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Contents

Editorial

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'In-between': The Dwelling Place of Our Time

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

In the last two Editorials, we positioned Awareness-Based Systems Change as a journey that moves from transactional to relational (Koenig et. *al.*, 2021) and from duality to complementarity (Koenig et *al.*, 2022), somehow indicating a clear-cut transition from a point of departure (A) to a point of destination (B). Yet taking such a viewpoint can easily be criticized as reifying the same Western-dominated epistemological patterns of thought and practice that we, as a journal, have intentionally set out to challenge by exploring and bringing into relationship different epistemologies and knowledge systems in an intentional effort to better source and expand the knowledge needed for social and systems change. What we sensed was lacking, and what we find ourselves drawn to by the contributions to this issue and by the necessity of our time, is the space in-between, which speaks to the messy and potentially generative process of transition.

Almost 100 years ago, imprisoned by Mussolini's Fascist regime, Antonio Gramsci famously wrote in one of his notebooks:

> "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." (Gramsci cited in Baumann, 2012, p. 49)

While 'interregnum,' according to Baumann (2012), points to the common historical use of the term as denoting the "time-lag separating the death of one royal sovereign from the enthronement of the successor" (p.12), Gramsci infused this term with a new meaning that reached much deeper into the socio-cultural realm.

There have been numerous attempts at deciphering the meaning of Gramsci's quote. From a socio-historical vantage point, Achcar (2022) sees Gramsci's use of interregnum as referring to the already incapacitated bourgeois rule and the 'not yet' capacitated working-class rule, a situation which, at the time when Gramsci was writing, was in the midst of giving rise to European fascism (p. 385).

Carrying the notion of interregnum into the here and now, we could refer to the decline of an increasingly incapacitated neoliberal-capitalist order and the not-yet-fully-emerged system of global coordination and cooperation needed to successfully face the climate, social and economic polycrises (Dixson-Declève et al., 2022). The morbid symptoms of our times can be witnessed in ever-accelerating global destabilization leading to what Scharmer (2022, para 4) describes as, "pervasive collective depression that shapes everyone's outlook, in particular that of our youth, who will carry the burdens of our societal failures into the future."

One concept that has gained much attention due to its ability to capture both the essence and emergence of such interregnum, or in-between states and the problems and tensions inherent in transitioning from one state to another, is that of 'liminality.' For Thomassen (2016), liminality refers to:

> …moments or periods of transition during which the normal limits to thought, self-understanding and behaviour are relaxed, opening the way to novelty and imagination, construction and destruction. For these reasons, the concept of liminality has the potential to push social and political theory in new directions. (p. 1)

As a concept, liminality was first described by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in his 1909 publication *Les Rites de Passage* (van Gennep 1909/2013), in which he studied the importance of transitions for any society. In his culture-transcending empirical work, van Gennep saw that rites of passage appeared to follow a generic pattern. The sequence he identified begins with a phase of separation, characterized by disjointing and detachment from the given order of things, and moves to a phase of incorporation and integration. The middle phase he coined as the 'liminal phase,' with the feeling of liminality leading to feelings of ambiguity and unsettling uncertainty for the liminal subject(s), which include individuals and collectives alike.

"In order to find your way, you must become lost," says Bayo Akomolafe in a recent symposium of the International Society for Systems Sciences (2022, 1:38:20)[1], referring to a Nigerian proverb. While the subjective experience being freed from forms of structure might be seen by some as exhilarating, and while we know that this experience is ripe with potential for growth and transformation, for many the task of having to navigate through life without a reliable sense of guidance—often accompanied by a corporeal sense of loss—feels daunting and intimidating (Kelly, 2008). The collated articles in this issue provide concrete examples of the ways in which awareness-based practices for systems change can serve as gateways for systems to get un-stuck. To do so successfully, write Buechner et al. (2020), it becomes necessary that we shift our attention,

> …from these individual qualities to the dimension of social space or a "container" in which interpersonal relations take place and the roles which shared experiences of liminality and communitas might play in creating conditions for transformation at the level of social and personal meaning systems. (p. 106)

Shifting attention from individuals or collections of individuals to the 'social space' or 'container' requires us to lean into new methodologies and epistemologies that represent other possible ways of knowing and shaping our world at this time, across different cultures, contexts, and positionalities. In these new epistemologies, the sources of knowledge are rarely uni-local and attributable to one individual, but rather surface and become known through experience, with one another, in the in-between. The articles in this issue show how the potential to become unstuck in the liminal space lies in our relations and our relating. As such, these pieces show how the in-between can be *both* a place of frustration, pain, and paralysis *and* the very catalyst for new knowledge and knowing that is needed to activate and support transformative action. The new doesn't come without pain. Not acknowledging this is why so many transition attempts fail.

Contributions of This Issue

The collated papers in this—the fourth—issue of the Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change point to a variety of theoretical and practical approaches to working with the in-between in a way that supports a shift from a sense of depression toward a journey of collective awareness and co-creative responses.

This issue features our first-ever *invited full article*. In it Thomas Hübl and Lori Shridhare vividly show that while trauma occurs in separation, healing

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[1] The symposium entitled *Meeting/Greeting the Future Halfway*—thereby playing with Barad's (2007) famous proverb (meeting the universe halfway)—was organized by Megan Seneque and Raghav Rajagopalan, two members of our Editorial Team.

happens in relation. Further, the power of collective witnessing is harnessed in the Trauma Integration Process—the framework Hübl and Shridhare introduce for integrating individual and collective trauma for healing. In framing their article, they borrow the 2018 Nobel Laureate in Literature Olga Tokarczuk's concept of the *tender narrator,* representing a fourth voice in collective experience, one whose perception crosses the boundaries of time and space and sees the whole. By intentionally opening a space for the full emotional spectrum of the liminal state and by providing a scaffolding for holding individual and collective trauma, their practice aims to move beyond trauma-informed to trauma-integrated interventions.

In the first of our *peer-reviewed articles*, Rachel Lilley, Mark Whitehead, and Gerald Midgley document their shared learning, which spans over a decade, in trying to meaningfully address limitations of existing governance systems. The authors guide readers through a theoretically sound and highly applicable exploration of combining Mindfulness-Based approaches with Behavioural Insights instruction. They present research results on a program that was developed for and iteratively tested and refined within Welsh civil service with the aim to develop collaborative and distributed leadership, and encourage emotionally-informed decision-making.

Victor Udoewa provides a thought-provoking account of the failures of traditional approaches to design, which, he argues, have perpetuated societal injustices and have remained a practice largely done *on* or *about* people, and only rarely *with* them. As a viable alternative, he proposes a meta-methodological approach called Radical Participatory Design, a way of approaching design that is participatory to its core. Through a deepening of our awareness of the power dynamics embedded within these interpersonal spaces, he claims we can move beyond Human-Centered Design and towards genuine participation and systemic action.

John Davis – Cobble Cobble, and Rhonda Coopes – palawa, invite you into an experience of Indigenous Knowledge creation through the practice of circle work. As a reader, you have the opportunity to take a place alongside the fire, and witness knowledge production and transmission through deep storytelling, yarning, and narrative capture. Embedded within this unfolding narrative, the authors showcase the philosophy, governance structure, and organizational systems processes of the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab at Deakin University, all of which are grounded in Indigenous practices and methods of inquiry.

Glen Cousquer's work extends awareness-based systems change practice beyond the human realm and into the domain of inter-species solidarity and cooperation. His article documents a Theory U-informed Action Research project inquiring into improving equine welfare practices in the Moroccan mountain tourism industry. He explores how *absencing* functions as a relationship-defining barrier to inter-species understanding which supports the (mal-)treatment of mules founded on their objectification. By intentionally creating holding spaces

and attending to the feedback animals are able to offer, a space opens for creative possibilities to "be and become with," thereby reshaping and regenerating the relationship forged between humans and non-humans.

The second book review to be published in JASC offers Norma Romm's intimate read of Hilary Bradbury's new book *How to Do Action Research for Transformations at a Time of Eco-Social Crisis* (Bradbury, 2022). Much more than a simple re-narration of the main points of Bradbury's book, Romm's book review serves as an account of her personal engagement and dialogue with Bradbury's work, both in resonance and appreciation and also at times challenging the very personally-informed experiences and derived conclusions that shape the core narrative of the book.

This issue's *In-the-Making* features Stacy Guenther's doctoral research study in which she conducted a phenomenological inquiry into the interpersonal and intersubjective phenomenon of group coherence. In her study, focusing on a series of virtual sessions designed to cultivate a sense of group coherence, Guenther makes an effort to bring empirical research to bear on some of the lived intra- and, most notably, interpersonal experience of this ephemeral phenomenon often theoretically described as group "being- or oneness," which thus far has rarely been investigated. In her *Discussant Commentary*, Jessica Bockler deepens and expands upon Guenther's work by offering her insightful reflections on the nature and potential of group coherence to address our global meta-crises. In her highly-balanced article she not only maps further evidence for the potential of awareness-based practices to engender coherence, but also sheds light on the shadow side of inner group life, in particular how the power of group coherence may be abused and directed toward malevolent purpose. Especially concerning the latter, she shows how one of our greatest challenges in cultivating coherence lies in inviting spaces that truly engage with and are able to hold disagreement and fragmentation as a generative source of diversity and creativity.

In what we can now already call a tradition, this issue closes with *In Dialogue*. Thirty years after futurist Sohail Inayatullah and Otto Scharmer participated in a seminar focused on macrohistory held by peace activist and futurist Johan Galtung, this dialogue sees a reunion of these two leaders in their respective fields supported by recent graduate from the London School of Economics Emma D. Paine, in a multi-generational conversation. Taking our current context of polycrisis as a point of departure, their dialogue journeys across topics ranging from patterns of microhistory to collective depression and agency, to the role of futuring and higher education in societal transformation.

Fittingly the *In-Dialogue* plays with the metaphor of the planetary gardener in its title, which bends us back to van Genepp's notion of the study of liminality as a life science and the vision underlying his work. He writes:

> Finally, the series of human transitions has, among some peoples,
> been linked to the celestial passages, the revolutions of the
> planets, and the phases of the moon. It is indeed a cosmic

conception that relates the stages of human existence to those of plant and animal life and, by a sort of pre-scientific divination, joins them to the great rhythms of the universe. (van Gennep 2013, p. 194)

As we've seen in this brief review of the various pieces that constitute this issue of the journal, the process of transition is a necessarily messy and generative one. There is no clear-cut easy transition from a point of departure to a point of destination. The way one holds this liminal space is critical if it is to release novelty and imagination, construction and destruction. Thomassen (2016), in the closing of his book, provides a complementary reading to van Gennep's quote, offering a nuanced description of our relationship with nature and the act of creation:

(T)he role of human beings in the universe is not to erect order, create schemes, concepts and models and then impose these upon an unstructured chaos, to 'build the world' from scratch. This tendency was what Eric Voegelin recognized as the gnostic drive of modernity. Instead, our role in this universe and on this planet— the only one we have—should rather be to humbly 'tune in' to the beauty of the world. Or, as van Gennep put it, join the great rhythms of the Universe. (p. 229)

Bayo Akomulafe, in the above-mentioned symposium, *Meeting/Greeting the Future Halfway*, uses the term trip epistemologies to describe the ephemeral and vulnerable ways of knowing we enter into in our efforts to tune into the world in this way, including tuning into pain and messiness. He states,

[The] system is not complete without its glitch...we have to find ways of situating ourselves within the glitch, not as a neutral space but as a space that is generous and is available and is inviting us to sit with, or as Donna Haraway (2016) would say: sitting with the trouble is generous work at the end of the world." (International Society for Systems Science, 2022, 1:49:30 – 1:50:10)

It is precisely these much-needed different epistemologies, ontologies, and knowledge systems for navigating troubling transitions that are exemplified in the various contributions to this issue, and which the journal seeks to make visible.

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Invited Article

The 'Tender Narrator' Who Sees Beyond Time:

A Framework for Trauma Integration and Healing

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Abstract

While trauma occurs in separation, healing happens in relation, where the inner dynamics of voice and expression play an important role in narrating a traumatic experience. In her acceptance speech for the 2018 Nobel Prize in Literature, novelist Olga Tokarczuk envisioned a new form of a literary narrator, one who sees beyond a singular point of view to include the interrelatedness of the world and the interdependence of all beings. In this article, we present a framework for the integration of individual and collective trauma that is focused on creating safe, interactive group spaces for dialogue, group coherence building, reflection, and transformative practices. We illustrate the foundational role of narrative as part of this integration process in groups and programs led by the article's co-author, teacher and international facilitator Thomas Hübl. We examine the stages of the narrative process in trauma integration, observing the potential

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shifts in points of view to listen for the voice of what Tokarczuk refers to as the "tender narrator." We review the literature on trauma and collective trauma, and identify its impacts, especially its ubiquitous nature as part of every society's social milieu. We also read part of a transcript of a dialogue focused on intergenerational and historical trauma, inviting us, as authors and readers, to participate in a practice of embodied witnessing. In presenting this framework, our intention as collaborators is to underline the urgency for healing individual and collective trauma through engaging in novel pathways of group experiential learning and integration.

Keywords
collective trauma; trauma; trauma integration; presence; collective healing

> I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion.
> These three are your greatest treasures.
> Simple in action and in thoughts,
> you return to the source of being.
> Patient with both friends and enemies,
> you accord with the way things are.
> Compassionate with yourself, you reconcile all beings in the world.
>
> – Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

Introduction

At the end of his essay "Notes on Trauma and Community," sociologist Kai Erikson poses the question, "To what extent does it make sense to conclude that the traumatized view of the world conveys a wisdom that ought to be heard in its own terms?" (Erikson, 1995, p. 198). To hear the specificity of trauma is to investigate "the story of a wound that cries out" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4) and that which is unspeakable (Herman, 1997).

Those who have experienced a traumatic event may suffer symptoms that range from hyperactivation of emotions to numbness and a shattering of safety and trust, all of which affects systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community (Herman, 1997), causing dysregulation, as well as distortions in time, space, and rhythm (Hübl & Avritt, 2020). One therapeutic intervention is articulating the "trauma story" (Mollica et al., 2014) to restore an individual's dignity, agency, and relationality.

If trauma yearns to be voiced yet is unspeakable, from what point of view or perspective will the narrative of that story emerge? Is it possible, as the wound "cries out," that it might convey a particular wisdom? In this article, we explore the inner dynamics of narrative voice as part of the Trauma Integration Process

(TIP) (cf. Hübl & Avritt, 2020), a *living*, iterative framework to guide the stages of trauma healing in group settings.

An interdisciplinary framework, the TIP draws from interrelated and disparate fields that study trauma: psychology, psychiatry, and sociology, primarily, but also trauma theory, neuroscience, epigenetics, peace and conflict studies, and social work. The practices of the TIP focus on self-reflection, dialogue, group sharing, and cultivating presence to generate what we view to be profound transpersonal development and collective shifts. If it's true that "we all live in societies constructed to a degree in a milieu of collective trauma" (Rinker & Lawler, 2018, p. 159), how do individuals access and express their trauma? Can a collective develop capacities to witness itself, and identify and express its trauma? These are the questions explored in a TIP.
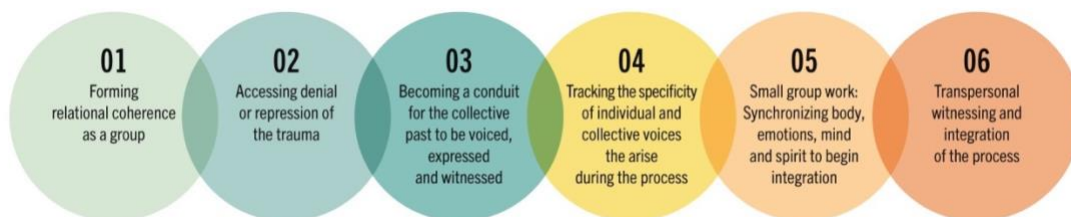
Figure 1: Stages of the Trauma Integration Process (TIP) ©2022 The Pocket Project.

In the initial stages of a TIP, a group is guided through a *synchronization* and *sensing practice*. As we attune to one another, we become aware of our interdependence, and how together, seeing and including both the muteness and expression of the wounds of trauma are fundamental to relating. These wounds may be silently held but can be sensed. They may be held uniformly across the collective body itself or fragmented throughout. As the group continues this synchronization process, new layers of trauma and stress may emerge with accompanying emotions, all of which is guided by a skilled facilitation process. Throughout this article, we will interweave the TIP as we investigate trauma, collective trauma, narrative voice, embodied witnessing and the potential emergences of the "tender narrator."

This article is a collaborative venture. It is based both on Thomas Hübl's body of work as an instructor, spiritual teacher, and international facilitator over the past 20 years, and the writing and research Lori Shridhare has done on trauma, which includes reporting on Thomas's work for several news publications (Shridhare, 2020a, 2020b) and her practice as a senior student in his training programs since 2017. In addition to her freelance writing and journalism, she is a communications director at Harvard Medical School, where

she has collaborated with Thomas as a volunteer to support his courses, workshops, and medical school talks.[1]

In this collaboration, our intention is not only to translate insights and learnings from our work together, but also to invite the reader into an exploration and discovery of embodied witnessing. In this way, we invite you to observe your inner state as you take in the various points of view in this article: the voices of scientific literature, the experiences of a retreat participant, and the shifting lenses through which we narrate this text. We offer this article in a spirit of compassion and self-care. When reading about trauma, proceed gently.

Origins of Process

To step into Thomas's story is to reflect on how "collective trauma found him," through "learning from the phenomenon itself in such a way that it becomes its own explanation," (Bortoft, 1996, p. 45). In Thomas's words:

> In the early 2000s, I returned from four years of a meditation retreat to lead retreats in Austria and Germany. In these groups, which included mostly Germans, participants began expressing strong emotions, often spontaneously, as if they were digesting unspoken grief and suppressed fear, shame, guilt, and numbness. As this process unfolded, together we began to unlock deeply held grief, confusion, and anger that had been passed on through the last generation in the wake of World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust. Unexpectedly, I was experiencing, along with the group, the impact of historical trauma. To access the roots of their sadness, we began to explore the group's felt experience of living in bodies as descendants of World War II.

As this work unfolded over the years into praxis, defined as being "concerned with reflection in the here-and-now as it is with reflection before or after the experience" (Sunitha, 2018, p. 839), Thomas wrote, "Each group that I taught throughout Germany was in fact instructing me. I began to witness a profoundly recursive pattern, emerging again and again in groups of all types and sizes" (Hübl & Avritt, 2020, p. xx). Soon after, the group demographic expanded as Israeli and other Jewish participants discovered his work.

In recent years, Thomas's programs have become increasingly international and racially diverse. His organization, Academy of Inner Science, makes

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[1] Harvard Medical School first invited Thomas in 2019 to speak on collective trauma. He has continued to present workshops and teach as guest faculty on trauma, resilience, relational competencies, and meditation, including at Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard teaching hospital, where he has offered workshops for physicians in the department of medicine (2020, 2022) and at Cambridge Health Alliance where he has served as guest faculty for a continuing medical education course on traumatic stress (2021).

available a signature foundational program, Timeless Wisdom Training (TWT)[2], which takes place over two years as a series of in-person and online group retreats.[3] All retreats, courses, and programs include principles of the TIP, which are intended to create a safe and generative environment for sharing and reflection. However, the programs also include content, dialogue, and group work not directly related to trauma. A team of therapists and other professionals support these programs.

Identifying Trauma

According to psychiatrist Judith Herman (1997), psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless, where the victim is "rendered helpless by overwhelming force" (p. 33). Traumatic events are extraordinary, she suggests, not because they're uncommon, but because they "overwhelm the ordinary human adaptation to life" as well as "the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning" (Herman, 1997, p. 33). "The effects of unresolved loss or trauma can be disorganizing and hidden from conscious awareness, resulting in disturbances in the flow of energy and information in the mind" (Siegel, 2020, p. 406).

While Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is diagnosable, "*many more individuals will exhibit resilient responses, subclinical symptoms, or consequences that fall outside of diagnostic criteria*" [emphasis added] (SAMHSA, n.d.). Referring to the multiple and often confusing uses of the word *trauma*, Erikson emphasizes that more important than the event that causes the trauma is *how people react to it,* and he makes the point that to "serve as a generally useful concept, 'trauma' has to be understood as resulting from a *constellation of life experiences* as well as from a discrete happening" (Erikson, 1976, p. 185). While therapeutic interventions are necessary for treating PTSD and other trauma disorders, group spaces dedicated to the TIP can fill the remaining gaps, nurture the growth of trauma-informed cultures, and focus on prevention.

Collective trauma is caused by natural and human-made disasters and is a "cataclysmic event that shatters the basic fabric of society" (Hirschberger, 2018, p. 1441). While sociologist Kai Erikson (1976) referred to individual trauma as a blow to the individual psyche, he defines collective trauma as a "blow to the

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[2] See www.timelesswisdomtraining.com

[3] The first two-year program began in Germany in 2008, followed by six consecutive programs there. In the U.S., the first program was launched in 2015, followed by a two-year session from 2018-2020 until the current one launched in 2022. This iteration, 2022-2024 is a global endeavor, with meetings for both the European cohort (200) and U.S. cohort (200) online throughout the year, and two retreats for each cohort per year in person. Dozens of countries are represented in both groups, with translation in Spanish and German available. Scholarships are always offered, and diversity inclusion around race, gender, ethnicity, and disability is an inherent value in all programs.

tissues of social life that damages the bonds linking people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (Erikson, 1976, p. 302). Collective traumas such as a mass atrocity or genocide lead to dehumanization, and healing is a "holistic overcoming of the act of being dehumanized and as a coming to terms with its harms" (Thomson, 2021, p. 46). In this article, we include all forms of group experiences of trauma, including ancestral, intergenerational, and historical under the category of *collective trauma.*

Since 2020, our global state of trauma has been compounded by the pandemic, a collective trauma of unprecedented magnitude (cf. Holman et al., 2022), and in the U.S., through a series of incidents that surfaced and made visible the legacy of unhealed race-based historical traumas (Silver et al., 2020). Situational factors (cf. Taylor, 2020) that lead to traumatic experiences or exasperate existing trauma include colonialism, slavery, racism, ableism, class, caste, scarcity resources, genocide, war, migration, and gender violence, all of which continue to be addressed in TIPs. These impacts can be traced back to cycles of historical and intergenerational trauma stemming from the social and cultural environments in which children are raised as well as epigenetic transmission (cf. Siobhan, 2020).

While trauma, we argue, is ubiquitous in nature and has permeated our global culture, the burden is not shared equally, and disproportionately affects people who are not members of the hegemonic power structure, such as those who identify as Global Majority and Indigenous populations. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, of University of New Mexico, developed the Historical Trauma and Unresolved Grief Intervention for American Indians to heal their historical trauma, which she defines as "the collective, cumulative psychological wounds of massive, repeated, transgenerational group trauma" (Brave Heart et al., 2020, p. 2).

Trauma Integration

While trauma research has become more comprehensive in the last decade, what is missing are references to a holistic process of trauma integration. Integration can refer to narrative memory, proposed by psychologist Pierre Janet as the forming of constructs to make sense of an experience. Herman (1997) notes that the fundamental premise of the trauma story is in supporting integration, which, according to van der Kolk & van der Hart (1995), occurs when the narrative of the trauma experienced is "made part of one's autobiography" (p. 178). In the TIP, verbal narration is only an initial step to access what is most essential to this process: the energy, emotion, and information beyond the words.

A TIP may focus on one event or a constellation of experiences. Participants often reflect on their habits, stress patterns, challenges, and other life circumstances, including how the environment in which they were raised impacted their development. As Thomas leads this discussion, he invites the group to contemplate how each of us has been born into a world impacted by collective trauma.

On suffering, Brave Heart et al. (2020) write, "Contemporary individual suffering is rooted in the ancestral legacy and continues into the present. Traditionally, one cannot be separated from the influences of ancestral suffering. Time is nonlinear, circular, and simultaneous" (p. 3). Due to its cyclical—and often historic—nature, collective trauma can manifest as both a root cause of current conflicts, and as a consequence. Restoration means integrating past, undigested trauma into the present. In doing so, the boundaries of what is perceived as individual, ancestral, and collective experiences become fluid, dissolving our perception of time.

The Tender Narrator

In this section, we apply the concept of the "tender narrator" as a device for exploring and identifying emergent voices that express both the trauma narrative itself, and the *wisdom* behind the trauma.[4] Traditionally in English literature, the narrator is situated in one of three points of view, first ("I"/"I"/"we"), second ("you") or third person ("he, she, they, it"). In her acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature, Tokarczuk (2019) suggested the introduction of a fourth point of view, that of the tender narrator whose perception crosses the boundaries of time and space:

Seeing everything means recognizing the ultimate fact that all things that exist are mutually connected into a single whole, even if the connections between them are not yet known to us. Seeing everything also means a completely different kind of responsibility for the world, because it becomes obvious that every gesture "here" is connected to a gesture "there," that a decision taken in one part of the world will have an effect in another part of it, and that differentiating between "mine" and "yours" starts to be debatable. (p. 21)

When the first-person point of view is narrated, "the individual performs the role of subjective center of the world" (Tokarczuk, 2019, Nobel Lecture, section 2, para 5). In psychotherapy, this point of view is essential for healing, as the individual forms and narrates their "trauma story," which psychiatrist Richard Mollica defines as "stories told by survivor patients of distressing and painful personal and social events. Sharing these stories serves a dual function not only of healing the survivor but also of teaching and guiding the listener—and, by extension, society" (Mollica et al., 2014, p. 4). Expressing a first-person narrative therefore becomes a critical step for an individual in healing trauma. In a group setting such as a TIP, this singular perspective can begin to expand beyond a singular point of view to become a tender narrator. As a participant speaks, fragments of the trauma story form into a coherent whole. This emergent voice

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[4] The "tender narrator" is not a framework used in the TIP as a programmatic element; it is a device for this article's investigation of potential shifts in points of view and experience that can emerge through a TIP, and is utilized here solely for the purpose of reflection on the process.

can be witnessed by both the speaker and listeners. We might envision this tender narrator as that voice which speaks *from the whole*, that which, in its essence, is inherently connected to a greater wisdom.

Accessing the Unspeakable

Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth (1995) writes, "If trauma is unspeakable, it is because it eludes memory, as it *escapes* full consciousness as it occurs" (p. 153). Personal horrors—as well as those on a collective scale such as gender violence, war, and genocide—erase and delete words, creating a chasm where memory ceases to exist. We are unaware of the unconscious impact of trauma that colors our perceptions, ways of seeing the world, and one another. "The knowledge of horrible events periodically intrudes into public awareness, but is rarely retained for long. Denial, repression, dissociation operate on a social, as well as an individual level" (Herman, 1997, p. 2). In 2022, it is not possible to be "periodically" intruded upon by the news of horrible events. The question for our collective responsibility then becomes how do we face our denial when collective trauma is pervasive and persistent?

"Trauma is the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge" Caruth continues (1995, p. 153). She writes about Claude Lanzmann, the late film director of the documentary *Shoah,* which documents accounts of the Holocaust from survivors, bystanders, and perpetuators. While speaking at an event, Lanzmann "precisely began with the impossibility of telling this story, suggesting that historical truth may be transmitted in some cases through the refusal of a certain framework of understanding, a refusal that is also a creative act of listening" (p. 153). This act of refusal, she posits, is not a denial of the past, but a way to "access knowledge which has not yet attained the form of 'narrative memory'" (p. 154).

To bridge the phenomenon of trauma that exists within the realm of the unspeakable, unknowable, and unthinkable requires a narrator who observes, but does not conclude, who asks questions, but does not offer solutions. We imagine this narrator gently circling all that is beyond the realm of conscious reach, holding a higher source of wisdom that even within the absence, the numbing, and the denial, leads to an opening. Tenderness, Tolgarcek (2019) said:

> is deep emotional concern about another being, its fragility, its unique nature, and its lack of immunity to suffering and the effects of time. Tenderness is spontaneous and disinterested; it goes far beyond empathetic fellow feeling. Instead it is the conscious, though perhaps slightly melancholy, common sharing of fate. (p. 24)

This quality of tenderness often emerges in the TIP, as participants perceive less distance between themselves and others, demonstrate greater compassion, and become attuned to the "we" of the group experience, shifting into the interconnected perspective of what we might call the tender narrator.

Sharing and Embodied Witnessing in Groups

In a TIP, many participants have some familiarity with complex, stressful, or traumatic experiences of their past. Others may discover that the surfacing of their memories is triggered by current events which open their awareness to previously buried ancestral, intergenerational, or historical trauma. The focus is on all that spontaneously arises for the participant who is sharing, not on achieving an outcome.

In a TIP, there are several stages that can be observed as a participant shares an experience with the larger group, guided by the facilitator. The stages outlined exemplify only a *potential* process; each share is unique and unfolds organically according to infinite variables and factors as unique as the participants themselves.

STAGE	PARTICIPANT	FACILITATOR PROCESS/ LEARNING	PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE	DEVELOPMENTAL LEARNING
1	Speaks before group (shares or asks question to facilitator)	Articulating and hosting a space of safety and compassion. Observes individual as an expression of the whole, fluid relationship with group field	Establishing comfort with speaking, somatic awareness, hearing/ sensing one's own voice, discovery of emergent narrative	Authenticity, vulnerability, expressing needs; *being*
2	Further reflection and articulation of experience or question	Opening the field of listening and creating space	Intention/self-contact	Observation of initial connection with facilitator while speaking (or not); *becoming*
3	Deeper reflection of opening into experience or question	Observing the group's energy as they begin to listen and attune to speaker	Narrative, and the energy behind the narrative	Higher levels of awareness/seeing
4	Access emotions/ inner state	Engaging with flow of movement of process, not fixed on a prescribed outcome or assumed goal of dialogue	Emotions: Anger, fear, joy, sadness, shame, or numbness may emerge, mental activity fades to greater awareness of somatic and emotional sensing	Being with what is, sensing both what can be felt and the nature of what is hidden or numb
5	Deeper awareness and articulation of inner state	Listening to the 'voice of the past' which emerges through narrative	Attunement	Self-regulation and co-regulation
6	Tracking of inner state in attunement process	Allowing the possibility of non-resonance, continued guidance of tracking with speaker	Narrative voice of tracking and attunement with facilitator	Awareness of relational attunement, or not
7	Completion or move to next step in cycle as new layers open	Observation of specific manifestations of individual, ancestral, collective experiences/trauma in speaker	Listening for the voice of: individual, ancestral, and/ or collective, possible interconnection of all	Steps towards integration, self-reflection, witnessing the process of sharing narrative with group; *belonging*
8	Regulation	Assess the need for additional support from facilitation team	Support	The group field as co-regulating power
9	Pause and reflect	Introduce pause and meta-reflection process of witnessing experience to entire group	Digest, reflect, integrate	Observe new awareness of integration, also the experience of being listened to/witnessed by the group

NOTE: The order of stages represents a potential flow of the process; each participant dialogue is organic and unique.

Figure 2: Stages of Facilitator-Participant Experience ©2022 Lori Shridhare.

First, participants are invited to raise their hands if they want to ask a question or share a personal experience in dialogue with the facilitator, who then invites the other participants to practice observing their emotions as they attune to the person speaking. The facilitator supports the speaker's emergent process of sharing, gently guiding the flow by asking questions of clarification and by transmitting an interiority of spaciousness and openness. Throughout the time the speaker shares, and the dyadic process unfolds (15 to 50 minutes), the facilitator provides pointers for the speaker to reflect and focus on their somatic, emotional, and mental states. Together, the speaker and facilitator conclude the dialogue, returning the speaker to a regulated state for further reflection, which may include support from the assistant team. Figure 2 outlines these possible stages.

As the participant and facilitator engage in a dyadic conversation, the wider group of participants—which can range from 100 to 1,000 people—practice becoming embodied witnesses. The TIP involves creating spaces, in Otto Scharmer's words, "at a level that can really hold the complexity of very difficult and traumatic experiences of the past. And that has to do with the deeper capacity of unconditional witnessing. And then, as we deepen this process toward the open heart, there is this holding of the other" (Scharmer & Hübl, 2019).

When each participant of a group engages in this "holding of the other," we can listen for an emergent voice arising from the collective, speaking from a source of realization that illuminates and updates our understanding. This "voice of the collective" may be loud or subtle. In becoming aware of the possibility of this voice we begin to expand our dimensions of listening together, attuning our energies to that which seeks to be released, the "wound that cries out." Together, we may learn to identify the distinct, *direct* voices of individual, collective, intergenerational, and historic traumas.

With the permission of Dasha Gaian, a writer and photographer who lives in Mill Valley, California, and a participant in TWT who attended an in-person retreat in April 2022, we share an excerpt of a 3,300-word transcript of a 30-minute dialogue with Thomas. Dasha raised her hand in the opening session, after Thomas invited shares that related to the war in Ukraine.

> **Dasha:** I'm very nervous because it's the first time speaking to such a large room full of people. I am from Ukraine and I have connections to Russia and Ukraine. Both of my parents are half-Russian, half-Ukrainian. And I grew up speaking Russian and Ukrainian. And I feel like if the planet is my body, then some parts of my body are fighting right now, and it's terrifying.
>
> And I've been avoiding throughout my life anything that had to do with the military. I found people who choose a military career to be strange or traumatized or not fully respectable, and now it's the exact opposite. I have so much respect for people who are defending their country, or my country.

And I'm curious: is this numbness when I feel like I'm okay, I'm safe? Am I just numb to what's going on? Or is it resilience? With the anxiety that arises and then I have a peaceful moment and then I feel like things are okay, for me at least.

Thomas: So what do you think? What's your feeling? You know your process.

Dasha: I think it's possibly a little bit of both. I think that I had to develop—my nervous system had to adapt—because I've seen so much disturbing footage that I am glued to it all day long. I think about it all day long. Before, I couldn't watch violent films, knowing that it's a film, and now it's real life. Homes that look just like the home I grew up in that are destroyed. And people who look just like my neighbors or my family have died.

Children who look just like my children. And yet I just keep watching, I can't stop. And there is this anxiety that pulsates in my solar plexus. Worry. Fear.

Thomas: Maybe you said it now yourself, you see that you are not numb because it has a lot going on in you. You said it right now. And maybe we just, let's make a moment, because I think we are practicing how we as a community can witness each other's process, how we can be mindful of what's going on in every one of us and learn from each other, because you're sharing with us something that we can also learn from. And so maybe if you make a space for this, for the anxiety and this shivering inside, and maybe we take a moment to just allow that to be, instead of it being a disturbance. That what comes up in us right now is part of the issue, not something that is only separate from it. So since you have such a strong connection to the country, it's very natural that you will surface what you feel. Maybe we can just allow this to even have a bit more space.

Dasha: It's like pulsating really strongly.

Thomas: And also when you say there's a lot of fear coming up in you ...So maybe we can together—that you and I and whoever is feeling you right now—that we can soften a bit into the fear. Because often we try to get away from fear, and what we want to do is actually almost the opposite, to make some space and allow it to be, so that your system can digest it rather than just get away from it or keep it in place. So often we keep those feelings in place and then they just stay there. Right.

And if you soften a bit the way you feel the fear, you make it a bit softer and allow it to be assimilated. Right. And the same with this

pulsing that you feel, that you soften a bit your nervous system, the way you feel it.

Dasha: It's almost challenging to stay in the body. I've developed this superpower to go into the mind and analyze everything.

Thomas: Exactly. Yes, exactly.

Dasha: It was easier when I closed my eyes to go inside, to go into that area that's in the solar plexus that's so active, and I saw this vision of thousands of voices screaming for help. And a lot of them are female voices and children, and they're just calling, "Help us!"

Thomas: And then to see when you connect to your inner sensations and you check in, what's happening to our relation, when you are connecting to what you feel? Do you have a sense that I'm here or do I feel a bit at a distance?

Dasha: Feels like a bit at a distance. It's like I developed a layer of protection. I'm growing to overcome it, but it's almost like I feel alone in this.

Thomas: Exactly. And I would like us not to try to overcome it, but to include it. That the distancing is something you feel, it's part of your perception. And I would like us just to include the distancing, so you feel scared, afraid, and distant, and a bit alone. Alone means a bit retracted towards the inside. Right. And that we just include that without trying to overcome it.

Dasha: It's like my sense of me is growing into these boundaries that seemed far away before.

Thomas: Exactly. It made immediately a difference, you saw it, it immediately opened some of your energy when you included it. Right. The distancing is part of your intelligence, it's not something that we want to get rid of. It's something that we want to include and then see how it grows, how it changes. Exactly as you're doing it now. And you feel that it makes a difference?

Dasha: Yeah. It's also me, but like I retreated into a shell. The shell is me as well. It's part of my body. But it's …hiding.

Thomas: Exactly. And then now—since that opened up more—you check in again how your relation to me feels now. It changed a bit, this sense, then you include the new state again, as we did it before.

Dasha: Yeah, I feel more present and I feel the connection more active.

Thomas: And then let's include the connection. That's also how I feel. I feel now like a step more included when you look at me. Like as if you feel me more; I feel more felt. And then you can see if the fear is still there. If some of it is still there, then to feel both; your inner activation with what's going on according to the global situation, and us being related at the same time. That fear exists within a relational context.

(Dialogue continues)

After the completion of a complex share that touches upon both individual and collective trauma, the larger group reflects together or divides into triads. In this case, the group reflected together by pausing and sensing the impact of this share on their mental, emotional, and physical states.

Reflections Following the Dialogue

Six months after her dialogue, Dasha shared her reflections in response to questions that Lori Shridhare posed to her.[5]

As you were sharing this experience, did anything surprise you as you heard your own voice?

I have very little experience with public speaking, and usually even the thought of it brings about some of the most intense emotions I've ever felt—a mix of fear, anxiety, excitement and joy, a mix so powerful that it takes extreme effort to stay in the body and to stay coherent in my expression. As I heard the recording of the process, I was surprised that my voice sounded clear and my speech was mostly coherent, with only occasional inaccuracies.

How did your awareness shift from your somatic sensations, to your intellect, to your emotions throughout your share?

As I was going through the experience, my point of view kept shifting between various angles.

First was the richness of my inner process—sensations, emotions, thoughts, images. I would open up to the intense sensations in my body, then my mind would get activated and draw all the energy of my awareness upwards, working on analyzing what was happening. It would take conscious effort of shifting my focus to once again feel my somatic sensations and emotions, and I remember occasionally closing my eyes and retreating deeply into

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[5] Interview conducted via shared document on Oct.8, 2022

my inner world in order to maintain awareness of what was happening beyond my intellect.

What was it like to share your fear while relating, in dialogue?

I would become aware of my interaction with Thomas, as his gentle guidance brought me out of my internal bubble, reminding me that this is a shared experience, and there is an open invitation to not have to go through it alone, as I was conditioned to do through my developmental trauma. Growing up with mostly loving parents who had no awareness or training on how to help a child navigate the wide spectrum of human emotions, where my expressions of negative emotions were met with either a disproportionately strong outburst of more negative emotions and violence—or worse, sarcasm—caused me to retreat deeper into my inner world, to become emotionally self-reliant too early and to mistrust interactions with others.

Yet, my interaction with Thomas was entirely different. Partly because I have already witnessed him leading dozens of processes with other participants in various contexts, both online and in person, which led me to develop a deep trust for his presence and approach, and partly because of how he interacted with me in the moment. By using a gentle, kind, tender voice to calm my nervous system and by allowing ample space and time for my process to unfold, he created a safe container within which I felt secure enough to share my emotional experience—my fear—not only with him but also with the group.

What was the experience of being witnessed by others?

It was only occasionally that my awareness included the group of more than 200 participants as well as many experienced assistants and trainees that held a coherent field of active presence around me, the safe resonance body that intensified my process. For a significant portion of time, I almost forgot that others were present, my nervous system canceling out the group to not overwhelm me. Yet, at a subconscious level, I still felt the warm, soft, attentive field that allowed for me to be vulnerable, surrounding our interaction with a womb-like boundary.

One memorable moment that has been unfolding for months after the experience was Thomas's invitation to "soften a bit into the fear," instead of my habitual responses of either fighting it with a variety of techniques or turning away from it—both with unhelpful intensity.

Another deeply impactful outcome of the process was when
Thomas brought into my awareness the fact that I was
withdrawing from the shared experience, and invited me to include
this layer of protection, this impulse to retract inward, instead of
trying to overcome it. Including him and our interaction into my
awareness, far beyond the small space I've grown accustomed to
occupying, initiated an alchemical process inside my nervous
system and my energetic field, which has transformed my
interactions with the outside world, familiar or unfamiliar
circumstances, groups small or large, and continues to unfold
today, six months later.

Many aspects of the TIP can be noted in Dasha's reflection, as well as shifts
from various points of view, into a voice we might recognize as a tender narrator.
She demonstrates a competency to utilize all her senses, not only her intellect, to
track her interiority and emotional process which manifests through her body.
While she speaks from the first-person point of view, there is a sense that the
voice of the collective, and possibly her ancestral lineage, emerges through her
experience around the war, appearing as images and somatic sensations. She
also becomes aware of how a lack of emotional co-regulation in a traumatized
family system can generate a protective mechanism of inward retraction as a
child. As an adult, this pattern can become so habitual that it escapes conscious
awareness, until the experience is witnessed in relation, which can facilitate a
transformational shift. In this way, Thomas's listening becomes an entry gate to
understanding her childhood experience, as the past becomes present. Dasha also
reflects on how having the space and time to engage in this dialogue created a
sense of safety in her nervous system, allowing her to process fear.

Finally, she reflects on the presence of embodied witnesses. When 200 people
are *dialed in* to Dasha's process, the strength and intensification of attunement
is greater than a dialogue with just one person. As the speaker shares,
participants in the larger group are invited to practice tracking their somatic,
emotional, and cognitive shifts as they listen, sense, and attune to the speaker's
inner state, and to notice any shifts in the group field as the interactive dialogue
with the facilitator unfolds. When triggering content is shared, a range of inner
responses can emerge, some of which lead participants to request support from
the assistant team. Figure 3 outlines in more detail the potential stages of the
group process.

STAGE	LARGE GROUP	PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE	DEVELOPMENTAL LEARNING	FACILITATOR PROCESS/ LEARNING
1	Large group comes together for a retreat (ie TWT) or TIP (dedicated trauma integration process)	Meditation, 3-Synch, group attunement; presencing	Listening, witnessing, sensing as "we." When virtual: Scrolling through gallery view to practice connecting with various people	Observing the energy and coherence of group space at start of event
2	Content talks by facilitator, practice sessions, writing exercises, and triads	Participation/focus, receptivity, listening, authenticity	Individual: Tracking the emerging emotions in relation to this group experience. Group: Reflection practices on becoming aware of the "we" space and changes	Opening the field of listening and creating space
3	Participant-facilitator sharing and questions (See figure 2)	Group field attunes to the narrative, and the energy behind the narrative	Deeper levels of awareness/seeing	Supporting group container
4	Sharing continues: Access emotions/inner state	Individual participant: Witnesses their inner narrative, and any emotions in response to sharings. Anger, fear, joy, sadness, or numbness	Being with what is	Supporting group container
5	Sharing continues: Deep listening of potentially sensitive or traumatic experiences	Group attunement, "waves" of emotions and/or somatic experiences such as fatigue, heaviness can move through the space	Group as conduit for collective past to be expressed, voiced, and witnessed	Observes group for shifts and any emerging needs for support
6	Group attunement & regulation	Witnessing the voice of: individual, ancestral, or collective material	Moving beyond "other", empathic listening, belonging	Observes group for shifts and any emerging needs for support
7	Triad or small group work (See figure 2)	Exploration of resonance with talks and group sharings, how *the center of presence held within the larger group field unfolds for each individual, deepening this awareness throughout the triad process*	Meta-reflection	Listens for the specificity of individual/ancestral/ collective trauma in the sharing and in the energy of the group field
8	Participants in triad return to large group space for meta-reflection			

Figure 3: Stages of Group Experience ©2022 Lori Shridhare.

In Conclusion: Fluidity of Integration and Group Healing

In individual healing, sharing one's trauma story, usually as part of psychotherapy, is a key initial step in integration. In the group healing process presented here, we conceptualize how this first person point of view might expand to encompass greater awareness of the whole. In practicing together as a coherent field, the point of view of the narrating, embodied speaker can shift, illuminating potential paths for insights and perspectives for self- and group reflection.

At the conclusion of her speech, Tolgarcek invited authors to "tell stories honestly in a way that activates a sense of the whole in the reader's mind, that sets off the reader's capacity to unite fragments into a single design, and to discover entire constellations in the small particles of events" (Tolgarcek, 2019,

Nobel Lecture, section 6, para 7). Her siren call to step out of the confines of singular points of view applies to all of us who are called to create—and to heal— and to move beyond speaking *about* to speaking *from* a state of presence. "There is no purely intellectual point of view, and there is no view from nowhere, there is only an embodied point of view" (Zahavi, 2019, p. 36).

Trauma integration is the process of awakening the parts of ourselves that have been split off and fragmented in the past, reconstituting our awareness of their separate or muted existence, and allowing these aspects of ourselves to be seen and held in relationship, witnessing this totality come into presence. Beyond the simple act of verbal narration and the biology of seeing, this process invites layers of holding, denial, and defense to unwind, returning us to our original energetic voice, which speaks beyond the boundaries of time, space, and the confines of a singular perspective.

While collective trauma (including the study of it) can be overwhelming in its power to contract and distort, the witnessing capacity opens space to host the world *as it is* within us. To see healing through a wider lens, where the limits of time and borders of *mine* and *yours* dissolve, is to become a tender narrator. While this narrator may embody a fluidity of seeing the interconnectedness and interdependence of humanity, and all of nature, the seer is not overwhelmed, but empowered. As responsible, informed citizens and leaders, we are charged not only with becoming trauma-informed, but trauma-integrated. We are charged with accepting this responsibility and practicing with self-compassion, caring for ourselves and others, and approaching the delicate membrane of our composite of traumas with gentleness, even with joy.

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Peer Review Article

Mindfulness and Behavioural Insights:

Reflections on the Meditative Brain, Systems Theory and Organisational Change

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Abstract

This paper explores the impacts of the Mindfulness-Based Behavioural Insights and Decision-Making (MBBI) programme. Combining mindfulness with behavioural insights instruction, the authors have developed the MBBI programme through a series of iterative trials over the last ten years. In addition to fusing mindfulness and behavioural insights, this programme also draws on the theories of autopoiesis, anticipatory systems, the predictive brain and constructed emotions, which all challenge the common assumption that

behavioural and emotional responses are automatic (triggered by given stimuli and not open to change through self-reflection). The paper explores the use of the MBBI in the Welsh Civil Service. Employing evidence from in-depth interviews with participants and a SenseMaker analysis, it rethinks the role of mindfulness at work, repurposes the application of behavioural insights training toward a more ethical and systemic direction, and develops a reflective approach to capability building amongst public servants.

Keywords
anticipatory systems; autopoiesis; behavioural insights; capability building; cognition; emotions; government; mindfulness; policy making

Introduction

Mindfulness and behavioural insights have simultaneously risen to public prominence over the last decade.

Contemporary mindfulness has been defined as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). The impacts of mindfulness have been most pronounced in the fields of mental health and wellbeing (e.g., Gu et al., 2015; Lomas et al., 2017; Dunning et al., 2019; Tao et al., 2021; van Agteren et al., 2021), but their broader implications are now being explored in other policy areas, including education (e.g., Hwang et al., 2017; McCaw, 2020) and prison reform (e.g., Suarez et al., 2014; Haskin, 2017).

Meanwhile, 'behavioural insights' has developed independently from mindfulness. It involves an approach to policy design and delivery that draws on the behavioural sciences in order to account for forms of human behaviour that do not conform to neoclassical economic expectations. This approach particularly relates "to behavioural biases, the nature of rationality, habit formation, emotions and heuristics" (Pykett et al., 2016, p. 7). The field of behavioural insights has influenced thinking across most major public policy sectors (OECD, 2017; Baggio et al., 2021).

While mindfulness and behavioural insights are prominent as separate fields, there has been relatively little work on the connections and synergies between these approaches to human behaviour change (Whitehead at al, 2015). Arguably, this is surprising given that they share a common interest in challenging the idea that human beings are, for the most part, rational decision makers. In terms of practice, both fields are also concerned with the regulation of harmful cognitive processes and related behaviours.

This paper offers a critical account of a series of interconnected trials that have explored the impacts of delivering a workplace training programme that creatively combines behavioural insights with mindfulness. The programme was designed to address the limitations of existing governance systems, particularly

in dealing with complexity and addressing wicked problems (e.g., Rittel & Webber, 1973; Sydelko et al., 2021) such as climate change (e.g., Lazerus, 2009; Levin et al., 2012; Ison & Straw, 2020). It addressed these governance limitations by supporting people in countering cognitive bias and enabling reflective awareness of the inevitable partiality of understanding and judgement in policy making and workplace relationships.

The adapted mindfulness programme described in this paper combines mindfulness practices with the emerging insights of the behavioural sciences concerning the roles of cognitive and unconscious biases/heuristics in decision-making processes. The iterative trials associated with this programme explored:

1. A rethinking of the role of mindfulness at work, considering the impacts that combining mindfulness training with behavioural insights has on the ways in which secular mindfulness could be thought about and adopted in workplaces, responding to contemporary critiques by Purser (2018) and others.

2. A repurposing of the application of behavioral insights training, identifying a more ethical and systemic direction for this. At the same time, the trials addressed some of the current limits of government systems – especially the lack of more psychologically-informed policy making and ways of working (Dolan et al., 2010; Hallsworth et al., 2018).

3. The iterative development of an approach to improve the capabilities of public servants, understanding the extent to which contemplative (awareness-based) techniques could enhance experiential learning in relation to behavioural insights analysis.

In particular, we were interested to learn whether mindfulness could more effectively embed behavioural insights into workplaces and support the creative development of new, ethical, systemic and empowering ways of working with these scientific insights. The new, psychologically-informed approach we introduced into government involved addressing cognitive biases and implicit assumptions, supported moves toward co-production in the policy process (by enabling reflection on the inevitable partiality of single policy-maker perspectives), developed collaborative and distributed leadership, and encouraged emotionally-informed decision-making (Sharp, 2018; Mair et al., 2019; Whitley et al., 2019).

As part of our trials, new forms of both mindfulness and behavioural insights training were developed, drawing on recent advances in theories of consciousness and perception, and changes in understandings of the emotion-cognition axis (e.g., Maturana, 1988; Pessoa, 2013; Clark, 2015).

While this paper describes the results of these trials, it also speaks to a series of debates surrounding the applications of both mindfulness and behavioural insights more generally. In particular, we are interested in critiques of neoliberal 'corporate mindfulness' (Forbes, 2019; Purser, 2019; Stanley, 2019); Buddhist critiques of workplace mindfulness initiatives (Tomassini, 2016; Crane, 2017); and critiques of the field of behavioural insights (Leggett, 2014;

Gigerenzer, 2015; Pykett et al., 2016). While we have sympathies with all of these critical perspectives, we have chosen not to abandon mindfulness and behavioural insights thinking, but instead to address the critiques through the design and evaluation of our own programme.

This paper begins with a brief analysis of existing academic work on mindfulness in the workplace, and the use of behavioural insights. We then describe the development of the adapted mindfulness-based programme that formed the basis of our trials, explain the systems theory and neuroscience that informed it, and discuss the methods deployed to analyse the programme's impacts. The final section of this paper reviews the results of these trials and draws conclusions on the contribution of our programme to the field of workplace-based mindfulness.

Mindfulness, Behavioural Insights and the Workplace

Mindfulness and behavioural insights are two widely-discussed sets of ideas and practices in the world today. While mindfulness has ancient Buddhist origins (Maex, 2011), it is now an object of significant natural-scientific and social-scientific analyses. Mindfulness is being promoted within a bewildering array of contexts, including education (Hwang et al., 2017), health care (Segal et al., 2004), prisons (Suarez et al., 2014; Haskin, 2017), the military (Jha et al., 2015), government (Pykett et al., 2016; Bristow, 2019) and numerous self-help movements (Nehring & Frawley, 2020). The behavioural insights movement is an area of interdisciplinary inquiry that combines economics, psychology, neuroscience and different branches of the behavioural sciences (Jones et al., 2013; Oliver, 2013; Whitehead et al., 2017). Behavioural insights thinking is having an increasingly significant impact on the ways in which policymakers, corporations and non-governmental organisations comprehend human behaviour, and how it can be more effectively governed (World Bank, 2015).

It is our contention that combining mindfulness training with behavioural-insights learning offers three significant benefits: a context within which to rethink the role of mindfulness in workplaces and beyond; a framework of inquiry to repurpose the application of behavioural insights in more ethical, systemic and efficacious directions; and an approach to delivering improved public policy capabilities to address wicked problems, such as climate change.

The application of mindfulness in the workplace has been one of the most significant aspects of the secular adaptation of mindfulness practices in recent years (Good et al., 2016; Reitz et al., 2016; Tomassini, 2016; Crane, 2017; Kersemaekers et al., 2018). It includes specific applications of mindfulness in politics and public policy (Pykett et al., 2016; Bristow, 2019). The 2016 Mindfulness Initiative report, *Building a Case for Mindfulness in the Workplace*, describes mindfulness as a "promising innovation" in a series of organisations and workplaces, which is now associated with a "rapidly evolving evidence" base (Mindfulness Initiative, 2016, p. 6). There is evidence suggesting that mindfulness might improve wellbeing and resilience (Lomas et al., 2017),

relationships and collaboration (Kersemaekers et al., 2018), job and task performance, leadership qualities (Reitz et al., 2016; Arendt et al., 2019), bias avoidance in decision-making (Hafenbrack et al., 2014) and organisational transformation (Lomas et al., 2017).

However, there is also a growing recognition of the limits of mindfulness, which suggests that authors might be over-claiming early successes, with effect sizes no higher than other traditional behavioural or cognitive-behavioural therapies (Kersemaekers et al., 2018, p. 2). Others have pointed to the use of inadequate methodological approaches in mindfulness research (e.g., Goldberg et al., 2017; Van Dam et al., 2018) and a propensity to overstate positive effects on pro-social and pro-environmental behaviours (Geiger et al., 2018; Kreplin et al., 2018). In relation to our focus in this paper, there also appears to be an evidence gap in the study of workplace mindfulness, which needs addressing through new forms of intervention and the testing of more specific, targeted and contextualised programmes (Rupprecht et al., 2018).

In a review of mindfulness in workplaces, Tomassini (2016) argues that organisational initiatives can be split into three main categories: *anti-stress remedies* (as in the case of adapted Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction [MBSR] and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy [MBCT] initiatives); *attention arousers* (improving the focus of attention in relation to working practices); and *liberating practices* (improving individual self-reflection, but not tied to performance in the work context). The programme that we outline below has much in common with Tomassini's vision of mindfulness as a liberating practice. However, it goes beyond Tomassini's vision by exploring the use of systems theory and recent neuroscientific theories of mind, cognition and emotion. These theories suggest that experience does not just 'arrive', but is something we *proactively create* as individuals and groups.

The behavioural insights movement embodies the practical application of the emerging insights of the behavioural and psychological sciences into human decision-making (Jones et al., 2013; Oliver, 2013; Whitehead et al., 2017). As a scientific project, behavioural insights is a form of inquiry into the human condition that moves beyond idealised, theoretical accounts of human action, in order to focus on the empirical investigation of observed human behaviour. In this context, the behavioural-insights movement has become associated with the rejection of highly rational accounts of human motivation and behaviour, and it shows a renewed interest in human irrationality – or rather, it argues that the distinction between rationality and irrationality is not well founded, as empirical research demonstrates that decision-making inevitably involves limitations of time, knowledge and cognitive capacity (Simon, 1955, 1990; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

In the public sector, behavioural insights have been utilised in order to better understand the practices of those working within the Civil Service, and to support the development of more behaviourally-effective forms of public policy (Oliver, 2013; Sanders et al., 2018). More recently, there has been pressure to

incorporate behavioural insights learning into political and policy-making processes, acknowledging that systems of government are biased and partial. Midgley and Lindhult (2021) talk about partiality involving purpose-driven and values-informed boundary-setting, so policy makers have inevitably-incomplete understandings. Bias and partiality exist despite the stated intention of governmental systems to be objective, honest and maintain integrity (GOV.UK, 2015; Hallsworth et al., 2018; Sutherland, 2018).

Mindfulness and behavioural insights are connected in two main ways. First, they can both be thought of as modes of inquiry into the nature of the human condition, which seek to engender social improvement. Second, they both display a particular concern with forms of unconscious action that are products of automatic systems of human behaviour and decision-making (Langer, 1989; Kahneman, 2011).

The adapted mindfulness-based programme recounted in this paper specifically combined mindfulness and behavioural insights for four reasons. First, mindfulness was utilised as a practical context in and through which participants could actively experience behavioural insights (often expressed through recognition of biases, assumptions, emotional states and the limits of attention). Second, combining mindfulness with behavioural insights provided the possibility of offering more contextualised and non-therapeutic forms of mindfulness training to support reflective practice within workplace settings. This is the kind of awareness-based systems-change practice suggested by Scharmer (2007). Third, it offered an opportunity to work with novel, contemporary theories of the brain and behaviour that were able to extend, and to some degree challenge, often-ancient understandings of the human condition that inform mindfulness training. Fourth, it was hypothesised that, in generating new ways of attending to behavioural prompts and contemporary understandings of human motivation, mindfulness could support more emancipatory and ethically-attuned applications of behavioural insights.

Behavioural Insights, Mindfulness and New Theories of the Mind

Both mindfulness and behavioural insights are grounded in particular definitions of, and assumptions about, mind, cognition and perception. These theories of mind inform the frameworks that the two disciplines use to help people work with stress, mental health issues (in the case of mindfulness) and improved decision-making and behavioural public policy (in the case of behavioural insights). Arguably, both disciplines have helped address the failings of human folk psychology by offering understandings, practices and approaches that allow insight into how we as humans operate (Ward et al., 1997, p. 104). Behavioural scientists regularly contest the common lay belief that people can intuit the complex mechanisms of their own minds (Chater, 2018, p. 13). Both mindfulness and behavioural economics attempt to address this problem, but are

also somewhat-ironically limited by the theories that originally informed them. There has been a failure to adapt and further develop the ideas in the light of systems theories and the most current neuro-psychological and social-scientific theories of mind, cognition and emotion.

Standard mindfulness-based stress relief programmes describe the mind as involving a process of stimulus and response, where mindfulness changes automatic reactions so that we can be 'in the moment' and see beyond automatic thinking. By avoiding automatic responses, it is claimed, we can see what is 'really there' (CMRP, 2013). Some authors discuss mindfulness as a witnessing or meta-cognitive capacity that enables us to increase our 'direct' sense of what is going on (Williams & Penman, 2011). Segal et al. (2004) describe mindfulness as a process of re-perceiving, where we can step back and appreciate a "deep, penetrative nonconceptual seeing into the nature of mind and world" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 146). However, the idea that mindfulness enables us to 'see' the mind and world in this way is being challenged (Thompson, 2020): systems theories from the last two decades of the twentieth century (e.g., Maturana, 1988; Rosen, 1991), as well as more recent cognitive theories, such as the theory of predictive processing (e.g., Clark, 2015; Seth, 2021), suggest that our perception involves *self-fulfilling our expectations* rather than enacting automatic responses. Predictive processing theory makes similar paradigmatic assumptions to earlier systems ideas concerning the nature of human organisms, but it also offers substantially new understandings of how the brain constructs consciousness in a predictive manner.[1]

As early as 1972, Maturana and Varela advanced the proposition that all organisms, including human beings, are *autopoietic*, or self-producing. An autopoietic system has the capacity to continually reconstruct itself 'in its own image', both physiologically and psychologically. Over our lifetimes, we may renew ourselves many times, yet we keep the same biological identity (Maturana, 1988). This is well known, but the situation becomes more interesting when we understand the implications of autopoiesis for the operation of the mind: we are only able to perceive what our physiology and histories of experience allow. Logically, then, cognition cannot directly reflect a real world, but is *actively constructed internally* based on a combination of biologically-determined capabilities and subjectively-perceived past experiences. We can only see what we are already primed to expect, and the accuracy of our expectations are refined over time through processes of learning (Maturana & Varela, 1987, 1992).

Maturana (1988) also challenges the idea that cognition and emotion are separate systems within an individual. Rather, he argues that they are inextricably intertwined, so we can only 'change our minds' (move from one way of explaining things using language to another) via our emotions, as it is these

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[1] For example, Seth's (2021) understanding of the fragmentary nature of perception, and the use of Bayesian statistics to model the brain's predictions and error correction processes.

emotions that direct attention to the need for a new way of thinking. Thus, emotion is *part of* cognition, and is also constructed internally. This way of thinking about emotion now underpins many writings in contemporary neuroscience, and strong empirical evidence for it has been accumulating for decades (Barrett, 2006).

This theory has specific implications for understanding why our behavioural and emotional responses should not be considered 'automatic'. If there was an automatic, one-to-one relationship between any given stimulus and response, we would be nothing more than deterministic systems, with no capacities for learning, choice or autonomy. Even the most systemically-constrained forms of autonomy would be impossible. A function of mind, according to the theory of autopoiesis, is to provide multiple options for a behavioural and emotional response, even though what we are responding to is not actually the external world itself, but our internally-constructed expectation of what that world implies for our next actions.

Building on the above understanding, Rosen (1985, 1991) argues that the defining feature of all living systems, including human beings, is *anticipation*: i.e., we continually generate an ever-changing embodied model of what we expect in our environment. This model guides behaviour, which induces feedback from whatever we are interacting with. Critically, however, feedback can only be perceived as such, and be translated into error correction, if the organism has the capability (based on biology and previous learning) to become aware of it (Maturana, 1988).

These systems-theoretical assumptions about the mind, and how it enables us to transcend simple stimulus-response determinism, are also foundational in contemporary ideas about the predictive processing of the human brain. In predictive processing theory, which was used to inform the intervention described in this research, the mind does not react to stimuli, and nor does it simply infer the world through referencing bottom-up stimuli to schemas or associations. Instead, we make sense of the world by continuously offering multiple predictions, based on scraps of sensory information, seeking to confirm one prior prediction over another. These predictions help to fill in gaps in our internal models of the world, such that we largely perceive information that confirms our predictions, thus creating a reality we expect to see (Seth, 2021). This process is mediated through prediction errors: when we notice something that doesn't fit with our expectations, we update our mental models. However, we often miss prediction errors, leading to confirmation biases.

While the idea of 'present moment awareness' (mindfulness) has proven helpful in advancing our understanding of the capacities of perception, both systems theory and the science of mind have clearly progressed beyond it, and a new paradigm has been established. As already mentioned, systems theory and neuroscience both suggest that minds are more constructive (Rosen, 1991; Maturana & Varela, 1992) and predictive (Clark, 2015; Seth & Friston, 2016) than they are reactive, seeing a world they expect rather than responding to a

fixed reality. Compared with earlier ideas, this is a significant paradigm shift in both systems theory and the brain sciences.[2]

Proponents of the theory of autopoiesis (e.g., Maturana, 1970) and the predictive mind (e.g., Clark, 2015) both say that their ideas offer a unifying account of perception, cognition and action. These frameworks challenge dual process theory, used to explain cognitive bias, suggesting that bias is not because of automatic responsiveness (as in Kahneman's, 2011, 'fast thinking'), but is due to predictive processing and a tendency to see the reality we expect (as in confirmation bias). It also challenges the idea, commonly used in mindfulness training, that our mind or brain is a stimulus-response system: rather, the brain is a "statistical organ that actively generates explanations for the stimulus it encounters – in terms of hypotheses that are tested against sensory information" (Seth & Friston, 2016, p. 1). In this context, mindful practice becomes less about regulating reactions, and instead potentially *offers capacities to notice our predictions* (Lutz et al., 2019; Pagnoni, 2019). In seeing our predictions, there is also the potential to see how we construct our biases and partialities (Hinton, 2017).

What differentiates our work from previous research in the field is our desire to explore a fuller range of emerging insights into the blurring of the distinction between rationality and its opposite. This leads us to explore and test updated framings of 'mind' and 'perception' within the context of mindfulness and behavioural insights training applied to decision-making and collaboration in the policy-making process.

Developing and Delivering the Mindfulness-Based Behavioural Insights and Decision-Making Programme

The starting point for the design of our Mindfulness-Based Behavioural Insights and Decision-Making (MBBI) programme was a standard Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme, and its more recent variant, the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) programme (Whitehead et al., 2017). In Table 1, the MBBI is compared to more traditional mindfulness-based therapeutic interventions, while Table 2 gives a breakdown of the content of an eight-week MBBI course. Notably, MBBI is much more orientated to shifts in group meaning-making, whilst also understanding the more predictive, partial and biased nature of the mind, rather than focusing on wellbeing and the regulation of reactive thinking. The content of the programme was developed iteratively over a number of years, spanning 2011 to 2020 (also see Whitehead et al., 2015, 2017). The results that we analyse in this paper are exclusively drawn

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[2] It has already transformed some therapeutic interventions, such as the treatment of chronic pain: pain can sometimes be a predictive error rather than the result of on-going physical damage (Fazeli & Büchel, 2018).

from MBBI programmes that were delivered between 2016 and 2020. By this point in time, the form and delivery of the programme was settled and consistent.

	Therapeutic MBSR/MBCT	MBBI
Theoretical Model	• Neurobiology of stress and anxiety. • Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (DBT/ACT).	• Neurobiology of decision making and group work. • Rationality and behavioural economics. • Social science (cognitive/developmental psychology), progressive organisational theories, systems theories.
Delivery Method	• Evidence-based therapeutic models of delivery using combinations of individual and social (but more focused on the individual journey).	• Highly responsive, tailored to context, likely to be delivered using social/group (rather than individual) practices and conceptualisations.

Table 1: A comparison of MBSR/MBCT and MBBI programmes.

This paper draws on insights that have been developed over the last 10 years on the MBBI programme. In particular, it draws on evidence from nine MBBI interventions delivered with 175 staff working in the Welsh Government between 2016 and 2020. A 'real-world' approach to action research was used (Robson & McCartan, 2016), seeking to investigate and make change in how reasoning and decision-making take place in government. The approach was participatory, but because we were working with senior leaders with limited capacity for additional work, it was adapted to their situation.

Initially, SenseMaker analysis was used to map the systems that people were working within. SenseMaker is a distributed-ethnographic method, which gathers and collates in-depth and self-signified journal data. It has been designed to capture real-time reflections and the 'rich context narratives' that inform how people make sense of their daily lives (van der Merwe et al., 2019). The SenseMaker used in this research was designed in collaboration with the target research group, consisting of an initial full-day design workshop, and follow-up prototyping on a small group of civil servants. A final version was presented to programme participants at the first session of any given MBBI programme in the form of an app that could be downloaded onto a phone or other device. Participants were then encouraged, via email and verbal reminders, to input short narratives into the app, which offered one of two prompts:

Prompt 1: Please share a recent workplace experience when you interacted with others.

Prompt 2: Please share a recent decision that affected you personally, which illustrates what it is like to work here.

Taster and orientation session

- Introduction to themes and format of the course.
- Short attention and interoception practices.

Session 1 – Day intensive

- Introduction to relevant theories of mind and emotion, neurophysiology, decision-making theory, behavioural economics, bias.
- Introduction to basic mindfulness attention practices, body scan (interoception), relaxation and use of support app.
- Development of group reflection and trust.

Session 2 – Attention

- Theories of attention, multi-tasking, decision-making – the full cost of interruptions.
- Group check-in and reflection.
- Attention practices – pausing, noticing, extended 10-minute mindfulness practice (attention plus breathing).

Session 3 – Emotions

- Neurophysiology, latest understanding of what emotions are and why they are relevant to decision- and policy-making.
- Group check-in and reflection.
- Attention and body scan practices: developing interoceptive capability alongside attention capabilities.

Session 4 – Predictive mind/bias

- Understanding cognitive bias, inevitable partiality and decision-making in more depth. The predictive brain and constructed emotion.
- Group check-in and reflection.
- Repeating and building on practices above, opening with attention/interoception practice and reflection, integrating feedback from both. Moving into life practice, focussing attention during the day (plus body scan and repeat of attention practices).

Session 5 – The social brain

- Neurophysiology of interactions, emotions, biases and shared decision making.
- Dialogue practices (noticing how we predict and make assumptions as another talks, integrating attention/interoception practices to support noticing).
- Repetition of attention/interoception (including body scan) practices, and integration into group check-in and reflection.

Session 6 – Communication

- Meetings and team decision making, further exploration of cognitive bias in policy making.
- Group check-in and reflection.
- Dialogue practices, dealing with difficulty, integrating relaxation, attention and interoception practices as developed in previous sessions.
- Repeat of attention/interoception practices and integration into group check-in and reflection.

Session 7 – Collaboration, organisational and cultural development

- Neurological insights and mindfulness in organisational development (including the idea of Deliberately Developmental Organisations).
- Dialogue practices, dealing with difficulty repeated, with more challenging forms of dialogue, integrating relaxation, attention and interoception practices.
- Repeat of attention and interoception practices, and integration into group check-in and reflection.

Session 8 – Leadership: course review and post-course planning

- Repeat of attention/interoception practices and integration into group check-in and reflection.
- Repetition of body scan (interoception) and attention practices, considering different forms and lengths of practice. Reflection on using practices moving forward.

Table 2: The content of an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Behavioural Insights (MBBI) course.

One hundred and twelve SenseMaker narratives were gathered. The example below demonstrates how data were visualised using SenseMaker triads (See Figure 1). Once participants had inputted a few words or sentences into the app, they were offered a series of triads, created during the design process discussed above, to use to self-signify their stories according to different themes. In the example triad below, participants were asked to place their narrative in relation to the three signifiers of "following procedure", "relating to others" and "understanding context". This led to clear patterns emerging. In this example triad, for instance, narratives are mostly clustered in the bottom left corner of the triangle, towards "relating to others" rather than following procedure or understanding context. Once a pattern has been identified, it is possible to consider it in more detail by looking at the stories behind each of the data points. SenseMaker thus offers both quantitative and qualitative detail to build a picture of civil servants' day-to-day experiences.

Figure 1: SenseMaker Triad example ("The most important thing in my story is…..").

In addition to the Sensemaker survey, opportunities arose during the delivery of the MBBI programme for 'deep hanging out' with participants. While informal in scope, the insights that were gained from these ethnographic opportunities were recorded within a fieldwork diary. Related diary entries offered insights into the working lives of participants and the impacts of the MBBI programme.

Initial, in-depth scoping interviews were also conducted with participants to understand their working lives, and to inform the design and delivery of the MBBI programme. In-depth interviews were additionally conducted on the completion of different MBBI programmes with selected participants. In total, over 60 semi-structured interviews were undertaken to both inform the design

and delivery of the programme and gather insights into the intervention's impacts on the participants and their work.[3]

Following the analysis of SenseMaker and field-notebook data, and the coding and analysis of interview transcripts, all the data were drawn together to identify emergent/inductive themes. These themes generally emerged from our reflections on the data, without the use of explicit theory, although (as Weimer, 1979, argues is inevitably the case) there was *implicit* theory (i.e., assumptions based on past learning and experience) informing our reflections. An exception to this generalisation was our concern with the predictive mind: a more deliberate, explicitly theory-informed attempt was made to draw out relevant insights in this context. In what follows, we outline three of the most significant themes that emerged out of the data analysis.

Combining Mindfulness and Behavioural Insights in the Workplace

Confronting Bias and Emotions

A key concern within the development and implementation of the MBBI programme was the nature of the interaction between mindfulness and behavioural insights: we wanted to see if the integration of these ideas within the training was beneficial. In general terms, participants felt that the combination of mindfulness and behavioural insights was useful in the context of the day-to-day working practices of civil servants. As one participant observed,

> "It helped me understand why my brain might, in a certain situation, take a short cut and take me down a path which, had I paused and reflected, I might have taken my brain down a different path, and that seems to me to be fundamental. Mindfulness gives me the practice to take that time, to unstress, ground myself. Give yourself the space, if you like, to unburden the cognitive load, free up your mind, start thinking about things in a different way. But it seems to me the behavioural insights, the teaching of those sorts of things are really fundamental to everybody understanding, how do I react the way that I do? How lazy actually is my mind? It takes short cuts that get me to places I don't really want to be. That is the stuff that is going to make a fundamental systemic change that the First Minister [Mark Drakeford] is pointing us to. Everyone needs to be taught the

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[3] A number of these interviews were with senior staff in the Welsh Government, including Directors and Deputy Directors responsible for leading policy delivery in the National Health Service, Social Services, Child Development, Community Regeneration, Climate Change, Finance, Local Government Management and Government Law.

behavioural insight stuff as well as the mindfulness"
(Ethnographic notes from discussion with senior civil servant, July
2019).

There appears to be something within the practice of mindfulness (and the associated "unburdening of the cognitive load") that enables the biases identified within behavioural insights to be recognised and acted upon. We have written elsewhere about the ways in which mindfulness appears to offer a practical context within which it becomes possible to notice and address normally-unconscious cognitive biases (Whitehead et al., 2015). But within the reflection above, there appears to be more to the connection between mindfulness and behavioural insights than a helpful combination of practice and theory.

The idea that mindfulness can support de-stressing activities also appears important to facilitating action on behavioural biases (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). However, participants indicated that the nature of the relationship between mindfulness, stress reduction and action on behavioural insights is complex. One participant observed that,

> "…the minute you ask people to start touching into their own
> minds, fear and anxiety comes up because it's not what people are
> comfortable doing. Whether that's based on their own experience
> or on a misconception, they might have some resistance to that, to
> just exploring their own mind because of the negative
> connotations" (Interview, UK civil servant, Sept. 2016).

Here we see explicit reference to the fact that addressing the issue of mind, behaviour and self-awareness can generate aspects of fear and anxiety as people are expected to recognise and reflect upon their own cognitive limitations and vulnerabilities. Obviously, such a process can be challenging in any context, but in a workplace, it can feel particularly threatening. However, our research indicates that mindfulness provided an effective context within which to explore potentially-troubling cognitive issues.

In addition to providing a practical and supportive context to explore behavioural biases in the workplace, it appears that the MBBI also facilitated broader shifts in how emotions are understood and acted upon. A key implication of behavioural insights training is recognition of the role of emotions in human decision-making (Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman & Klein, 2009). The MBBI programme developed an innovative take on the role of emotions, and we will discuss the implications of this later. At this point, however, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which the MBBI programme appears to have enabled a re-orientation of civil servants' relations with emotions. One MBBI programme participant made the following observations:

> "People are expected to become cogs in the machine that are run
> to set protocols, and life isn't like that. I never thought it was, but I
> think I have really appreciated, in this recent period, that it very
> definitely isn't, and that actually you can get better results for

yourself and for the organisation if you can adopt a better
approach. That's the benefit of this programme: to have that
ability to slow down and to switch off, and to create a calmer and
more reflective environment, which I have found more helpful,
which allows you to see things in perspective and to identify other
areas to work on, particularly for me that emotional component"
(Interview, senior civil servant, 2017).

The reference here to "cogs in a machine" is interesting in the sense that it
reflects how civil servants feel they are perceived – as almost automaton-like,
and devoid of emotion. The MBBI programme appeared to challenge this
conception by enabling participants to legitimately address their emotional
selves. Significantly, it would appear that framing emotions around the insights
of predictive mind theory and behavioural science (in particular, ideas about
constructed emotions from Barrett, 2006, which are consistent with the
autopoiesis, anticipatory systems and predictive mind ideas discussed earlier in
the paper) gave them greater legitimacy than may have been the case if they had
been framed only through the therapeutic mode of mindfulness.

According to participants, the lack of sensitivity to the emotional aspects of
working life was in part driven by a particular idea (or ideal) of who the civil
servant is supposed to be:

"My personal take would be that I have felt unequipped to deal
with those sorts of things because so much of my professional
training has been logic, evidence, rationality, objectivity, rules,
procedures, and it's driven out more of that emotional component"
(Interview, senior civil servant, 2017).

One participant suggested that the MBBI programme had enabled them to
develop new ways of relating to their emotions, claiming that, prior to the MBBI,
they adopted a form of emotional suppression, which appears to be the norm in
the Civil Service:

"[…] I feel a lot better at it [addressing emotions] now that I have
been on it [the MBBI programme]. I know what's going on in a
more sophisticated way. I have a narrative that enables me to
understand what's going [on], and not suppress my emotions but
notice them and decide whether I want to behave in line with them
or choose some other form of behaviour. I think I went with the
emotional suppression before, but now it's about noticing it,
understanding what it is, and deciding whether you want to go
with it or do something differently" (Interview, senior civil servant,
2017).

This shift towards acknowledging the role of emotions in decision-making,
rather than suppressing them, is a significant positive result emerging from the
MBBI programme. Suppressing emotions has been shown to *inhibit* clear
thinking rather than improve it, which overturns the dominant belief about

emotion and thought that prevailed for many years (Barrett, 2006; Gross, 2014). In this context, the MBBI programme appears to have enabled civil servants to bring theoretically-informed and non-judgmental attention to the roles of emotions in their working lives.

The Wider Working Environment and Relations with Others

In addition to the more 'internal' psychological and emotional benefits of the MBBI, it is also clear that the programme facilitated new ways of conceiving of the organisational context within which civil servants operate. Related to the work of Weick (1995), it appears that the MBBI programme enabled participants to not only understand the ways in which their internal cognitive-emotional systems produced poor working practices, but also to pay closer attention to the systemic design of their organisations and how this worked against certain behaviours. One participant observed:

> "There are analogies here to healthy food: we tell people they need to eat healthy food, maybe they even start having some healthy meals, but then they are surrounded by unhealthy food. This is particularly bad in hospitals where, until recently, there were only unhealthy vending machines. We have an organisation that wants people to pay better attention, but then puts them in a working environment where it's hard to actually pay attention. We need to create the infrastructure that nudges, that creates the behaviour" (Ethnographic notes, discussion with senior civil servant, 2017).

This reflection is interesting because it demonstrates a link between the qualities of mindfulness and behavioural insights that were promoted within the MBBI. In likening an inattentive organisation to an obesogenic environment, it reveals that the MBBI may be able to use mindfulness to draw greater attention to the often-overlooked working practices of an organisation. In making this link between a practice (inattention) and an environment (working cultures), this quotation emphasises a central aspect of behavioural insights thinking: that human biases and partialities are not only products of the internal limits of human cognitive capacities, but also arise from the systemic forces around us.[4] It appears, at least in this context, that the MBBI was able to support a practice of organisational awareness (following Weick, 1995), and also suggest a behavioural diagnostic of the problem. This insight addresses some of the critiques of mindfulness, which suggest that it makes the individual the focus of change, without reference to the social, material and cultural systems of which they are a part (Purser, 2018). Using mindfulness together with behavioural insights

[4] Also see Midgley & Pinzón (2011) on understanding the systemic patterns of conflict and marginalization within and beyond organizations that entrench the partialities, value judgements and boundary setting of decision makers and their stakeholders.

appears to help people appreciate themselves as embedded in, and not separate from, their wider context.

We do not have space within this paper for an in-depth exploration of all the organisational practices and cultures in the Welsh Civil Service that work against the effective use of attention, and support biased/partial thinking and action. One participant's reflection does, however, provide a glimpse of what these cultures may look like:

> "We go on courses on how to have a difficult conversation, and you get a checklist, but that is not the same thing as having a culture in which difficult, clear conversations are expected by the individual, or the other half of that clear conversation, so I think we shy away from it, making the problems worse because you create an organisation where no one expects to have clear conversations. I also think the same is true of developmental and more positive conversations. I don't think we are very good at that either" (Interview, senior civil servant, 2017).

In this observation, the participant reflects upon the perennial problem of having difficult conversations with work colleagues. These forms of conversation are often seen as problematic, as they are associated with the surfacing of emotions, which many civil servants try to suppress in the workplace, and because they involve dealing with difficulty. The MBBI programme appears to have played a role in enabling participants to become more aware of the problems associated with not having clear conversations, and the ongoing biases, problematic assumptions and misapprehensions that this can perpetuate. It gave them new understandings of 'negative' emotions, together with practices that facilitated the more regular instigation of clear interpersonal interactions.

The MBBI and the Predictive Mind

A distinctive feature of the MBBI was the introduction of new approaches to understanding emotions and the mind. At the heart of this aspect of the programme was a desire to move away from framings of human behaviour that are based on stimulus and response systems. The aim was to explore the capacity of mindfulness to enhance the precision of our predictions, improve our capacity to update our existing inferences, and mitigate bias and partiality. While it is a challenge to disentangle the precise impacts of this aspect of the MBBI from its broader impacts (at least without overtly prompting those we interviewed), the results indicate that the programme was successful in enabling participants to begin to understand their behaviours using a more predictive frame. As part of one SenseMaker narrative response, an MBBI participant reflected:

> "I often multitask when trying to listen (e.g., writing notes, thinking about something else, even using my phone) and also have a habit of anticipating what the person is going to say or trying to jump to the conclusion they might be reaching. My

> practice involves trying to focus entirely on the person talking, focus on the words (not what they are going to say next or how I might intervene), making eye contact where appropriate, etc. I find it difficult in the moment, but it is quite rewarding. I am transforming the purpose of the interaction, so I am receiving more, not distracting myself so much, and not seeking to impose my own interpretation as much" (SenseMaker narrative, 2017).

Within this account, we can see evidence of the MBBI starting to transform the "purpose of interaction[s]" for this participant, from one of unreflective anticipation, to one of closer attention and reflection, so that problematic anticipations can at least be recognised. While such a transformation may have occurred using the long-established frameworks of cognition and emotion found within many mindfulness and behavioural insights texts, this participant seems to describe more open engagements with prediction. In this context, it appears that, rather than trying to address a specific bias or compulsive response, there is a genuine interest in observing and regulating predictive responses in general.

Another participant described the predictive mind element of MBBI as a particularly thought-provoking aspect of the programme, which made them more open and less controlling in their leadership style:

> "That session you did about the brain: you know, the brain being a box and the external world not being real. I thought that was quite thought provoking. Having spent 35 years running about the place, it's been really important to have that space and enough of an understanding as to why things might work…[I have become] a bit less of a perfectionist, a bit less of a control freak, a bit less obsessive, a bit less pass/fail" (Interview, senior civil servant, 2017).

One participant observed how the predictive component of the programme had helped them challenge themselves and their assumptions of others, enabling different, more useful pre-conceptions to colour an interaction:

> "I found the session on making assumptions and on how the brain fills in detail that is not really there very useful, because it has helped guard against making easy but untested assumptions. In terms of interactions with others, it has made me think about how my assumptions about a person's motivations and objectives may sometimes flow from what I think I know about their situation" (Interview, Welsh Government lawyer, 2020).

Note that, in the sentence before the quotation, we said "different, more useful" rather than "fewer" pre-conceptions. It is tempting to believe that our understanding is becoming more objective, or more reflective of the real world, but this would be a return to the old idea of moving towards seeing what is 'really there', which we know from the systems and neuroscientific research discussed earlier needs to be replaced by a more systemic understanding of the

anticipatory or predictive mind. In our view, the programme helps the person to be more open to error correcting their predictions, and of course error correction is only possible if there are other predictions that can be made based on further, initially-latent pre-conceptions that make errors in the initial prediction visible.

Another more systems-philosophical way to explain this is that, when we take any perspective, there are unseen assumptions being made. In a reflective moment, we are able to reveal these assumptions, but in doing so we make further invisible assumptions (Fuenmayor, 1990). Theoretically, we could continue critiquing our assumptions (pre-conceptions) infinitely, always knowing there are more to uncover, but in practice there are limits to the time we have available for this kind of repeated critique (Ulrich, 1994). So, it's not a matter of eliminating all pre-conceptions, but only a matter of eliminating (or suspending action upon) those pre-conceptions that a greater openness to questioning and error correction reveal to be problematic or doubtful. Questioning and error correction involves the invocation of a new framing based on different pre-conceptions, which at some future time might in turn be problematised (Midgley, 2000).

Interestingly, it appears that understanding the ways in which predictive responses operate has been used by participants to better understand the unexpected reactions of others to themselves:

> "The epiphany of the course for me was that a person's approach to a particular matter is heavily influenced by their experiences, culture, etc. When that is in play in the development of policy, for example, and where (due to lack of resources or time) that policy is not properly peer reviewed, it can be the case that the policy may reflect (even subconsciously) the values, etc., of the person who has developed it. Confirmation bias will mean that (unless alive to it) a person will always look for things that support rather than detract from a person's position. It has often puzzled me that (as I have a Civil Service and professional obligation to do), [when] I ask questions that test the policy, I can sometimes get a visceral reaction from the other person. The epiphany for me on the course was that this might not be because I'm challenging the policy or legislation, but because their view is coloured by their background, so they feel it personally" (Ethnographic notes, internal discussions with senior civil servant, 2019).

The full implications of new theories of mind and emotion for both mindfulness and behavioural insights thinking are still to be determined. However, what our MBBI trials appear to reveal is that these theories can be explicitly explored within the existing frameworks of mindfulness and behavioural insights training, as long as there is a willingness to step aside from the assumption that mindfulness enables people to see things 'as they really are', and go beyond the belief that behavioural insights can be reduced to a universal set of biased responses to reality. In the context of the reflections of the

participants on our MBBI programmes, it appears that these theories provided useful frames through which they could interpret their relationships with themselves, others and organisations.

MBBI and the Development of Ethical and Empowering Ways of Working

The third main theme pertaining to the impacts of the MBBI programme related to the ethical and empowering practices of policymakers. In this context, we were particularly interested in the critiques that have been levelled against behavioural public policy (those policies which derive directly from behavioural insights thinking) (Jones et al., 2013; Whitehead et al., 2017). These critiques have argued that, once acquired by policy makers, behavioural insights thinking can lead to a potentially unethical exploitation of unconscious bias, which can bypass the informed consent of citizens and their active engagement in the policy process. Although we have not been able to trace the impacts of the MBBI programme on specific policy areas, we have gathered evidence which begins to suggest that it can lead to approaches to policymaking and delivery that seek to be more empowering towards citizens. In this way, behaviourally-informed public policy can become less ethically problematic. One MBBI participant observed,

> "I have been trying much more to be more empathetic and [to] understand the difficulties others have and allow that they are as ambitious and keen to succeed as I am, so that it is not that they are lazy and idle and unbothered, it's that they are facing genuine difficulties. So, I find it has shifted my perspective quite considerably" (Interview, senior civil servant, 2017).

It appears that certain qualities of the MBBI programme make participants less likely to unilaterally diagnose the behavioural failings of their colleagues and the public without considering the latters' perspectives. This, in turn, allows them to devise policy responses with more nuanced understandings of others. It is perhaps the emphasis that the programme places on the experience of behavioural predictions, biases and partialities that enables greater insight into the need for perspective-taking—a skill that Churchman (1979), Checkland & Poulter (2006) and Cabrera et al. (2015) identify as core to systems thinking. Other participants appeared to support this insight:

> "The team I am in were already struggling (pre-Covid). If that person is at a senior level, then that has an effect all the way through the organisation. Mindfulness and behavioural economics [insights] help me step back and be reflective, look at what is going on, take a pause. When I meet someone, I tend not to make assumptions. I know that they are different, and this difference is something to be curious about" (Interview, senior civil servant, 2020).

While we would not agree that all assumptions can be suspended, awareness of the need for curiosity about other perspectives is important. The MBBI programme has been adapted to support the training of civil servants during the Covid-19 crisis. In this context, it appears that, despite the pressures that Covid has imposed, the MBBI has still enhanced curiosity. This kind of inter-subjective curiosity is very different from the forms of off-the-shelf behavioural public policies (such as nudges) that are often associated with behavioural insights thinking. While it seems likely that mindfulness may support a more curiosity-orientated approach to behavioural public policy, it is also possible that the emphasis the MBBI places on systemic theories of the predictive mind and constructed emotions have encouraged a more open engagement with the nature of human experience.

It is clear from the following reflection that the MBBI has certainly supported new forms of strategic thinking about the policy-making process as a whole inside the Welsh government:

> "There's a whole literature on change and how you create the conditions for change, and we are trying to change things all the time. In terms of out there, it's reinforced some of the stuff [that] I suppose to some extent we already know, or we think we know about how we promote engagement with change, and how we overcome people's reluctance and fear of change, so I think in terms of our policy-making process, irrespective of the specific policy that we are talking about, it's made me think a lot more about how we engage with others in it" (Interview, senior civil servant, 2017).

This strategic rethinking of the policymaking and delivery process appears to support a more trusting and empowering vision of government. As one MBBI participant stated in relation to the benefits of the programme:

> "I would be trying to link the benefits, perhaps some of the benefits of organisational letting go and being more trusting and needing less bureaucracy and fewer rules, but more of a high-trust, enabling environment for people to thrive in, because it works for me, has worked for me, so why would I assume that other people need to be controlled? Why can't I assume that other people have the same view of their work as I do of mine, which is the desire to do a good job, to be trusted, to be given space to be offered support, be allowed to fail a little bit, as long as I learn from it, to be allowed to develop key relationships?" (Interview, senior civil servant, 2017).

The emphasis being placed here on being "allowed to fail" is potentially significant. We cannot yet be sure why the MBBI programme appears to inculcate a desire for a more open and empowering form of government. It does, however, appear that, through the practical experience of highly-personalised behavioural insights, it can instigate forms of genuine interest in the behavioural

experiences of others. Participants also appear to recognise that this behavioural curiosity is best fulfilled by a more open, empowering, and ultimately empathetic style of government. This is in sharp contrast to the more manipulative forms of government that have historically been associated with behaviour change.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have outlined the MBBI programme that we have been developing over a period of ten years. On the basis of the delivery of this programme to approximately 175 civil servants working in the Welsh Government, we have reported on some promising early results. The programme successfully combines mindfulness practices with behavioural insights theory, and in so doing, rethinks the role of mindfulness at work. It appears that this combination provides a meaningful and supportive workplace training context within which to learn about and experience key insights into human thought and behaviour.

Building on previous work on mindfulness and organisations, our research also considered the impacts that the MBBI programme had on organisational awareness and working practices. Crucially, it appears that the MBBI helped participants to identify the organisational structures, processes and cultures that keep biases, problematic partialities and poor decision-making in place. Thus, the civil servants involved in our study avoided seeing behavioural bias and partiality as challenges that only exist at the individual level, and the programme supported a more systemic approach to the application of behavioural insights —i.e., it fostered awareness-based practices to help people consider the need for wider system change. Indeed, our analysis of the MBBI indicates that our approach to mindfulness and behavioural insights may facilitate a more ethical form of behavioural public policy than earlier nudge approaches. This ethical orientation appears to have derived from the empathy with others and behavioural curiosity (as opposed to problem fixing) that the MBBI stimulated in participants.

A novel aspect of the MBBI was the introduction of theories of the predictive brain and emotion, which sought to challenge the established models of mind and emotionality evident in both the mindfulness and behavioural insights orthodoxies. Our results suggest that predictive theories of the brain and emotion may be able to augment, rather than undermine, mindfulness practices and behavioural insights theories. In particular, it appears that greater awareness of predictive cognition and the contextual interpretation of emotional responses provided participants with more nuanced understandings of the complexities of partialities and biases in themselves and others. Also, the MBBI programme seems to have provided a suitable container within which civil servants could explore the roles of emotions in the workplace, rather than ignoring and/or suppressing these emotions. In short, the MBBI offered an approach to capability building amongst civil servants that emphasised ongoing reflective practice on predictions and emotions.

The MBBI programme is a relatively new innovation in workplace-based mindfulness training, and this approach is now being built into programmes to support the development of systems thinking capabilities in leadership practice (e.g., Birmingham Leadership Institute, 2022). Our early work, reported in this paper, suggests that the programme offers fresh ways of integrating mindfulness into workplace contexts, and provides a creative framework for challenging established assumptions of mind and behaviour that currently characterise mindfulness and behavioural insights thinking. It also promotes a more systemic approach to policymaking and organisational change.

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Peer Review Article

Radical Participatory Design:

Awareness of Participation

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Abstract

Design has been a massive failure. It has functioned in the service of industry and
capitalism, leaving us a world with several crises which we are failing to resolve. The
onto-epistemic framework out of which this type of design injustice emerges is
coloniality, highlighting a trans-locally experienced truth: our ontologies are our
epistemologies. And our onto-epistemologies are our namologies–studies,
perspectives, types, or ways of designing. If we instead embody an onto-epistemic
framework of relationality, our design process becomes radically participatory.
Radical Participatory Design (RPD) is meta-methodology that is participatory to the
root or core. Using the models "designer as community member," "community
member as designer," and "community member as facilitator," RPD prioritizes
relational, cultural, and spiritual knowledge, as well as lived experiential knowledge,
over mainstream, institutional knowledge. Based on the experiential knowledge of
employing radical participatory design over many years, we have induced a
characteristic definition of RPD. Through an awareness of participation, we discuss
the various benefits of RPD including genuine inclusion, true human-centeredness,
moving beyond human-centeredness, embedded empathy, trauma-responsive design,

and systemic action. We discuss the ethics of Radical Participatory design from both an equality and equity perspective. We offer ways of evaluating the success of the radically participatory design process. Lastly, we discuss the barriers and ways we have overcome them in our projects.

Keywords

participatory design, participatory research, decolonizing design, research justice, design justice, critical design, (relational) action research, relational ontology, relational epistemology, community-based action research, action research

Introduction

As a human animal, a part of nature, I inhabit multiple spaces of privilege and lack of privilege. I am a cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, male, U.S. American human. Simultaneously, I am a Black, disabled Nigerian in the U.S. from an immigrant family. I am a member of the indigenous Ibibio people group, and my name, *Anietie,* is a shortened version of the phrase "Who is like God?" When I write, I tend to write from a perspective of African indigeneity, different from indigenous perspectives in the Americas or Australia. There are many other parts of my background that place me in positions of privilege or disadvantage—country of residence, education, income, etc. Many of those have changed throughout my life.

One influential privilege I hold is the position of designer. I have practiced design in communities around the world. Despite my highest hopes, design has not risen to the challenge of resolving our current, growing crises. We face an economic crisis locking some people, groups, and nations in cycles of poverty with fewer people controlling greater shares of the wealth; a climate and environmental crisis of ever worsening ecocidal devastation; a conflict crisis where entrenched casteism, xenophobia, jingoism, and ethnocentrism fuel ongoing disputes; and a spiritual crisis where none of our best faith traditions have been able to address any of the previous three crises. This crisis-bound world is a world of our monohumanistic design, creating a one-world world, in the service of industry and capitalism (Escobar, 2018; Law, 2015; Wynter, 2003; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015).

Awareness-based system change agents recognize that we cannot solve our crises only with external methods, or methods focused on creating change outside of ourselves. We must pay attention and nurture our inner life and interiority that provide the source conditions fueling our actions (Scharmer, 2009). However, it is not enough to do this on an individual level. It is difficult for social change to happen if I only nurture my interiority and no one else does, or if we each do it individually. We must also pay attention and nurture our communal interiority, directing our collective decision-making and actions. Participatory design (PD) attempts to focus on communal interiority. Instead of focusing on the

external methods, methodologies, or what we do, it focuses on how we do what we do, the interior dynamics, ecology, and positionality of a living community.

If design has failed at creating a pluralistic, flourishing world, PD has experienced a type of stillbirth, never truly beginning to bring about the emancipatory democracy promised as one of its goals (Geppert & Forlano, 2022), struggling to rid itself from its inherent coloniality (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). This makes sense as our namologies—studies, types, or ways of designing—are simply a reflection of our ways of knowing which are a reflection of our ways of being (Ibibio, Generations). Our ontologies are our epistemologies and our onto-epistemologies are our namologies. Thus, there is a need to decolonize decolonization, or more specifically, decolonize PD. By embodying an onto-epistemic framework of relationality, the design process can become radically participatory. To embody relationality, designers need an awareness of participation, and, from awareness, can take action.

The first purpose of this paper is to go beyond critique, to decolonize and refute PD. Secondly, I aim to holistically describe the PD I have experienced, as many PD researchers and writers do not often explain fully how, when, and what PD was implemented on a project. Third, through a holistic description, I want to place the PD I have experienced in comparison and conversation with what others mean or practice when they use the term PD. Lastly, I hope to encourage participatory designers to go further, fully radicalizing participation while encouraging non-participatory designers to begin the PD journey with a radical approach or goal. Communities, the people for whom professional designers design or the people who will use what is being designed, can and have always practiced radical versions of PD without professional designers. The problem occurs with the colonizing presence of professional designers. This paper presents not just insights but expertise from community practice that is not synthesized through mainstream, academic, institutional knowledge-based understandings of research rigor, but through indigenous, practical synthesis which is incarnationally and relationally codified by traditionalizing certain community practices and discarding other community practice, utilizing learning circles, storytelling, oral histories, art, ceremony, and more (Ellison, 2014; Smith, 2021; Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014).

In the rest of the paper, I share an awareness of the typology of participation and a description of Radical Participatory Design (RPD), the participatory meta-methodology this paper describes. Different from a methodology which is a collection of methods or guiding philosophies or principles that help one to choose a method at a particular point in a process, a meta-methodology is a way of doing a methodology, an approach or orientation that can be used with any methodology. Because RPD teams tend to gravitate towards certain methodologies over others, it can be considered an approach, orientation, or philosophy that guides one in choosing a particular methodology.

After introducing RPD, I discuss the ethics of RPD focusing on remuneration through the lens of equality and equity, dissemination of knowledge, and

community accountability. I then discuss the evaluation of RPD to determine if the process was truly and critically radically participatory. This is helpful due to the invisibility of coloniality that may lead us to believe we, design team members, are practicing RPD when we are practicing colonial participatory design (CPD), conventional participatory design in which designers lead the process and participation is not fully through the design process. Next, I discuss the benefits of RPD, how it opens up pathways to other types of design such as society-centered, futures, systems, or planet-centered design. I share how it relates to empathy, comparing it to other design awareness-based systems change practices. I then discuss the difficulties of practicing RPD and provide tips to minimize the difficulties based on experiential knowledge. Lastly, I provide insights on addressing and overcoming organizational barriers to the practice of RPD.

The Awareness and Typology of Participation

To compare various PD practices, I use a typology of participation based on three spectra or questions (Figure 1). Who initiates? Who participates? Who leads? There is a temporal distinction between initiation, on one hand, and participation and leadership, on the other hand. Even though initiation only occurs at the beginning of a project while participation and leadership occur throughout, the effects of initiation can be experienced throughout the project, and initiation can even affect participation and leadership.

On the spectra, I locate: community design when only the community is involved; community-driven design when the community may invite professional designers for at least a little help, up to equal participation; CPD where designers fully lead and participate, never reaching equitable leadership with the community; and RPD in which the community fully or equally participates and fully or equitably leads. Visualizations for each type of design can be viewed elsewhere (Udoewa, 2022b in press). Radical comes from the Latin word "radix" meaning root. Radical Participatory Design is a design that is participatory to the root, all the way down, from top to bottom, beginning to end.

Thus I introduce Radical Participatory Design as having three defining characteristics.

1. Community members are full, equal members of the research and design team from the beginning of the project to the end. There are no design team meetings, communications, and planning apart from community members. They are always there at every step and between steps because they are full and equal design team members.

Communities are not homogenous. In RPD, we, the design team members, form qualitatively representative samples of the community in a way that honors cultural understandings of leadership and participation. We also drop designer-

dominated notions of time, and move at the pace of community relationships, availability, and desire.
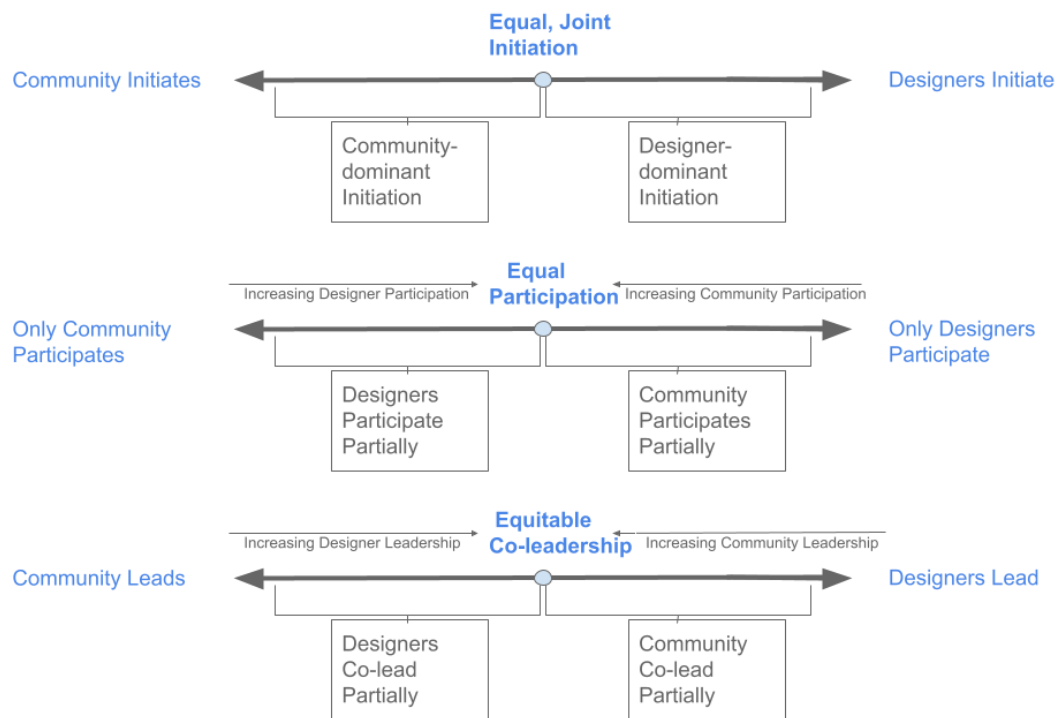
Figure 1: Three axes of participation: initiation, participation, and leadership.

2. Community members outnumber non-community, professional designers on the design team.

When a person is both a community member and designer, and she leads the process, choosing methodologies, she is practicing CPD. In RPD, when a person is both a designer and community member, she primarily embodies the community member role, offering design skills alongside all other community skills, while the community facilitates and leads the process. Because an organization may refuse to implement community ideas or prototypes during a PD project, there is a third characteristic.

3. Community members retain and maintain accountability, leadership, and ownership of design outcomes and narratives about the design artifacts and work.

Characteristic 2 is a guideline, not a requirement. However, RPD projects tend to be more successful when they embody that characteristic. The goal of RPD is transformational justice, though RPD retains the benefits of multidirectional learning, inclusion of community perspectives, better design outcomes, and increased ownership over the outcomes.

In RPD, professional designers do not empower since empowering reinforces the hierarchy participatory designers seek to subvert with PD. Instead, in RPD, professional designers divest of power, and the community assumes it. The RPD process naturally becomes an educational one in which learning is embedded in every phase and activity, not just in research phases, due to the experiential, cultural, and spiritual knowledge the community embodies and their presence at every step in the process. Unlike research justice which views experiential, mainstream institutional, and cultural/spiritual knowledge as equal, RPD views experiential, cultural, spiritual, and embodied knowledge as greater or more important than mainstream institutional knowledge for system change.

Instead of the "designer as facilitator" model, we, RPD team members, move to a model of "community member as facilitator," "designer as community member," "community member as designer." "Community member as designer" means they are full-members of the team, researching and designing. "Community member as facilitator" recognizes that no matter how much designers try to neutralize our facilitation work, facilitation is power, and the power should be wielded and held by the community on whose behalf we are designing. So community members facilitate the process. Lastly, "designer as community member" signifies that the designer sits equal to and alongside all the other community members on the team, offering her skills (design and research) as equal to and alongside all other skills, assets, talents, and gifts of all other community members.

Through these models, RPD creates suspended space with an alternate social field. A social field is the structure of the social relationships between individuals, groups, organizations, and systems (Scharmer, 2009). Suspended space is a space where the social rules, norms, and relationships, governed by the larger society, are suspended in the subset space or small-group space within the society (Rollins, 2006). Because those social norms, rules, and relationships are different, an alternate social (sub)field emerges. Radical Participatory Design creates an alternate social field which aims to move across 3 stages. In the first stage, intrapenetration, the colonial logics of the macro-social field of the societal system naturally enter into the micro-social field of the design process. In the second stage, interpenetration, the micro-social field of the design process also begins to affect the macro-social field of the system and some of the new relationships held or suspended in the design process begin to carry over into societal interactions outside the design process. In the last stage, extrapenetration, only the design process's social field is affecting the larger system's social field. The more RPD is practiced the longer the design team is able to sustain the suspended space naturally outside the design process or in other projects.

There is still more work to do to decolonize awareness-based systems change methods which are not yet or not necessarily radically participatory. The MAPA innovation lab (Sbardelini et al., 2022), social field action research (Pomeroy et al., 2021; Wilson, 2021), systemic constellations (Ritter & Zamierowski, 2021), and social field pattern development, including social presencing theater work

(Gonçalves & Hayashi, 2021), still maintain a difference between participants and researchers, researchers who planned or analyzed alone or chose methodologies for participants. Even Global Social Witnessing (GSW), a contemplative social cognition practice that facilitates mindful witnessing of critical events, is not necessarily participatory and can even be done alone without a community (Matoba, 2021).

Ethics of Radical Participatory Design

In order to explicate the ethics, evaluation, and benefits of RPD, I will highlight two projects specifically, while mentioning others. The first was a digital literacy project done under the auspices of a multinational technology company. It was a special project for a vice-president (VP) who wanted a global certification with multiple tracks—a system admin/devOps track, a mobile and web application development track, and a digital literacy track. I will focus on the digital literacy track. Three times, the project failed to reach not just literacy targets but even registration targets. The VP left the organization, and the project lead moved to another project. I was allowed to run the project in any way I chose with the budget. I recruited a team of 12 people mostly from north, central India and participated in an RPD experience to redesign the educational service in a way that would improve digital literacy levels in north-central India to start before expanding to other regions (Udoewa et al., 2016; Udoewa et al., 2017). The digital literacy project is an example of a successful RPD project, in which the team experienced sustained and sustainable shifts in power.

I also participated in the redesign of an international summer service-learning program for high school students, in which Washington, DC high school students traveled abroad during the summer doing service-learning projects and then returned home to complete social entrepreneurship projects in DC (Udoewa, 2018, 2022a). This project was completed under the auspices of a nonprofit in collaboration with the local DC public schools district (DCPS). The project to redesign the international summer service-learning program and curriculum is an example of a failed RPD project due to the program's refusal to give up power. I will use both projects to talk about the ethics and evaluation of RPD.

The ethics of general design work apply to RPD, including: confidentiality, anonymity, data disclosures (what, why, and how long data is collected, and when it will be destroyed); transparency and communication of the work and goals; IRB reviews; and research participant referrals when issues come up beyond the skillset and purpose of the designers including trauma issues, etc. Informing the community of the progress, status, and outcomes is also important, though the focus in RPD is informing the wider community since community members are full members of the design team.

Similar to indigenous methodologies, the community leads and decides not just what research is done but also if, what, and how research is shared (Smith, 2021). Usually, RPD communities do not have a preference for the written word. However, when projects are shared in writing, RPD practitioners recognize

collaborative and community authorship in two ways. First, all community members who want to co-author a paper can do so (Udoewa et al., 2016; Udoewa, et al., 2017). Secondly, in non-project papers written alone like this one, I try to cite cultural and community knowledge as a reference equal to other 3rd-person-knowing, academic author references, not just as a footnote.

Radical Participatory Design requires the addition of remuneration as an ethical concern. It is unjust for a designer to be paid for design work while community members, who are equal designers doing the same work, are unpaid (equality). The injustice is more apparent when we consider that the designer does the work as part of the job while community members must do the work in addition to their normal livelihoods and routines. In cases where community members are jobless or the RPD work takes community members away from their jobs, the offense is greater. Because the design work is not the job of the community member, it costs the community member more to participate in RPD and therefore they should be paid even more (equity).

In the international summer service-learning project, the student community members of the design and research team were not paid for their time. It is possible to say we, the design team, did have equality because the two professional designers, including myself, were also not paid. However, from the standpoint of RPD, ethically, it was still poor practice to fail to compensate the students for their time. Moreover, we did not achieve equity, because failure to compensate design team members had a bigger impact on the students than the impact on the professional designers. The project failed ethically from the standpoint of RPD.

In contrast is the example of a current systems practice RPD project, focused on generational, racialized trauma in the rural U.S. South, the sponsoring nonprofit pays team members (professional designer or community designer) equally according to hours of work. In cases where it is difficult to get approval to pay community members equitably, there are numerous, creative ways to compensate community members. In the digital literacy project in India, I paid for breakfast and lunch each day, a few dinners when it was late in the day, all equipment needed, all travel expenses to work locations, and full room and board for overnight travel and experiential homestay research. I gave references, referrals, recommendations, and certificates of completion to team members to use in job hunting, made the project an internship for resumes, and encouraged team members to publish our work so that they became published authors of two papers.

Community review boards (CRBs) are not a replacement for participation or leadership by the community. They can provide an extra check to prevent unethical, unsafe, inequitable, exclusive research or design from being implemented. Still it is possible for a CRB to become a gatekeeper, setting up a hierarchy filled with the same logics of coloniality. For CRBs to work well, they must be radically participatory and radically representative, like an RPD team. However, they are not a requirement, as an RPD project brings the ethical

community checks into the actual research and design process due to the presence of community members. Most RPD projects do not use them.

Evaluation of Radical Participatory Design Processes

The examples of remuneration hint at the way to evaluate the success of the RPD process, which is distinct from the success of the design outcome (Drain et al., 2021). An RPD process is successful when a majority of the community designers on the design team experience a sustained and sustainable shift in power. The purpose and goal of RPD is transformation and power exchange. If the power exchange does not occur or is not sustained beyond the work, the RPD process was not successful.

In the international summer service-learning program, I formed an RPD team with students in the program (2018). Though the project had all three RPD characteristics, the organization who initiated the project switched the project to a CPD project when they rejected the student designers' decisions and would not implement them. The students left the experience discouraged, with the same amount of power they had at the beginning of the project. Nothing changed for them. The RPD process was not successful, not radically participatory.

My digital literacy project was the opposite (Udoewa et al., 2016; Udoewa et al., 2017). My organization fully relinquished control and implemented what the community designers created. The community owned the narratives of the work and pointed proudly to the outcomes in the news claiming: "We did this. Look what we did!" As a result of the work, they gained experience that helped five of seven community members gain a job. A sixth community member, who was employed, received a promotion. The seventh community member improved his floral business. All became first time authors with two publications. Additionally, our team included three non-designers from within our organization who took a break from their marketing and sales work to do community projects on the ground. All three employees quit their jobs within a year of the experience to focus on similar social impact work because they could not go back, divesting of their power in a multinational company. I did the same. One hundred percent of team members' positions of power at the beginning of the project were transformed and remain that way to this day.

Some of these examples of transformational power exchanges are still within the system of values of those with power, leaving the system unchanged. For example, publishing in a peer-reviewed journal is an achievement that conveys authority and increased power in our current social hierarchy. However, research justice tells us that experiential and cultural knowledge is just as important as published, institutional knowledge. The community may or may not value increased power within an unchanged, oppressive system. Though RPD designers value and fight for increased representation of underutilized communities in traditional seats of power like journal authorship, a higher goal of RPD beyond individual and group power exchanges within the same system is the creation of alternative systems based on community values; this is the goal of

pluriversal design. Radical Participatory Design most successfully creates alternative modes of living in the world. Power exchanges for a majority of community members on an RPD design team are still a success because such power exchanges are necessary systemic steps towards pluriversal goals of alternative systems.

Benefits of Radical Participatory Design

The benefits of RPD include more successful and effective design outcomes, mutual learning, and power exchanges. Additionally, community members conduct research among other community members. When doing interviews or observation, the familiar community faces help to reduce anxiety. Often, interviewees are more willing to talk and be open with other members of the community. In cross-cultural design and international design projects when professional designers speak a different language from the community, translation is usually needed. In RPD projects, interviews can be conducted in the primary language of the interviewees because design team members speak the language. The ultimate benefit of RPD is embedded local, experiential knowledge in the design team.

Beyond Inclusive and Human Centered Design

Radical participatory design facilitates inclusive design and moves beyond it. Instead of only including marginalized community members in research recruitment, RPD places community members as full, equal members of the research and design team. Designers and community members benefit from mutual learning, and the community benefits from a design outcome that is based on their lived, experiential, relational, cultural knowledge. Moving beyond inclusive design, RPD focuses on an inclusive design team. An inclusive team, then, aids in inclusive research recruitment because the team can use their community connections, networks, and lifelong relationships to expedite and facilitate the recruitment process, reducing anxiety more quickly with research participants who recognize the researchers and designers as people from their own community. In the digital literacy project, the design team did not need translators and could go into communities and immediately reduce anxiety by using the local language and building on networks, connections, and relationships the design team members already had (Udoewa et al., 2016; Udoewa et al., 2017). In RPD, the community benefits from better design outcomes due to the inclusion and greater willingness of research participants to offer experiential knowledge and expertise.

The only way to truly achieve a Human-centered Design (HCD) process is through RPD. Human-centered design is a methodology that centers every part of the design process on the community for whom designers are designing. When doing design injustice or CPD, there may be an activity or a phase centered on the community, but the process always moves back to a phase or activity or

interactivity work that is not centered on and apart from the community. In an RPD process, every activity of every phase, including interactivity work, is centered on the community because the community is always there, co-leading the design work, driving it forward, and often initiating the work. In cases when the community does not initiate the work, it can still be an RPD approach if the professional designers, who initiate, give up control and power and the community both participates and assumes leadership including leadership that has the power to stop the project.

Ultimately, when conducting RPD, it is common to move away from HCD towards society-centered, community-centered, life-centered, or planet-centered design, methodologies centered on society, community, all life, and the planet at every phase in the process. If a community is truly centered in a design process so radically that they are full-fledged, equal, and equitable team members, then their expertise and desires lead the process. When their expertise leads the process their expertise brings out two dynamics. First, due to the relational nature of existence, to truly care for a group of humans, one must care for the entire ecosystem that nourishes those humans, an ecosystem in which those humans sit. Second, communities care about more than human individuals. They care about their community, society, land stewardship, water resource stewardship systems, etc. Centering the community means centering the cares and priorities of the community which naturally broadens design.

Such a shift benefits not just a specific group, as in HCD, but rather an entire community, society, non-human life like animals and plants, and ecosystems including non-living things such as rivers. Ultimately communities benefit because they have healthier environments and ecosystems, and the design team benefits from learning how to design eco-systematically, relationally, and holistically. Communities near the bottom of social hierarchies tend to be more in tune with the system in which they sit and the various competing needs of both life and non-life in the environment (Gurung, 2020). They bring that knowledge into the process. For example, in a translocal, community design project on water, the community chose this challenge: *Ensure a safe, sustainable, equitable, and affordable drinking water future* (Roberts, 2017). This design challenge is not anthropocentric, but life-centered. In a current, local, community project where we, the design team, are designing a racially just school community, in addition to human needs, we are looking at the building needs, plant needs, compost needs, and more.

One principle of feminist standpoint theory is that people at the bottom of a social hierarchy tend to have a more accurate or holistic picture of reality (Gurung, 2020), which oppressed communities have always known. Since awareness-based methods entered design through Liberatory Design, Equity-centered Design, and more, reflective activities have been added to design processes (Anaissie et al., 2021; Creative Reaction Lab, 2018). However, the focus of awareness-based methods is on people higher in the social hierarchy who do not see parts of the system due to their location in the social field and system.

The awareness of the field is generally more communally known to groups at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Instead of expending so much energy to encourage powerful people to reflect on their positionality and the field dynamics, becoming reflexive but not necessarily reflexible—moving towards flexible change—it can be more efficient to simply engage in RPD, shifting the leadership and participation spectra to the community and letting awareness result as a product of the process (Arnold & Schön, 2021).

In contrast to general needs-based design injustice methodologies, RPD brings the benefit of pluriversal design and futures design. Futures design can be considered an asset based approach where the aspirational asset is the shared vision of the future. Pluriversal design seeks to create alternative and multiple modes and ways of being and living in the world according to the values and identities of various communities (Escobar, 2018; Leitão, 2020). Pluriversal design is "a desire-based approach" that opens up the pluriverse, a multiplicity of possibilities, or a world of many worlds which can all be good and different (Escobar, 2018; Leitão, 2020). It is much harder to move from a damage-centered or conventional needs-based approach to a pluriversal, desire-based approach or a future vision, asset-based approach when the community's desires and vision of the future are not represented and voiced in every activity, phase, and interactivity moment of planning and decision-making.

Radical Participatory Design provides a platform to converge the desires and visions of the designers and the desires and visions of the community because of the power-exchanging models of "community member as designer" and "designer as community member." This exchange during RPD allows for the visions, desires, values, expertise, and identities of the community to be present and voiced on the design team during the design process, increasing the likelihood that the design process moves to a pluriversal approach, outcome, and a shared vision of the future, if the community is truly leading the process. Thus, RPD is not neutral, but represents a pluriversal bias towards the identities, values, desires, and shared future visions of the community leading the process. For example, in the international summer service-learning project, students mapped out pathways through a future program, not based on problems they experienced, but based on who they wanted to be and what they wanted to become (Udoewa 2018). Thus, in RPD, communities benefit, then, from a design that embodies their local, specific, future vision. This benefit highlights the relationship between decolonization, anticolonialism, and postcolonialism. Decolonization is not the goal. In a postcolonial and neocolonial world, decolonization is the first step on the anticolonial road to a pluralistic multiverse—the pluriverse.

Sustained Embodied, Embedded, and Auto-Empathy

One way to hold empathy for community members throughout the entire design process is through RPD. Empathy is one of the primary mindsets and an ideology of HCD (Heylighen & Dong, 2019; Kolawole, 2016). Designers try to gain and

keep empathy by researching with community members and carrying the results of that research and the community perspectives into the design stage through qualitative data and design artifacts like personas and empathy maps. But what is empathy? If empathy is understanding and sharing the feelings of another person, we may realize that achieving empathy through a generic design injustice or CPD project is an impossibility.

When viewing empathy through the Global Social Witnessing (GSW) perspective, there are three stages: the witnessing stage in which the observer still feels separate, the sensing stage in which the observer experiences empathy and connectedness with the observed, and the witnessing stage in which the observer experiences oneness with the observed "through mental, affective, and bodily responses" (Matoba, 2021). After the GSW practice, the observer hopefully takes action based on the global empathy gained (Bachen, et al., 2012).

In contrast, Goleman and Ekman identify three components of empathy (Vlismas, 2020). Cognitive empathy is understanding what someone is experiencing, but there still is a distance between the empathizer and the subject of the empathy. Cognitive empathy maps to the observing stage of GSW and the research stage of HCD. The second component of empathy is emotional empathy. Emotional empathy is feeling with someone, experiencing the same feelings and sharing in that experience. The empathizer has now put themself in the same emotional space as the subject of the empathy, walking alongside the subject through their emotional journey. Emotional empathy can extend to physical sensations as well, and maps to the sensing stage of GSW and the synthesis and define stage of HCD. Lastly, there is compassionate empathy. Compassionate empathy is being moved to help. It is a balance between cognitive and emotional empathy, where the empathizer is not overwhelmed and paralyzed by emotion (emotional empathy) and simultaneously does not immediately jump into problem solving based on understanding (cognitive empathy). Compassionate empathy maps to the last witnessing stage of GSW, in which the observer experiences oneness with the observed through responses, and to the design and delivery stage of HCD.

When we understand empathy, not as one type or another, but as the summation, co-mingling, or relation of all empathic components, we know that empathy is not required for designers to engage in a design injustice or CPD project. Most designers work with an intellectual understanding of community members' experiences, and then work to change the situation or design a solution. It is clear that one component, cognitive empathy, can be temporarily achieved through research. The difficulty is maintaining the cognitive empathy initially achieved, and achieving emotional empathy and compassionate empathy.

In work with experienced senior designers, cognitive bias slips into the design process blocking cognitive empathy. The further away in time designers are from the research that informs the design, the less cognitive empathy the design team has. Cognitive biases even appear directly after research in the

awareness-based sense-making and synthesis phase, when experienced designers and design researchers make claims or extract insights that are not based on patterns but rather the last piece of information they read, the most recent interview debrief, or one interview, observation, activity, or report that they remembered quite well. When I ask what data the claim is based on, I discover that it is scant or not there. Even artifacts, like personas, that are meant to carry cognitive empathy into later stages of the design process can falter due to various reasons: irrelevant information included in personas that designers implicitly and cognitively interpret as important, persona photos or images whose demographics and physical appearances are erroneously associated with subcommunity members introducing more bias, obsolete personas which are incorrectly treated as current because designers do not continuously update them, and the complete lack of use of a persona in the design process after its creation as if the simple act of creation is enough to generate empathetic fitness or empathetic endurance (Farai, 2020). The same analysis can be applied to other design artifacts like empathy maps, days-in-the-life, etc.

In addition to the fleeting nature of cognitive empathy, it is rare for designers to create emotional empathy. Because it is not required in the design process, it is not measured, captured, or evaluated. There may be designers who achieve it and others who do not. Anecdotally, emotional empathy is rare from my experience; most designers are referring to cognitive empathy when they use the term empathy. Additionally, a large barrier to emotional empathy is the lack of sufficient relational time in the context of the power hierarchy between the designer and research participant. Though designers could utilize more longitudinal studies interacting with the same participant over time, most design studies involve a single interaction with a community member during a research phase. Compare a single design interview to the repeated interaction over months that a clinical psychologist or therapist has with a patient. Even in the therapeutic context, MacNaughton (2009) argues that empathy is impossible due to the imbalance in the relationship. Over time, the building of relationship and psychological trust can reduce or temporarily suspend the power imbalance enough to allow the possibility of empathic transfer; however a single design research interview is insufficient to achieve this. Another obstacle to emotional empathy is the lack of experiential research in many projects. It is difficult to gain emotional empathy through interviews alone without actual experiences. Simulations and experiential methods like mystery shopping, mystery working, homestays, participant observation, work-alongs, etc. are much more powerful at evoking or provoking designers emotionally to move towards emotional empathy (Stickdorn et al., 2018; Woodcock et al., 2019). However, they are not used as much as the interview method. Finally, what happens when one has a strong aversion to the lifestyle or values of the community members one is researching? One might have cognitive empathy but emotional empathy may be an impossibility due to conflicting values and worldviews. This situation leads to critical empathy which is not emotional empathy (de Coning, 2021).

However, designers do respond to the community needs which would seemingly qualify as compassionate empathy. The difficulty is that compassionate empathy is not simply responding to help or acting, it is being moved to respond to help, and then helping. Compassionate empathy necessarily requires emotional empathy. Even if emotional empathy were not required, the motivation for compassionate empathy must be compassion. It is impossible to achieve this in the case of a professional designer because the financial incentives, wages, or salary make such compassionate motivation impossible. With or without compassion, the designer's job and goal is to act and receive compensation. Even when designers conduct pro bono or volunteer work, the framing of the work or the agreement is that the designer will conduct research, uncover important insights, and create something. This framing or prior agreement makes compassionate empathy an impossibility. We can never know if the designer would have been moved to act and then act, outside of an agreement that dictates they will act.

If not an impossibility, empathy is rare (Macnaughton, 2009; Nathanson, 2003; Watson, 2009). How can we ever truly, experientially know what someone else is going through (Heylighen & Dong, 2019)? It is much better to avoid the problem of gaining empathy. For example, in the international summer service-learning project, instead of the designers building personas to create empathy, the students built auto-personas of themselves (Udoewa, 2018). Radical participatory design avoids the problem of gaining empathy by simply embedding empathy through lived, communal, embodied, cultural, and spiritual experience and experienced emotional journeys, into the design team for the entirety of the design process. Instead of relying on transcripts and research artifacts to create empathy and hold the community needs in the forefront of the minds of the designers throughout implementation, the presence of community members on the team brings their lived experience into all conversations, decisions, explanations, and implementations. That lived experience can check a process, encourage, cajole, explain, remind, expand, teach, and familiarize. This converts the design process not only into a power exchange but also an emotional exchange between team members as the professional designers on the team relate to, engage with, connect to, and learn from their community member teammates and designers. Such an empathic exchange benefits communities by creating a design outcome fully driven by and embedded in their experience. Designers benefit through mutual learning and the gift of relationship.

Systemic Action

Radical participatory design has a higher likelihood of creating systemic action or active non-action (refusing to act unjustly) than other awareness-based methodologies. While awareness-based methodologies and methods can and have led to some kind of action, two difficulties with action arise. First, in my lived experience, often they do not lead to action. This is due to the fact that post-awareness action is always a choice. Similar to the bystander in GSW or the

"white moderates" to whom Dr. King wrote from prison, a person can become aware of a situation or the plight of another and choose not to act due to fear, very high costs, fragility, system-reinforcing punishment of anti-systemic behavior, etc. (DiAngelo, 2018; King, 2018; Matoba, 2021). There can be a disconnection and stagnant absencing between the presencing steps of open heart and open will (Scharmer, 2009). In some situations, people who are aware of social injustice pretend to be unaware or do not acknowledge it at the conscious level even when their subconscious knows it to be true (Gilson, 2022; Pohlhaus, 2012). Pomeroy et al. ask: "what are the methods that best serve action" as an open question (2021, p. 115). Radical participatory design moves from awareness to social action; it is a design meta-methodology. Action is often a result of design processes that implement something. Radical participatory design goes further because it moves to social action. Cunningham reflects that awareness-based methodologies "don't unmake centuries of injustice and violence by being generative in a room, but [they] do help the social body in the room become more effective at the thing they are trying to do" (Cunningham, 2021, p. 12). Awareness-based methods are more focused on making people more effective at the work they are already doing with some level of awareness, while RPD actually creates new work and actions by the very nature of being a design meta-methodology. The new work can be considered a trivial outcome because design, by definition, usually creates new things. Still, any system-oriented design, especially one like RPD that changes the structure of relationships and connections in a system, has an advantage over awareness processes that may not lead to new work or actions. RPD creates new actions and work for professional designers who may be completely unaware, thrust into an environment of relational knowledge, or for newly self-empowered community members due to the active divestment of power by professional designers. Second, often contemplative and awareness-based methods lead to personal or insular change and never transition to change for social justice. I had this conversation with participants while participating in a contemplative dance workshop that moves from emotions to art, from art to awareness, and from awareness to action. Often the change or action is personal and there can be a disconnection to larger, needed social change and actions. Because of the shift of the leadership spectrum to the community, RPD often leads to social change, evidenced in various movements such as U.S. civil rights and labor rights (Udoewa, 2022a, 2022b in press).

Radical participatory design tends to create more systemic action by inviting new entrants into systems change. As Cunningham notes, awareness-based methods improve the effectiveness of what change agents are already trying to do (2021). They do not necessarily invite more people into the work. If the fundamental work required for systems change is to align the purposes and awareness of all system actors, awareness needs to spread to people who do not practice awareness-based methods. However, there are people who are not willing to participate in contemplative or awareness-based practices as they are not comfortable or accustomed to operating from that emotional or spiritual

center. However, participatory design is often defined and viewed as a participatory way of practicing design, and a person may not realize the awareness-based dimensions of the practice. Designers new to systems change may practice RPD with less trepidation than an explicit awareness-based practice.

Lastly, RPD more naturally leads to systems practice (a practice focused on improving the health of a system), futures design (the use of longer-term forecasting or visioning to drive design choices in the present), and other asset-based methodologies. Due to the shift of the leadership spectrum to the community, the community chooses the methodology instead of the professional designer, opening up a variety of possibilities. When conducting RPD, it is quite natural for the work to become asset-based because community members naturally define themselves by what they offer and what gifts they bring, not by what they lack. I view systems practice and futures design as asset-based methodologies because instead of focusing on the problem, they focus on assets: the system dynamics and health, and a shared vision of the future, respectively. Community members know, implicitly or explicitly, the dynamics of the system in which they sit and often highlight the system concerns and the interconnectedness of the system components when the design team is considering the plausibility of a particular option. Communities contain deep experiential and cultural wisdom that understands the system and underscores needs outside of human needs. For example, I work on a community project where the team has designed several system interventions based on high-impact leverage points found while analyzing a system map the team created based on their systems research of generational racialized trauma in the rural south (Jagannathan & Seugling, 2018). Through RPD, communities, society, and the environment benefit from more systemic solutions, avoiding HCD solutions that leave the problem unaddressed, make it worse, or only temporarily resolve it. Designers benefit from learning systems practice skills.

Trauma-responsive Design

Radical participatory design is a more effective approach to practice trauma-informed and trauma-responsive design than trauma-informed design based only on mainstream institutional knowledge (Jackson et al., 2020). All designers, including RPD designers, should practice trauma-informed design because it is not possible to know if a particular community member, interacting with researchers or their designs, has experienced trauma. One 2016 epidemiological study, conducted in twenty-four countries, found that over 70% of research respondents had experienced at least one trauma event and 30.5 per cent had experienced four or more trauma events (Benjet et al., 2015). When working among historically and presently marginalized, colonized, and oppressed communities, the percentage of people experiencing trauma can be even higher.

Trauma-informed design is design that involves three components. First, trauma-informed design is design that recognizes that people can have many

different traumas in their lives including past traumatic events whose adverse effects can still be present today, as well as the possible paths to recovery. Second, trauma-informed design involves designers who recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in participants, researchers, and societal systems. Third, and most importantly, trauma-informed design is designing in ways to avoid triggering and to resist retraumatizing participants through research and design work and interactions.

The US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines six principles of a trauma-informed approach (SAMHSA, 2014).

1. Safety.

2. Trustworthiness and Transparency.

3. Peer Support.

4. Collaboration and Mutuality.

5. Empowerment, Voice and Choice.

6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues.

Instead of the designer having to carry the weight of ensuring these six principles, RPD bypasses this work. In the RPD approach, peer support, collaboration, mutuality, empowerment, voice, and choice are more naturally a part of the process because the community is participating, leading, and driving the process. The community brings its cultural and historical knowledge and lived experience including gender identities and issues. Because their presence is welcome and their voices are heard and they see other community members leading, safety is increased and anxiety is reduced both in the research and design process and in interacting with designs created by the design team. Trust is increased and community design members offer transparency and communication to the broader community about the work they are doing. In other words, the SAMHSA principles are built into the RPD framework naturally as the community is embedded on the design team as equal, full members with leading voices.

Of course, in general life, traumatized people can traumatize other people. In a design process, a trauma-informed design team may be at a disadvantage if their practices are only based on mainstream, institutional, social work knowledge. Because mainstream, institutional knowledge or 3rd-person knowing is studying lives, bodies, experiences, cultures, communities, and more, it is always behind the lived, experiential, embodied, intuitive, relational, communal, cultural, and spiritual knowledge itself. Through the RPD meta-methodology, the team is better able to be trauma-responsive due to a greater array of epistemologies providing and embedding more current trauma information and updated care practices. For instance, in the digital literacy project, the design team was able to avoid triggering and retraumatizing often forgotten people in temporary housing because the design team was composed of community

members who knew what it was like to be in such a situation (Udoewa, Mathew, Al-Hafidh, et al., 2016; Udoewa, Mathew, Gupta, et al., 2017). Through RPD, designers benefit from experiential knowledge-based and skill-based trauma-responsive practices, and community members and designers benefit from reduced triggers and harm, as well as an increased sense of care and belonging.

Challenges and Barriers to Radical Participatory Design

The fundamental and most dangerous difficulty of RPD is the tendency for an RPD process to stop being critically and radically participatory. This can be mediated by the second characteristic of RDP: community members outnumber the designers.

In designer-initiated projects, an RPD process may flip to CPD, as well, because the designer or the design organization decides to usurp or regain control, rejecting the work of the community. Perhaps the community members were only invited for a short period of time so the project reverts back to an organizational design injustice process. Or the designers and the organization never made plans for the critical involvement past the design phase into the implementation phase. To address these pitfalls, I have learned several lessons from experience. Strategically work to institutionalize RPD in the organization so that an RPD project is not simply a one-time event or an approval process each time. Secure resources, such as funding, to make RPD a continual part of the project work. Contract community members throughout the lifecycle of the product or service. Create transition plans so that community members can retire from the RPD work and new community members can join and take the place of the retiring members. Practice relinquishing power daily. Due to the structure of society and the continued aggregation and consolidation of power in certain organizations and people, it is important that the divestment of power be a continual practice. The designers and the design organization should continue to divest of power while the community members assume power even in the implementation stage. When the divestment of power is done to the core, even if a design organization wanted to take control and run the project differently, the organization could not do this. The design artifacts, the narratives, and the resources are all within the control of community members. If these resources are not within the control of the community, the designers and design organization did not truly give up all power. In the following section, I will give advice on how to choose projects where the organization is more likely to give up power.

Another challenge for designers in the RPD process is privileging the process and their expertise over the lived experience of the community members. The nonlinearity of the process should not come from a designer's power as facilitator, making decisions and planning apart from the community between design activities. The nonlinearity in the design process should come from the insight, inclination, needs, desires, and even disruption of the community member designers on the team (Knutz & Markussen, 2020). In the recent digital literacy

project, the design team implemented a positive deviance research method in the middle of prototyping because the community member designers were feeling uninspired (Udoewa, Mathew, Al-Hafidh, et al., 2016; Udoewa, Mathew, Gupta, et al., 2017). Likewise, in the same project, I, a professional designer, did not "correct" their designs from a Western Anglocentric design perspective, but watched them aesthetically design what was most pleasing to them, based on their experiences and values. We were practicing pluriversal design.

Keeping in mind that the design team may be more heterogeneous as a result of the RPD process, one must pay more attention to team dynamics (Huybrechts et al., 2020). Mixing community members with designers of largely homogenous backgrounds juxtaposes multiple subcultures together. The team must work to establish a strong foundation of trust and safety, and then, upon that foundation, cultivate a culture that mines for conflicting ideas in order to get to the best ideas (Lencioni, 2012). This type of culture is not automatic and must be built on any team, especially and including an RPD team which may have designers who have never worked with community members and vice versa.

Making decisions in ways that do not privilege the designers can be difficult. There is no one way RPD teams make decisions because, generally, design team members try to use culturally appropriate ways of making decisions. Usually, we, design team members, decide as a group how to make decisions in such a way that everyone will support the decision, even if the decision was not their personal choice. In order for the support to be present when decisions are made, we decide how to decide, using either unanimity, consensus, or consent-based decision making (Bockelbrink et al., 2022). Once a particular choice is unanimous or we have a consensus or complete consent, we can proceed to make decisions using the chosen decision making process. In some RPD, there is also an eco-relational approach to the politics of decision making in which people do not voice individual desires but simply carry out tasks with aligned purpose, like parts of the human body. The ecological system of people makes decisions based on the collective purpose (similar to the way that blood might rush the limbs during a flight, fight, or freeze response without any part of the body making an explicit conscious decision).

Due to the educational nature of the RPD process, decolonial concepts of time, and lives of community members, RPD may take longer than design injustice or CPD because of availability, pace of community life, decentering white-supremacist sense of urgency, and the many learning and practicing sessions (Smith, 2021; Mowris, 2020; Creative Reaction Labs, n.d.). When compared to CPD outcomes over shorter project timelines, communities alongside whom I have worked value the RPD outcomes over the longer time. It is helpful to plan for this time and flexibility from the start and communicate the flexibility and timelines to stakeholders and community members.

Lastly, RPD does not avoid the problem of bias on the design team. In fact, the participating community members may represent a biased portion of the community and their biased lived experience can shift the work the design team

does, creating designs that do not serve other portions of the community (Taoka et al., 2018). To counteract this effect, choose a qualitatively representative sample, when possible. Avoid looking for a representative from every family in a community or subgroup. Rather, list all the attributes of community members that might alter how one would design for them. Then make sure the design team has community members from different parts of each attribute spectrum (IDEO.org, 2016). Any bias or limited knowledge on the design team should be addressed by recruiting a qualitatively representative sample of the community as research participants. The bias of the community members on the design team can still affect the process. Conduct "Beginner's Mindset," "Observing vs Interpreting," and other bias awareness training like bias journaling for the entire team (IDEO.org, 2007). I usually repeat bias journaling weekly and review my writings ahead of each research session. Ideally, conduct the training sessions before the research and interview and observation guide creation. The training does not eliminate bias, but serves to make the entire design team more aware of their bias and, thereby, to limit its adverse impact.

Organizations can still pose a barrier. It is unnatural for those with power to surrender it, a requirement for the success of the RPD process which involves a power exchange. Organizational leaders often prohibit RPD work because they do not want to invest the time or resources. Others do not want to invest in proper ethical treatment of external community members. Others do not understand what purpose designers have if design can be done by anyone. Many are afraid of anything new, and are change-averse. If the organization and its methods are successful by some measure, they do not want to change it. Others do not trust community members and want to retain control.

Conclusion

There are many challenges when participating in RPD work. The design team must take care to plan for a longer, educational process, working to reduce bias on the design team, and specifically working to prevent the RPD process from switching to a CPD process. The act of divesting of power is a continual act into which the designers and design organization must repeatedly enter. Ultimately, an RPD process is most successful when alternative systems of value and ways of living in the world are created.

Organizations resist giving up power. One barrier is not understanding the purpose of designers and paying for design services if the community can design. Designers have honed a craft that can be helpful to the RPD process. Their knowledge is not privileged above community experiential and cultural knowledge. Designer knowledge is still useful and especially powerful when combined with community knowledge. For example, a community, practicing community-driven design, might call a structural engineer to validate their building design. I have worked on a learning design project in which the community unearthed learning design principles and created designs based on

learner needs without a learning designer. Still, if needed, communities may invite designers at any stage such as research, design, or implementation.

Ultimately, the invitation to divest of power, as a designer, can still be accepted even if the organization refuses to do so. One can divest of one's power by leaving such organizations. The best way to engage in RPD work is not to fight unwilling organizations, though important, but to work with fellow community members in the local community on local problems. This work will automatically be RPD because one is a community member, not an outside designer. The designer's design skills are a benefit to the community just as the skills of the other members are a benefit to the community. Foremost, the designer's lived experience in the community makes the designer a member and positioned to co-lead and drive the work alongside other members.

In future work, I will go beyond general relational design which includes RPD and elaborate on a subset of RPD that I call Relational Design. In Relational Design, design team members do not only design relationally, or alongside community members. Design team members also replace various extractive and transactional steps in the generic design process with explicitly dialogic and relationship methodologies and activities. Secondly, I want to elaborate more on the decision-making process and options in an RPD project. I will show what RPD decision-making looks like, highlight a relational and biosystems approach to decision making, and share how to make decisions in a way to minimize the likelihood that an RPD project flips to a CPD project.

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Peer Review Article

Our Fire Stories:

Emergence Through the Circle Work-Process at the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab

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Abstract

The directional learning path our Indigenous Knowledge (IK) reveals, is happening and emerging in a way that is based in our lore and systems. What I refer to here in Australia is over 60, 000 years of continuous cultural knowledge connected around 60,000 years' worth of campfires.

The pattern which we gather and sit around these campfires is in circle. And the circle pattern we have gathered around these times creates a distinct flow of energy and knowledge transfer. The distinct pattern of IK transfer at Deakin's Indigenous Knowledge System Lab (IKSL) now, can be understood in four ways, IK in Production; Transmission; Application and Regeneration.

We see emergence through the patterns and stories that are brought through following the whisps of smoke from the fire – the unseen made known through the form of smoke - dgumge. To pay homage to our beginnings in shares and development of knowledge's we write together as part of the 'IK pattern' of

yarning (Yunkaporta, 2019), we use in Labs – us/only, us/twos and us/all ways of communicating.

This paper is a way for us/two, Dr. Rhonda Coopes – palawa and Dr. John Davis – Cobble Cobble, as fellow countrywomen and men, camped around these IKSL fires, to give some markers, lay some tracks, make sense of the paths we take through the ever-emerging patterns of IKSL yarns, actions, and project activities.

Keywords
Indigenous Knowledges, patterns, systems thinking, emergence

The Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab (IKS Lab), NIKERI, Deakin University, Australia, integrates Indigenous philosophy and custodial governance to establish as its basis organizational systems, processes, and methods of inquiry that are grounded in Indigenous protocols. This integration is a key component of the energy produced in and for research at the Lab. The vehicle for "bringing to life" in knowledge creation, production, and transmission is deep-time storytelling, yarning, and narrative capture. This is the integrated ontology and epistemology that informs and is integral to Indigenous Knowledges (IKs). In our Lab we refer to this research energy and integration as the flow and weaves, *mimburi ngin wanjaus*, which we extrapolate throughout this article.[1]

Forged now, in the fires that have grown from the resilience of our people, the application and directional learning path our IK reveals is happening and emerging in a way that is based in our lore and systems. What I refer to here in Australia is over 65, 000 years of continuous cultural knowledge connected (Clarkson et al., 2017), collected, and "kinnected" (connected through people and place) around 65,000 years of campfires. The pattern in which we gather and sit around these campfires as Indigenous researchers is a circle. And the circle pattern creates a distinct flow of energy, time, and knowledge transfer. Time and energy is what IKS Lab invests in, focuses on. The distinct pattern of IK transfer at our Lab now can be understood through four processes: production; transmission; application; and regeneration. This pattern, and the contribution of the IKS Lab, will be elaborated on further as we share our narratives.

We come together in circle and form and embrace new fire paths to apply our IK thinking to the "wicked problems of the world." Our role in this contemporary fire circle is to stoke, make space, and place more metaphoric wood (ideas) on the fires to increase knowing and relationships in addressing the wicked problems we all (us/all) are facing. For us, resource scarcity, bio-security, land tenure and

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[1] *Mimburi ngin wanjaus are the* Kabi and Barrungam words for "flow" and the Barrungam words for "crossovers / exchanges."

security, and new so-called space discovery are real-time challenges for us/all as collective beings on our planet. Dr. Tyson Yunkaporta's seminal book *Sand Talk* provides the stepping-off point for IKS Lab to set our circles, focus our collective thinking, actions, and energies. The challenge, as Yunkaporta frames it, is that "We rarely see global sustainability issues addressed using Indigenous perspectives and thought processes" (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 19). Now through IKS Lab, operating as a collective of IK researchers, we're able to set more formalized, regular, ongoing circle work by enacting projects and processes that enable us to apply Indigenous systems thinking to the wicked problems of our world.

All of our projects and processes are part of our open-translation research (shared on our web space (Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab, n.d). It is referred to as "open translation" because each Lab researcher is tasked with the web and weave of their own interpersonal, cross-country relationships and has an "open front," accessible web, and research article "shares" to build collective agency with and alongside our people. We translate our way, *wanjau*, as "embassy" in English; in my language *wanjau* refers to relationships of exchange, reciprocation, and responsibility—personal, familial, and tribal. *Wanjau* applies to us/all as IKS Lab researchers.

Examples of specific project and process works include the newly formed Indigenous relational network being created by the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME), led by the founder, JMB. The relational network has been described recently as the "ultimate anti-algorithm" (personal communication, AIME Imagination Factory launch, October 2022). The relational network is based on AIME's leading mentor/mentee experience for Indigenous Australian accessibility to higher learning (university pathways). It has expanded and is set to form and focus on "all education equality" through the development of a new and rich online learning resource. It is based on and will test the "coming together" of diverse, yet equal young people and transgenerational mentors, using and testing the 'Unlikely Connections 5" or UNC/5 model. Our Lab is the lead research agency in setting the pattern and directional path of the network.

As we write, our Lab is also working on a tool for "Cultural Indicator Species Symbiosis." This tool has been requested by Ethic, an international financial impact agency, whose remit is to maximize social impact. This is specific research project and processes will help co-create a "Nature-based" fund. Our idea is simple: to create a Nature fund using Indigenous system thinking and have our relational research, based in Australia, lead the planning and development of the tool.

Relating to the way social field research can be seen through third, second- and first-person narrative, in this article we describe a way of seeing the research at IKS Labs from a broader macro perspective to a narrower relational micro perspective. Lab-ers set individuated circles from all parts of kin and country around Australia. The diagrams that follow (Figures 1 and 2) provide a

translation of our way, placing our work as we weave within the world of co-design and collaboration and "claim our space" as Indigenous researchers. We apply Aboriginal English to the third space perspective; we set circles, figuratively and literally, as "kolabbers" (see Figure 1). We do the introduction and contextualisation first, to position and make a "safe space" for the us/two yarns to flow. We start below with the micro perspective and follow with the macro perspective.

IKS Lab Micro

Our drivers, our ways to the fire at IKS Lab, are focused on IK production, transmission, application, and regeneration of research. IK production refers to research practions[2] (Steffensen, 2020), which move humans to our ecological custodianship. IK transmission relates to information flows—our function to translate and make meaning of our IK in a 21st-century context. In all our flows we build affordances: we aim to increase positive human interaction as well as learnings with and through non-human entities—what we call IK application. In translating research, we also aim to utilize learning through our ways, such as Aboriginal memorisation techniques (Pappas, 2021) and "big story" (Yunkaporta, 2019) learnings to apply what we frame as IK regeneration (Marshall & Twill, 2022).

Metaphysical Metaphors

At the Lab, the bringing together of us as Indigenous research fellows (see Figure 1), our collective and kinnected knowledges, methods, and methodologies, has been designed around the metaphor and imagery of fire, specifically familial and base or home campfires. We've spoken on this. We have sat and yarned collectively as Indigenous thinkers and research fellows at the center of the Lab. We have designed protocols based on the guiding principles of care and increase. The importance of fire has come and been shaped by and is connected to earlier Lab work and processes nested at our base camp—NIKERI, Geelong, Wadawurrung country (see first paragraph).

Now we utilize this space or imagery as a connector, a way of bringing us and new Lab members together around our "fire story" protocols (Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab, 2021a). The original art design of painter Deanne Gilson (Gilson, 2020) is used by NIKERI as a safe space reference and logo. It is utilized by us in the Lab to think on, make, share, and create knowledges around

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[2] *Practions* is an Aboriginal English and IK word used by Steffenson in his fire country work with his Elders. Praction refers to action in practice.

our strongest point—our hearths, our fires. Our live website shows the image of our Lab through a wisp of smoke coming from a fire.

As palawa, Dr. Rhonda Coopes uses the voices of Australian Indigenous thought leaders to describe her thinking and being within our Indigenous knowledge systems connected to education. I use, as a member of the Cobble Cobble (carpet snake) clan of the western Bunya Mountains plains, the language and imagery of our people through smoke words, actions, and visuals:

BIUN BIUN...

Dgumge yonung, dgumge yonyung,

Bianga bianga...

Look & can't see

Hear & no noise

Taste & no flavour

Smell & can't breathe

Stop, bianga

Feel – tingling, slow time;

Smoke

Eyes like nyal (eagle)

Binna like gooraman (kangaroo)

Mouth like yuggera (goanna)

Nose like barrunga (rat kangaroo ~bandicoot)

Gujumba

Dgumge yonyung

Biun Biun in Barrungam means dreams.[3] *Dgumge* in Barrungam lingo means smoke. This poem and my reflections to come relate to our storying from country through dreams, which can be understood through the pattern and seeing of smoke. For myself, making a kinnection to what we do in IKS Lab, I share *wanjau*, writings/reflections of country, from country. [4]

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[3] Barrungam is the language of western downs, west of Bunyas. This is the lingo of my Cobble Cobble people.

[4] *Kinnection* is a connection between people and place (J. Davis, 2018)—one's kin and kith. *Wanjau* translates as crossover or exchange.

As part of knowledge exchanges, transmissions, and applications, I and we work hard at tracking, recording, reinterpreting our land, our country, post-contact. We do this because "we are here," as palawa yadgie shares: "We are resilient people." The poem above is one such reflection from country that is part of the Cobble Cobble historiography, resilience, and survivancy (Yunkaporta, 2021) of the area. This is not a non-Indigenous historian's take and make of space and time but our reflection, connection, voice. Further knowledge and insight on Cobble Cobble thinking and knowing kinnected to country can be found through the IKS Lab podcast series, and reshares of and on our "think tank"[5] yarns through the "Other, Others" podcast (Yunkaporta, 2021) as well as the "Process & Protocols" section of our website (Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab, n.d.). Further insights can be found in Cobble Cobble texts (J. Davis, 2016, 2018; M. Davis & Williams, 2021).

IKS Lab Macro

There is one certainty in the Labs, and that is uncertainty. Although individualistically we are "lead thinkers," knowers, and do-ers in our collective disciplines and spaces, we aim for and work to be humble enough to acknowledge what we don't know. Coming from a field of discipline, education, the need to problematize and "solve" our people's education struggles (Western struggles, that is), it is liberating to set circle with phenomenal minds who come from far points in the field, such as marine biology, complexity thinking, and design thinking. Core to the research translation is an Indigenous think tank team (see Figure 1), led by founder Dr. Tyson Yunkaporta and the director of NIKERI, Professor Gabby Fletcher, supported by two research fellows (Dr. Chels Marshall and me). This core has been supported by Indigenous fellows like Dr. Rhonda in the past, and regular yarners and do-ers in the Lab—Josh Waters, an associate fellow; JMB, an adjunct fellow; and brother Wayne Williams and sister Fi Bobongie.

Figure 1 aims to show what the internal Indigenous think tank and bases look like within the Lab and across the Deakin University diaspora. The inner circle, the heartbeat—the hearth of the fire—is IKSL (IKS Lab). Around this fire are our Indigenous fellows and associates. The core projects our teams work on come through our weekly think tank yarns. Next in the circle flow or pattern are our kolabbers. These are our non-Indigenous Deakin University colleagues, deans of education, professors and directors who support and enable the work of the Lab to grow. Their role is as an enabling and supportive structure. From these parts and points of pivot, joint and broader projects like "Landlessness" and UNC/5 grow as "kollaborations." When these foci develop, there is always a

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[5] To match the Figure 1 explanation of IKSL that follows, we use full capitalization, THINK TANKS, from here on.

thread, warp, weft, and weave back to the original campfires, our IKS Lab inner circle.
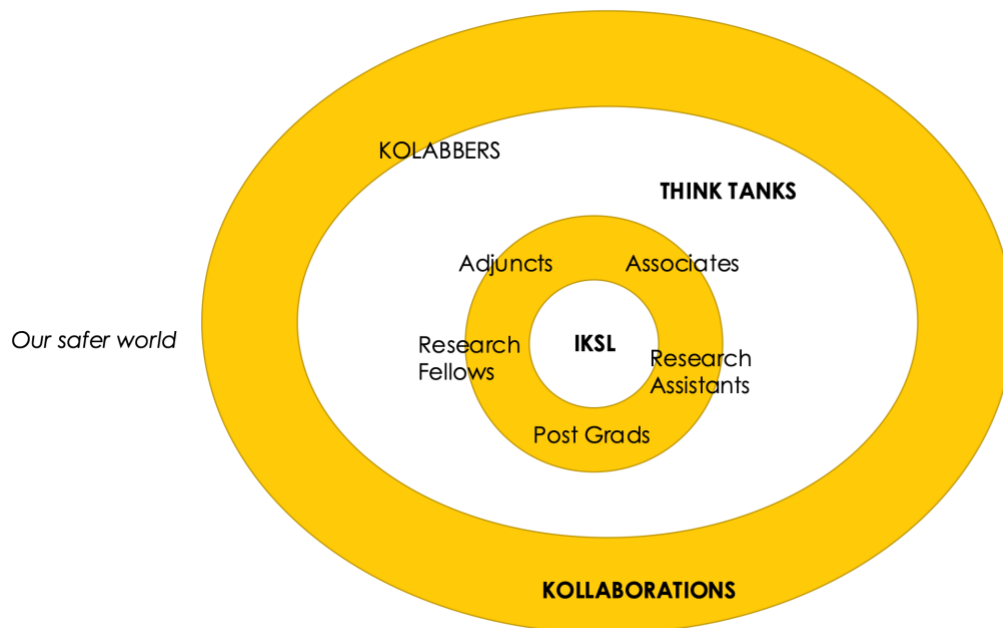

Figure 1: IKS Lab circle process.

Since the last version of this "Fire story" article, additional female Lab-ers are following Rhonda's earlier paths. Younger generations, including Rhi Miller, a CEO of AIME, and Steph Beck, a vice chancellor of AIME, are bringing new energy and nuance. The position our broad Indigenous meshwork holds, both outside and from points within the process of regular yarning circles, challenges the very Western and very human notion of "being the one," being the expert, being the lead. We constantly work on the pattern of our relationships to ensure at least two voices, then a group, and aim for more voices together—working on our female and male balance.

The subject of the next figure is IKS Lab research "pathways." With the two figures overlaid, this map of pathways (Figure 2) fits or sits within the IKS Lab "center circle" (of Figure 1). The Figure 2 design provides a big-picture map of the scope of work projects that IKS Lab looks at and applies IK to. The thinking and application work is interdisciplinary and intersects with several schools of thought and research activities.

Gamilaroi research associate Josh Waters provided the framing and scoping of our Labs' research or disciplinary pathways. The framing came from a need to translate the rich think tank process into a visual map or reference point for IK projects of regeneration curriculums based in compulsory schooling during the preparatory years (age 5) up to high school (to age 18). The diagram was created to capture the intersectionality and interdisciplinary approach that IKS Lab

centers our work from and is especially aimed at systems research and the behavioral sciences.

At our Lab we speak on the emergence of things, the development of processes, and guide of country, on country, off country. Guiding refers to the response and pattern 'in the land', no matter where we are. We see this emergence through the bringing together, setting circles at our hearths, sitting around our campfires. Whatever the school of thought or discipline, we work together to pull threads and make connections to what is known and can be applied through our IKS thinking. The think tanks incorporate a very real, very timely rhythm and help us make sense of us and for us as researchers to test ideas, work through possibilities, and decide what should be the focus of the research through our ways of being and doing.
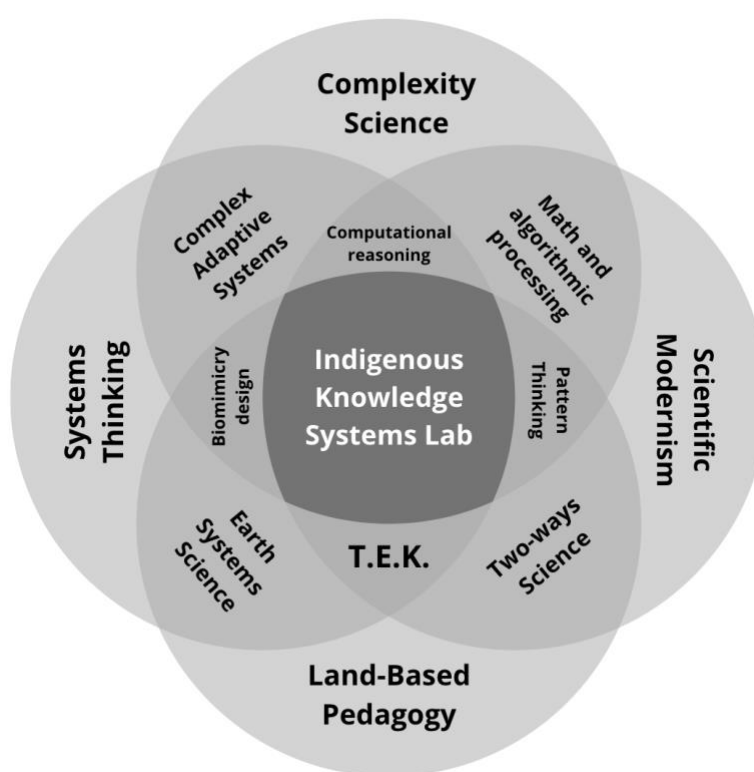
Figure 2: Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab research pathways.

We see emergence through the patterns and stories that are brought by following the wisps of smoke from the fire—the unseen made known in the form of smoke—*dgumge*. To pay homage to our beginnings in shares and in the development of knowledges, we write together as part of the "IK pattern" of yarning described by Yunkaporta (2019); in Labs we use us/only, us/twos, and us/all ways of communicating.

This article is a way for us/two as fellow countrywomen and -men, camped around these fires, to offer some markers, lay some tracks, make sense of the paths we take through the ever-emerging patterns of IKS Lab yarns, actions, and

project activities. Although both of us are Indigenous Australian researchers, our experiences of and learning through IK are different. Here, Dr. Rhonda shares stories of strength and resilience as part of her palawa story and kinnection; Dr. John shares more "on country" experiences and references through his Cobble Cobble perspective of re/learning languages and reconnection through country and "of country" cognition. What is his point of difference is learning through Cobble Cobble Indigenous Knowledges, a part of burning right fires on country, singing country and sharing country (J. Davis, 2018; Yunkaporta & J. Davis, 2021).

Dr. Rhonda started yarns with us/all at the Labs, as IKS Lab was forming. Dr. John remains at the fire, provoking and stoking the fires still. Both now take us down a pathway of discovery and thinking connected to "land-based pedagogy and systems thinking (see Figure 2).

Dr. Rhonda:

We resist what Jim Everett describes as the intention of successive governments to remove "traditional-historical Aboriginal identity from any further acknowledgement." 6 Everett asserts that the introduction of the term "Indigenous Australians" masks "a covert intention that eventually all 'Australian citizens,' black and white, who are born in Australia, will be acknowledged as 'Indigenous.'" (Everett, 2014, p. 29).

Quandamooka academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson concurs with the substance of what Jim Everett says:

White Australians voted in overwhelming numbers to endorse the 1967 Referendum. . . . Within the white imaginary, citizenship represented equality and it was assumed that this status would enable Indigenous people to overcome their poverty and become the same as other Australians [emphasis added]. (Moreton-Robinson, 2009, p. 62)

We are a resilient people, and that is a key attribute we can share: "'adapt don't assimilate.' They want us to assimilate. It is not going to happen" *(*Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020, p. 71). Resilience and new knowledge production, adaptability in a 21st- century context, is our provocation at IKSL. Through deepening adoption of Indigenous knowledges and following our ways, we further strengthen and tighten our collective, focused energy. Applying IK can produce or create more affordances, further resilience, resistance. Augmentation of IK applications can be achieved by following the

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6 The word *Aboriginal* without further reference to Torres Strait islander people is used when it is a direct quotation.

patterns of IK weaves and applying them to the new "wicked problems" of the world.

I am Dr. Rhonda Coopes, a palawac[7] woman. Growing up in Tasmania, I was faced with the paradox of being taught in social studies that the Tasmanian Aborigines became extinct with the death of Truganini.[8] What we were taught conflicted with family oral history. My maternal lineage traces back to a woman named Dolly Dalrymple Briggs, who was the daughter of a Tasmanian woman and a British sealer. Knowledge of this lineage was a simple fact of life for my extended family.

> Our palawa experience is summed up in the words of a family member:

> What is it like to be extinct? We can tell you this: it is to be touched intimately by death. The nuclei of each of our cells, with their sacred links to the world's most ancient continuing Indigenous culture, are caressed by the passing of the Old Ones. These are the people whose names are mentioned daily to give us strength and to remind us of the obligations of being who we are. The Old Ones who have passed away have imbued each one of us with a spirit that radiates from the past. (Lehman, 1996, p. 55)

We can marry change in education to the big ecological and social questions that need to be addressed with a sense of urgency.

> The cores of indigenous education are the traditional knowledges which explain ecological food-chains and the protocols of respect that have existed between human and non-human entities of the Earth's eco-systems since the long periods of time indigenous peoples call the Beginning. These cores go back beyond the living memories and recorded histories of non-indigenous societies. Nevertheless, they have been carried throughout the ages by indigenous peoples through stories, myths and legends; they provide understandings of how the practices of historically traditional indigenous lifestyles logically protect and sustain a continuum of mutual respect between human and non-human entities. (Everett, 1997, p. 11)

The mutual respect that Jim Everett raises is the pathway to education for all that sustains our ecology and nurtures social cohesion. It is not a huge stretch of the imagination to see these two practices as answering many of the issues of contemporary global societies. Our young ones can see this:

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[7] Lack of capitalization is deliberate. That is the way we spell our mob's name.

[8] Historically in history and education, Truganini and her kin were referred by non-Indigenous historians as the 'last Tasmanian Aborigines.'

> With 60,000 years of genius and imagination in our hearts and
> minds, we can be one of the groups of people that transform the
> future of life on earth, for the good of us all. (The Imagination
> Declaration, 2019)

I have made this, my yarn, a broader yarn by incorporating quotes from
several authors. The fact that they are predominantly from Australian First
Nations people and with a bias toward bringing fellow palawa into the yarn is a
deliberate choice. The voice of the United Nations is included because
acknowledging the value of IK and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is a
global concern.

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holds immense
> value and worth to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Its
> application across the sciences, health and welfare and education
> can provide new and deep insights and much needed innovations
> now and far into the future. (Australian Human Rights
> Commission, 2020, p. 61)

Colonization has been experienced differently by our mob in different parts
of the country (and globally), and some of us have had parts of our traditional
knowledges stolen, for a variety of reasons. One thing we have in common across
all First Nations is that we have survived. We have adapted to the significant
changes to our landscapes, our ways of life, and fought for our rightful place in
the emerging post-colonial policy of Australia. "Our heritage is in the Country,
our lands with stories of our history, rules of respect, and our families who
sustain us with food and shelter" (Everett, 1997, p. 38).

As the global community emerges from the pandemic, this world will change
and can change for the better through the embrace of IK and IKS Labs.

There is a groundswell of support for social change, as evidenced by the
emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement that spread around the globe
despite the overriding concerns of people about the transmission of the
coronavirus (Covid) and in Australia in the aftermath of a horrendous bushfire
and flood season. The bushfires of 2019–2020 added impetus to the developing
interest in First Nations' cultural burning practices (Steffenson, 2020).
Australia's recent flood events have led to a sharper IKSL focus on "ways to live
more seasonally," something we/all are calling "landlessness" (Yunkaporta et al.,
2022; Marshall & Twill, 2022). IK is the way to effectively manage our natural
environment to avoid catastrophes.

There is a strong focus on dealing with climate change, not just at the level
of the recent United Nations conference in Glasgow (United Nations, 2021), but
in the global populace, as demonstrated by the youth demonstrations around the
world inspired by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg. The United Nations
University states that "international discourse has often failed to consider the
valuable insights on direct and indirect impacts, as well as mitigation and

adaptation approaches, held by indigenous peoples worldwide" (Raygorodetsky, 2011, p. 3).

As long ago as the 1830s, an observer in Tasmania noted that "the [palawa] people's abilities to read the signs correctly to forecast approaching weather conditions… [w]ere acknowledged and relied upon by white men, who would seek consultation on weather matters that were found to be usually correct" (Plomley, 1966, p. 300, as cited in Cameron, 2008, p. 12).

Henrietta Marrie, a Yidinji woman with a notable career, from school in Yarrabah to several roles with the United Nations and positions in Queensland universities, sums up our traditional knowledges succinctly:

> Indigenous peoples have evolved complex relationships based on systems of eco-kinship with the elements of the world that surround them… These systems are supported by highly complex and integrated bodies of knowledge of the natural world—often referred to as traditional ecological knowledge, or TEK. (Marrie, 2020, pp. 48–49)

The university world provided a deepening of learning of "self" and the "story" of palawa for me. During my undergraduate studies at the University of Tasmania in the mid-1970s, one of my lecturers was engaged in research involving the genealogies of palawa people. In conversations with him I became aware of more aspects of Tasmanian history than had been part of family tradition. These combined factors led me to personal research into the history of my home state and resulted in a wider understanding of issues faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Nothing was in the schoolbooks; in the "imperial chronicles," as John Pilger refers to them in the documentary based on his book *A Secret Country* (1989), there was nothing about the history of the palawa people since the death of Truganini. This information and much more was available in primary sources but ignored by the authors of school texts. It was not until the 1970s that First Nations activism resulted in the recognition that there were many people in Tasmania and on the Bass Strait Islands who identified as Tasmanian Aboriginal.

> The world we live in vibrates with the energy of political struggle and revitalisation. The clarity of our vision and the depth of our understanding of the world today is made possible through our intimacy with death. (Lehman, 1996, p. 55)

Acknowledgment of the palawa community, however, had little immediate impact on social justice issues in education. When studying for my 1978 Diploma of Education, I still learned nothing about appropriate pedagogy for First Nations students. In three years of teaching before leaving Tasmania, I was not made aware of any developments in policy related to social justice. The landmark 1973 Karmel Report and its implications for the Disadvantaged Schools Program were not even brought to my attention through any form of in-service training or dissemination of information to staff in the somewhat rarefied climate of the

matriculation college in which I was teaching. (And as a very young teacher I had not yet developed the rigor to personally pursue information on new thinking and new developments.)

In 1983, after leaving Tasmania, I began teaching in an Ipswich high school in Queensland. I was at this school till late 1984. Ipswich is the traditional land of the Jagera and Yuggera people, and the long-time home of the late (Senator) Neville Bonner. I shared a staff room with Neville's stepdaughter. We had significant numbers of First Nations students from adjacent housing estates, and from further afield because of the school's rugby program. Despite the demographics of the school, nothing specific was happening to improve the educational experience of First Nations students.

In 1987, in an outer Brisbane school, I encountered English as a Second Language (ESL) issues and English Language Development Across the Curriculum (ELDAC) pedagogy methods through in-service training provided by the Queensland Department of Education. The emphasis in my school was on support for students from immigrant non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB).

The concept of Australia as a multicultural nation introduced in 1978 had officially replaced the view of Australia as a monocultural, monolingual outpost of Britain. However, much of the emphasis was on the culture of migrant groups, with only passing mention of Australia's original cultures. The impact for the teacher at the "coalface" in urban areas was at the language teaching level for NESB students, and at the superficial level of celebrating different cultures through food, music, and dance. I still had not encountered any systemic initiatives addressing issues for First Nations students.

A transfer in the second term of 1988 placed me for the next four and a half years in a school in a satellite suburb almost exclusively made up of public housing. The enrolments averaged approximately 20 percent Aboriginal students and about 20 percent NESB students. The school faced a range of issues created by the archaic practice of building huge clusters of public housing that concentrated residents experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage.

With the introduction of the National Aboriginal Education Policy (NAEP) in 1989, increased funding became available to schools for specific First Nations programs. However, despite emerging systemic changes, racist comments were still common in staff rooms. My identity was questioned or denied by other staff on the basis of skin color, and for spurious reasons such as not having skinny ankles. Discussions of individual students often included equally ignorant or uninformed comments.

An example of educators' lack of knowledge was a discussion I had with a teacher I had worked with in the early 1980s; he had later become head of the school's department for Social Science. Systemic social justice priorities came up in our conversation about what we had both been doing in the previous decade. The information I shared seemed largely unfamiliar to him, and his resistance to hearing about the issues raised bordered on outright hostility. He described

policy makers in the central office as out of touch with the realities of the classroom, and teachers as too overworked to have time to read the documents that emanated from the head office. I believe there is an ongoing need to involve teachers, to expose them to IK, to our ways and strengths.

In summarizing a history of First Nations education policies and programs, Kaye Price (2012) observes:

> To date, the majority of programs . . . have been directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents and caregivers. Very few of them are directed at or involve principals and teachers working in mainstream schools… The programs that have involved teachers and principals, are the ones that have developed real outcomes. Teachers are the key: teachers… who value Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander lives. (pp. 16–17)

Emerging change through the 1990s and 2000s was driven from the top down. After new funding was provided to expand the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education unit of Education Queensland, I was approached to join the unit. During my time there the education department had designated the social justice strategy as a system priority. This strategy included an inclusive curriculum and supportive school environment initiatives. I was involved in the development of documents related to system priorities. I left the unit in 1994 for personal reasons and undertook some contract teaching in schools on the Sunshine Coast. Most of these positions were in special-needs units. As a result, I interacted with many staff because the students needed support across a range of subjects. Most of the staff I talked with in these schools had not heard anything about the departmental social justice policies and related documents developed by the central office. The exception always was the principal, and in some cases the deputies. Until the locus of power and control shifts substantially within the systemic bounds of educational jurisdictions, the "unknowing" and sometimes outright hostility will continue to prevail in the schooling sectors of Australia.

Teaching largely in the university sector for the next decades, I then was involved extensively in one of the largest Indigenous education longitudinal studies in the country. The study tracked the impact of the so-called Stronger Smarter training (Sarra, 2011; Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017), which had won substantial federal government grants and supports in the 2000s (Luke et al., 2013).

The Stronger Smarter Leadership Programme was (and remains) a successful teacher education training program aimed at moving the "mindsets" of teachers— most of whom are non-Indigenous—to enact a more culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogies (Sarra et al., 2020; Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017). The programming was based on the highly successful transition of Cherbourg as a learning community—which was predominantly Indigenous, embracing the philosophy, curriculum, and pedagogies of Strong & Smart (Sarra, 2011). "Strong" means being centered and based in the strength of one's

Indigenous identity. "Smart" means being able to succeed and outperform others in any educational context from preparatory age (5 years old) to high school (18 years of age), the age range of compulsory Australian schooling.

In 2013, I worked as chief investigator on a university team tasked with analysing Stronger Smarter's impacts on education across the national educational landscape. The study was called *A Summative Evaluation of the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities Project* (Luke et al., 2013). This research experience would require another article to describe in full. Briefly, though, what was apparent from the longitudinal study was the inherent institutional racism and structural bias that exists within tertiary systems— university worlds. Over time (since the study was completed), Stronger Smarter has moved away from the university confines that controlled its place in Australian education. This was the space in which I saw Stronger Smarter. Since the longitudinal study of 2013, it has grown and developed into something else— even more than what the longitudinal research recommended in 2013.

Having provided professional training for over 4,000 active school staff, the Stronger Smarter Institute has grown exponentially from its locus within the university (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017). Since the 2010s, Stronger Smarter has designed and established a Research & Impact division: "research of, from, and for." And now I choose to sit within Stronger Smarter's locus of power and control, the Research & Impact division as a senior researcher. It is one of the largest Indigenous education training providers in the country, owned, led, and operated by a majority Indigenous board as part of the Australian not-for-profit sector. Stronger Smarter remains a cutting-edge and field-informed professional development and teacher training body. My role in it now is to impart further wisdom and advice on how we move Stronger Smarter impact translations further, past the earlier hostility to previous social justice policies and implementations (from my earlier career experiences), toward an emancipatory and more resilient and focused path, what the institute calls "strengths based" (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017; Stronger Smarter Institute, 2020). Learning from the locus of power disseminated through longitudinal studies (Luke et al., 2013) as well as grounding from lived teacher experience, Stronger Smarter works hard at placing new thinking, new ways—our ways now, our stories, our IKs—at the forefront (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017). The newly forming IKS Lab relationship is a great example of that enactment.

> Dr. John:
>
> *Yau gamba gamba, ngai gamba gamba! Gamba ngindus Budin Yadgie!*
>
> – Dr. Rhonda

Always a part of our pattern, as a part of the Indigenous education diaspora in Australia, is the need for more collective and mutually beneficial partnerships. Through sheer elements of conquest and colonisation, we as a collective polity constitute 3 percent of the total population in Australia. That is a fact of our

social dynamics now, in 2022. To deliver on the opportunity and potential of "learning Stronger Smarter ways," I need, and we as fellow training organizations and entities need to lead the way on how and why we partner equitably with IK thought leaders like IKS Lab. IKS Lab has shaped and shifted as a key partner of IK thinking, knowing, being, and doing. Writing and being a part of this rhythm ensures that work like Stronger Smarter's praxis is judged, analyzed, and shared within a broader map or broader ecology of Indigenous Knowledge and systems thinking. Too often, programs of and on Indigenous social justice in Australia are co-opted or designed through an individualistic and very corporate model of learning (Shay et al., 2020; J. Davis, 2012, 2018).

Hearing the yarns, seeing the words unfold on pages, provides reinforcement to the space of not knowing. And being settled in not knowing, as Rhonda has shared so strongly, "One thing we have in common . . . [in not knowing] is that we have survived." A goal Rhonda and I share collectively is the advocacy and delivery of a better "voice" in education through Stronger Smarter leadership training and development. Rhonda was evaluating programs as part of longitudinal studies; I was presenting and facilitating (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017; J. Davis & Woods, 2019). Stronger Smarter in fact gifted me my "place" in higher degree research. I started my master's journey with the institute in 2010 and completed my PhD with Stronger Smarter support in 2018. An age-old saying among Indigenous and other people of color is, "You can't be what you can't see." As an early-career teacher with a moderate degree of success in complex learning environments, being nested within an institute since its inception in 2006, I saw other "same faces" and people of color who had experienced similar struggles. I saw them lead the institute, succeed and become doctors and earn master's degrees in philosophy and a range of disciplines. They made me believe and want to achieve further success and deepen my learning through a higher degree pathway.

In this part of our yarns, I share my understandings, respectfully to palawa (and us/all) about IKS. I use the pattern of smoke as a way of translating what is happening in our space of emergence, now. The smoke pattern at IKS Lab is an important reference not because it dates to our contact struggle, which Rhonda has shared so well above, but because it ties us to an age-old process of setting circles around hearths, growing strength together. This is what the young ones in 2019 spoke of as "60,000 years of genius and imagination" (AIME, 2019). We are present and active participants in a process that has existed for millennia in Australia, connects us across the seas, from where we write this journal article that links us to others all around the world.

In IKS Lab circles there is no one voice, no one cultural authority. By design, we aim for the agency and leadership of deep knowledge exchange and practices that have sustained this country for millennia (Bunya Mountains Elders Council, 2010; Mowaljarlai & Malnic, 1993; Steele, 1984; Sveiby & Skuthorpe, 2006; Pascoe, 2018; Yunkaporta, 2019). And when it comes to resetting our circle interests within a Western institutional structure there is tension—in the kolab

pace there is pushback, there is "a need for order and control" by that system—still. Even with the broad-ranging success and expert "lead thinking" that exists within the Lab, there is a structural need to overlay university caveats and reference to power. A more regenerative and future-focused way of following the fires that were started is for future systems enactments and abilities to let the fires burn, to sit back and watch the smoke form, to follow the patterns that the relationships and exchanges of earthly elements intersecting with our spirit worlds bring.

Within the IKS Lab we remain fiercely interdependent of and with each other. The way I see us/all from my fledgling knowledges is as elemental parts of the fire. The cleared earth—*djah*. The hearth, the circle—*boul*; surrounded by rock—*dael*. We are the branches of trees or of the brigalow bush—*murambi*; and when we light fire sticks—*gujum*—with good kindling we first make smoke to show there is movement, there is flow—*dgumge yonyung*.

Authority isn't superimposed or earned through transactional leadership—apply, assign, represent. Authority is humility, a humbleness to know because "we don't know all." Dr. Chels Marshall of Gambingirr,[9] shared a great reflection on that in one of our regular Think Tanks in 2021. She reflected on and we spoke about the open shares and source of knowledge—the intellectual property (IP) position. To paraphrase our yarns, "Our knowledges as a systems point of view weren't laden by the individualistic. No one person was the great song man or woman, storyteller or artefact maker. We had a number of specialists you had to go to and learn from and with" (Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab, 2021b). We were speaking about how the Western concept developed or morphed through our countrymen and -women's experiences in recent Australian Native Title[10] settings and deliberations across families and countries always seed and create an image of "the one." That is the antithesis of the circle as a pattern. For complexity, dealing with the ever-changing and adaptive style of learning in country, our country, one of the harshest climates in the world, adaptive and interpretive knowledge systems and knowledge practitioners were and are key. *Practitioners* is plural, and plurality for our IKS Lab purposes requires "embassy" (as defined earlier) (Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab, 2021a).

Using our us/all *think tank* methods of setting yarns, I will, as palawa yadgie has done, apply some context and deeper thought as to why and how I see, and why we need to reflect the pattern of the smoke from our fires. My strength from country is the ability to yarn and weave many people together through different contextualizations and points of reference. My country, *djanganbarras*, Warra Warra, is a place steeped in a long line of exchange culture and broad meshwork developments. The perspectives I share are deep, freshwater knowledge exchanges kinnected to the Bunya Bunya (Bunya Mountains Elders, 2010; W.

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[9] Gambangirr: traditional lands of the central and mid-coastal areas of New South Wales.

[10] Native Title refers to the national legislation that recognises First Nation rights to land.

Davis, 2007; J. Davis, 2018). I feel great love and respect for my knowledge, our knowledge, and for our people. So, when I write to share (*wanjau*) knowledge, it is to place my learning, which is largely open (allowed to be shared), in context— to give context and seek meaning. The Bunya Bunya provided regular nourishment for our people and then in the bumper season of bunya cone production, every three years, multiple tribes were invited to share in the overabundance in our summer—the hot seasons (Bunya Mountains Elders, 2010; Steele, 1984). This triennial ceremony would go for as long as the bunyas bore fruit, from December till March. And when completed, multiple tribes would reassert boundary lines, make further connections through marriages, settle disputes. Most important, to share and exchange (*wanjaus*), the bunya gatherings provided an access point for Traditional Owners in colder months, May till July. They gave permission for Bunya hosts to visit saltwater country and share in the bountiful fish runs.

During all these big affordance times, fire, cooking, burning for hunting, and clearing the earth were (and remain) essential elements of caring for and looking after country. When we burn our woods and place our leaves on top to create more smoke, it is to cleanse or clear, bathe or heal. The antithesis of smoke is water. Not knowing all parts of *dgumge* story from country is a part of making story work. For our people, Murries of the southeast, we are reminded of this by the pattern of our lingo and language when it is recorded. A large group of our people are known as "no-people." That is, we refer to ourselves through the way we say "no." *Waka. Kabi. Yugam. Yugar*. All these words mean "no" and are part of the tribal recognition of our language speakers of the southeast—Waka Waka, Kabi Kai, Yugambeh, and Yuggera. To know is to also say "no," as our old people made and referred to themselves/ourselves still do today. When I write from my campfire knowledge, when I use *wanjau* knowledges, I share—and we as a general praction share—knowledges that are "open." To be open and share and exchange, as well as cross over knowledges, IKS Lab practices a time-honored tradition of knowing and allowing what should be seen and closing off what should not (Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab, 2021a).

I don't speak for all our knowledge as a Cobble Cobble clansman, from the Barrungam speakers, west of the Bunyas. I can speak for the places, spaces, rituals, and traditions I am related to and able to share. For us/two and then us/all, I deepen understandings and develop solutions for wicked problems by sense-making ways to gather, with embassy, and create new ways of yarning and doing. Through my and IKS Lab ways I sense-make to create. I can *wanjau*— cross over and exchange common ideas. Part of my bridging work, to weave and apply IK, is to create more "safe spaces" for our Indigenous fellows to gather, set circle, and yarn. This work or weave continues a pattern of relational flows that have been passed on to me. IKS Lab makes space for me to reflect and refract, turn up and contribute through a sense-making I was gifted in the 1970s (passed on many fires ago): the ability to relate, elicit, and kinnect through yarns.

We are better in, more fitting in, more represented in the circle of and on collective knowledges that work, are working, and that we have connected to country of and from that country (Chilisa, 2012; J. Davis, 2018; Martin, 2006; Steffenson, 2020; Yunkaporta, 2019). The safe space that is created for me by IKS Lab is through the *think tanks* and Lab structures (shown in Figure 1). At all points of delivery and enactment of IK we look at what IKs show us, reveal, seek to apply—and then when understood and enacted by us as Indigenous researcher leads, can be expanded out to our non-Indigenous colleagues (kolabbers).

Earlier research experiences have shaped and informed the practions that grow around the hearth of IKS Lab. In making sense of the world, our worlds as Indigenous researchers now, our individuated systems of land-based pedagogies, our heuristics, inform and direct our research. The fires of Durithunga, my PhD research base, were already burning strong in the local community of Logan (J. Davis, 2012; J. Davis & Woods, 2019)—Yugambeh and Yuggera country. The bigger kinnect and insight I see, and that we make in Labs, is the development of the IK "research bridge." Understanding the collaborative Indigenous leadership circle of Durithunga was good and needed. This is the "what" that the PhD research was for. The bridge or further translation for wider application is "how" the research was conducted. By studying the university value of and on our collective community voices, I and we were able to praction, reflect, and respond to the research context, not through methods of inquiry of and on qualitative Western tradition and analysis but by diving deeper, working at reflecting this corpus of knowledge translation closest to the IK root it is kinnected and related to (J. Davis, 2018).

The Tumba Tjina research frame and Bunya Bunya research method (J. Davis, 2018; Yunkaporta & J. Davis, 2021) were and are specific research translations which at the time I used (and we use regularly through individual applications of our IKs in research) to *goomeri*[11] (shield) myself, contextualize, and develop voice from the deepest parts of knowledge connection. Regular supervisor and then "marker" feedback through my PhD writing process was that the IK methodologies developed are a "significant part of IK research original production." To me, though, it was a written translation of a tangible and visceral energy, a live and living process of knowledge exchange and transmission: "don't forget to roll your tongue boy. . . . To honour and remember the deep learning gifted to us as a people" (Blair in J. Davis, 2018, p. 192). The PhD research translations, methods, and methodologies to develop and create safe spaces was the nearest and closest reflection of the truths and voices of my and our Indigenous education collective.

I wove Tumba Tjina and the Bunya Bunya method into a specific research translation for the Stronger Smarter alumni and created a masterclass for

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[11] *Goomeri* means "shield" in Wakka Wakka and Barrungam.

educators to take a deeper dive through IK (www.strongersmarter.com.au). Tyson Yunkaporta from IKS Lab came to the first Melbourne masterclass to sit, share, and observe, as well as allow our participants to "fan follow," following the success of his book *Sand Talks* (something he never is comfortable with, which makes his position even more important). And with humility and respect I shared Tumba Tjina and the Bunya Bunya method with him and the masterclass, layering the knowledge as it has been layered to me and my families through spirit, story, and song. Our class was then blessed to have a sit-in speak and share with Yunkaporta as he provoked and prodded us about the thoughts we had just exchanged and provided more insight into *Sand Talks* (2019) and the need for Indigenous thinking to save the world.

And he and I, us/two continued that connection till now, a new/two sit around the hearth of IKS Lab campfires and share deeper yarns and reflections on the patterns and power smoke brings, as well as thinking about, and then applying, how our IK can create more safe space for our polity—First Nations Australians—to lead. In time, that triggers (and has triggered) the pattern of the "next two" to exchange and share. A connection and processes in place around the IKS Lab fires will ensure that a new two will work their ways, weave to create and make sense of the challenge of the "wicked problems of the world." I share this yarn to place, to enable readers to contextualize, and hopefully to understand and see the esoteric pattern of relationship, turns, wisps, and swirls of the energy IKS Lab brings. "Look & can't see. Hear & no noise. Taste & no flavour. Smell & can't breathe. Stop, bianga. Feel—tingling, slow time; Smoke…" (Biun Biun). I translate like this because this is how I feel.

Being who I am and knowing the parts of story I know, IKS Lab provides a further, deeper, and hyper-connected way of research translating, meaning making, and providing more positive energy transferral and solutions to wicked problems of the world. Just as Community Durithunga fires guaranteed (and still create) a pattern of sustainable Indigenous education leadership and leaders, in the IKS Lab I see, we feel, the knowledge production and research translation growing a dense, thick smoke of our next-generation IK professors and expert field leaders, regeneratively into the future.

As we write, edit, and finalize this article for journal integration, the Lab has sparked and is sparking more fires on bigger projects of impact to "save our world." In action now, IKS Lab has raised further research visibility through an ongoing podcast series (Yunkaporta, 2021). A new website presence, with academic papers and research translations in the four Lab knowledge areas, as well as space for blogs and communal feedback, now gives more spatial recognition of what the Lab focuses on. Our lead Indigenous design thinker, Dr. Chels Marshall, provides a core focus on national and international "regeneration" projects (Marshall & Twill, 2022). Examples of real-time research-in-action translations, as stated earlier, are AIME's Imagination University (UNC/5) IK systems thinking and influence, and kolabs with Deakin University's Astronaut XR projects, Cynefein and Complexability Australia.

Our partnering with Indigenous NGOs and NFPs like AIME as a lead partner, Stronger Smarter as a collaborator, and Deakin University as our anchor is our formula for further success and sustainability systemwide (see Figure 1). When we wrote this article, a new kolabber, the Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, had engaged with us at IKS Lab for thought leadership to assist in the application and pathway flow of First Nations knowledge and perspectives on a national research collaborative on the digital interface impacting early years education. We at IKS Lab know we are "not the one." And "for us/all" to see more circles grow around the campfires, to seek ways like the Labs, to focus energies on increasing relationships is an important power differential to play: sharing, weaving, and linking more collective energies to wicked challenges.

So, our woods have been restacked on the fire, around the hearth. From the sharing and reflection of and on our processes, it is clearer that protocols are an essential element of building respectful patterns to yarning. How we "come into' circle," how we "make more warmth" and space around the fire by "checking in" and "calling in" others, are important protocols to enact. Our lore governance, governing within circle, is determined by the laws of country. From the us/two yarns we have shared specifically what laws relate. We apply responses to "of country" questions like, Whose land are we on? What are our responsibilities while we are there? What are the contextual factors for how we speak, listen, and interact with one another—i.e., What season are we in? What language is spoken? Who has what knowledge? Who holds what status regarding a particular topic? What boundaries are in place and how are they maintained or respected? These are all examples of the kinds of protocol questions and directional paths our yarns may take.

And of country, the regularity, bringing the law and lore systems further upfront, creates an ongoing and needed tension to grow *gamba dgumges*. The rhythm and cadence of regular weekly *think tanks* yarns, setting circle for deeper space and times to yarn and kinnect, is the protective fabric enmeshed across all IK thinking and doing. Since time immemorial (65,000+ years ago) our people have made time, created time and space, to embrace the laws of country. Because of the impacts of colonizations, the sheer weight of numbers physically and economically, now it is essential to have more "safe space" times to think and yarn and just "be" as Indigenous researchers. The yarns in *tanks* are largely *duwur*[12] or closed knowledges. When we and they are ready we *balaun*,[13] or open for broader sharing (which is translated for our podcast series). The ways we see forward, our ways to follow, are IK. The image isn't fully clear through our initial fires, the first wisps of smoke and the pattern and way of the fire. But how the fire is made, what is laid to create strong fire, is. It is important for us/all to

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[12] *Duwur* means closed circle.

[13] *Balaun* refers to open plain or grassland balds (in Barrungam).

make time and space to have, think, and share these yarns, these messages and themes coming from the sit-down conversations. We're seeking to influence and burn into a broad reach of current academic thinking—our macro design shows that by focusing on complexity thinking, modern science, systems thinking, and land-based pedagogies. The beginnings of the fire—the hearth, the wood, the bracken and brigalow, paper bark and kindling, grass tree and gumbi gumbi leaves—ensure that we're going to make good smoke, *gamba dgumge*.

Can you see our smoke?

We smell it, breathe it, and feel it at IKS Lab, every day.

Gamba ngindus yau.[14] Thank you for taking and making time around the fire.

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Peer Review Article

Action Research With and For Pack Mules:

Transforming the Welfare of Working Equines in International Mountain Tourism

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Abstract

The welfare of equines working as pack animals on treks and expeditions within the international mountain tourism industry is often severely compromised. Awareness of these issues and of what prevents owners, trekking teams and the wider industry knowing and attending to the equine and to equine welfare has been advanced through a sustained research and development initiative and Action Research project focusing on the international mountain tourism industry in the Moroccan High Atlas. An approach based on Theory U and on the development of co-seeing, co-sensing, and co-creating journeys has allowed deeper levels of awareness to be accessed and developed. Shifting the quality of attention, of meeting, and of dialogue has allowed *eco-system awareness* to develop, where previously silo-thinking and ego-system awareness had prevailed.

This has allowed muleteering practice to evolve away from practices based on control and domination towards practices informed by the dialogical encounter. This paper will explore the role of Action Research in developing the awareness of the tourism industry and the communities of practice it supports. *Absencing* as a barrier to awareness and the approaches available to overcome it will be explored. A key distinction will be made between the outcomes emerging from the co-creative projects arising from genuine meeting and dialogue, and the outcomes arising from the failure to meet and dialogue genuinely, a failure rooted in the exploitation embedded in hierarchical relationships.

Keywords

awareness-based systems change; action research, working equines; pack mules; mountain tourism; theory U; one health

Structural and Attentional Violence on Pack Mule Supported Expeditions

It was morning and the African sun was making itself felt on the floor of the Aït Bouguemez (or "Happy Valley"), home to Morocco's Centre de Formation Aux Métiers de Montagne (CFAMM).[1] The elite group of forty mountain guide students gathered in front of the national guide training school were preparing for their final assessment, a gruelling 300km expedition across the Moroccan High Atlas, from Tabant to the Djebel Toubkal. The camping equipment and supplies for the entire two-week trek were being carried out from the stores and loaded onto the backs of the waiting mules, who patiently braced themselves as their packsaddles (burdâa) and paniers (chwari) disappeared under a seemingly vast charge (Figures 1a-1b).[2] The mule is often lauded in Morocco as the "quatre-quatre Berbère," capable of navigating the steep, narrow paths and rocky terrain of the Atlas Mountains (Cousquer & Alison, 2012)—an expression that can be both pejorative to the Amazigh people (Weitzman, 2011) and an objectifying violation for the mule. The muleteers[3] were keen to get going and grateful for the help of the young future guides who volunteered to help with the loading, for there were 30kms of ground to cover that day. There was no time to inspect the mules' backs or to weigh the bags, and little opportunity to ask any questions.

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[1] The last intake of students at the CFAMM graduated in 2014. A new school and training programme has since been established in Ouarzazate.

[2] Note the wide-based stance of the mule which hints at the extent to which she is bracing herself and how hard it is to gauge the weight carried and the wear and tear sustained by the mule.

[3] Muleteers is the term used here to describe the "packers" who work the mules and are responsible for moving the trekking team's equipment from one camp to the next.

Over the next few days, however, the five instructors[4], 40 mountain guide students, and nine muleteers gradually started asking questions as we became aware of the extent and impact of the load on the nine mules.

This year, 2009-10, was the first year that pack mule welfare had been taught at the guide school and the first time a veterinary-trained guide had worked as an instructor on this final assessment. Each night, the packsaddles came off and the backs were inspected both visually and by palpation—looking and feeling for hair loss, rubs, heat, swelling, discharges, discomfort, and pain (Figure 2a).[5] Time was found to weigh the loads, including the pack saddles, and it was established that the loads all exceeded 150kg. To put this into context, these mules are relatively small, weighing between 200-250kg. According to Galley (2012, p. 25), a mule can carry between 40-100kg depending on the terrain, whilst Geus (2007, p. 44) suggests that mules can carry 50kg and up to 80kg over easy terrain and for limited periods. An old man with a severe limp owned one of the mules. This mule was therefore not only carrying all the equipment but also her owner. It was likely that she was carrying in excess of 250kg and, by the start of the fourth day, she was severely lame. She was treated with intravenous analgesics over the next few days, but it was increasingly evident (at least to those observing her) from the heat in her foot and the extent of her lameness that she was suffering badly (Figure 2b). Over several days it was debated among the team what to do. Arriving in Setti Fatma, on Day 10, the owner was finally persuaded to allow his mule to be evacuated to a clinic in Marrakech. At the clinic, a stress fracture of the third phalanx of the right hind limb was confirmed on X-Ray.

The students, instructors, and muleteers had received a sustained experiential lesson that they were unlikely to forget. They had managed the presenting problems, improvising solutions as best they could, but how had this situation arisen and why? How had nine mules found themselves carrying the luggage for 54 people? A detailed report was prepared for the School's administrators to help them see and feel into this grave welfare concern with a view to developing their awareness of the issues and explore potential solutions. Over the next five years of teaching, fully illustrated reports detailing the injuries and welfare concerns identified were submitted after each trek. Gradually, the number of mules supplied was increased although their loads (unridden) continued to exceed 120kg. By the end of this five-year programme of training, some 200 guides had graduated with an understanding of the primary welfare concerns (including overloading, pack wounds, tethering injuries and

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[4] Including myself in my professional capacity both as a veterinarian and International Mountain Leader.

[5] The tissue over the withers and scapula of this grey mule is raw and weeping. The packsaddle should sit clear of the midline if pressure is to be eliminated and sores prevented, something the owner and students came to learn about as they studied the problem.

bitting injuries) that mules working in the mountain tourism industry are exposed to and suffer (Cousquer, 2011, 2014, 2015; Cousquer & Alyakine, 2012, 2014a, 2014b).

These young professionals thus expanded their awareness of the issues, however their awareness of the wider system - of which they and the mules are a part - was still developing. Mountain tourism is a multi-stakeholder (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021; Tallberg et al., 2022), multi-sited and highly complex system. The various ways that trekkers, trek agencies (both international and local), guides, and muleteers contribute to and help enact (Cousquer, 2018) poor welfare is profoundly entangled (Danby et al., 2019). This makes it very hard to clarify responsibilities, to negotiate and take responsibility, and to develop "response-ability" (Haraway, 2016, p. 16). Many of the upstream appearances (Bortoft, 2012; Cousquer, 2018) and causes of poor welfare lie hidden and few of the stakeholders pay attention. As David Fennell (2022) puts it: "It is we humans who fail to understand animal-expressed indicators, and … ignore these indicators in the pursuit of individual and organisational interests through pleasure and profit" (p. 1). Looking beyond the physical violence of overloading injuries, there are therefore hidden causes, or forms of structural violence (Galtung, 1969) arising from the decisions and actions of those who are not physically present on the trek. There are also causes associated with failures to look, see and feel, described by Otto Scharmer as "attentional violence" (Lawalata, 2022, p. 11). There is thus a great deal of *absencing* (Scharmer, 2009, pp. 247–248). When the stakeholders responsible for welfare are spread out across time and space, significant questions arise about how such complex systems can (individually and then collectively) develop awareness of and take responsibility for the welfare of the *beasts of burden* required to carry their luggage.

Figures 1a-1b: (Cousquer, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) The mules disappear under their packsaddles, paniers, and the load placed on their backs.

Figure 2a-2b: (Cousquer, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) When the packsaddle is removed and the back inspected, a packing injury is revealed. And the lame mule has her hoof cooling in some cold water whilst an anti-inflammatory injection is prepared.

Knowing the mule benefits from a plurality of epistemic practices for there are many ways of knowing (Argent, 2022; Brown & Dilley, 2012; Cousquer, 2018) that can enrich our concern for how she fares, inviting us to take responsibility for her welfare. Responsible tourism is, according to Goodwin (2011, p. 33), predicated upon awareness raising. But what exactly is awareness raising: How and when do we come to know, to care, and to take responsibility? Who should develop their awareness? What should they be aware of, and to what extent should that awareness be developed? When provided with opportunities to suspend judgements, redirect attention, and attend to others, their awareness may be transformed. But what do they then do with this awareness? How can awareness grow and spread across a community of practitioners? How does this awareness transform those individuals and communities? Answering these questions is of vital importance if those practising tourism are to take responsibility and develop their response-ability, their capacity to respond. Connolly and Cullen (2018) propose an ethic of care framework that increases the visibility of animals within organisations, enhancing their moral considerability (p. 406). This involves the inclusion of "fringe stakeholders," a "strategy that requires deep listening … with those who have been previously disregarded and marginalised" (p. 416).

This paper explores the potential offered by Action Research as a tool for awareness raising and transformative change. A willingness to listen is key here for, as Argent writes (2022, p. 41), "attunement transpires when one offers awareness, attention, receptivity, and responsiveness to another's emotional state or needs—when we listen." This work therefore presents how transformative change can arise when we extend an invitation to equines to contribute to systems change and create opportunities for equines to be listened and attended to.

This paper is organised in four parts: Firstly, the stakeholders responsible for the welfare of pack mules working in the international mountain tourism industry will be presented in order to provide a sense of the contexts within which an awareness-based systems change programme has been developed. Secondly, some of the merits and challenges involved in developing an Action

Research approach with this community will be explored, with a particular focus on bringing the marginalised mules and their owners into the conversation (Argent, 2022; Connolly, 2020, 2022). This allows us to then shift the focus from the actors themselves to the relationships they co-create together and, in particular, the ways in which they meet and dialogue (Cousquer, 2022). Fourthly, and in conclusion, the importance of holding containers (Cousquer, 2018; Scharmer, 2001) for genuine meeting and of turning to the other as a prerequisite for genuine dialogue and transformative change will be emphasised.

Mules and the International Mountain Tourism Industry

In this first section, the interwoven narratives of the key stakeholders who co-create mule welfare are presented. We start with the mule for she lies at the heart of this problematic. The mule's supremacy as a pack animal is legendary, nowhere more so than in mountainous terrain (Cousquer & Allison, 2012; Savory, 1970). Today, mules are for this very reason much favoured within mountain tourism (Giampiccoli, 2017). Their role and utility within this industry are widely acknowledged, but this recognition masks tensions between differing ways of knowing the mule and how she fares. The various practitioners thrown together, across time and space, for the purposes of a mountain expedition,[6] each form their own opinion of the mule's welfare. Their widely differing socio-historical and cultural backgrounds accounts for the disparate set of siloed practices in which the mule becomes embroiled (Figures 3a–3c). Considerable uncertainty therefore arises over what constitutes acceptable welfare, precisely because welfare is enacted within overlapping and often contradictory knowledge practices. In addition to questions of welfare, there are also questions of position and subjectification in the biopolitical field. Vasilopoulou (2021) examines these questions for the donkeys of Santorini, asking whether these animals are laborers, slaves, or machines. In doing so she highlights the quality of the donkeys' relation with their owners and the extent to which this is a matter of collaboration or of exploitation. Where expedition mules are concerned, Cousquer and Alison (2012) highlight that the expedition leader has moral responsibilities towards human porters and therefore to pack mules undertaking similar work. This recognition of mules represents a form of interspecies solidarity (Coulter, 2016) that recognises them not just as service providers but potentially as companions on a journey. There are echoes here of the ethics of the 1953 Everest Expedition (Hunt, 1954) in which it is recognised that the success of an expedition was dependent on the "combined efforts of the Sherpas and ourselves" (p. 230), their "unity as a party" (p. 229) and high degree of selfless cooperation that leads Hunt to declare that "it would be hard to find a more close-knit team

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[6] Within mountain tourism, the term 'trek' is also widely used. For the purposes of this thesis, 'expedition' will be retained as much of the work conducted as part of this project involved members of the Expedition Providers Association (EPA).

than ours" (p. 229). When Hilary and Tensing made their successful ascent, Hunt (1954) writes:

> … the tasks of the Sherpas and Sahibs were no longer complimentary, they were identical. All were sharing the same burden, all equipped with the same aids, were sharing the difficulties of the climb and the height. (p.230)

The guide students at the CFAMM had watched the film of this expedition and studied the ethos that ensured porters and Sherpas were treated fairly. They had then gone on to study the exploitation within the international mountain tourism industry that led to the setting up of the International Porter Protection Group and to growing awareness of how those working in mountain tourism can find themselves exploited (Cousquer & Allison, 2012). This allowed them to consider the ideal team where all members are kindred spirits and to extend this vision to today's mountain tourism industry and the question of whether mules be viewed as kin, as team members, as co-workers? Donna Haraway proposes this as a possibility in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) where dog training is presented not as an act of subjugation but as a symbiotic co-evolutionary practice.

Sadly, the reality for expedition pack mules falls short of this ideal: On expedition, the various practices and trajectories of the agency, tourist, mountain guide, muleteer and mule are drawn together, woven into "an immense and continually evolving tapestry" (Ingold, 2011, p. 9) that is suffused with light, weather, the rich aroma of aromatic plants crushed underfoot and the sound of hooves and boots moving over stony ground. Human feet carefully cover the terrain, whilst mules, on hooves perfectly adapted to rocky mountain paths, make their surefooted way from one camp to the next. Labouring to take in the sights, smells, and sounds that threaten to overwhelm the visitor, it is not always easy to spare a thought for the mules and their owners. The mules labour too: under the same sun, up the same gradients, across the same high cols and through the same scenery but under a very different load and for very different rewards. Laden high with all manner of items that the trekking team deem essential for the journey or could not leave behind, it is the mule who truly labours. Dwelling together, moving together, theirs is a shared journey; shared, but not the same.

The tourist is on holiday and their experience is all-too-easily romanticised. It is, after all, this escape from reality, this *dépaysement*, that is so eagerly sought. In appealing to the "tourist gaze" (Urry, 2002), a reality is quite literally constructed by the industry for the consumer. Sometimes this construction is a harmless appetiser to the trek itself; at other times, however, it masks unpalatable truths and harsh realities. Tourists and the wider tourism industry thus often fail to see the negative impact of their activities on local communities, whose members are both human and non-human (Hall & Brown, 2006), and the fragile mountain environment that sustains them. Fennell argues that "though we know the right thing to do whilst on vacation…we still opt for what is morally

wrong because we succumb to our selfish desires—we express a weakness of will" (2022, p. 7), which can be thought of as a reluctance or unwillingness to see and to care. The carefree thus all-too-easily become the careless or even the uncaring.

The muleteer is a *montagnard*[7] (Debarbieux & Rudaz, 2010), whose life, by contrast, is somewhat more prosaic. The mountain environment is harsh and unforgiving and the *montagnard*'s year-round survival hard won. Mountain communities are isolated and remote; if true geographically, this also holds socially, economically and politically. To survive and fare well in the mountains presents the visitor with significant challenges, but these are short-lived and readily relieved by a return to urban living. For the locals, by contrast, they remain a lived reality, a never-ending struggle for survival. Members of these marginalised communities are all-too-easily rendered voiceless, misunderstood and maligned, their needs neglected or even denied by outsiders (Debarbieux, 2008). Mountain tourism therefore has the power to seduce the traditional agro-pastoralist with the promise of a diversified revenue stream and the possibility of a reprieve from toil and uncertainty (Cousquer, 2016; Funnell & Parish, 1999; Garrigues-Cresswell & Lecestre-Rollier, 2002); a seduction that presents age-old traditions that had evolved to cope with mountain living with new threats and challenges. The cohesion and solidarity of local communities is disrupted by the ideology of the market, fragile mountain ecosystems are despoiled and local labour, both human and nonhuman, find themselves exploited (Mahdi, 1999; Ramou, 2007). Caught up in their own cares, it is all-too-easy for these communities to lose sight of the mule and of mule welfare.

Where does this leave the mule? Invisible? Overlooked? Forgotten? How is the mule in mountain tourism rendered absent from mountain tourism? Perhaps more importantly, how amid this complexity, can different groups learn to care for mules better? Holding such questions serves as a reminder that we must not lose sight of such questions and that curiosity is the way in…

Animals, it seems, may co-habit the same spaces as humans but we somehow remain blind to them and to the ways in which we have minimised our awareness of their lives and fates. This is significant, for awareness raising is central to the responsible tourism endeavour (Goodwin, 2011). John Berger's oft-quoted line that "prophesy now involves geographical rather than historical projection; it is space not time that hides consequences from us" (1971, p. 40) challenges us to consider what spaces and spacing (or distancing and absencing) devices prevent us from seeing, and what sorts of spaces and practices might allow us to see more clearly. His reference to prophecy also provides us with an orientation towards the future that can emerge through our choices as moral

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[7] This French term, much favoured by Bernard Debarbieux and Gilles Rudaz (2010), perhaps best describes the identity, nature and character of indigenous mountain people. Where the mountaineer may visit and travel through the mountains, the montagnard is mountain born-and-bred. The mountains are to them birthplace, workplace and home.

agents and communities. Ways of seeing and of knowing can thus travel and evolve, especially when we suspend old ways and, in particular, "the human biases, imaginaries, fears and wishes" (Carr, 2021, p. 37) that structure our thinking, and create opportunities to learn new ways.

In attending more fully to the mule and to the quality of attention paid to mules and mule welfare, an opportunity is fashioned that allows us to better understand the contested nature of welfare, a concept that sits "uncomfortably between scientific fact, social norms and individual subjectivity" (Buller & Morris, 2003, p. 219). This opportunity necessitates an appreciation of the different worlds from which the actors in mountain tourism are drawn, arguing that this is essential to an understanding of the problems posed when differing, or even incommensurate, views of animal welfare collide. Bringing these differing welfares together and placing them under tension, renders porous the bubbles in which they each exist and challenges those involved to see more clearly (Figures 3a-3c).[8] Elsewhere I have emphasised the value of heterogeneity and diversity and therefore choice in developing moral wisdom (Cousquer, 2018) and proposed that an awareness of the precepts of welfare born of seeing the mule more fully allows those involved in the mountain tourism industry to see their own roles more clearly. In exercising their power to negotiate ontologies more wisely, response-ability for mule welfare emerges. In essence, it is all too easy for the various actors in mountain tourism to turn their back on the muleteer and his mule and to sanction exploitation through this inattention. Developing attentional practices can ensure that intentions are clarified, and the welfare of the mule is considered and respected. To develop this further calls for engagement with ideas of collective responsibility; this commences a journey from ego-system to eco-system awareness (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013; Scharmer et al., 2021) and allows for the consideration of the welfare born of dialogue and community (Figure 3a). Hence the emphasis on the dialogical encounter, on systems change, and on Action Research.

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[8] Mule welfare is a heterogeneous, complex and contested concept that is enacted within overlapping practices that are brought into contact, and sometimes conflict, within the mountain tourism industry. These practices and the welfares they enact overlap are, however, shifting and emergent, as suggested by the use of dotted margins. Moving from an awareness of the welfare enacted within each of the bubbles to an awareness of the ways in which welfare is co-created requires the system to see itself and those involved to see themselves as part of that system. The welfare that emerges when all involved engage in dialogue rather than monologues and debates allows the existing impoverished welfare of mules to evolve towards a richer, more holistic welfare.
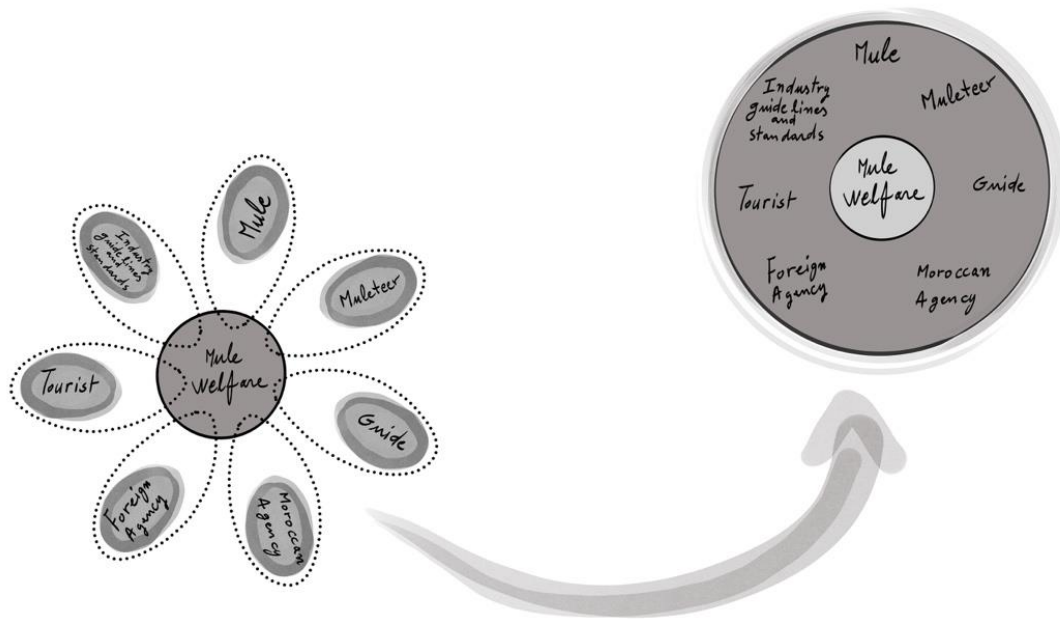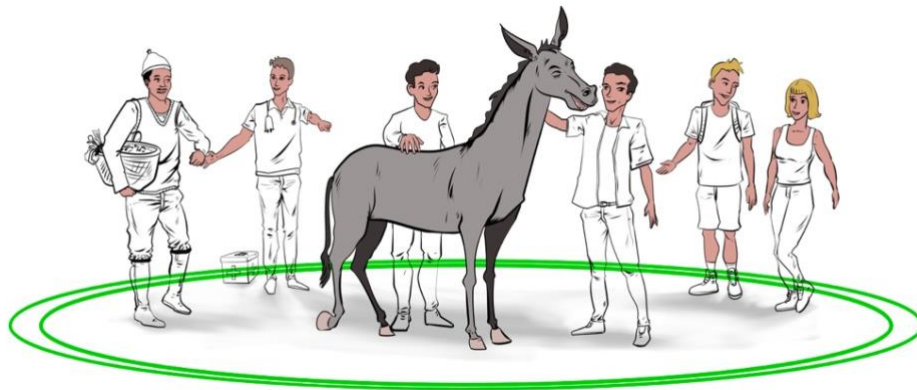
Figure 3a: (Zihounti, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) Moving towards welfares emerging through genuine meeting and dialogue.

The images (Figures 3b – 3c) capture Moroccan artist, ZiHounti's visual interpretation of how absencing arises for the visiting trekkers, the foreign and local agencies, the guide and even the muleteers themselves with the consequences weighing heavily on the mule. Abdelaziz has grown up in the south of Morocco, where mules and donkeys are very much part of the fabric of daily living. In the second image, Zihounti captures what can happen when promoting deep listening, when judgment, cynicism and fear are suspended by all involved and it becomes possible to meet genuinely, re-spect and dialogue with the mule.

Figures 3b-3c: (Zihounti, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) From turning your back on, to turning towards, the mule and to each other.

Action Research

Where the welfare of mules working in mountain tourism is concerned, there is an urgent need to understand how the practices that bind mule and man together can be improved and rendered more equitable. This represents a knowledge-doing gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000) that calls for a methodology for action, both with and for the mule. I argue here that if dialogue between the stakeholders is achieved, it is possible to move beyond restructuring and redesigning (new structures, practices, and processes) to reframing (new

thinking and principles) and even regenerating (new purpose) and thus to self-transformation (Scharmer, 2009, pp. 27–30).

The work informing this paper developed a staged model of Action Research (AR) that moved from an understanding of the issue(s) to the transformation of working practices with new insights emerging 'organically' (Bisplinghoff, 1998). As part of an ongoing inquiry into how mule welfare can be better practised, the relationship and communication between man and mule was targeted and an inquiring approach adopted that allowed practitioners to develop their ability to act "awaredly and choicefully" and to "assess effects in the outside world while acting" (Reason & Torbert, 2001).

The focus on the quality of attention, dialogue and communion needed to promote awareness and action, led to the use a form of Action Research developed by Otto Scharmer and his colleagues at MIT. This approach[9] to action inquiry, known as Theory U, was used in this study as a framework to develop and explore awareness of mule welfare and to transform the way the industry takes responsibility for mule welfare. This approach distinguishes between cycles of *absencing* from the social field through judgment, cynicism, and fear, and *presencing*—where these neurophysiological tendencies to close ourselves off from the other are suspended, creating opportunities for relational practices to be nurtured. This is similar to what Argent (2022) describes as trans-species attunement. Theory U seeks to deepen awareness by promoting open-minded inquiry and open-hearted compassion as ways to see more deeply into the social field.[10] It was anticipated that this growing awareness would enter, interact with, disrupt — and in turn, transform — the practices and context(s) of the lived world(s) that the mule is subject to. This paper is thus an attempt to better understand and map what these journeys towards our humanity[11] might look like. It seeks to hold open the space necessary for curious inquiry and genuine and generative dialogue to take place and shape a dialogue in which all participants, *including the mule*, can start exploring and negotiating what they truly want for the future. These journeys of exploration beckon to us.

> They connect meaning to action. They craft narratives that release human energy. They make new maps that guide us into places where there are no paths. As importantly, they help us to discover the courage that it takes to journey towards our humanity.
> (McManus, 2014, p. 158)

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[9] Further developed by the Presencing Institute, hubs and coaching circles have been established across the world. For further information visit www.u-school.org.

[10] According to Scharmer, Pomeroy and Kaufer (2021, p. 5) the social field is "the entirety of the social system with an emphasis on the source conditions that give rise to patterns of thinking, conversing, and organizing, which in turn produce practical results."

[11] What Scharmer describes as our *highest future possibility*.

The tendency for the muleteer to view and treat the mule as an object rather than as an extension of himself has come to define the relationships that exist between man and mule. It is possible, however, to transcend and dissolve subject-object awareness[12] and attain a new, higher level of awareness. Both mule and muleteer grow through this transformative process (Figure 4) as they let go of the ignorance, judgement, cynicism and fear that limits who they could be.
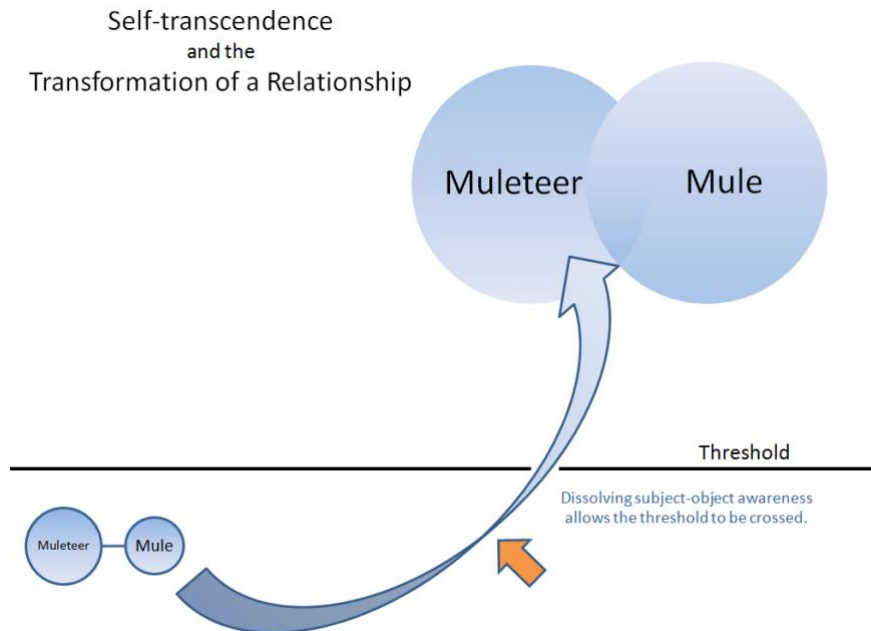

Self-transcendence
and the
Transformation of a Relationship

Muleteer   Mule

Threshold

Dissolving subject-object awareness
allows the threshold to be crossed.

Muleteer — Mule

Figure 4: Transforming the self and the relationship requires us to see ourselves in the other.

Methodology for Action

According to Reason and Bradbury (2008), Action Research is "not so much a methodology as an orientation to inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity, and question posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues" (p. 1). It brings together a range of "practices of living inquiry," "engaging those who might otherwise be subjects of research" in "more or less systematic cycles of action and reflection." These cycles integrate knowing and action, "responding to a desire to act creatively in the face of practical and often pressing issues" and open new "communicative spaces in which dialogue and development can flourish" (p. 3). Action Research "draws on many ways of knowing" and is "values oriented, seeking to address issues of significance concerning the flourishing of human persons, their communities and the wider ecology in which we

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[12] This involves a letting go of the illusion of the separate self and a shift into "interbeing" (Hanh, 2021).

participate" (p. 4). Perhaps most importantly it is a "living, emergent process that cannot be predetermined but changes and develops as those engaged deepen their understanding of the issues to be addressed and develop their capacity as co-inquirers" (p. 4). In this body of work, it was therefore assumed that stakeholders were on a journey where learning opportunities born of listening arose and could be integrated into practice. It was also assumed that judgement, cynicism, and fear would recur and interfere with the learning for these habits are deeply ingrained in our ways of being and doing and entrap us, denying us "the freedom that allows us to hear, and to see and to just be" (Hanh, 2015, p. 5).

Mules as Members of a Community of Inquiry

Debra Merskin's seminal paper on the promise of participatory action research for animals argues cogently that "working toward a level of mutuality with other-than-human-animals benefits us all (2011, p. 150) and that our ideas of research, communication, and community must be revised. I have argued elsewhere that the mule is a member of the trekking team (Cousquer & Allison, 2012). The mule is therefore a community member, a being with whom we communicate and negotiate; a participatory intelligence with big ears whose ability to co-sense, co-author and co-create the World we live in is only now being recognised.

> Our world does not consist of separate things but of relationships that we co-author…A participatory worldview places human persons and communities as part of their world – both human and more-than-human – embodied in their world, co-creating their world. (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 7)

I have therefore developed an action inquiry *with* mules rather than *for* mules. This steps over the threshold that has been reified by the mule's perceived linguistic limitations and our own uncertainty when it comes to deciding whether we are *advocating for* or, indeed, *dialoguing with* the mule. In considering this question, we are led to consider the underlying purpose of this inquiry. Is it purely *instrumental* in the sense that it yields improvements in practice? Is it *interpretive* in the sense that it aims to inform the wise and prudent decision making of practitioners? Or is it, in fact, emancipatory in the sense that it seeks to emancipate people from "determination by habit, custom, illusion and coercion which sometimes frame and constrain social and educational practice" (Kemmis, 2006, p. 95)? I believe that it can be all three and could even prove to be emancipatory for the mule.

An emancipatory view recognises the need to improve our self-understanding and address collective misunderstandings about the nature of mules and of muleteering practice, and how both have been constituted, shaped, and re-shaped culturally, socially, historically and discursively (Geiger et al., 2020; Vasilopoulou, 2021). Developing the latent potential for travel and tourism to facilitate change is thus a disruptive force that can be harnessed wherever there is a willingness to surrender into listening. The project's emancipatory aims

function in the same way that the political dimension of Action Research asserts the importance of "liberating the muted voices of those held down by class structures and neo-colonialism, by poverty, sexism, racism and homophobia" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 10), this research project gives voice to the mule and allows that voice to be heard and respected.

The mule has so often been maligned and excluded from narratives and negotiations. Our understanding of the reasons for this become apparent as we start to see how we absent ourselves from the mule and the resulting gaps in our awareness through which the mule disappears. There will be those who state, paraphrasing Wittgenstein, that even if mules could talk, we would not be able to understand them. This idea emanates from the divisions and distinctions that language and reason allow us to make (Carr, 2021; Venegas & López-López, 2021). But, as de Fontenay and Pasquier (2008) point out, if God speaks to us by the prayers that we address to him, where the language of animals is concerned, perhaps it is sufficient simply to speak to (and indeed with) them. Merrifield (2008) similarly highlights the importance attached in the Quran to the prophet's ability to speak to and with donkeys. According to de Fontenay and Pasquier (2008), the ability to commune with those who are silent to us, whether they be animals or those we have lost, is not granted to all. They suggest it is, in fact, a gift of translation.

In describing the person who can speak (or whisper) with animals as sharp of hearing or graced with the gift of translation and understanding, the status of animals as dumb or silent creatures is questioned. The metaphors used to describe the ways by which we can break into this mysterious 'other world' include 'remedies', passwords, rituals, and shibboleths.[13] Humankind has thus always wrestled with the challenge of breaching these barriers of incomprehension. But how is this to be done? How can one address what Pierre Enoff (2014) has called "the silence of horses" and appreciate what we humans have inflicted on all equines by our reluctance and inability to commune with them?

That no one has yet dared to undertake Action Research with animals reflects perhaps the uncertainties and tensions raised when viewing them as subjects with something to say. I argue, however, that any interpretation of a mule's experiences is not meant to be definitive or absolute. It is proposed,

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[13] "on découvre en effet, chez Virgile et Michelet, dans le lien que l'historien entretient avec le poète, l'évocation d'une secrète analogie entre les animaux et les à demi vivants que sont pour nous les morts. *Autres* qu'il est difficile, voire dangereux d'approcher. Avant de les rencontrer, il faut se munir d'un mot de passe, d'un *schibboleth*, d'un rituel, d'un instrument orphique, ce qui n'exclut cependant pas l'effort et l'endurance. Ce pouvoir énigmatique, on peut le nommer indifféremment, finesse de l'oreille ou don de la *traduction*. La grâce est accordée à certains et refusée à d'autres, qui permet d'entendre et de comprendre le parler des à jamais silencieux, et d'administrer un remède à cette immémoriale séparation entre les bêtes et les hommes qu'on nomme pompeusement la différence zoo-anthropologique." (de Fontenay & Pasquier, 2008, pp. 20–21).

instead, as a question for curious exploration and deliberation, an opportunity for us to examine our own sources and determine where we are operating from and how we are impacting on the mule and on mule welfare. I argue that we realise this when we learn to see ourselves mirrored in the mule. The mule thus has the power to transform those of us who are willing to listen and worthy of her trust by dint of the "re-gard" or "re-spect" we afford her. As Thich Nhat Hanh (2021, p. 142) asserts: "right action is the kind of action that goes in the direction of understanding, compassion and truth. It is the kind of action without discrimination based on the insight of interbeing."

Opening ourselves to feedback and, in particular, to the feedback the mule is offering and the mirror the mule is holding up to us can lead to revisioning, reshaping, and regenerating the relationship forged between humans and non-humans.[14] These are creative processes of "becoming with" that demand practical engagement to evolve and direct our skilful being in the world. To explore how this can be realised, we now introduce the specific Action Research approach that informed and structured the co-seeing, co-sensing, and co-creating journeys that allowed awareness of the mule and mule welfare to emerge and alternative futures to be explored.

Theory U

This approach pioneered by Otto Scharmer and his colleagues at MIT as a way of exploring and supporting change in people, organisations, and society (Senge et al., 2004) builds on the work of reflective practitioners (Schön, 2016) and the action and reflective turns in social science. It proposes an "advanced social sciences methodology that integrates science (third-person view), social trans-formation (second-person view), and the evolution of self (first person view) into a coherent framework of consciousness-based action research" (Scharmer, 2009, p. 16).

Theory U's merits lie in its emphasis on awareness raising and dialogue and on helping individuals and complex systems see themselves as co-creators of the many problems we face in today's globalised industries. Co-seeing and co-sensing journeys are integral to the change inquiry advocated by Theory U, which provides a structure to address the invisibility of the mule and of mule welfare within the mountain tourism industry. By promoting curiosity and compassion, cognitive and emotional energy is released that can fuel transformative change. A shift in the source of our attention and therefore how we attend to the world arises when we allow ourselves to see (opening our minds) and to sense (opening our hearts). According to Buber (2000), these represent first a relational shift into technical dialogue (*I-It*) and a deeper relational shift or turning (Cousquer,

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[14] and specifically, in this case, the gendered relationship between man and mule.

2022) into genuine dialogue (*I-Thou*), characterised by a quality of mutuality and reciprocity that leaves us changed by the encounter.

The Role of Dialogical Encounters in Deepening Awareness

The previous section has outlined the theoretical merits and challenges associated with bringing the mule into a process of lived inquiry. In this next section, we focus on how seeing and sensing feedback loops were established between the mules and the various stakeholders represented in Figure 3 so that the system can come to see itself and negotiate better mule welfare. The quality of encounter and exchange are thus prioritised. Before moving into the reciprocal exchange (dialogue born of compassionate sensing), curiosity has to be elicited so that the stakeholders are drawn in and start to see with as little judgement and as much patience as possible.

These feedback loops have to be grown organically: The guide students on expedition would not usually have walked over to the mules and inspected their backs at the end of the day. This was now part of their training, and they were learning that there is little difference between interesting ourselves in the state of the clients' and indeed their own feet (which suffer from ill-fitting walking boots) and the state of the mules' backs (which suffer from ill-fitting pack saddles). The pathology of pressure points and friction rubs is very similar. Having the students examine the backs allows the rubs, the hair loss, the heat and swelling and any associated raw wounds to be observed visually and palpated topically but also and perhaps most significantly, felt (Figures 5a-5b). A pain response can be read; the mules can speak of their pain. As Fennell (2022, p. 7) acknowledges "animals do in fact speak for themselves through their emotions, preferences, behaviours, and physical state, and we have simply avoided their "voices" because of ignorance and self-interest." Attending to the mule's experience presents us with choices. The causes of the rubs can be sought out in collaboration with the muleteers and addressed, as communities of practice and learning (Cousquer & Alyakine, 2014b) emerge from this shared reflection on experience (Scharmer, 2001). It also becomes possible to engage the mule in this process of research and inquiry for they will typically demonstrate avoidance behaviour such as dipping the back if there is a pack sore, when they are loaded, indicating that they are not consenting to being worked. This thus raises the possibility of "animal informed consent providing guidance" (Fennell, 2022, p. 8) to the trekking team.

Figure 5a-5b: (Cousquer, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) The author, the mule owner and one of the guide students examine[15] a mule's withers at the end of day 10 of the "Grande Traversée de l'Haut Atlas". Wounds are cleaned and dressed by the students before assessing how to eliminate pressure points and rubs between the pack saddle and the midline.

The communities of inquiry established on the trek are only able to deal with the presenting problem and the immediate causes. The root causes associated primarily with overloading, with poorly fitted and adapted packsaddles and with the absence of a collaborative preventative approach (Blakeway & Cousquer, 2018) are not touched, however. To bring these into view requires us to extend the conversation to the wider system, to identify other key decision makers and stakeholders and to recognise the various ways in which the problem statement is incomplete because of the failure to recognise these inter-relationships (Senge et al., 2008).

Bringing the trekking clients and the trekking agencies both into the conversation and, ultimately into the same shared space, was not easy. Awareness raising initially consisted of a range of initiatives to disseminate information about the various welfare issues in the popular mountaineering (Cousquer, 2014, 2015; Schmidt, 2015), professional mountaineering (Cousquer, 2014, 2015) and veterinary press. The provision of CPD courses for International Mountain Leaders built on this awareness raising and elicited an unsolicited inquiry from the owner of a British company running expeditions for schools who wanted to develop policy and practice within their own organisation but also saw the opportunity to extend this to members of the Expedition Provides Association[16] (Cousquer, 2018). Such interest and deep-seated commitment to addressing a common concern is of critical importance if communities of commitment and creation (Scharmer, 2001) are to emerge and sustain themselves. The company hosted a series of meetings in the UK to engage other providers working in the sector and raise awareness of the welfare concerns. This ultimately led to the creation of the EPA Mule Welfare Charter (Cousquer, 2018); visions of a positive future thus established a creative tension with the truth

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[15] The back is both examined visually and palpated. The mule's discomfort comes to be not just observed but felt.

[16] See https://www.expeditionprovidersassociation.co.uk

about present reality (Senge et al., 2008). This represented a shift from explicit knowledge about the problem into the co-initiation of a process of sustained, iterative learning as the industry explored how to implement these commitments on the ground. Mules were present throughout this process, even at a distance, for their documented lived experiences lay at the heart of the initiative. The timeline for this process is shown in Figure 6, illustrating how the initiation of these meetings provided a space for individuals to see and feel the impact of their consumption of muleteering services on the mule and muleteer. Turning away from the "will to profit and to be powerful" (Buber, 2000, pp. 48–49) and attending to the mule and muleteer as *I-Thou* thus has the potential to be transformative.

June 2014	Initial contact made by Chris.
July 2014	Chris visits the Donkey Sanctuary in Sidmouth to learn more about mule welfare; further meetings held at his home.
July 2014	Development and publication of Leader Checklist
September 2014	Mule care on the agenda for EPA Meeting, hosted by FFE.
October 2014	Mule Care Initiative Workshop for FFE school group in Morocco.
October 2014	Retirement of aged mule, named Betty.
November 2014	EPA Working Mule Care Initiative Workshop (UK)
March 2015	Ground handlers Working Mule Care Initiative Conference and Workshop (Morocco).
April 2015	First Mule Welfare Audit undertaken for FFE.
May 2015	Charter for Care of Working Mules issued.
June-October 2015	Further Mule Welfare Audits undertaken for EPA members.
June-October 2015	Training expeditions for muleteering teams undertaken.
March – May 2016	Training workshops for World Challenge.
September 2016	Drafting of EPA Technical Guidance Document on Pack Mule Welfare on Expedition.
February 2017	Training workshops for PEAK (World Challenge's ground handlers in Morocco)'s guide team and muleteers.

Figure 6: Timeline of initiatives that allowed awareness of mule welfare in the expeditions industry to be developed across EPA companies over a two-year period from 2014-17, from the point the owner of Far Frontiers Expeditions made contact.

Creating further ways of seeing and sensing into the lived experience of the mules and muleteers working for several international travel agents and the local agents who acted as their "ground handlers" started with systematic mule health and equipment checks on their muleteering teams with detailed reports being compiled that showed:

– The mule's biographical history (age, gender, duration of ownership)

– The body condition and conformation of the mule

– The presence of old and new injuries (packsaddle, tethering, and bit-related)

– The condition of the equipment and the likely causes of any pack wounds

– The weight of the pack saddles

– Key recommendations where changes should be made

These insights then served as initiators of an iterative series of ongoing discussions that sought to develop co-creative solutions to address these concerns. It was soon realised that writing animal welfare into the contracts between the international and local agents would not solve very much as each welfare issue arose through a collection of interdependent elements, including equipment, training in the use and maintenance of the equipment, training in muleteering practice and many other factors. Each issue had to be explored, whilst recognising they may be interdependent. Here we will focus on overloading as a welfare concern: On the surface, it might be assumed that overloading can be addressed by setting weight limits. A weight limit cannot simply be imposed unilaterally. The audits had established that the pack saddles typically weigh twenty kilogrammes and so any weight limit would need to take this into account. Bags would need to be weighed and total loads checked (but how, with what, and by whom?). It was recognised that the number of mules provided by a ground handler needed to grow; however this came at a cost. The muleteer salary could not be squeezed as a way of managing costs for the muleteer is, in turn, responsible for covering the costs of feeding and equipping his mule and must do so year-round with little work available during the winter months. In the absence of skilled muleteers capable of training and managing a pack-mule train, it is currently not possible for the number of mules to be increased without this adding to the number of muleteers employed. The muleteers also had their own concerns and priorities. In many cases they did not have the means, equipment, knowledge, skills, authority and even motivation to address many of the welfare issues identified. They thus needed to be supported in prototyping and developing their muleteering practice. These realities confronted the international and local agencies with the reality that the muleteers had historically been viewed as independent contractors, contracted in to provide a service. In many cases they were recruited from poorer, more remote

valleys as the muleteers from these valleys would typically accept lower wages (Figure 7a). It soon became apparent that muleteers had never previously been invited to team meetings or provided with training in the way that guides are. A shift into an eco-systemic view (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013) was therefore needed for the system to start to see and sense itself with agencies recognising how they were responsible for the poor welfare of mules through their exploitation of muleteers. This was made possible when a conference was organised by EPA members, in Imlil, for their ground handlers, muleteers, and local guides as well as other unaffiliated stakeholders. This meeting provided an opportunity for deeper listening (Figure 7b).

Figure 7a-7b: (Cousquer, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) The muleteers pictured riding their heavily loaded mules are working for 70-80 dirhams per day.[17] As part of a two-day workshop, muleteers, guides, local trekking agents and international trekking agents gathered together with mules to learn about how mule welfare issues could be addressed collaboratively.

Muleteers evoked the poor pay and seasonal employment low status of the work as issues of concern that resulted in posts being filled with young muleteers who did not care about the mule and viewed the work as temporary. One of the local company owners summarised this:

> There are two parts to the problem – a financial part and a personal part. Where loads were concerned, services are provided according to the size of the group but this could be difficult in a competitive market. Then there was the new generation of muleteers who did not care about their mules as their fathers had done. They were more likely to get on the mule because it was not their mule and not their investment. These boys often just viewed the mule as a tool of work. (Quotation from Research Participant)

One of the guides further expanded on the role and impact of competition, saying:

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[17] They are from a more remote area and the lack of respect afforded to them cascades falls on the back of the mules. The passing muleteer on the right is on a training trek with another agency and this encounter provides rich material for discussion when the root causes of exploitation are discussed that evening.

> There is competition between companies in Morocco…they have to remain competitive. This means they will often refuse to help or listen to muleteers. Muleteers' work is undervalued and little appreciated. It is only when they are not there that you realise how important their role is. Everything is getting expensive – 125 dirhams a day is nothing!…Companies are just concerned about their benefits.(Quotation from Research Participant)

This represents a radical insight for it highlights that exploitation of workers, both human and other-than-human, can be systemic, cascading down through a hierarchical structure. It is striking how few opportunities existed for foreign companies to meet the mules and their owners and inform themselves about how both fared. They are all-too easily forgotten. In 2015, Hicham Houdaifa published a small book on exploited workers in Morocco, many of whom are women. Tellingly, the book's title was "Dos de femme, dos de mulet: Les oubliées du Maroc profonde,"[18] drawing a telling parallel between the burdens carried by women and mules and how they are forgotten. Exploitation is made possible when it is rendered remote, not brought into view and held up to scrutiny. In the months following the conference, muleteering teams were therefore provided with paid[19] training treks to bring their practice into the light.

Taking small groups of muleteers and their mules away specifically to learn to work the mules in head collars provided "holding spaces" (Scharmer, 2009) for the muleteers to embody a different way of working and relating to their mule. Their wider practice was observed, filmed, viewed, and reviewed by the team at the end of the day. This, perhaps more than anything else, allowed the mule to hold a mirror up to the muleteer and for awareness of the gaps to be explored—between theory and practice, between policy and policy implementation.

The detailed training reports allowed the mule to hold that same mirror up to other stakeholders and rendered visible a host of realities that had, until then, remained hidden. They had not previously been reflected back into a space, and then reflected on. These realities were no longer private matters and could not be dismissed as such, for the structural and attentional violence was now being attended to. Each muleteer's equipment, the condition of his mule, and the way he worked and related to her was no longer his private affair. It was visible, made public, compared to that of his colleagues and with the norms set out by EPA (Cousquer, 2018, pp. 349–354). These realities then become the shared responsibility of those actors in the supply chain who employ the muleteer and his mule and who oversee the work. When the pack saddle is taken off, the back examined, the correspondence of wear to the pack saddle and to rubs considered,

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[18] Translated as "On the backs of women and of mules: The forgotten of deepest Morocco."

[19] This aspect was not funded by the trekking agencies but made possible through funding obtained from an animal welfare charity.

when the muleteers learn to assess whether the pack saddle sits clear of the midline, they start to take an interest in, care for, and take pride in their mule and their work. If their proficiency is not seen, appreciated, and rewarded, however, it can become harder to sustain this level of attention and care. The guide as the representative of the agencies on the ground has a crucially important role to play in ensuring mules and muleteers are not othered, and are valued and that their welfare is not compromised. They must be able to listen to the mule and to the muleteer and to advocate for them when liaising with the agency. This was evident when one of the ground handlers organised a workshop for their guides, in 2017, followed by a three-day training trek for some of their muleteers (as shown in Figure 6). The Adventure Travel Trade Association,[20] of which the ground handler is a member, promote professional development through their international Guide Standard.[21] There is thus a further mechanism through which expedition standards are being promoted by ensuring guides receive training in this area and come to understand their responsibilities to human porters and pack animals. Such training, if systematically undertaken, provide opportunities (holding spaces) for a holistic approach to be taken with the potential to ensure a successful expedition is had by all members of the trekking team.

This approach's transformative potential derives from its focus on the field structures of awareness and how these affect the quality of attention, dialogue and encounter. These, in turn, determine the constitution of the collective (or community) and the future that emerges through collective action around common intentions. Enabling shifts in the field of awareness allows stakeholders to engage in technical dialogue and, in many cases, genuine dialogue and, eventually, generative dialogue. This work recognised early on the need to engineer situations that gave rise to reflective inquiry, dialogue, and generative flow. Failure to do so simply gave rise to polite or defensive answers[22] rather than deep reflection and creative thinking. In other words, the low-energy interactions characterised by *I-in-Me* and *I-in-It* field structure of attention (Scharmer, 2009, pp. 237–238) gives rise to rule reproduction and rule contextualisation. This is unhelpful because it does not expose and explore hidden assumptions and habits of thought and does not therefore allow welfare and exploitation to be considered in a deep, critical, collaborative, and meaningful manner. When operating from an *I-in-You* or *I-in-Now*[23] state, by contrast, one starts to relate to and connect with the field; a higher energy state is reached that gives rise to rule evolving and then rule generating behavior.

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[20] https://www.adventuretravel.biz/

[21] https://learn.adventuretravel.biz/guide-standard

[22] That curtail inquiry resulting in a "shallow dive" that only travels so far down the U.

[23] This occurs when operating from beyond one's periphery or from a place in which one is able to permeate all of one's open boundaries.

Conclusion: Turning to the Other

This paper has provided insights into how both pack mules and muleteers can be brought in as members of a community of inquiry to explore more equitable and respectful ways of meeting and working together. This process must be facilitated for it is dependent on holding spaces being created in which the quality of listening and attending (Scharmer et al., 2021) deepens, such that awareness develops and feeds action for societal transformation. Despite the asymmetry of the relationship between other-than-human-animals working in tourism and the human stakeholders (Fennell, 2022), the mule is able to hold a mirror up to those willing to look into that mirror and can thereby highlight the structural and attentional violence that underlies their exploitation and poor welfare. This mirror is always available but our willingness to look into the mirror, to listen and change, will always be a limiting factor.

This paper has highlighted that mules are easily overloaded in terms of what they physically carry and over-burdened with the costs of poor welfare practices. These consequences are easily ignored through the system's failing to see and feel into these lived realities. The mule's burden is further magnified by that of their owner who is all too easily exploited (with impacts felt in terms of inadequate nutrition and inattention to the mule's body and packsaddle) and given little opportunity to voice these concerns. The ability of concerned tourists to advocate for animal welfare and to complain about failures can, however, be leveraged as a disruptive element that can lead to international and local trekking agencies inquiring into the systems that give rise to poor welfare. This is possible when they or the guides see and report back; it remains somewhat ad-hoc, however. A more systematic and thorough auditing system of mule welfare would take this to the next level — where seeing and sensing are undertaken systematically before, during, and after every trek and these findings used to review and improve practice (Blakeway & Cousquer, 2018). This requires space and time to be created for such encounters. A key question to consider for the future is how these inspections will be conducted and whether the industry can develop enough expertise to undertake them internally.

The merits of Theory U's approach, with its focus on seeing and sensing as key thresholds to be crossed in order to develop awareness of the health of the whole, have been shown to allow the mule to hold up a mirror to exploitative practices (Figure 8). And by prioritising deep listening, it becomes possible to hear the voices and concerns of mules. Furthermore, this has also allowed the concerns of their owners to be heard. Key to this understanding is an appreciation of the quality of listening and therefore of dialogue this gives rise to. Scharmer (2009) argues that we absent ourselves from the other when we fail to suspend judgment, cynicism, and fear. The mule has a long history of being misjudged and maligned; they are also viewed with fear. The importance of curiosity, kindness and courage in Action Research with mules should not therefore be underestimated. Suspending judgment, cynicism and fear, staying mindful, present to the other and to the moment gives rise to genuine meeting

and transformative change. This represents a shift from ego-system to eco-system awareness (Scharmer, 2009; Scharmer et al., 2021). Parallels in this work can be drawn to the wisdom offered by John O'Donohue (1988) for whom, turning from *I-It* to *I-Thou* is part of the battle between the ego and the soul:

> In a certain sense, the meeting with your own death in the daily forms of failure, pathos, negativity, fear or destructiveness are actual opportunities to transfigure your ego. These are invitations to move out of the protective, controlling way of being towards an art of being which allows openness and hospitality. To practice this art of being is to come into your soul rhythm. (p. 262)

Figure 8: (Zihounti, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) The mule is able to hold up a mirror to their humans and help them to free themselves from the absencing that arises when they judge the mule (closed mind) and then slide into uncaring cynical attitudes (closed heart) and start fearing the mule and abusing her.[24]

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[24] These aversive pathways give rise to absencing. Presencing becomes possible when judgments are suspended and encounters promoting curiosity and compassion encouraged. The human can then find themselves exploring the left side of the U and opening up their creative rather than aversive pathways.

If there is one thing to emphasise to anyone interested in applying an Action Research approach to the transformation of human-equine relationships, it is the need to focus on our openness and the need to be more hospitable to ourselves and to others. Hospitality, however, is an under-rated virtue. To become more hospitable can help us to discover our soul rhythm and can transform the way we listen to, meet, and dialogue with the equine. Hospitality also relates to our ability to gather together, to listen, and to develop common intentions. For pack mule welfare in mountain tourism to continue to improve, it is essential that holding spaces are provided that allow the key stakeholders meet regularly and in which the mule and muleteers' concerns are heard and their burden shared. Such hospitality will allow us to seek and ask better questions, of ourselves and of each other. Our society is accustomed to asking blunt, materialistic, capitalist questions, but unfamiliar with the moral questions of how we will be to each other. These are questions we must live our way into, and that will help us to appreciate that the shared burden is one of responsibility and response-ability. The trekking agencies and tourists have for too long exploited muleteers and mules in invisible ways; this represents a structural violence. The attentional violence arises through absencing, when we fail to open our minds and hearts to the impact of the burdens we place on the mule and fail to care for our own deep discomfort when we realise that we have failed to re-spect the mule, to look them in the eye and meet with them genuinely.

Figure 9: (Zihounti, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) Genuine meeting arises when we look deeply into ourselves and into the eyes, minds and lived experiences of our common mortals.

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Book Review

Action Research as a Hopeful Response to Apocalypse:

A Review of Bradbury, H. (2022). How to do Action Research for Transformations at a Time of Eco-social Crisis. Edward Elgar.

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When I first opened this book and saw Hilary Bradbury's dedication "to land, culture and sustainable transformations" on the first page, coupled with her Blessing on Action Research for Transformation (ART) on page v, I knew that the book would resonate with my understanding of the importance of organizing research that is intentionally future forming (as Kenneth Gergen, 2015, succinctly puts it, and as he reiterates in his Foreword to the book). My own position on appreciating land, culture, and regenerative transformation—a positionality that the journal editors asked me to include in this review—was formed as I grew up in apartheid South Africa. I was defined as White in racialized social groupings, and over a period of time I came to recognize the privileges that this categorization affords. Eventually I came to define myself as "Indigenous-oriented," appreciating the worldview of Ubuntu, which is domain to Africa (as a relational onto-epistemology). As I explain in my book *Responsible Research Practice* (2018):

> As far as considering myself as Indigenous-oriented is concerned, what I mean is that I identify with the values which I see and draw out from authors writing about Indigeneity, including values which I draw out from my interactions and conversations with people Indigenous to Africa in particular. (p. 29)

And as I point out further:

> …when we engage with traditions (such as traditions of Ubuntu) we can seek interpretations that offer options for revitalizing dialogue around the values by which we wish to live together with others (and with all life on the planet). (p. 29)

Bradbury's book is about ART and those committed to collaboratively engaging in contemporary action research toward transformation (ARTists) "at a time of apocalypse" (p. 60). It is about learning together through inquiry processes that deepen our understandings and possibilities for collaborative action. The book explains, with reference to Bradbury's personal involvement in a myriad of different arenas, how ART connects those who may be (partially) positioned in academia as "scholars" with citizens positioned in other social spaces. Bradbury explores how ART is a process of revitalizing social, and indeed natural, science away from its elitist pretensions. In her endorsement of the book, Lake Sagaris indicates that, considering Bradbury's role as "curator of crucial handbooks," here "we meet more of Bradbury herself." Indeed, through her narrations of how "science" can become citizen science, Bradbury gives substance to a broad definition of science as a future-forming and value-based enterprise that can be used in the service of social and ecological wellbeing. This is achieved as people become less self-centered (a legacy of the Western heritage of individualism) while becoming more relationally attuned to developing themselves in relational spaces with others (including with nature, from which much can be learned).

In Part I of the book, Bradbury offers what she calls Groundings. While explicating the groundings of ART, she locates seven "choice points" for doing ART—choices that we make about the ways we live our lives and our involvements with others. All of the choice points of ART are linked with fostering collaborative action as part of the "knowing" process (pp. 52–56). The choice points include: defining purposes collaboratively; developing partnerships; activating participative research methods; making explicit links to acknowledge the contributions of previous work; creatively thinking together about new ideas to guide action in response to the urgency of transformation; developing and widening spaces for practitioner engagement, including the voice of nature as a stakeholder; and practicing developmental reflexivity, which enables us to reflect on ourselves also in relation to what she calls larger "structural inertia," which carries patterns of social and environmental injustice (p. 55).

In Part II, Bradbury spells out how ARTists indeed work at the developmental edge, while creating friendships in which they and others can develop, addressing power relations toward more collaborative engagement and

action, and proliferating micro worlds, working on a range of "scales." In Part III, she explicates how caring in the process of doing science can and should be made visible. Here she explains how science as conventionally understood (in Western-oriented paradigms of knowing) can be repurposed.

In the book's dedication, she points out that she wrote the book manuscript in Portland, Oregon, "ancestral land of the Peoples of the Willamette River Valley." She cautions us that the spirit that fed the genocide of these ancestral peoples has not disappeared. But in hope, she indicates that Portland has "become a sustainability leader, designing for the long term with attention to climate justice, and new energy and transportation infrastructure." In the "Port chronicle" in Chapter 1, she recounts her involvement with a range of other actors in this process. She notes that in this "relational space" there was no "systems regulator" for the cooperative behavior that emerged—this depended on people (as stakeholders) "learning new ways of relating," which became a "learning and development journey for all" (p. 13). As part of the process, those who can be classified as committed to Action Research for Transformation (ART) from the University of California Center for Sustainable Cities partnered with the Port of Los Angeles (and decision makers across the port's cargo system) to "tackle air pollution implicated in childhood asthma increases" (p. 3). The intention was to find a way for the port to "balance the competing demands of operating profitably within nature's parameters" (p. 3). Bradbury leaves in abeyance the definition of "profitability," but indicates that profit-making at the expense of people and planetary welfare was not the way in which the port should be functioning—as admitted by the various decision makers (toymakers, shippers, truckers, retailers, waste haulers, etc.). Together the partners managed to find workable solutions, such as developing a carbon calculator from which less-polluting transportation routes could be chosen (p. 3). In a commentary in Chapter 8 on the "promise of microworlds proliferating," Bradbury points out that "the success [of this port] with carbon-reduction strategies was shared through the "national port conference circuit." This resulted in new policies and new practices up and down the West Coast of the United States and further at the ports of New York and New Jersey (p. 126); and these innovations then leapt in a new format across the Atlantic Ocean toward redesigning a large health clinic system that centered on the patients' experiences, initiated by a Swedish physician who had heard about the system design of the Los Angeles Port (p. 126).

In addition, as part of her "dedication to land, culture and sustainable transformations," she tells us that Ireland was her birthplace, and she remarks that it is also a land with an ancient culture that was "colonized and impoverished for centuries" but now is beginning to regenerate thanks to "revitalizing civil structures." She states (performatively, also as a plea to promote further action on our parts) that "truth, goodness and beauty are interweaving to regenerate these [various] lands and cultures." Of course, she implies that this regeneration requires continued dedication on the part of people committed to transformation. Her book is a plea for us to revitalize this potential

for social and ecological regeneration. She argues that as *homo sapiens* we are a species that can learn. But she also notes that sustainability and social justice require a large majority of "we the privileged" to "see it in our direct interest to take care of everyone" (p. 7). Here she positions herself as indeed part of "the privileged," hoping to use her privileged social positionality in service of a common good and to encourage others to likewise see themselves as directly connected and interdependent with "others" who are no longer "othered" but are experienced as part of ourselves. Later, writing about "developmental friendship through community rupture and healing" (pp. 117–126), she explores in depth how she has tried to deal with her privileged position in relationships with others, recognizing that colonization and its dynamics "is not just a historical matter" or "something that happened in a faraway place" (p. 121). Later in this review I elaborate on her story around this (in a workshop encounter with a participant named Zee), which I found to be an excellent and honest account of how Bradbury came to recognize what it means for people to live and learn from a pluriverse of cultural options in the face of the power of dominant cultural expressions.

Notably, in her invocation of a Blessing on ART—and those practicing it — she indicates that she hopes the book will bring "light and encouragement" and "help us to recognize our interdependence deeply enough to transform our inability to collaborate" (p. v). She laments that collectively "we are making our beautiful planet inhospitable" (p. 2). That is, considered as a whole, we are creating chaos for ourselves and for "all our relations," including all life forms (the term "all my relations"—which includes what various Indigenous authors call the more-than-human world [e.g., Ritchie, 2015; Mabunda & McKay, 2021]— conveys the suggestion that we are fundamentally related to, and interdependent with, all that exists). Drawing on and extending the wisdom of Indigenous seers and scholars grappling with current catastrophes, both social and ecological, she suggests that we need to (re)define ourselves as relational selves so that we can better harness our capacity to collaborate in an inclusive community, where community is not confined to any (human) group of people; nor does it exclude what we call "nature," of which indeed we are part (p. 182).

As Gergen writes in his Foreword, the book does not offer "standardized rules" for what counts as ART and being an ARTist, but implores us to consider in the inquiry process what we are trying to achieve (via the research), who the stakeholders are (including the more-than-human ones), and what the social and ecological repercussions of proceeding in a certain way are likely to be (as experiments are also undertaken as part of this process). What is vital, he says, is that this book prioritizes action for a *sustainable world*, highlighting the current stage of eco-social crises, but recognizing that despite apocalyptic possibilities, there is still room for hope if enough people take up the challenge of becoming ARTists to confront our global challenges. And this, as Otto Scharmer points out in a second Foreword, requires building an awareness-based capacity both individually and collectively, where the two are seen as tied to each other,

as we broaden our horizons through creating developmental friendships based on "caring for one another's highest aspirations."

One of Bradbury's chronicles that expresses well her own experience in dealing with conflict, also in full recognition of the impact of racism and colonialism on our social relations, is her account of a workshop with around 50 participants that she and ARTist colleagues facilitated in Europe. It was titled "Developmental Leadership for Transformations: Responding to Social-Ecological Crisis." The way the workshop proceeded indicated to her that they had not adequately prepared for "inherited structures of racism" and issues of systemic power and privilege (p. 118). In brief, during the workshop a person named Zee (from a US protectorate in Asia) shared an account of her culture of island leadership, where she was recognized as a leader. She spoke in a very soft voice, which Bradbury and others had to strain to hear. After Zee spoke, Bradbury chose not to ask Zee or her colleagues to share more in the session. She simply said, "thank you" (without further comment) and declared that it was now time for lunch. Later, while gathering her belongings, she noticed that Zee was close to tears. Zee told Bradbury that she felt Bradbury had not shown sufficient respect for Zee and what she had shared (and could further share) during the session: the islanders interpreted Bradbury as having turned her back on their culture—in white-supremacy fashion. They suggested that Bradbury should organize a session where everyone would participate in the island community's practice of conflict resolution; they insisted that all program participants should be present. Bradbury and colleagues proceeded to "retrieve those who had left," and Zee selected two facilitators to facilitate the session. During the session they clarified why Bradbury's response to a senior leader in the community had been disrespectful and explained that this had been very hurtful. Thereafter they demonstrated their leadership skills by adeptly facilitating the session.

As Bradbury summarizes, she learned from this workshop encounter that Zee's experience of embodying the role of teacher and leader on this occasion "liberated my and our collective awareness that colonization had marked Zee's life. Feeling colonized is not something that others did in the past. It is alive in spaces where we learn" (p. 121). Bradbury also learned that, going forward, "I and co-facilitators [must] pay more attention to preparing and convening relational spaces by bringing awareness of historical context and institutional patterns of power" (p. 122). In the meantime, "listening and appreciating the deftness of Zee's leadership" taught her to listen better. Bradbury notes that that the learning that took place also rippled forward when, for example, one of the participants working with refugees realized how he could seek out leaders among the refugees as "resources for solving problems associated with their resettlement" (p. 113).

In Chapter 13, Bradbury reflects on her "personal growth work," admitting that when she came across the Indigenous practice of "vision questing in the wilderness" she found this profound but would be "unable to teach" it. She wonders if, in her list of growth options, she would include what she considers to

be an "unusual capacity such as attunement with deceased ancestors" (p. 197). Hailing from Africa myself, where attunement with ancestors is common, I do not find this an unusual practice. Perhaps Bradbury (and others) could expand their "developmental friendships" by drawing on the wisdom of those who experience a spiritual connection with the wisdom of the ancestors, whether or not as part of "conflict resolution practices" among the Zulu, which she cites Burt Hellinger as adopting to bring to "The West" (p. 198). Bradbury is not sure how long her list of options should be, but she does note that her list grows and then gets pruned. Yet swapping potential lists with others is also part of the "enjoyment of time spent with developmental friends" (p. 198) who can help one to learn new ways of being and of tapping into creative energies.

What struck me about the book as a whole is that although it is about a fundamental repatterning of relations, and expanding conceptual spaces as part of this process, Bradbury seems to be interpreting financial accounting in sustainability performance as still allowing a mindset of "maximizing profit" as a goal (p. 26), along with caring for the land and the people (the so-called triple bottom line). But what I regard as important is that economics itself becomes (re)interpreted so that an inclusive wellbeing (including people and planet) is given priority (see, for example, Akena et al., 2022).

Chronicling her involvement with the designers' association Golf and Garden Growers, Bradbury tells of meeting, during a video call, a "charming, conservative man who made it clear there would be little room for discussing climate change" (p. 25). Although climate change terminology was therefore off the agenda for discussion, the charming man did care about beautiful spaces, as she did. When the team was due to meet, she suggested inviting a leader from the Federation of Indigenous Nations because "they're the real experts on how to treat the land" (p. 25). This proposition was accepted. And they subsequently all agreed to spend two days learning how sustainable development changes how the land is treated. Finally, with a range of stakeholders, including immigrant laborers who work with the chemicals and deserve health precautions, Bradbury did "casually mention" huge fines that had been levied in the past against producers of lawn chemicals, hoping that this too would help clarify what she calls a broad intention—namely, that the Golf and Garden Growers Association "had to care for the land and the people to maximize its profits—the triple bottom line of sustainability performance (economy, society, and environment) " (pp. 25–26). As I see it, however (along with many Indigenous seers and scholars hailing from colonized areas), the idea of maximizing profit within a supposed triple-bottom-line approach is not conducive to advancing Indigenous values of relationality (or what Harris & Wasilewski, 2004, call the four Rs).

When Bradbury refers to the *people* in the triad of triple-bottom-line accounting, which she believes is being improved by "sustainability accounting" (p. 32), she speaks of the "skills and competencies that companies are trying to master," but this says little about a sense of caring for people (workers and others in the community). And her reference to the planet, taking into account

what she calls "pollution emissions and natural resource impact," also does not include recognizing the requirement to care for nature not as a resource but as a *relative* (as Indigenous leaders would suggest); the idea of caring for all our relations is lost in this definition of the triple bottom line. Bradbury recognizes that "we have short term capitalist economies in which we need to be radically different" (p. 32). But I did not find that her chronicles showed sufficiently how ARTists might shift the dynamics of capitalist economies, where massive profits are being made while the vast social inequalities within and between countries attendant on the "big economic system" remain (and are worsened), while the costs of continued environmental devastation and disasters are borne disproportionately by those most marginalized.

As part of Bradbury's storying around the possibility of "tackling the power relations and economics that help keep current systems unsustainable," she states: "If acting unsustainably is the most profitable or economically sensible approach, people will mostly act unsustainably. In that sense it is not about power structures between stakeholders in the room as much as the big economic system that surrounds the room and *within which everyone must live*" (p. 29, my emphasis). She gives an example of some changes that may occur in the "payback time" for a sustainability investment (toward future profitability), which can be extended by a company (p. 29). But does this amount to a repatterning of mindsets (and attendant practices) toward creating enterprises that prioritize care for workers, care for the community, and care for nature? An (additional) good book worth reading in this regard is *Pluriverse,* edited by Kothari et al. (2019), which contains many chapters by authors from across the globe criticizing the dominant way of interpreting "economics" and offering options for operating outside of the "big economic systems" that currently dominate.[1]

Although Bradbury suggests in her final chapter that "all experiments that reduce energy consumption, expand a community, opt for cultivating productive land and make for sustainable food choices" (along with restoring land rights to Indigenous people) can be "done at scale" (p. 196), I wondered whether her chronicles revealed sufficient options for repatterning at scale as a way of interrupting the "big economic system." But perhaps indeed all the experiments she mentions for repatterning agricultural industrialism (as also advanced by Vandana Shiva, whom Bradbury names as important) can indeed make an important difference (see also Libsker, 2021).

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[1] The initiatives of the Action Research Network for a Wellbeing Economy in Africa, WE-Africa: www.we-africa.org, are also noteworthy here. And the activities of Dzomo la Mupo in South Africa [Venda], an organization that nurtures learning processes and practices operating outside of the overly pervasive "big economy mindset," is another example. See, for instance, the write-up by Jay Naidoo [a former minister in Nelson Mandela's cabinet]: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-10-29-indigenous-voices-speak-the-truth-that-can-help-save-our-planet/.

Bradbury patently offers insightful chronicles of her own and other ARTists' efforts to co-create new futures in acknowledgment of our eco-social crises. I recommend it (and the other works I mention herein) as crucial reading for those wishing to partake in what Danny Burns (in his endorsement of the book) calls "an erudite and passionate articulation of pathways to action at a time when the world urgently needs to nurture the 'proliferating micro worlds' that she describes."

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In the Making

From Me to We:

A Phenomenological Inquiry into Coherence

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Abstract

Groups play a pivotal role in human lives and may be even more important at this current moment when the human species faces myriad intractable issues. It could be argued that groups that are able to form tight connections may be needed now more than ever. While many empirical studies of groups focus on group performance, productivity, and effectiveness, or group "doingness," this paper introduces a recent study that explored group "beingness" and the experience of manifesting deep union and oneness, an intersubjective phenomenon called coherence. Coherence has been written about from a theoretical and conceptual perspective, as well as from a practice perspective, but it has rarely been investigated empirically. An interpretive phenomenological investigation of coherence inquired into the phenomenon through the facilitation of two group coherence sessions immediately followed by group interviews. The study's design aimed to explore coherence from the intersubjective perspective, allowing participants to make meaning of their coherence experiences in community. This paper introduces the study and its findings and posits the importance of this type of group phenomenon in our current human reality.

Keywords

coherence, co-sensing, intersubjective, group development, beingness, ways of knowing

Introduction

The relational dimension of awareness-based systems change cannot be underestimated. In my 20 years as a facilitator, ten years as a meditation and mindfulness teacher, and over the course of my many decades of personal and spiritual development, I have worked with and in all types of social systems. These systems, made up of a wide variety of memberships, share both the joy and difficulty of being in community. The joys are seen in rich connections, smiles, laughter, and tears. For me, the positive aspects of membership in social systems across the board have been elevating and life-affirming. As most of the social systems with which I've been affiliated have shared some aspects of positivity, they have without exception also faced some kind of challenge or difficulty.

Our memberships in groups can bring us joy that can be found in the collective effervescence we experience in crowds when we feel a union, joy, and confidence borne out of being in a group (Páez et al., 2015). Joy can be found in experiences of cohesion and synchrony, when we are metaphorically glued together (Nelson & Quick, 2007) and literally in sync with each other (Reddish et al., 2013). And that joy may be found in an emerging concept called *coherence* (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016; Steininger & Debold, forthcoming; Vervaeke, 2019), when members of a group are able to cross a threshold (Yorks, 2005) into a shared field (Brabant & DiPerna, 2016; Gunnlaugson, 2011, 2016; Steininger & Debold, 2016) to experience a oneness that has been described as magical (Briskin et al., 2001; Levi, 2003).

While the joy we feel in communion with other human begins may be something we seek, in the world today, it may feel as though the difficulty we experience in groups is more commonplace. One need only look to the U.S. Congress to see how challenging it is to find common ground on complex issues that are politically and socially charged. Polarization and discordance within groups, small and large, are very much part of our VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) global environment. And yet, effective, cohered groups may be exactly what is needed in this moment of our evolution as a human species.

During my recent doctoral education, I was drawn to groups as my focus of study, and I turned to explore phenomena related to peak collective experiences. During this time, I learned about coherence, a group phenomenon being

discussed in integral communities,[1] Presencing Institute communities,[2] and within platforms like Rebel Wisdom.[3] In these communities, coherence was spoken of conceptually and experientially, but it did not appear to have been studied empirically in any kind of extensive or rigorous way. Coherence is something I believe I have experienced with these groups and others as a magical connection and oneness that is both difficult to explain and at the same time strangely accessible. These experiences during which the groups I was part of transformed into something clear and focused out of chaos made me wonder if this kind of group phenomenon may help us, as a human species, to begin tackling the many intractable issues we face.

The ability of groups to address the increasing complexity of the world and the destructive forces at play has never been more important than it is now. As a species, we face myriad intractable issues. As Dossey and Dossey (2020) explained:

> Our species has tried to secede from nature, and we have failed. In doing so, we have misconstrued the nature of our own consciousness, our connectedness to one another, and our relationship to all sentient life. Something is missing in modern life. We are starved for vision. We hunger for a culture that transcends the suffocating narrowness and intellectual strangulation caused by prejudice, bigotry, greed, and crass materialism that threaten our future. We yearn for connections. (p. 122)

Indeed, something is missing. We cannot figure out what that something is in isolation. We must find ways to work and be together that bring out our individual and collective best, and those ways must be different from our traditional linear processes of problem-solving.

> There is a growing recognition that the sole reliance on linear thought processes, cognitive reasoning, and behavioral protocols is inadequate for addressing the complex, interrelated challenges we face today. We need radically new approaches that are responsive, adaptive, and participatory and that can help us evolve in how we relate to and care for each other, the natural world, and all forms and expressions of life. (Ritter & Zamierowski, 2021, p. 102)

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[1] For example, in the late Terry Patten's New Republic of the Heart (https://newrepublicoftheheart.org/person/terry-patten/).

[2] As part of the Presencing Institute's GAIA Journey in 2020 (https://www.u-school.org/offerings/gaia-recordings), I was part of a small group interested in exploring coherence.

[3] Although Rebel Wisdom's work is coming to an end, the platform (https://rebelwisdom.co.uk/) containing videos, several of which discuss coherence, continues.

As Einstein said (New York Times, 1946), "A new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive and move toward higher levels" (p. 11). Could this group phenomenon of coherence be that new type of thinking?

This paper aims to discuss the study of the group phenomenon of coherence through a discussion of relevant constructs, the study's methodology and design, and then through an overview of findings.

Intersubjectivity, Beingness, and Coherence

This inquiry was rooted in the philosophical and psychological construct of intersubjectivity. Coherence is a phenomenon that appears to occur between and among groups of people, and in this study, occurred through a sense of being instead of centering on a group goal, activity, or project. Therefore, the following key concepts hold a central focus: 1. intersubjectivity 2. Coherence, and 3. Beingness, particularly Group Beingness.

Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity can be considered, metaphorically, as the space between two subjects. Philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965) explained that the space between two people, for example, is a unique entity that is neither one person, nor the other, but instead an entity unto itself (Buber, 1947/2002). He described a conversation between two people as taking place between them "in the most precise sense, as it were in a dimension which is accessible only to them both" (p. 241). He explained that there "is a remainder, somewhere, where the souls end and the world has not yet begun" (p. 242) that happens in the interrelatedness of two people, two souls. He elucidated intersubjectivity as something that "is not to be grasped on the basis of the ontic personal existence, or of that of two personal existences, but of that which has its being between them, and transcends both…where *I* and *Thou* meet, there is a realm of 'between'" (p. 243).

De Quincy (2000) explained that relational experiences are "the most vital manifestations of consciousness" (p. 135) and defined intersubjectivity as:

> Mutual co-arising and engagement of interdependent subjects, which creates their respective experience. It is ontological. Strong or ontological intersubjectivity relies on cocreative nonphysical presence and brings distinct subjects into being out of a prior matrix of relationships. (p. 138)

De Quincy's definition speaks to the socially constructed nature of reality, where I am who I am, because of my experience and relations with other people. It is through you that I see myself, and likewise, you are you, because of my interaction and shared experience of consciousness with you. Not only do we co-create our experience, but I am also a compilation of all of the previous experiences I have had with others, as are you.

Intersubjectivity is "the shared inner dimension," which "is represented spatially as between us (2nd person position), in contrast to inside us (subjective or 1st person position) or outside us (objective or 3rd person position)" (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016, p. 12). Intersubjectivity is "based on the notion of 'we-ness,' that we are always selves-in-relation-to-others" (Cunliffe & Hibbert, 2016, p. 54) and is "where the lifeworld is situated in a web of collectively evolving relationships" (Scharmer, 2016, p. 95). Not only, then, is intersubjectivity an element "between us," as Buber (1947/2002) explained, but is also a shared internal state.

Siegel (2006) added a neuropsychological element to our intersubjective experience, which he called "interpersonal neurobiology" (p. 248), and explained that we neurochemically entrain with each other through the mirror neurons system. Research has revealed that "the brain is capable of integrating perceptual learning with motor action to create internal representations of intentional states in others" (p. 254). According to Siegel, there is a physical, embodied component to intersubjectivity. Surrey (2005) explained that our "inner world is constituted through interaction with the interpersonal world, both in the course of early development and in ongoing, real-time contact with others" (p. 95). Plainly stated, our health and well-being are derived from our interaction with other people. "Intersubjective experience is, to varying degrees, an empathic experience in which we consider how others are experiencing the world and attempt to see through their eyes, walk in their shoes," according to Gunnlaugson et al. (2017, p. ix).

The space where intersubjects co-arise is the field, called by some the intersubjective field (Brabant & DiPerna, 2016; Gunnlaugson, 2011, 2016; Steininger & Debold, 2016) and also referred to as the social field (Scharmer, 2016). In integral communities, it is the "We-space" (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016). The field can be characterized as a "larger tide of living intelligence" (Patten, 2010, para. 3) that arises through us and as "a shared field of attention where the collective can become an entity itself," sharing "awareness of our connectedness, our interweaving" (Baeck, 2016, para. 3). Experience itself is "seen to emerge out of interactions within the intersubjective field (past and present relationships" (Finlay, 2009, p. 3). The concept of *We-space* originated from Wilber's Lower Left quadrant of his Four Quadrant model where collective forms of consciousness reside (Wilber, 1997). *We-space* emerged from integral communities engaging in collective practices to explore collective stage development (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016).

Beingness and Group Beingness

This study was situated in group beingness vis a vis group doingness, which is not a term that is in public discourse but instead is a created term meant to encompass mainstream research on groups focused on productivity, performance, and efficiency. In contrast, beingness is "who we are in the world" (Studdert, 2016) and is closely connected to Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, or Being-in-the-

world, which is the activity of existence (Wheeler, 2020). Group beingness, then, shifts the focus from individual being in the world to a collective experience of being alive and existing. Communal (or group) beingness is "the outcome of constant sociality enacted in common and created and sustained in common through the inter-relational linking of action, materiality, subjectivity, speech and the world of accepted meanings" (Studdert, 2016, p. 622). Studdert's definition is a complement to de Quincy's (2000) explanation of intersubjectivity, and indeed, the two are overlapping and corresponding concepts. Most importantly, the term group beingness is not focused on the entity's performance and productivity and instead, is more aligned with who the group is at its core.

Coherence

Coherence, in the context of this paper and study, describes two or more people forming a deep bond and connection through consciousness. Coherence is a "sense of 'communion'—being together in sacred union" that people who have experienced the phenomenon have described as the "deepest experience of connection" that is a "felt sense of nonseparation, belonging, and profound attunement with the others in [a] group" (Steininger & Debold, forthcoming, p. 12). They continued, "From the perspective of the group, coherence integrates the participants into a whole that can then begin to tap into a shared intelligence and awareness" (Steininger & Debold, forthcoming, p. 13). Psychologist John Vervaeke called coherence "a kind of communitas…directed toward engaging the collective intelligence of distributed cognition" (2019, 52:33). It is a coming together of two or more people at the deepest level of experience.

Coherence has been likened to a group flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Salanova et al., 2014), but flow without the association of task, doingness, or content (Rebel Wisdom, 2019). Others have described coherence as a shared sense of support and well-being (Glickman & Boyar, 2016), internal alignment and optimized group energy (Hamilton et al., 2016), shared heart intelligence (Patten, 2016), and a sense that everything has settled into place (Steininger & Debold, 2016). Using spiritual language, coherence could be explained as the experience of oneness and non-duality, either through an altered state or through the felt sense of oneness (or both). To enter a state of coherence, practitioners have written about a shift occurring (Briskin et al., 2001; Caspari & Schilling, 2016). The shift may be experienced as a "higher level of order that comes into the room…a kind of group intuition" (Hamilton, 2004, p. 58), the crossing of a threshold (Yorks, 2005), or a contraction of the group container (Levi, 2003).

HeartMath's conceptualization of social coherence surfaces the importance of emotional and social connectedness among participants as a key component of coherence. McCraty (2017) explained that social coherence:

> …is reflected by stable and harmonious relationships, which
> allows for the efficient flow and utilization of energy and
> communication required for optimal collective cohesion and action.
> Social coherence requires that group members are attuned and are

emotionally connected with each other, and that the group's emotional energy is organized and regulated by the group as a whole. (p. 1)

From my empirical study of coherence, I developed the following definition of coherence:

A group-level phenomenon wherein members experience a collective shift into a heightened state of connectedness marked by a quieting, slowing, and calming of the group climate, an activation of an enlivened intersubjective field, and a calling forth for members' best selves resulting in an acceptance and celebration of differences among members. The shift is aided by skillful means, and members are able to process and make sense of the experience through somatic, emotional, spiritual, and creative ways of knowing. (Guenther, 2022, p. 169)

Coherence is an intersubjective phenomenon that seems to be rooted in who a group is in its beingness as opposed to its work toward task and goal completion.

In the next section, I will outline the empirical study of coherence in the intersubjective field.

From Theoretical to Empirical

Although the phenomenon of coherence has been discussed conceptually and theoretically (see Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016), it has rarely been studied empirically. Even when a group phenomenon like coherence has been studied empirically (Briskin et al., 2001; Levi, 2003), the methods used to study the phenomenon have been primarily from first- (*me*) and third-person (*it*) perspectives versus from the second-person (*we*) position. Ideally, the study of an intersubjective phenomenon would be investigated from the first- and second-person position, thereby providing a means for the first-person experience to be corroborated by the *we*.

The phenomenologists never conceive of intersubjectivity as an objectively existing structure in the world which can be described and analyzed from a third-person perspective. On the contrary, intersubjectivity is a relation between subjects which must be analyzed from a first-person and a second-person perspective. It is precisely such an analysis that will reveal the fundamental significance of intersubjectivity. Subjectivity and intersubjectivity are in fact complementing and mutually interdependent notions. (Zahavi, 2001, p. 166)

The relative absence of literature on the empirical study of coherence from the first- and second-person perspectives provided an opportunity to do just that: investigate coherence through a group process.

The few previous studies in this area (Briskin et al., 2001; Levi, 2003) were conducted using retrospective interviewing with individuals who recounted experiences of group resonance and group magic. Funded by the Fetzer Institute, Briskin et al. (2001) interviewed 61 professional facilitators and consultants, many of whom are well-known in the field, to inquire into moments when groups began to function harmoniously and fluidly. Their findings highlighted eight elements of fluid, harmonious group experiences, including synchronicity, alchemy, movement to the whole, and love, as well as six outcomes, including connectedness and healing. Levi's (2003) dissertation study sought to explore the phenomena of collective resonance, which she named *group magic*. She interviewed 34 individuals who believed they had experienced moments of collective resonance. Her findings named what group magic was like with 14 characteristics including connection to others and an energy field, as well as how the experiences happened with seven contributing factors that included silence, storytelling, and spirit.

Methodology

I chose phenomenology as the methodological approach to investigate the lived experience of coherence. The term phenomenology has multiple meanings: it is a philosophical movement (Gill, 2014), a general term for qualitative methodologies (Smith et al., 2009), and a methodology in and of itself. For the purposes of this paper, the term is used to name the methodology, phenomenology, used in this study. Phenomenology is a methodology that "thematizes the phenomenon of consciousness…and…refers to the totality of lived experiences (Giorgi, 1997, p. 2).

Two primary traditions are found within the methodology of phenomenology: descriptive and interpretive (Gill, 2014). I locate my research within the interpretive phenomenology tradition. Where the descriptivist tradition focuses on phenomenology from an epistemological standpoint, interpretivist phenomenology is more interested in the beingness of entities, and therefore, gravitates toward the ontological perspective of phenomenology (Gill, 2014). This emphasis on beingness formed a resonant basis for the study. Additionally, because group coherence may be somewhat elusive and fungible, the tone and tenor change of the experience may shift depending on who is experiencing it. In that light, interpretive phenomenology, which accepts that interpretation is a part of analysis (Smith et al., 2009), was better aligned with my study.

Participants

Two criteria guided participant recruitment. First, I sought small groups with members from the same organizations. I posited that shared organizational rituals, such as meditation and language, could ease the period of group formation during the facilitated sessions as well as provide language for what could be a challenging phenomenon to discuss. The members did not need to

know each other personally; instead, a shared context could bring familiarity to an unfamiliar process. Potential downsides of not attending to this dynamic of group formation could result in discontent, uncertainty, and preoccupation with members finding their places in the group (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Second, participants each had an active or previous committed meditation or contemplative practice. The participants' practices increased the likelihood that they would have an awareness of their own states of consciousness and be able to intentionally shift with the group.

To recruit the small groups, I contacted approximately 15 leaders in my network who were involved in facilitating and leading spiritual development in some way. I requested that they recruit small groups from their organizations to participate in my study. From the 15 leaders contacted, five replied to my request expressing interest and a willingness to explore forming a group from their organizations. Of those five leaders, two were able to form a small group and find a date for me to work with the group. One group was formed by the director of a coach-training program, and the other group was formed by the director of a personal and spiritual development training organization. Neither organization worked explicitly with coherence as a concept. One of the small groups was populated by members who all knew each other well. The second small group included members from two different cohorts of a coach-training program, so they did not all know each other before the facilitated session. All of the 13 participants reported a robust, daily current or past meditation or contemplative practice. Participants are detailed in Table 1.

Group 1				Group 2			
Participant Number	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Participant Number	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender
1A	55–64	White	Female	2A	30–39	White	Male
1B	65–74	White	Female	2B	55–64	White	Female
1C	18–29	Latina	Female	2C	45–54	African American	Female
1D	45–54	White	Female	2D	55–64	White	Female
1E	55–64	White	Female	2E	55–64	African American/ Multiracial	Female
1F	45–54	White	Female	2F	45–54	South Asian/Indian	Female
				2G	45–54	White	Female

Table 1: Coherence Study Participants.

Facilitated Coherence Sessions

Where the few previous studies on similar phenomena utilize retrospective interviewing methods, as stated previously, this study's design and method

focused on studying this phenomenon intersubjectively and experientially. As such, participants were recruited based on their perceived potential to enter coherence. The study's design centered on two small groups each participating in a day-long session that I facilitated. The sessions were intended to move each group toward coherence. Both facilitated sessions were followed immediately by group interviews providing participants with the opportunity to share and discuss their experiences with their groups soon after the experiential elements.

My use of a research design embedded in a relational ontology enabled me to get closer to the phenomenon of interest (Storberg-Walker, 2022). Storberg-Walker (2022) explained this act of getting closer to one's phenomenon of interest as a "deep interdependence and co-creation of reality" (p. 4). She explained relational ontology as a new way of approaching research:

> This requires a shift in consciousness—from consciousness of separation to a new way of being in the world that recognizes the interdependence and dependent origination of all of the material world. (p. 5)

Prior to the sessions, members of the group received an email that contained instructions for the sessions, including the purpose of the sessions and how to use Zoom (for example, turning off self-view, not using artificial backgrounds, ensuring good lighting and sound); a brief explanation of the phenomenon being studied, *coherence*; a pre-session questionnaire inquiring into participants' previous experience with coherence; and informed consent forms. The coherence overview and pre-session questionnaire were intended to "prime the pump." Because I was inquiring into the lived experience of coherence and not whether or not coherence was a phenomenon, orienting participants toward the phenomenon had the potential of opening their minds to what was possible within the facilitated session.

Each of the two small groups participated in one full-day session, and the agenda for both of those sessions are included in Table 2. The sessions included a series of meditative practices, activities, and dialogue intended to create conditions in which a group could enter coherence. Because coherence can be elusive (Brabant & DiPerna, 2016; Cox, 2014; Guttenstein et al., 2014; Yorks, 2005), entering coherence was not guaranteed. Acknowledging this, the session was designed with successive practices, dialogue, and interactions meant to take the group deeper into silence and stillness together.

Run Time	Element
:15 minutes	Welcome and Opening
:15	Opening meditation and gazing practices
:20	Check-in
:30	Activity: Consciousness shifting
:10	Break

:60	Shared intention setting, meditation practice, and discussion
:30	Lunch break
:20	Art project
:10	Meditation practice
:40	Sharing art and storytelling – "show and tell"
:10	Closing and checking out using art cards and storytelling
:10	Break
2:00	Group interview

Table 2: Facilitated Session Agenda

An arts-based method, in this study called the *art project*, invited participants to engage in sensemaking through the artistic medium of their choosing. Prompted by instructions for participants to use art to convey what the session was like for them as a member of the group, some participants chose photos or art that spoke to their experiences. Others drew or painted pieces. One participant shared a poem she had written, another played a song that resonated with her, and still another sang a song. This arts-based method was included to assist with translating the inner experience into language, which can be difficult (Higgs, 2008). Additionally, the sharing of art has been noted to increase rapport and resonance in groups (Warren, 2009), which I found to be the case here. As one participant explained, "This exercise is so indicative of our different ways of sharing creatively our experience, yet there's all these commonalities." They went on to describe the commonalities, which seemed to have allowed the entire group to see the shared aspects of the encounter.

The timing of the study during the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated that the study be conducted in a virtual environment. Activities were based on online and facilitative practices from One World in Dialogue[4] as well as from the Presencing Institute,[5] Liberating Structures,[6] and Lynne McTaggart (2017).

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[4] Thomas Steininger and Elizabeth Debold of One World in Dialogue (https://oneworldindialogue.com/) offer training as well as salons and practice sessions focused on creating deep connections.

[5] The Presencing Institute holds a wide variety of convenings and trainings, including one course called Digital Leadership aimed at cultivating dynamic offerings in a virtual environment (https://www.u-school.org/learning-modules#sp-digital-leadership).

[6] Originators Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless offer a multitude of creative facilitation practices through what they have named liberating structures (https://www.liberatingstructures.com/).

Data Collection

The group interviews held immediately after the facilitated sessions were semi-structured and designed to allow the participants to do the majority of the talking. Questions were asked about what the experience was like, whether they had a sense if others within the group had similar experiences, and if and how the group changed throughout their time together. Two brief follow-up questionnaires were completed, the first one week after the sessions and the second three weeks after the sessions. Each questionnaire included open-ended questions that inquired into perspectives on the experience as well as probing into comments made during the group interviews. Questions from the group interviews and questionnaires are included in the appendix.

Analysis

The data under consideration were stories and sharing from the art project, interview comments, and questionnaire responses. Data analysis was based upon the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process outlined by Smith (Smith et al., 2009) beginning with reading and re-reading transcripts and questionnaire responses, noting,[7] developing themes, searching for connections of themes, looking for patterns, and then repeating the process several times. This process, a version of the hermeneutic circle developed by Heidegger and then expanded by Gadamer (2013), allowed for the ongoing development of interpretation and understanding (Vagle, 2018).

By engaging in the circular process of looking at the line-by-line data, stepping back and taking in the data as a whole, and then going back to the details and back to the whole again repeatedly, I was able to see the data from different angles and at a number of levels. According to Donaldson and Harter (2019), one must complete the hermeneutic circle "to understand and have a contextual reference of the whole to understand the parts while simultaneously having an understanding and contextual reference to the parts to understand the whole" (p. 10). The circle is "concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, at a series of levels. To understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28). Whereas qualitative analysis tends to be presented and engaged linearly, interpretive phenomenological analysis involves moving back and forth "through a range of different ways of thinking about the data, rather than completing each step, one after the other" (p. 28). In other words, my analysis involved line-by-line review while at the same time holding awareness of the whole of the data and likewise, analyzing the whole of the data while holding

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[7] An IPA method much like memoing, noting is researcher's notes on the transcripts and questionnaires (Smith et al., 2009).

awareness of the details. As Smith explained, it was not a linear process, but rather, made space for the "data to speak" and findings to emerge.

Concurrent with my analysis, a separate team of volunteers conducted a line-by-line analysis of the data which allowed me to triangulate my perceptions of the salient themes with other perspectives on the data set.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations, the primary limitation being the small size of the study. Additionally, the study captured only a day in the life of two groups of people, both of which had no formal purpose, structure, or future plans. The participants came together as two groups for the purposes of this study. This is relevant because group dynamics can become more complicated over time as individual agendas, preferences, and relationships shift and evolve. Additional research on a larger scale studying a group's coherence over time may allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

As with most qualitative studies, it was not my intention to produce generalizable findings. However, readers may experience *naturalistic generalization*, meaning they may find that some of the descriptions and findings shared here may resonate with their own experiences (Mills et al., 2010).

Findings: Lived Experience of the Intersubjective Field

The sessions described in this study were designed to create the conditions for group coherence, as has been described above. The data collected through interviews and follow-up questionnaires aimed to access the inner and intersubjective nature of the experience. The analysis of the data collected as part of this study resulted in 18 components of coherence organized into four categories: What It Was Like, How It Happened, Antecedents, and Outcomes. In the space available, I will provide an overview of select components of coherence in lieu of a detailed report of findings.

Components of Coherence

Sense of Connection

When asked what the experience was like, participants often reported a sense of connection to other participants and to themselves throughout the groups' time together. One participant said, "I felt a level of wholeness and a deep level of connection that felt very good in my heart." Another explained in her art project, "We are souls connected." And yet another participant was surprised to feel the depth that she felt. She said, "I really wasn't expecting the connectivity that I felt today, and it was an awesome experience." Likewise, one participant found the

sense of communion unusual. "I've never been part of a circle of people I just met where there's so much connection." He went on to explain:

> I feel like when we came into the space, we were all gifted with a note, and it was the only note that you had. And we all had a handbell or something. And Stacey, you invited us in, and you encouraged us, and you just banged our notes. And we felt the reverberations of our energy of maybe a note or a song that we forgot we had. And we were just feeling that, and we were like, oh my gosh, I have a note . . . and you have a note. And then we were all describing what we were feeling, and at one point, we made that intention, and it was like we put all our notes together for a brief and powerful time. And there was a beautiful harmony that played in that moment, like one song that only we could have played in this moment together. And it resonated, and it was powerful. (Quotation from Research Participant, 2021)

Inclusivity, Acceptance, and 'Best Selves'

A theme of accepting differences and being inclusive was a repeating topic for both groups. In one group a participant said, "I felt drawn to the field as an equal and valued person." And another said that the experience was "powerful, uplifting, and a feeling that the connection made was truly from the heart with everyone's best interests in mind—no judgments, just respect and happiness for each other."

In the second group, the members reported being able to be their full selves and still feel accepted by the group. One member described an envisioned world where "human skin structure was disappearing and seeking evolution." Another member said:

> This is probably one of the first groups where I felt that everyone in the group was very accepting of all our differences. That's an awesome experience. We were all different. And I wasn't feeling like, for the first time, that one of us doesn't belong, and it's me. I felt like, wow, we're all different, and it's okay. This is my dream world. (Quotation from Research Participant, 2021)

With the accepting and connecting aspects of coherence, participants shared that they noticed authenticity and the best parts of themselves and other members of the group manifesting in the phenomenon. A participant talked about the aspect of supporting each other's authentic selves being part of the encounter. She said, "We're all individuals, but we're part of the group. That's the best part [of the experience]—that we can all be individuals who were part of the group." Another participant, as part of the art project, talked about "the bounty of…diversity, and…just allowing everyone to bring their special gifts." One participant replied when asked what the members thought had happened

with the group during the session, "We brought each other's higher selves forward. Our selves, best selves."

Nature of the Intersubjective Field

The experience can be thought of as taking part in the intersubjective field, much like a playing field in sports. And like a playing field, the intersubjective field was experienced by its occupants as having certain energy and characteristics. A participant noticed the "shifting energy in the group," and another characterized the unique energy to the group as an energy fingerprint: "this individual fingerprint, like…energy print that we have." Through the practices and activities, participants noticed shifting energy. A participant said, "The gazing gave me the opportunity to carry a little bit of everybody's energy in me and trust that they carried a little bit of my energy in them, so that started to build us as an energetic group energy." She continued, "The energy was strong—I could feel that network, the weaving, happening." In the first group, one participant described the energy in the field as a "vortex," and another said it was "moving. It is circulating. It is vibrating." In the second group, a participant named the energy in the field a "pulsing of this common heartbeat." The outcome of being in the field created both shared and individual manifestations of energy and aspects of quieting, calming, flowing, slowing, deepening, and becoming clear. One participant explained that "it was a soft flowing," and another said, it was "like gently being held." A participant described the energy as "peacefully calm and cool," and another noticed that "the jumble became really quieted". *Energy* was the most frequently appearing theme in the study.

Drawing on Multiple Intelligences

How participants made sense of the phenomenon, how they knew something had happened collectively, and how they translated the experience into language seemed to be supported by using intelligences that went beyond intellect. One participant explained this activation of different ways of knowing:

> What I noticed was how I was experiencing our activities and the group somatically and analytically; i.e., I was in touch with the feelings, sensations, emotions (my somatic and heart intelligences), as well as with both sides of my mind wisdom—the analytical left brain intelligence and the intuitive, creative wisdom of the right brain. (Quotation from Research Participant, 2021)

Another described "somatic sensing and feeling for me made me very aware of how different this experience was."

Several participants spoke of transcendence of the group's way of knowing and understanding. For instance, one participant said, "I could sense and feel within our collective that we were having similar thoughts and images," revealing an awareness tuned into the collective's experience. Another

participant declared that they "felt alive," because they saw that another participant is feeling alive, indicating positive affect as emotional contagion. Two other participants reported that what others in their group were describing as visualizations, sensations, and impressions that came during meditation were very similar to what they experienced during the same practice. The participants' statements suggested that there is also a heightened state of connectedness among group members that went beyond a feeling of closeness, perhaps indicating collective wisdom. Collective wisdom is a "transformative shift that affects both inner awareness and outer behavior" (Briskin et al., 2009, p. 32) and is "neither of the intellect alone nor of any individual" (p. 27).

Sense of Trust

Trust, choice, and courage allowed the individual members of both groups to fully engage and enter a shared state. A participant said, "What bolsters my courage is the trust I have in the group members, facilitator, and process…I made an intentional choice to share my feelings and insights and to trust that I could do so without judgment." The trust resulted in an opening for authenticity. "There's no fear. We could be who we are individually in a collective gathering without fear of judgment," one participant explained. Another added, "I think it not only took trust and courage but also practice and humility."

Experiencing a Shift

Groups were asked explicitly if they experienced a change or *shift* in the group during the session. Both groups both agreed that a shift had occurred. In writings, this shift is sometimes referred to as the transition from me to we. One participant described shifting.

> Coming in…it was about the curiosity, and the curiosity is kind of like a palpitation. The embodiment is a quickened heartbeat, this kind of giddiness that it's something new. The shift, for me, is when it switches into my belly, and it feels like butterflies, because there is an energetic and a spiritual shift that begins to happen and emerge, and everything begins to sit within that space, because energy is rising and flowing in a different way. So the palpitations actually stop in terms of quickened heartbeat of the excitement and curiosity of something new. And then there is a fluttering that begins to happen, along with a warmth within that shares that this is an emotional or spiritual shift or change that is happening with the energy in the space. (Quotation from Research Participant, 2021)

Another participant said, "We all just went into the field and flowed with it." Still another called the connection a "coming together in harmony" and her art, as she explained it, included "colorfulness, playfulness, open sky possibilities" of

connecting, while "allowing everyone to bring their special gift." A fellow participant agreed and added, "Our energy, our combined energy flowing together independent of space and time, magnified." Another continued, "I felt my own personal container enlarge as our group container expanded to welcome and hold all of us."

Entering a State of Coherence

The facilitated sessions were designed to create the possibility of coherence, but coherence was not guaranteed. A key question for consideration was this: did the two groups experience coherence? As discussed above, coherence is thought to involve a shift of some kind from normal functioning into a quieter, calmer, more connected energy. Shifting into coherence is described as having a unifying effect, moving the group from a set of individuals in a group to a cohered whole sharing some degree of consciousness. This shift is palpable and is felt as "some kind of higher level of order that comes into the room, and it's very noticeable to people" (Hamilton, 2004, p. 58).

When I asked the groups if they noticed any kind of shift or transition into their reported connectedness, both groups agreed that they noticed that something had changed. The following is an excerpt from the transcripts during which one of the groups is discussing when that change occurred.

> **Participant 1:** …I knew it happened as soon as we started to do the heart linking through the meditation. And it continued to build.
>
> **Participant 2:** Kind of the same for me…
>
> Facilitator/Researcher: Was that before the gazing8 and during the meditation
>
> **Participant 2:** Yes, it was
>
> **Participant 3:** For me, it was the experience of the gazing
>
> **Participant 4:** Yeah, it was the gazing
>
> **Participant 5:** Definitely the gazing was very powerful…

In addition to the reports of the presence of shifting energy and climate, aspects of coherence, which were explicated earlier in this article were revealed in participants' comments and accounts of their experiences. A "sense of 'communion'" (Steininger & Debold, forthcoming, p. 12) and "a kind of communitas" (Vervaeke, 2019, 52:33) were reflected in participants' descriptions of feeling connected. "Shared heart intelligence" (Patten, 2016) was reflected in

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[8] A gazing practice, developed by Thomas Steininger and Elizabeth Debold of One World in Dialogue, invited participants, with Zoom video feed on, to gaze deeply at each other while inviting a heartfelt connection.

participants' comments such as, "There was an interconnectedness that happened at the heart level, at all the levels of my being. I just was in this place of oneness, full of love and connectedness." One participant described a feeling of positive affect and well-being, explaining, "We caught the rainbow." She later explained, "When I think of a rainbow, I think of unity and harmony…I was hoping that all living things could live in unity and harmony." This sense of unity and harmony may indicate a shared sense of support and well-being (Glickman & Boyar, 2016) as well as internal alignment (Hamilton et al., 2016). Taken together, the data may indicate that both groups entered a heightened state of connection and union, which aligns with descriptions of coherence.

Discussion

Coherence and phenomena like coherence are often talked about as a *something* that happened but rarely is that *something* named. That *something* is in my view quite significant. It is at once an ethereal and ineffable phenomenon, and it is also quite often one that is ephemeral, difficult to hold on to, and one that makes those who experience it question whether in fact the experience even occurred. For both of the groups that I studied, that *something* was apparent during one of the session activities, the intention activity, when participants reported hearing other members of the group share their visualizations from within the intention meditation that were the same visualizations they themselves had experienced. Repeatedly, several members reported being ready to share an experience with the group only to have that same sharing come from another member of the group first. While these types of experiences are sometimes spoken about as psychic and psi[9] phenomena, I believe that naming evokes an anomalous connotation that does not fit.

My research suggests that these types of experiences are actually quite accessible and that you do not need a psychic gift, a special visitation, or any other type of otherworldly capability to experience shared consciousness in an intersubjective field. This study may reveal that access may be available to anyone willing to commit to cultivating their awareness, which can be accomplished through a consistent daily meditation practice, an openness to that which is unseen, and a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) that allows you to believe that more is possible than can be proven through traditional measures.

Even so, I invite caution for those interested in facilitating these types of experiences. For researchers and practitioners who would like to begin working with groups and teams to cultivate heightened states of group beingness, I recommend that the first step be to engage in one's own path of personal and spiritual development. Anyone who wants to lead or facilitate these kinds of

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[9] According to Dean Radin (2018), psi is another named for psychic phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis.

experiences should have a committed personal practice, several years of experience participating in and being a part of these types of phenomena, and should also be very clear about their intention regarding cultivating we-spaces. Coherence and other group phenomena are not tools meant to be used for increasing productivity and profitability. Those intentions run counter to what these experiences are about. Instead, these practices help to make the world a better place by reminding people of who they are through deep connection and by widening their views of reality and what is possible.

The study of coherence in the intersubjective field was intended to provide an opportunity to inquire into a phenomenon that has been presented conceptually and from a practice standpoint, but one that has not frequently been studied empirically. When phenomena like coherence have been studied in the past, retrospective methods, such as interviewing participants who were remembering magical group experiences, have been employed (Briskin et al., 2001; Levi, 2003). The study discussed in this paper may be just the beginning of an area of inquiry that could broadly expand our understanding of coherence. Additional studies are needed to further this area of research. Variations in participant recruitment, study size, and how coherence is engaged would continue the exploration of coherence and other group-level phenomena.

In our current collective reality and time of poly-crisis, our ability to join together in ways that are life-affirming, positive, and accepting of difference is crucial in the quest to work toward solutions to these crises. Learning more about group phenomena such as coherence may aid in that quest. The empirical study of these phenomena is possible and warrants our time and attention as researchers. Not too long ago, I am confident that a dissertation committee would not have entertained such an inquiry for a doctoral dissertation. As we evolve in our abilities as human beings, as demonstrated in our capacity to experience coherence, should we not also evolve our thinking about what is possible and what is important in terms of empirical study?

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Discussant Commentary

Group Coherence:

Its Shadow and Its Generative Potential

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Abstract

The purpose of this commentary is to offer reflections on the phenomenological inquiry undertaken by Guenther (2022), exploring the nature and potential of group coherence in addressing our global meta-crises. I deepen the discourse in three interrelated areas, to expand our understanding of collective coherence and to explore how we can approach researching it. Firstly, I highlight research, mapping the evidence for consciousness-based practices in engendering greater social harmony and coherence. Secondly, I shine a light onto the shadow sides of coherence and how the power of coherence may be abused for ill purposes. I argue that the cultivation of coherence must not only involve consciousness-raising practices, but that it must also entail direct engagement with social and systemic wounds and fragmentation. Thirdly, I call for multi-faceted forms of research, to enable us to gain a deeper appreciation of group coherence in varied life contexts. Building on Guenther's vision, I affirm that this research must invite alternative and participatory ways of knowing, so that a multiplicity of voices, inner and outer, are heard and honoured in action.

Keywords

group coherence, consciousness, social fields, social transformation, the shadows and amorality of coherence, expanded ways of knowing, holistic intelligence, participatory and transpersonal research

The purpose of this commentary is to offer further reflections on the phenomenological inquiry undertaken by Guenther (2022), exploring the nature and potential of group coherence in addressing our global meta-crises. Given the extreme forms of polarisation and division which we have been experiencing in many spheres of public life, the idea of researching and evolving ways to generate collective coherence—also described in Guenther's paper as "group beingness"—is very compelling. It is hard to bear witness to the multi-faceted forms of fragmentation that continue to proliferate in our social, economic, and political systems, generating rampant forms of intolerance and extremism. I find it deeply heartening that an increasing number of people in business, leadership, education, and research are seeking to develop frameworks and practices that aim to seed transformative "we-spaces" (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016; Patten, 2018) and enable the emergence of collective wisdom (Morgan & Murphy, 2022). The pursuit of generative group coherence, and the aim to research what might enable it, fits readily into these new approaches to practice and research, and it makes a vital contribution to the evolution of human consciousness and culture. Responding to Guenther, I deepen the discourse in three interrelated areas, with the hope that the considerations given below might help us to expand our understanding of collective coherence and how we can approach researching it.

Firstly, I highlight research, mapping the evidence for consciousness-based practices in engendering greater social coherence and harmony. In doing so, I capture glimpses of the potential and challenges that lie before us as we actively seek to engender coherence. Secondly, I shine a light onto the shadow sides of coherence and how the power of collective consciousness may be abused for ill purposes. Here, I emphasise that the cultivation of human consciousness must not only revolve around the calling forth of our *best selves* but also invite direct engagement with our wounds and fragmentation in order to heal them. Thirdly, I call for multi-faceted forms of research, to enable us to gain a deeper appreciation of group coherence in varied life contexts. Building on Guenther's (2022) vision, I want to affirm that this research must invite alternative and participatory ways of knowing, so that a multiplicity of voices, inner and outer, are heard and honoured in action.

Understanding Coherence and Its Generative Potential

An increasing number of researchers and practitioners working at the interface of inner development and outer transformation are exploring the value of consciousness-based (spiritual) practices in engendering social change (Wamsler

et al., 2022; Rothberg, 2008; McIntosh, 2012; Nicol, 2015; Patten, 2018). Building on the premise that consciousness is a non-local phenomenon, Nicol (2015) advances a nuanced argument for the potential of spiritual practices in reducing human conflict and engendering greater global coherence and peace. The core argument that Nicol unfolds is this: Beneath the surface appearance of separation, human beings are embedded in deeper fields of consciousness which are nested and correspond to units of social organisation—from families, to communities, to nations, to earth, and cosmos. At the deepest level, Nicol suggests, there exists "a unified field that underlies both the human mind and the natural world" (2015, p. 153). Individuals are profoundly influenced in their thinking and behaviour by these nested fields and, critically, they can also influence them, contributing to and shaping the collective memory of fields. One mechanism posited for exerting influence is that of morphic resonance (Sheldrake, 1981, 1988), which entails a nonenergetic transfer of information. As Nicol (2015) describes it, morphic resonance thus "involves a kind of action at a distance in both space and time, in which past patterns of activity influence the behaviour of subsequent similar systems" (p. 136). Sheldrake (1981, 1988) asserts that morphic fields evolve over time, accumulating the habits and learning of all members, past and present, of a particular organisational unit, such as a species or social group. In transpersonal psychology we find similar proposals, suggesting that consciousness-transforming, or healing, practices may impact the explicit, phenomenal realm by influencing the deeper layers of the collective unconscious (von Franz, 1985).

The idea that group coherence may influence social dynamics at scale has been subject to research in several arenas. Likely most well-known are studies into the Maharishi Effect that have shown significant correlations between the practice of transcendental meditation in large group assemblies and improvements in social indicators, such as crime rates (Borland & Landrith, 1976; Dillbeck, Landrith & Orme-Johnson, 1981; Dillbeck, Cavanaugh, et al., 1987), and war deaths (Orme-Johnson et al., 1988) in certain geographic locations. The research has rightly been subject to scrutiny and some critique, but as Nicol (2015) remarks, the Maharishi Effect has now been demonstrated in dozens of studies published in reputable scientific journals and the results have been statistically significant to impressive degrees.

Another initiative worthy of mention is the Global Consciousness Project (GCP), which utilises internet technology and random number generators to record the effects of significant world events on human consciousness. The GCP is an international collaboration of around 100 scientists originally created at Princeton University and now logistically overseen by the Institute of Noetic Sciences[1] in the USA. The GCP collects data from a global network of random number generators located in up to 70 host sites around the world. The project

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[1] https://noetic.org

examines subtle correlations between the occurrence of major global events and the coherence of what should be random number events at the given time. So far, the results of the project appear to indicate that meditation and prayer events, organised at a large scale, as well as events of significant global interest, generate subtle effects of coherence in the physical world (Nelson, 2001a; Nelson, 2001b; Nelson & Radin, 2003; Nelson & Bancel, 2011). Nicol (2015) concludes, "The combined evidence strongly suggests that nonlocality [or interconnectedness, JB] is indeed not limited to the quantum realm but can also operate at the macroscopic level, and that the practice of techniques like meditation or prayer by large groups of people may have a measurable effect on levels of social harmony" (p. 120). This said, we must acknowledge that the research output and conclusions reached have also been repeatedly reviewed and critiqued for potential experimenter biases (Bancel, 2017a, 2017b).

Some theorists and practitioners suggest that a certain threshold must be crossed to affect fields of consciousness in significant ways, requiring either large numbers of people or groups of highly experienced practitioners who are able to generate coherence of sufficient intensity (Orme-Johnson & Dillbeck, 1987; Bache, 2000). Of course, that is not to say that all work aiming to increase group coherence must be directed at larger scales. I rather agree with McIntosh (2008) that we do well to cultivate both small and large initiatives. It is in the intimacy of smaller projects that we can tap our sense of belonging to specific places and communities and thereby generate actions that arise from this embeddedness. McIntosh (2008) proposes that, when awakened, our unique sense of place feeds our identity, values, and responsibility, thereby helping us to cultivate sustainable and wholesome forms of action. It is this rooted sense of agency that helps us to contribute to meaningful changes in the world, with outcomes that will likely ripple across scales and domains in unexpected ways. As O'Brien (2021) puts it, "Through our entangled intra-actions, we are mattering in every moment. But it's not just the expression of agency that matters. Rather, it is the quality of agency that we are interested in; a quality that recognizes oneness and is expressed through values inherent to the whole, such as equity, diversity, and compassion. When these values are at the heart of individual agency, collective agency, and political agency, it is possible to generate new, fractal-like patterns that replicate across scales, in every moment" (pp. 98–99).

Grappling with the Shadows and the Amorality of Coherence

Looking at the evidence presented above, we might feel compelled to assume that our salvation lies in the collective pursuit of consciousness-raising practices to foster ever greater expressions of coherence. I want to sound a note of caution here, in that I believe that nurturing the kinds of changes we want to see in the world requires more than a conscious striving for harmony, putting forward our "best selves," as Guenther (2022, p. 162) and her research participants have put it. Results from the GCP show that negative global events that reach a

significant number of people around the world can also temporarily increase coherence. Coherence is essentially an amoral phenomenon which manifests when many people align their attention; and it can be used for good, as well as ill, intent.

I would like suggest that the pursuit of greater global harmony and peace requires us to dwell in and integrate our shadows, as well as to embrace consciousness-raising practices. As integral practitioners like DiPerna & Augustine (2014) put it, we need to "clean up" as much as we need to "wake up," "grow up" and "show up." As I have elaborated elsewhere (Bockler, 2021), in order to achieve greater social and cultural integration we need to enable compassionate relational spaces in which we can attend to othering and suffering in ways that honour the experiences and perspectives of those we disagree with, bearing witness to the shadows of human kind. In many places, attending to fragmentation and othering may be necessary prerequisites for the kinds of consciousness-raising practices Guenther (2022) deployed in her study. Otherwise, we risk falling prey to (social) forms of spiritual bypassing (Welwood, 2000), i.e., using our spiritual practices to side-step emotional, social, and systemic injustices and wounds. In a similar vein, Nicol (2015) acknowledges that narratives of unified consciousness "might be viewed with suspicion as yet another 'totalizing unity' that promises emancipation, yet which in fact perpetuates oppression" (p. 161). Given all this, I feel that we must honour our differences, as much as we must seek to own our shadows.

Coherence is amoral, and it has throughout history been used for devious, as well as benevolent, purposes. One need only to look at the mass rallies organised by the Nazi regime which generated social fields charged with enormous energetic coherence, interlacing emotional contagion with coercion, and inspiring much hatred, bigotry, and violence. Or, indeed, we may look at extremist and religious cults which have exploited the very human need for belonging and intimate connection to subjugate individual will and agency. Thus, we need to explore the conditions that foster the emergence of healthy and liberating group fields, leading to collective wisdom, versus coercive ones that may seed collective forms of folly and perpetuate structures of oppression.

Nicol (2015) asserts that our challenge lies in developing a more complex understanding between the individual and the whole, "one that honours differentiation and distinctness as vital components of any authentic wholeness" (p. 161). This principle applies intra-relationally as much as it applies inter-relationally. Within us exist a multiplicity of voices, some dominant, some less so, others entirely repressed. Similarly, in all social contexts, there are dominant voices that drive the discourse as well as voices that have been marginalised and even silenced. We must endeavour to co-create participatory spaces in which we can be real, vulnerable, compassionate, and open-hearted as much as open-minded. A participatory approach to group emergence means embracing a stance of *active receptivity* (Bockler & Hector, 2022), which entails committing to calibrating our actions in response to what is arising in the unfolding moment of

our (shared) experience. Here, we must learn to release, or at least attenuate, our assumptions and cultivate our capacities for listening to the subtle cues calling from the edges of our awareness. Equally, we must be prepared to hold space for dissent, allowing antagonism and resistance to express themselves. If we can do that, Bohm (1996) suggests in his reflections on group dialogue, we may be able to cultivate a sense of fellowship through mutual participation. Such shared group consciousness is not necessarily immediately pleasant, Bohm asserts. "People tend to think of common consciousness as 'shared bliss.' That may come; but if it does, I'm saying that the road to it is through this. We have to share the consciousness that we *actually* have. We can't just impose another one" (1996, p. 33).

A number of scholars and practitioners have begun to explore and map the conditions conducive for the emergence of wholesome group intelligence (Briskin et al., 2009; Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016; Patten, 2018). To me, their work illustrates that we must engage a full spectrum of practices that bridge inner with relational work, so that we may cultivate the necessary attitudes and capacities within ourselves to engage in group work with grace, presence, holistic intelligence, and sensitivity. Guenther would likely agree with my assertion that this imperative for integrative cultivation is one that applies to us all—individually and collectively.

Participatory and Transformative Approaches to Researching Coherence

Bearing these considerations in mind, I now want to expand on the kind of research needed to help us penetrate further into phenomena of coherence. In my view, Guenther (2022) rightly calls for multi-faceted forms of research, placing emphasis on first person (subjective) and second person (intersubjective) approaches and highlighting the need for expanded ways of knowing, so that we may gain a more holistic appreciation of coherence and what may enable it. My sense is that we need to study coherence in varied life contexts, paying attention to oppressive, as well as liberating, expressions of coherence. Group dynamics always have shadow aspects which are influenced by the social and systemic milieu, as well as by intersectionality and relational dynamics, leading to many overt and covert expressions of power and privilege within a group. Research exploring group coherence thus needs to be participatory and ethically sensitised, endeavouring to ensure that no voices within a given context are marginalised or omitted.

Recent decades have seen the emergence of a range of participatory research approaches, like *participatory action research* (e.g., Chevalier & Buckles, 2019), *appreciative inquiry* (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), and *cooperative inquiry* (Heron, 1996). These methods all embrace a *participatory worldview* (Ferrer, 2002) which contrasts strongly with the positivist/mechanistic perspective, in that within these approaches "experiential reality is seen as a dynamic

cocreation between interdependent players within living systems" (Sohmer, 2019, p. 67). Participatory forms of research aim to acknowledge and empower research participants as co-researchers, thereby honouring their rights "to participate in processes that seek to generate knowledge about them" (Sohmer, 2019, p. 67).

Relatedly, forms of transpersonal research have evolved, incorporating expanded epistemologies that welcome contemplative, embodied, imaginal, and intuitive ways of knowing (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Braud & Anderson, 1998). Anderson & Braud (2011) have mapped a whole range of practices that can be deployed to enhance the preparedness of the researcher and the research participants, enabling more skilled work with forms of *direct knowing* that are cultivated in spiritual and wisdom traditions (e.g., knowing through presence, compassion, and love) as well as in the arts and humanities (e.g., knowing through play, imagination, embodiment, artisanship, etc.).

In my view, it is these participatory and transpersonal methods that will enable us to come into a deeper relationship with phenomena of coherence, by helping us to attend to the "warm data" (Bateson, 2021) that make visible something of the complexity of any group dynamic in its real-life contexts. Given that group coherence practices are now sought after in many arenas of social change, we need to acknowledge that our established ways of knowing and doing are, frankly, impaired and limited by our very own preconceptions and polemics of change which we perpetuate in our social circles and cultural narratives. As Bateson (2022) asserts, every framework and theory of change effectively narrows our perception of possibilities and becomes an obstacle to our readiness for emergence. Transpersonal research methods can help us to decouple from established norms of knowledge generation, by engendering deautomatisation of perception, thinking, and behaviour (Bockler, 2021). If we can open the aperture of our perception, learn to listen to and to be with each other in the fullness of our being, and embrace resonance and dissonance alike, perhaps we can learn to be with the crises that now besiege us without feeling the immediate compulsion to fix them or to make anything happen. In this surrender of our compulsions may lie the true liberation of our being and the fuller realisation of our capacities, which, in turn, may give rise to truly unfathomed possibilities.

Conclusion

Guenther (2022, p. 167) concludes her own paper stating, "As we evolve in our abilities as human beings, as demonstrated in our capacity to experience coherence, should we not also evolve our thinking about what is possible and what is important in terms of empirical study?"

I whole-heartedly agree—and, as I see it, this means revisiting our presuppositions that dictate to us what is possible. From my perspective, this essentially entails understanding consciousness as a nonlocal and fundamental property of the universe (Barušs & Mossbridge, 2017; Lorimer, 2019), rather than defining it as an emergent phenomenon arising from individual brain activity. This perspective helps to normalise phenomena—such as psi—that

Guenther (2022) described as anomalous and otherworldly. What if we gave ourselves permission to accept these diverse states of consciousness and extended human capacities as a "new normal" and sought to incorporate them in our working practices and research? My sense is that this could revolutionise our scientific discourse and understanding of what is unfolding in these unprecedented times.

I want to conclude this commentary by sharing a story. In the late 1990s, when I was in my early twenties and still an undergraduate student pursuing studies in community arts and acting, I had the serendipitous opportunity to train in conflict resolution with Centre de Médiation et de Formation à la Médiation (CMFM) in France. CMFM pursued a transformative model of mediation, advocating transcendence of a conflict over following the mainstream path of negotiated settlement. At the core of CMFM's training approach were role plays which tapped into the underlying, universal dynamics of human conflict. Each session began as a simulation of conflict between two trainees as adversaries, accompanied by three trainees acting as mediators. As the mediations progressed, the simulations felt increasingly real as they became rooted in the inner life of the trainees. The confrontations in the room, the anger, the pain, the tears felt entirely real. And yet as time went by, we began to experience profound states of opening, leading to deep compassion and even love between us. These experiences of group beingness were enabled by practices of witnessing and mirroring, expressing the pain and suffering we perceived. It struck me that in Guenther's (2022) research, the gazing practices were similarly regarded as powerful in enabling shifts. Witnessing each other in our fullness, honouring darkness and light in more expansive, compassionate, and intentional ways, may well be at the core of what is needed to engender greater coherence in the world today.

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In Dialogue

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

Metaphors for Bringing the Future into Being

Sohail Inayatullah, Emma D. Paine, Otto Scharmer

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

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

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

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

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

Participating in the Dialogue

Sohail Inayatullah
Professor at the Graduate Institute of Futures Studies at Tamkang University in Taipei, Taiwan and UNESCO Chair in Futures Studies at the Sejahtera Centre for Sustainability and Humanity.

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

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

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

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

Going to the Mountaintop: The Macrohistory Perspective

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Through Metaphor

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Agency and Collective Depression

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Emma: Yeah, in some ways.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Futuring in a Polarized World

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The University of the Future

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sohail: Yeah, definitely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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