling colonization. Whereas another outcome might be that we've been helped to experience differently and tune in differently and more creatively and hopefully benignly to something that wasn't there, at least in this form, before we started that which we're sensing is kind of useful. If we got the hang of that, then we're probably going to continue doing it whether Oliver was there or not, whether we've got the rulebook or not. Because we've now got initiated into the different experience that we were blind to before.

I see it as layers and layers and layers of blindness. So, there's this kind of triangle of realizing the necessity of the predicament we're in, in a whole variety of ways and where each of us is embedded in some aspect of that. Then there is the recognition that we lack the experiences that have been triggered, so that's, if you like, the awareness base. So how do we trigger those experiences with very carefully designed methods that are deceptively simple, like three lines on a piece of paper? Those enable the experience to emerge, but are facilitated in a way where they don't become the next rulebook. Rather they've informed life, and we're actually dealing with those necessities in a better way, however small. So it hopefully becomes a benign cycle.

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