



# ***From Ego to Eco***

***Organising for a  
regenerative future***

Journal of the Association for  
Management Education and  
Development



**Edition Editors: Tom Boydell and Mike Pedler**

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# From Ego to Eco

## Organising in the Climate Emergency Era

Mike Pedler and Tom Boydell



### Introduction

Critics have panned Alex McKay's film *Don't Look Up* – where two scientists fail to raise the alarm about an imminent comet strike that will destroy life on Earth – as being over the top, exaggerated, over-acted, heavy handed, condescending and depressing. Yet climate scientists say that the film mirrors the terrifying non-response to the mounting evidence of our ecological crisis; which will extinguish life on this planet if we cannot look up to face the onrushing future.

By way of encouragement, the last two years of the Sars Covid 19 crisis, have demonstrated that C19 is as much a social as it is a physical disease. To contain a virus spread through social contact we have learned to change how we conduct ourselves in social relationships. Similarly, the climate crisis is a social and political challenge as well as being an ecological and a biodiversity emergency. Moving from “ego to eco” means re-inventing the ways we live together on the earth (Latour 2021) as well as resolving the physical problems of global heating, pollution, species loss etc.

In our call for contributions to this Special issue of the AMED Journal, we invited responses to this relatively sudden realisation that we must make major changes in human behaviour, including how we organise ourselves. The Anthropocene – where human impact on the planet has already begun a new geological era – demands a fundamental shift of mind in order to inhabit the earth more sustainably.

Our invitation was influenced by three related ideas:

**Anthropocentrism.** We have perceived the world as humancentric, focussed on ourselves. The Anthropocene is a consequence of human exceptionalism, defined as “*a belief in humans and their existence as the most important and central fact in the universe*” (Cambridge Dictionary). Momentous human achievements in arts, sciences and human rights have been accompanied by the exploitation of the planet in our own interests, with little regard for the rights of other forms of life.

As a philosophical perspective, **Post-humanism** can help us to reintegrate with each other and with other forms of planetary life. As well as seeing animals and plants as having their own beings and rights, Post-humanism addresses the imbalances of power and justice between humans and other humans. Inequalities in income and health and forms of oppression such as racism, slavery and patriarchy affect individual and collective wellbeing and make responding to the climate emergency immensely more difficult (Wilkinson & Pickett 2009).

**Eco-consciousness.** The necessary shift has been described as moving from Ego-consciousness to Eco-consciousness - care for the well-being of all, of our global communities and planetary ecosystems (Scharmer & Kaufer 2013:2). In the Modern era we have moved far away from cultures seen as "primitive" and their close connections with earth and nature. Now we need to re-learn to see ourselves as inseparable from the natural world (Senge et al 2008).

### **A note about the cover:**

The cover shows two pictures of "eco". One is a lovely rural scene, with nature in harmony with itself. The other is of *Little Amal*, a twelve-foot tall puppet of a nine-year old girl, representing refugees - other victims of ego-thinking, as we see only too clearly in Ukraine as we go to press.

*Amal* walked from the Syrian border with Turkey to Manchester and then on to COP in Glasgow. In this picture she is in Sheffield, where [she was welcomed by a dance group](#) of which Tom Boydell was a member. Her journey was organised by *Good Chance*, an arts-based organisation that supports refugees and asylum seekers - <https://www.goodchance.org.uk/>

We greet Amal with eco-conscious love, and we strive to find creative and constructive ways to channel our anger at ego-consciousness - including of course our own.

### **A brief look at the contributions**

This assembly of contributions is emblematic of the theme, being wondrously diverse and yet entangled and intertwined, one piece with another. Unlike the usual response to a call for papers, contributions have continued to come in, so that we could have carried on collecting, and have only been stopped by running out of time. Whilst styling ourselves curators rather than editors, standing back to review what we've got is inevitably partial and incomplete.



As there was no starting order of contents and with no obvious arrangement arising from a preliminary review, these 25 offerings are presented in a random sequence. Beginning with the order in which the files were listed in the desktop folder, the numbered list of contributions was converted via a random numbers table to produce the final running order.

Again, in no particular order, here are brief outlines of the contributions to this AMED Special Issue: *From Ego to Eco: Organising in the Climate Emergency Era*:

In his **Eco-Leadership Explorations**, Simon Western sets out to encourage us as individuals, teams and organisations to be *“more located ... more embodied and more at home in ourselves (in order to) become relational beings. ... We can then focus less on our anxieties and insecurities, become less ego-centric, anthropomorphic and narcissistic, ... (and) ... find our place in the ecosystems in which we live”*. Thus, we can take our place in *“the Assembly of All Beings”* (Snyder 1990: 121).

Joining with the assembly of all beings finds echoes in other contributions, including Rosemary Cairns, whose **What’s Next? The small stories that are shaping a new sustainable narrative** uses pictures, stories and a two loops model to show how the sharing of many small stories of sustainable achievement can build up into a bigger picture of both the old era which is dying and that which is newly emerging. The sharing of stories leads to conversations about the transitions from the old to the new, and what that means.

Similarly concerned to find “maps to guide us through the planetary crises we face”, James Barlow, Jake Farr and Kirstin Irving’s **This is an emergency. We must slow down** describes their work and their belief that *“the massive improv act we are all engaged in during these disrupted times benefits from radical collaboration between diverse actors”*. James, Jake & Kirstin aim to build a more consciously interconnected society participating in an experiment in organising for a regenerative future.

Nick Heap’s **Ego to Eco. A joyous and enriching journey** expresses his belief that learning to live in harmony with the earth and each other can be joyous and fun. He offers some simple and practical actions for developing listening, imagining, connecting, organising, fulfilling, happiness, hope and appreciation with each other, together with links to accompanying resources on his website.

**Facilitating out of the four walls ceiling** by Nadia MacArthur is a brief account of Nadia’s transition from working in conventional corporate settings to “nature-led facilitation”. Meeting in natural settings, working on the same tasks, but without the white board, the premium coffee, and other comforting facilities, helps to produce an unpredictability, emergence and synchronicity not found indoors.

Hope is the key word for Julie Allan. In **Practical Hope: the most vital resource?** Julie argues that hope is of even more importance in times of great difficulty, especially that hope which is active and engaged. This short contribution contains a video link which introduces a personal reflection activity on practical hope.

Bev Morris is one of several contributors who have turned to poetry to express their thoughts. Her **Empathy or Die** begins with poems on the elements of water, fire, air and earth before turning to the challenges presented by the Anthropocene. Bev also reflects on the irony that - to encourage a shift away towards Eco - we can only work out of Ego.

By contrast and drawing on the premises of logical positivism, critical realism, pragmatism and social constructionism, John Burgoyne's concise **Surviving and Thriving** offers a philosophical justification for moving from Ego to Eco. To do this we have to both adapt to the environment and also change it: "humans survive and thrive through a process of co-evolution with the environment as part of an increasing unit of survival".

In **Re-balancing Nature's Inclusional Dance**, Louie Gardiner rejects the binary notion of Ego & Eco, offering instead a more inclusional view that we are nature and that saving the planet is saving ourselves. Using extracts from her poetry, which can be heard as well as read, Louie guides us through the "self-centring praxis of Presence in Action (PIA)" to develop "personal and collective response-ibility".

**In Defence of Humanism: Why humanism is a solution, not the problem** is Paul Harrison's challenge to the premises of post-humanism and a plea for retaining the humanist worldview as offering the best opportunity for solving our current problems. He argues that humanism makes strong commitments to animal welfare and that of all living creatures and the natural world. Where humans and organisations are concerned, humanism implies the support of human rights, democracy, and the equal dignity and treatment of everyone – including the commitment to ending racism, sexism, and LGBT+ discrimination.

In his paper, **Steps to an Ecology of Agency: Organising to live well together - a 'grammar' of collective well-being(s)**, Chris Blantern draws attention to the importance of language and culture in shaping human actions and organising. This paper introduces the important notion of the "social grammars" that go to make up "cultural ecologies" that help us to live well together, or not. Grammars that promote "otherness" – of people and other living beings, seen as different to "us" – include forms of speech and action that divide us and encourage hierarchy and inequality. To overcome these, we can cultivate grammars that support agency, interaction, equality and collaboration.

Chris's additional contribution: **Three Ways to Manage** serves as a concise exemplar of how different social grammars generate cultural practices that can positively affect organising and management-in-action.

Also emphasising how we talk about ourselves and to each other, Margaret Gearty & Steve Marshall's **Towards Everyday Activism(s) – making the 'eco' move: how reflexive video-making is helping us connect to an ecologically orientated practice** is an experiential inquiry that draws on Kenneth Gergen's notion of "Poetic Activism". Margaret & Steve's "everyday activism" provides a means of finding an ecological stance to guide their daily practices of working and living. Central to these practices is the awareness that how we talk and interact with each other can either reinforce or challenge "the rules of the game".

**In Colonialism and Extractivism: A Tale of Two Commodities**, Anna Fairtlough proposes that it is our fundamental commitment to “extractivism” that is the greatest challenge for human beings and our relationship with the earth. Using the examples of coal and tea in Colonial India, Anna traces the practice and ideology of extractivism which brought about the transition from ‘eco’ to ‘ego’ via the direct extraction of material resources and indirect extraction through the exploitation of human beings’ labour, culture and knowledge”. Climate injustice, whereby those in the Global South who have contributed least to the emergency suffer most from its effects, is an enduring legacy of colonialism. With its close cousin capitalism, colonialism normalises and celebrates the extraction of short term “surplus value” from land, animals and humans alike, with little thought for longer-term consequences. Making the reverse shift from Ego to Eco means changing this fundamental stance.

Christine Abbott’s “**Dear Jen**” begins as a Christmas letter and continues as an extended meditation on the activities and place of ants in the natural world. Quoting the biologist E.O Wilson’s dictum that “it is the little things that run the world”, Christine draws parallels on how to “run organisations and communities that don’t overrun our planet.”

Tom Boydell’s contribution - which started as a short call for papers - took on a life of its own and is now included as a five-part serialisation of **From Ego to Eco: Where are we? Where are we Trying to Go?** In Part I he looks at the difference between the human separations of ego-consciousness and the oneness of eco-.

He then explores the three separations suggested by Shiva and Shiva (2019). In Part II he considers that oneself from oneself, in terms of a framework of development of ways or Modes of being in, relating to, the World. He then focuses on the separation of humans from nature (Part III), from each other (Part IV) and from each other again in the ways we run organisations and politics (Part V).

Peter Bernays’s **A Vocabulary for an Age of Community Sustainability** is an A to Z of words and phrases in support of “mapping community” and developing community practices. From Ableism to Zooniverse, including terms not normally found together, such as Exoplanets, Exotic Flours Pancakes & Expanded Cinema or Nonprofit Organisations, Nonviolent & Compassionate Communication & Nyckelharpa, this intriguing glossary for living in community is sure to amaze and delight.

Ian Andrew **Before it became land**, Tom Boydell **In Pandemic Voice** and **How can I walk on by?** Mike Pedler **Being Ecological** and Chris Blantern **From Eco to Ego** all contribute stand-alone poems which speak for themselves on ecological themes.

## Some connections

Readers will make their own connections and draw their own conclusions, but here are some of the things that we noticed:

## Language & media.

The importance of language and culture, in particular of how we speak and think about ourselves, each other and other living beings, is clear in a number of these contributions. A variety of forms is employed by contributors to give voice to their concerns and hopes: videos, interviews, activities, meditations, stories, images, poems as well as the more familiar written forms of papers and articles.

## Poetry.

There is a lot of poetry here: stand-alone poems from Ian Andrew, Chris Blanter, Tom Boydell and Mike Pedler, and poems embedded as illumination, touchstone or prompt in papers from James Barlow, Jake Farr, Kirstin Irving, Louie Gardiner, Margaret Gearty & Steve Marshall and Bev Morris. What might explain this reaching after poetry to address these particular questions? Perhaps, in awareness of the Blah, Blah, Blah! of so much climate emergency discourse, these contributors are reaching for something more potent than prose. Poetry deals with powerful feelings, imaginings and possibilities not glimpsed through reason and logic, and whilst it uses everyday words, it orders and patterns them differently to find novel ways of seeing things:

It is difficult  
To get the news from poems  
Yet men die miserably every day  
For lack  
Of what is found there.

(William Carlos Williams "Of Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," 1962)

## Love and Rage.

This battle cry of Extinction Rebellion, founded in October 2018 in the UK, signals the need for both of these moving forces. It is perhaps inevitable in a collection like this that love is better represented than rage. We are after all people who work with others on human and organisational development. And yet, and yet..... we should surely be angry about the continuing dominance of "extractivism"; we should truly be angry at the extent of the denial, the refusing to see and the "greenwashing" of "business as usual". Whilst we really need much love more to bind us together and to help us collaborate as never before, is love alone enough to shift us? We doubt it.

## Optimism and Pessimism.

Similarly, we are an optimistic community, working in the hope and belief in better futures. Does this "professional deformation" blind us to the stark realities of the data and the increasing evidence of irreversible damage done to biodiversity and climate? In his Prison Notebooks, the Italian revolutionary socialist Antonio Gramsci combined a pessimistic analysis of the growing authoritarianism of the 1930s with an optimistic commitment to the potential for bringing about a socialist society. His famous motto, calling for a "Pessimism of the intellect; optimism of the will", combines a sceptical, questioning of what is presented as "fact" or

“evidence” with a belief in the human capacity to rise to challenges, and learn from the experiences of acting upon them. However, perhaps so far at least, Gramsci’s pessimism has arguably been a better predictor than his optimism.

### Who are “we”? And who is included in “us”?

These two related questions surface or lurk around at many points in these Special Issue contributions. Most, if not all, of the contributors see the need for us humans to change ourselves in the face of these challenges. Most if not all proffer ways to bring this about. But whilst it seems clear that we must adapt and develop new skills, those contributors who talk about how we are divided, not just as humans vs. other living beings, or humans vs planet, but as humans vs humans across a plethora of differences, are sounding a different note. How can we learn to be more inclusional, as one contributor terms it? How can we unlearn our addiction to the dividing and othering that causes so much pain and suffering? Until we are able to do this, we will never succeed in grasping our full collective potential. Perhaps this is only possible by rejoining the Assembly of All Beings:

“When an ecosystem is fully functioning, all the members are present at the assembly. To speak of wilderness is to speak of wholeness. Human beings came out of that wholeness, and to consider the possibility of reactivating membership in the Assembly of All Beings is in no way regressive”.

Gary Snyder (1990) quoted by Simon Western in this volume

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### Acknowledgements

First, of course, we want to acknowledge the contributors to this, the final edition of e-O&P, who have responded to our fairly "loose" - perhaps "open" would be a better word - call for contributions with such richness of topic and medium. It's great to have a diverse mix of well-known members of AMED and those for whom this is their first contact with us. You are all very welcome and we hope that we will be able to keep in touch within whatever form AMED takes in the future.

As guest editors, we are very grateful to **Bob MacKenzie** and **David McAra** for their never-ceasing encouragement, patience and tolerance, exercised with an amazingly facilitative style not always associated with roles such as theirs. Bob encourages and allows free rein with suggestions and ideas that at times might have seemed a little bizarre. David, who puts the text together in its final form, exercises immense formatting skills combined with endless patience and tolerance for difficult layouts, numerous footnotes and uncooperative tables, keeping calm regardless of the sound of deadlines whizzing past. Which is a cue for apologising for the late appearance of this edition, caused entirely by one of our contributors – namely, Tom Boydell - who was constantly seeing just another couple of pages that were asking to be included. I am sorry for all the pressure this has caused David and Bob, and for the frustration of all the other writers, who delivered well on time and have been wondering if their work would ever appear in print. Now, here it is **at last!**

We'd also like to express our thanks to **Linda Williams**, AMED's Office Administrator, for all the backroom support that she willingly and cheerfully offers. We must also acknowledge the encouragement, support and critical friendship of **Triarchy Press** over the years. In no small ways have they all made a distinctive contribution to the quality and freshness of the articles that have appeared under AMED's aegis. Thanks also to **Ned Seabrook** for his customary work of separating out individual complimentary pdf copies for contributors following publication.

Between them, Linda, Bob and David have over many years enabled e-O&P to be lively, informative, provocative and attractive, not only in content, but also in form and presentation. What other publications can claim the same? We hope that its spirit will live on in some form of reincarnation in the future, and that this special edition will contribute in some small way to the essential and existential project of saving our planet.

### About Mike

Mike Pedler lives at Hathersage in the Peak District National Park and is a member of Hope Valley Climate Action. He has been a manager, an adult educator, a teacher in Higher Education and a consultant on managerial and organisational learning. Since a meeting with Reg Revans in 1976, he has worked especially with the action leaning idea.

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### Tom Boydell writes

When I turned 80 I was advised to go part-time. So I'm now a part-time management development consultant, a part-time writer, a part-time actor, a part-time singer, a part-time poet, a part-time weaver and a part-time gardener. I'm glad I'm only a part-timer, otherwise I'd be worn out.

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# *Towards Everyday Activism(s) – making the ‘eco’ move*

*How reflexive video-making is helping us connect to an ecologically orientated practice.*

**Margaret Gearty and Steve Marshall**



## **Introduction**

### **Recurring questions**

Is the work that I am doing worthwhile?

Am I making a helpful contribution to the world?

How do I see the future and my role within it?

No doubt we have all been visited by questions like these from time to time. Nowadays such questions seem deeper and ever more present. As we write, the Covid pandemic rumbles on ominously, forest fires burn across the world as preparations for COP 26 are underway, and thousands seek emergency evacuation from Afghanistan. Disruptive global events increasingly mean that our taken-for-granted norms, customs, established tropes and seemingly immutable truths are being interrogated or, in the case of the pandemic, effortlessly knocked aside. Perhaps it is little surprise that so many of us are reconsidering issues of personal consequence in our home and work lives, even though the wider implications of our actions can feel insignificant within the global context. What we describe in this paper was born from a wish to find an ecological orientation or a stance – that might guide our everyday actions in a meaningful way. We will describe an action research project we've been engaged in over the past two years in which we were moving towards understanding what everyday activism(s) within the context of our lives might look like. We'll

describe how we began to explore visual/video inquiry methods to bring focus to an elusive starting idea of activism – ‘poetic activism’ – in a way to help us make eco-moves in our everyday lives and start to address the deep, troubling, recurring questions that we each held.

## Who we are

Since 2012 we’ve worked together on the action-research based doctorate in organisational change at Ashridge/Hult and we each run independent research and consultancy practices. We had arrived into the field of action research mid-career from very different hinterlands: Steve was formerly a military aviator and Margaret had been a silicon chip designer. From this provenance, both of us – in our different ways – had interests in the aesthetic qualities of complex (and sometimes very) technical systems.

In our conversations with doctoral students, we constantly ask questions relating to stance as we describe it above. Things like: what matters to you, what do you stand for, and how do you participate in change? Naturally we have become entangled ourselves with such questions. Back in 2019 we both had separate writing and creative projects on the go alongside our educational work. We were both blogging and engaging with social media.

Steve was pursuing an interest in phenomenology, aesthetics, and the idea of an ‘ecosophic, artistic practice’<sup>i</sup>. He was experimenting with visual representation. One example of this was his #1000Steps project where every day he shared on social media a photo taken from within 1000 steps of his home and dialogued with those who responded. The conversations in turn catalysed a variety of spin-off ideas including a ‘visual inquiry’ syllabus for parents with children in lockdown and a #100Steps project designed for elderly relatives to share imagery on-line with their families.

Margaret meanwhile had been researching responses to climate crisis at a personal and organisational level for many years and at that time was beginning to write about and inquire with others into the idea of ‘poetic activism’, a phrase coined by social constructionist Ken Gergen.

We saw our respective efforts as more than creative expression; these were attempts to influence discourse, a form of ‘action’ in the broadest sense. There seemed then to be common intent in our experiments and a similar thrust in our questioning. Steve attended the first poetic activist gathering Margaret had co-convened (of which more below) and this planted the first seeds for us to combine our visual and activist inquiries in an action research project.

## Poetic activism

Ken Gergen’s writing has long recognised that practices of language are bound within relationships and patterns of practices<sup>ii</sup>. Put simply his suggestion is that how we talk and the way we interact has the potential to reinforce the ‘rules of the game’ or to ‘make new worlds’. It’s a liberating thought, and in recent years Gergen has become more activist in his writing, increasingly pressing the relevance of his thinking and connecting his ideas to social change:

“Constructionism invites us to become poetic activists. .... The strong invitation is for the emergence of new forms of language and ways of interpreting the world.”<sup>iii</sup>



He goes on:

“Invited are generative discourses, that is ways of talking and writing or representing (as in photography, film, art, theatre and the like) that simultaneously challenge existing traditions of understanding, and offer new possibilities for action.”<sup>iv</sup>

Gergen’s strong invitation had immediately resonated with Margaret when she read it. The phrase ‘poetic activism’ juxtaposed poetic sensibility with activism in her own search for a ‘stance’ and offered a way to create possibilities for action. She started to blog about what poetic activism could mean in her life and have inquiring conversations and with two co-conspirators started convening poetic activist gatherings of artists, researchers and organisational practitioners to explore and experiment further.

After some months she commissioned a graphic<sup>v</sup> to convey an interpretation of poetic activism and to do this she drew on some of Donna Haraway’s post-humanist thinking and languaging<sup>vi</sup>, creating a manifesto for everyday activism that included: making kin, with each other and the more than human world, and reaching out to form tentacular connections<sup>vii</sup>.

This attempt to visualise differently and Steve’s experiments in visual representation seemed to fit precisely with Gergen’s idea of a ‘generative discourse’. As we write, it seems congruent that Gergen’s words influenced and incited action in us – guiding us to seek new forms of language in the form of this research.



Figure 1: A first visual image of ‘poetic activism’ (shown here as part of the video film we created).

## Poetic activism – a slippery term

We want to emphasise that the term ‘poetic activism’ was not something we sought to pin down. It was (and in many ways still is) a nascent idea, a muse rather than a goal in our inquiries: a yet to be known everyday practice we wanted to explore in practical rather than theoretical terms. From the start it was proving to be a slippery term, constantly luring us towards firmer definitions and the expectation that one day it could be explained. These extracts from Margaret’s blog illustrate the issue:

“The thing is,” my sister C said to me, when we were face-timing last week: she in Dublin, me in the UK. “I don’t really get this poetic activism thing. Am I being dumb, but what actually is it?”<sup>viii</sup>

“I’m not into poetry much,” says one friend P from time to time. He’s participated fully in many of the workshops and conversations we’ve had on this topic, and is a thoughtful practitioner interested in social change, but in the end, he cycles back to a puzzled place saying: “This poetic activism – whatever it is – it’s just not me.”<sup>ix</sup>

Like the doctoral students we work with, who frequently struggle to see or name their research topic, our capacity to define our emergent sense of ‘poetic activism’ left us feeling like it was hiding at the edge of our peripheral vision. As we attempted to face ‘it’ more squarely it would fade from our gaze. In the poetic activist inquiry groups, things would relax when we moved away from definitions and shared stories that seemed to chime or agreed simply: “we’ll know it when we see it.”

## Research agenda and approach

### Emergent research question

As we increasingly brought our agendas together, we started to question if video, film or photography could represent the delicate complexity of a more nuanced form of activism in our everyday lives. Following one of the early Poetic Activism gatherings, we reflected on-line in our duo about how we could use photography and video to support future events. We considered using video or photography as a means to document parts of the workshops, or working closely with our co-inquirers, recording them as they reflected on their activism, or even filming alongside them in their lives as they brought that activism to life. Yet each of these interventions seemed to prematurely define an idea that we were still struggling to ‘see’, and Steve’s independent work suggested video-making could have the potential to help us into a more expansive field of inquiry.

We could not have crisply stated our emerging research question at that time though, in retrospect, we now see it as:

“How might reflexive videomaking help us know our own eco-practice of poetic activism more deeply?”

In practice, our question was refined and sharpened within a braided series of related activities and inquiries; our videomaking inquiry ran alongside, but was independent from, the series of poetic activism inquiries that

Margaret was co-convening. These included face-to-face gatherings, community zoom calls and a deep-dive co-operative inquiry towards the end of 2020. Though these strands are separate from the visual inquiry we are describing here, they inevitably became significant sites of inquiry and exchange. Many other co-inquirers and co-conspirators were involved in this wider work and we acknowledge them as we write.

### **Adopting visual approaches**

Our visual experimentations were therefore not so deliberately methodological at the start, and our choices were, in part, simply pragmatic. The video facilities on our phones and computers were ready-to hand and, borrowing a mantra from our doctoral program, we decided to 'start close in'<sup>x</sup> and record our reflections as they arose immediately after and between each Poetic Activism gathering.

It is natural to associate poetry with words – written and recited. So, it may seem curious that we moved away from written text or journaling but, from the start, we were clear that we leaned towards the 'poetic' as a form and sensibility rather than poetry per se. Similarly, rather than use smartphone imagery and video as artefacts to illustrate, alarm or encourage engagement with environmental themes, we were using digital image-making as a method to open and support us in a dialogical inquiry into the question of how we could come to know "our own eco-practice of poetic activism."

### **Research cycles – ad-hoc and rigorous**

As action researchers, we intuitively fell into an emergent process of inquiry held in place by the rhythms of multiple cycles of action and reflection. These were ad-hoc at first and then started to take a more rigorous shape as a series of experiments with visual media that ran from December 2019 through to April 2021. Our process was relatively straightforward at first. We started by sharing 'talking head' videos that drew attention to events in our lives, and from there we began to exchange moments of video as we attempted to 'show' our thoughts and experiences. This led to the creation of a film that we showed to an audience and then to further video exchange as well as reflective writing. After each cycle we met and reflected, sharing reactions to each other's work. We always recorded these meetings and sometimes transcribed the themes that were emerging. Only then would we decide on the next experiment.

Over time our reflective conversations as a pair became something of a touch-point. They were animated and wide-ranging in their scope with an excited and vulnerable aspect. Though we had worked together for a long time, our Zoom meetings and exchanges of video opened a distinct perspective to our conversations even though they remained enmeshed within other activities. We continued to blog and make social media contributions independently and to tutor on the doctoral programme at Ashridge. We both participated too in the wider Poetic Activism gatherings. Through all this we were dutiful in recording our conversations, maintaining a catalogue of events which has helped to take a retrospective view.

## Experimental inquiry

### Video Diaries

For our first cycle of experimentation we agreed an exploratory exchange of short video film via WhatsApp in December 2019. We were not clear at that stage value, if any, we might find in 'video diaries' and what the method might hold for us. Yet we quickly noticed how talking into our phones allowed us to speak in ways that offered flexibility; we could wander off track and find ourselves again, while the pauses and 'erms' offered us nuance and an appropriate uncertainty compared to our written reflections.



Margaret's first video was recorded in her house on Election Day (12 Dec 2019) and she spoke tentatively, nursing a cold, about her reflections on the previous Poetic Activism gathering, describing how she felt there was a yearning among those attending to be together.

"It seems to me ... [...] ... that the tension between the poetic and the activist seems to be a good enough 'container' to get people together."

(MG, 12 Dec 2019)

She went on to wonder how we might poetically 'shape ourselves towards the future.' She noted that our efforts, as we tried to give birth to a new consciousness, would be nothing more than a 'speck in this... but not a lonely speck...!' She then paused to let her dog in before returning to reflect on Poetic Activism as something that might sit within the contours of our own lives and jobs, and to speculate that it might embolden her activist blogging.

Steve's response, filmed from his office two weeks later after a period of intense workload on the run-up to Xmas, began with his reflections on how to make space for the work within the busyness of professional life. He went on to consider how the personal nature of the exchanges invited an accountability to each other and pondered the potential personal cost of holding a radical stance – even from the peripheries of an organisation. Yet, given the critical nature of the activist challenge, he searched for a worthwhile place to focus his attention before wandering towards the immediacy of the imagery and voice in Margaret's video.



"The bigger question that emerges for me is when we try to get involved in ...[...]. climate and social collapse, how do we make sense of our day-to-day activities and how do we not get distracted by the demands of getting by...?"

(SM, 26 Dec 2019)

In the New Year we then reflected on our video exchange via Zoom; we were surprised by the qualities revealed in the short pieces. Steve likened it to a form of ‘confessional,’ feeling that it began to validate the poetic activism inquiry for him; he noted how it was helping him to become more attentive to opportunities to take a more activist stance as they arose in his work. As a photographer, he was also surprised by his choice not to manipulate lighting and composition:

“There was an ‘unmaskedness’ about it – am I prepared to stand in this space as I am – and not to pull the wool over anyone’s eyes – and say what I think...?”<sup>xi</sup>

Margaret noted the depth of presence and vulnerability in the films. She found the interpersonal quality connected for her to the idea of ‘making kin’ – the Donna Haraway idea that she’d been exploring as a key element of poetic activism practice.

“As we’re changing genre of the form – with the filming... [...] ...something quite different starts to emerge. Which is an exploration for me in kinship and relational connection... [...] ...”<sup>xii</sup>

Our conversations continued over coming weeks within the context of other entangled work-based exchanges, including conversations about our doctoral supervision work and co-authoring a conference paper. Meanwhile we continued to share shorter inquiry videos as opportunities arose and momentum started to build towards another Poetic Activism gathering in February 2020 where about a dozen people had agreed to come.

### A Film Showing

With the February gathering approaching, the design began to take shape and we pondered how our visual inquiry might be make a useful contribution. Might we invite our collaborators perhaps to record a reflective piece to camera as we had done? Or perhaps we could film them throughout the gathering and then show them on a screen in the room at the end of the day? However, our decision-making was guided too by the practicalities of there being a larger group and mundane considerations about the technology we would need. We were also cautious – having noticed that our process was, in some way, still nurturing the fragility and vulnerability required to bring a new idea to life.

Finally, we settled on offering a more produced film; it would be an edited compilation of our video exchanges and our other pieces of experimental video. Although work pressure meant that time was short and risked any sense of participative collaboration in the production and editing, Steve produced a 10-minute film drawing on the shared videos, and using digital photographs and text headlines that briefly outlined the inquiry themes and process. As the video was completed only a few days before the Poetic Activism gathering, Margaret was effectively offered only a ‘veto’ of the final video; there would be no time to make further edits.

Perhaps we were both caught up in the rush of the video production but, nonetheless, we decided to go ahead and show the video at the gathering. Showing our work publicly on a darkened, rainy afternoon suddenly seemed to induce a sense of deep reflection and exposure. The slow cuts and fades, gentle dissolves through a black screen, the melancholy soundtrack, images that Steve had made while recovering from a period of severe burnout, Margaret’s sincere, circumspect considerations, heard as a ‘voiceover’

describing the seriousness and vulnerability of the work, alongside images that she had photographed around her home on walks with her family.

As the video played, Margaret felt the touch of one of our co-inquirers on her shoulder; a simple gesture which felt laden with significance as a deeper sense of meaning, and again kinship, that started to emerge in the showing. Steve noticed how he had felt rather disconnected from the film following an editorial process which had focused on the mechanical, technical aspects of video production and then found himself shocked by the act of publicly showing the work; *“The first 2 minutes were OK and then I thought, “What have we done?””*, he reported in a later Zoom call. When the film finished, there was a pause and then a follow up conversation. In it our co-inquirers were appreciative and puzzled. They wrestled with the notion of the video process as a way of coming to know and could comment more easily on the film as a presentational artefact – remarking on the soundtrack and its overall effect. Yet in her later reflections, Margaret noted,

“If it was an experiment in coming to know... [...] ... we discovered the melancholy - there is a deep sadness at the root of what we do.”

### Later cycles of inquiry

After the video showing, our inquiry continued to unfurl in accordance with its own momentum and in tandem with the pandemic which, within a few weeks, led to national lockdowns and huge adjustments in our ways of living. Throughout this time, we continued to exchange visual material, and to write and meet in our duo via Zoom. We also met virtually with others who had attended the gatherings to continue the conversation about poetic activism. Our inquiries at this time were no doubt fully coloured by the pandemic and contextualized by it. Questions of activism(s) from our everyday lives did not fade; instead, they took on a different hue. We were closer to home and, as our habits and attentions shifted, things were slowing down and opportunities narrowing. Staying local, within #1000Steps, for example, was no longer an artistic choice but a matter of legal obligation.

## Discussion

### Where did this take us?

Like all good action researchers, we not only seek insight from our research, but are primed to ask pragmatic questions like: Where is the action element in all this? What is useful here for other practitioners? What difference are we making to the global challenge? As we stood back to ask such questions of ourselves, challenging ourselves to find a ‘difference’ we might be making in the face of a huge global challenge, our resolve was tempered by the possibility of futility. The poetic activism inquiry had started out with big ambitions: to engage and build momentum within ourselves and in others in towards adopting everyday eco-activism(s). As we consider the visual inquiry that accompanied the more public strand of the work and reflect on the difference it made or might make – we found a different kind of action - something altogether more

humble and yet potentially profound. To catch this quality, we move now to a more poetic rendering to reflect on a couple of chosen themes. In so doing, we set out to catch some of the subtle effects of this work on us personally before considering how it might form the basis of practical insight for others.

## Learnings for us

### Authorization

Quiet friend who has come so far,  
feel how your breathing makes more space around you<sup>xiii</sup>.

Rainer Marie Rilke

After our video diary exchange, we noticed how visual experimentation authorized a way of sharing experience and feeling that had hitherto been submerged. Video invited us to voice and live into each other's worlds differently. Given the subject matter, this included a license to practice being 'poetic' in our daily lives. We noticed the poetic in the mundane everyday (like birds flying past – featured in our video showing) household spaces and materials around (seen in our video diaries) and, by sharing the videos and conversing, we were taking time to dwell on and repeat that noticing. Like the lines of Rilke's poem, the inquiry created more breathing space around and between us. We felt licensed to move slightly differently through our respective worlds.

By authorizing ourselves to talk and share what we were noticing, we found we were creating a different kind of inquiry space in which imagination and half-memory seemed more figural than before. For example, we spoke at length about a film Margaret made of waiting for a falling leaf. When we searched for the 'data' we found in fact there was only ever a film of waiting – no leaf had fallen. This was a space then in which concrete fact receded – and ephemeral patterns and possibilities were given more time to unfold. We found the inquiry was giving us a means to express a half-submerged knowing about our 'practice' into the world that, normally, was not voiced.

We might call the resulting inquiry space poetic indeed, in its broadest sense. Video caused us to stop and look, and look again. Certain moments became frozen and developed into 'reference experiences.' We became accustomed to the discomfort of witnessing ourselves on film too – able to bear watching our frozen moments as detached from fixed identities and emblematic of something to inquire into. In summary, these visual methods allowed us to share an embodied and different sense of our lives.

### Working with grief and melancholy

And this approach sometimes surfaced a surprise. The sharing of the edited video, and others' reactions to it, highlighted the melancholy that each of us brought to the work from our wider lives. In response to the audience, Steve noted that his editing reflected a period of personal recuperation for him after a long recovery from a period of burnout. Whereas the audience remarks and subsequent explorations led Margaret to inquire more deeply into the nature of her sadness about the environmental crisis.

"I understand my melancholy better now; how my concerns for the environment were connected to an overall sad tone in my life, and how in a way I was attached to that"

Margaret, Reflecting in Sept 2021

There is grief in this work. Perhaps our activism was, in part at least, about exploring ways to hold grief and understand it. Each day brings news that is difficult to stay with and digest. This morning, a minor news report talked of guillemots dying in unprecedented numbers off the UK coast<sup>xiv</sup>. The cause is unknown, said the scientist – it could be hunger or more likely is down to ingesting toxins from algal blooms that have grown large off the Scottish coast.

The news moved on, and so often, do we. How to be with such news? Joanna Macy, in a recent video<sup>xv</sup>, says, *“What we most need to do is hear the earth crying”* before going on to give a beautiful rendering of Rilke’s poem which started above and continues thus:

Let this darkness be a bell tower  
and you the bell. As you ring,  
  
what batters you becomes your strength.  
Move back and forth into the change.

Were we tolling a bell with our video on that dark February day? Perhaps. But if so, it certainly sounded different to a presentation that might represent the dire effects of climate crisis directly. The unintentional rendering of our melancholy to an audience had a softness that helped us look obliquely rather than directly at the underpinning sadness of this topic. Perhaps our audience were testing their own responses. How much could they take? Might a more uplifting soundtrack make it go away? We laughed. The surprise brought lightness, and clarity. As Rilke suggests, we found this strengthening – bringing mobility and further light onto our layered sadness.

## Changes out in the world

### Recognizing entanglement

What difference was this making out in the world? All the while we were engaging via social media and in inquiry groups with participants drawn to our form of poetic, ecosophic questions and practice. Steve notes how the whole tone of his work changed throughout this time and is now underpinned by creative disciplines that he views as foundational in support of the more day-to-day, prosaic elements of his work. Unknown others have responded to us (and continue to respond) – writing their own pieces and connecting their practices to ours<sup>xvi</sup>. Given that we worked together too we could snatch moments, during our frequent conversation within the doctoral program, to notice and speculate together how subtle shifts in our working and daily lives were being impacted. We know this is not a causal space – where the visual inquiry can be isolated from all else that was happening. However, the sense of entanglement does not prevent us from recognizing how it became a touchstone and anchored us in various interactions ‘out in the world’. We see how it suffused and stabilized an approach to life, from which issued some signals in the everyday theatres of our lives.



## Changes in us - subtle shifts in practice

At the time of writing, Steve reported how, almost constantly, he had become more mindful and aware of the decisions he was making, in his home life and at work, and the implication of them in ecological and social terms. He was contracting differently with the world as a result, conserving and focusing energy, speaking less – with more economy and precision. Margaret reported, by contrast, how one of the biggest impacts on her was that she was much more likely to speak up. The work on poetic activism, the constant holding and working with that frame, and the anchoring of that in this visual inquiry, supported her to be bold and more precise in her decision-making and when to say something (or not) – in all areas of her life.

## Learnings for others

### Visual approaches to slippery concepts

The visual work gave us a way into exploring the term ‘Poetic Activism’ as a lived phenomenon of practice rather than as a concept to be pinned down. The use of visual media supported us to inquire with the conceptual slipperiness of the term ‘Poetic Activism.’ The need to explain the term recurred throughout this work, but the pressure to culminate in a definition receded naturally as we stepped back and forth between conversational and visual mode. The visual orientation meant our cycles of exchange focused attention on ontological realities out of which normative positions could be distilled. As a result, rather than a construct, Poetic Activism became more of a practice to connect with and recognize. The finding leads us further towards exploring storytelling and ongoing visual modes of inquiry to continue to ‘show’ what poetic activism might look like for practitioners and leaders in their own lives. We see our visual approach as potentially valuable for researchers or organizational practitioners who wish to explore any such ‘slippery’ concept and make a move towards understanding it in the fullness of lived experience and practice.

### Visual practice tips for others

And now for something completely different! Everyone loves a set of clear bullets and outcomes and we are no exception. In this short section we draw out a list of tips and insights for those readers, whether they are consultants, leaders, managers, researchers or activists, anyone who might be interested in experimenting with video methods to explore a term or practice that eludes conceptual definition.

### Generic learnings: dos and don'ts about video inquiry

**Do experiment** – don't fix on form or methodological purity. Experimenting with different kinds of video in each cycle kept the inquiry alive and animated. We felt free to try different things: like voice to camera; short movies in outdoor settings; combining still image with voice and so on.

**Don't think you need to be technically competent or 'artistic'** to engage in this work. Finished, polished films may be part of it, but are not necessary. Unfinished, rough and ready work leaves the door more open for inquiry.

**Do be a bricoleur** – use what tools you feel comfortable with and that are ready to hand. We used whatever was at hand: iMovie, WhatsApp, Adobe etc., alongside phone video, digital SLRs and video cameras as well as graphic design. ‘Simple and easy’ is best: don’t buy loads of new kit!

**Do detach** yourself from your visual creations. See each one as an artefact, or an exhibit in itself – something to be curious about. You don’t need to feel it’s yours or that, in some way, it’s you.

**Do create** spaces to reflect, view and inquire. Having a chance to share what comes up while creating or viewing visual material is as vital as the material itself. Challenge yourself to show your material to others. This can feel exposing, but responses of trusted others can be vital to open new perspectives.

**Do conduct multiple experiments.** It can take time to relax into the different world that visual media and film creates. We needed multiple cycles to become versed with a less instrumental interpretation of our visual material. Conducting multiple cycles allows your subject matter to unfold through visual method.

## Closing reflections

As we close, the question returns: what difference does any of this make? As Steve said ruefully in one of our reflective calls: “well, better we spend time doing this, than something destructive to the environment.” If you multiply our experience and imagine thousands of others creating a poetic practice in their lives, it is not necessarily as defeatist as it sounds; in the video mentioned earlier, Joanna Macy says:

“I’ve come to think the first step to awakening is simply being glad you are alive Just to stop for a minute - that in itself is a politically subversive act<sup>(17)</sup>.”

Perhaps then that is activism enough. Ours is necessarily a humble and interior work, but one we hope offers a potential in the invitation it offers others – the legitimization to seek the poetic in our lives and trust that from their ‘good action’ will follow.

## The Eco-move

The call to this special issue asks plainly, ‘How shall we change our habits?’ In the light of the stark realization that, ‘we must make major changes to the ways we live to avoid destroying our planet along with every living thing,’ the editors offer us the idea of post-humanism – as another slippery term that nonetheless points towards a different way of seeing our place as humans in the world. The ego- to eco- perspective is sometimes characterized with an image that removes the human from the top of the tree to a more embedded place. Our visual explorations led us into a different kind of conversation with each other and with the more-than-human and material world around us. Exchanging visual media helped us to sense from behind another’s eyes into those worlds. We filmed birds, sprinklers and the root systems of trees. Sometimes, though not always, it was birds and leaves that became the main protagonists in our film. Perhaps, for a moment or two, our experimental moves helped us experience a sense of place among living and non-living things and catch glimpses of a world where we know our place.

As Rilke concludes:

In this uncontainable night,  
be the mystery at the crossroads of your senses,  
the meaning discovered there.

And if the world has ceased to hear you,  
say to the silent earth: I flow.  
To the rushing water, speak: I am.

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## About the authors

**Margaret Gearty** and **Steve Marshall** work with the Hult International Business School (Ashridge) with [New Histories](#) and [Photo-Dialogue](#).

**Margaret** is an action researcher, educator and writer. She's a professor and active member of the research and teaching community on the Ashridge Executive Doctorate in Organisational Change at Hult International Business School. Until 2018, she was also co-director of the Ashridge Masters in Sustainability and Responsibility. In 2013, Margaret founded the research consultancy New Histories through which consults for a range of third and public-sector clients on narrative and inquiry-based approaches to learning such as 'learning histories'. Margaret's passion lies in exploring how storytelling and action research might be creatively combined to develop systemic responses to the climate crisis. Her practice grapples with questions of change that span from the personal and local to the systemic and political. She blogs regularly about 'poetic activism' as a way to make the connection.

**Steve** has been trying for a while now to work with organisational and social change using written words, spoken dialogue, photography, film and (social) media. He is a member of faculty at Hult Ashridge working almost exclusively with participants on the Executive Doctorate in Organisational Change who are trying to make their own personal and public 'dint in the world.' In his Executive Education work, he includes an action research approach in interventions that typically focus on 'organisational transformation'. His research and private practice is primarily concerned with the nature of creativity and how visual/digital media might radically extend our epistemological and pedagogical repertoire. His regular blogs, experiments and ongoing digital action research can be found at [DrSteveMarshall.com](#). Away from work, he tries to spend as much time as possible hanging out with family, dogs and horses and, at every opportunity, cycling around the countryside.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> A rephrasing of Nicholas Bourriaud's writing in consideration of Guattari's work on an 'aesthetic paradigm.

<sup>ii</sup> Gergen, K (1999), Traditions in trouble. In Gergen, K, An invitation to social construction pp 1-32, London: Sage

<sup>iii</sup> Gergen, K. J. (2009). Social construction: Revolution in the making. In K. J. Gergen (Ed.), An invitation to social construction (pp. 1-30). London: Sage. p12.

<sup>iv</sup> Gergen, K. J. (2009). Social construction: Revolution in the making. In K. J. Gergen (Ed.), An invitation to social construction (pp. 1-30). London: Sage. p12.

<sup>v</sup> The graphic was launched on the blog in Feb 2020: <https://www.newhistories.co.uk/poetic-activism/>

<sup>vi</sup> For an introduction to anthropologist Donna Haraway see Haraway, D. (2016). Making Oddkin in the Chthulucene <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWQ2JYFwJWU>. The Evergreen Consortium Series: Evergreen State College Productions.

<sup>vii</sup> Haraway, D. J. (2016). Staying with the trouble. Duke University Press.

<sup>viii</sup> Margaret's blog "Poetic activism – explanations or stories" published in June 2021 <https://www.newhistories.co.uk/poetic-activism-explanations-or-stories/>

<sup>ix</sup> Margaret's blog "Poetic activism – explanations or stories" published in June 2021 <https://www.newhistories.co.uk/poetic-activism-explanations-or-stories/>

<sup>x</sup> "Start close in" is a poem by David Whyte. See Whyte, D (2012) River Flow. Many Rivers Pres. Langley.

<sup>xi</sup> Direct quote from the recording of the Zoom call in Jan 2020

<sup>xii</sup> Direct quote from the recording of the Zoom call in Jan 2020

<sup>xiii</sup> "Let This Darkness Be a Bell Tower", by Rainer Maria Rilke from Sonnets to Orpheus II, 29. Translation by Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows

<sup>xiv</sup> See [https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2021/september/guillemots-dying-in-unprecedented-numbers-off-UK-coast.html\(2\)](https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2021/september/guillemots-dying-in-unprecedented-numbers-off-UK-coast.html(2))

<sup>xv</sup> View the Joanna Macy film on <https://vimeo.com/588455489>

<sup>xvi</sup> See a recent blog from Joanna Maberly for an example of a ripple: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/meaningful-action-face-big-issues-joanna-maberly/?trackingId=ilhSowcBRi6iloGnl6r6ww%3D%3D>

# Before it became land

Ian Andrew

The calls of geese departing  
Ripple currents as they reach  
Beyond land's end, sky-etched echoes  
Sever sparkled tides,  
Lap against stones,  
Eddy blunt edges

Beneath the waterline.  
Water relentless and determined  
A teeming city by another name,  
Sighs in blowing rain.  
Mirrored sky above  
Seems to signal absence

Of everything, a vantage point  
From which to see and understand  
A home for sea before sea  
Begins, like a mountain might be  
Land before land becomes itself.  
Church bells muffled in twilight,

Trees hold almost still like horses  
Sleeping upright. Man can't trust  
This darkness of a river, its  
Unpredictability  
As if water, like the Earth, is just  
Another space to fill with his infirmity.



## About Ian

**Ian Andrew** lives in Warwickshire, UK. He believes strongly in the curative power of poetry. He is a member of the Change the Word poetry collective, run by the Good Chance Theatre Company, and is a regular attendee at Coventry's Fire and Dust open mic night.

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# *This is an emergency*

## *We must slow down*

**James Barlow, Jake Farr, Kirstin Irving**



[Leading Through Storms](#) is a newly forming community through which people, including those in corporate leadership, are resourced to discover their best adaptive responses to the climate, ecological and related crises. For the past two years, Jake, James and Kirstin have sought to build a more consciously interconnected society, conversation by conversation. Here they share their unique perspectives on what this means, what it requires and what they are learning about the process, experiencing themselves as an experiment in organising for a regenerative future.



Kirstin facilitates a group in Hazel Hill Wood, near Salisbury, UK. The woodland provides a beautiful and nourishing environment for creating community, supporting us to open ourselves to the enormity of what we face and discover our best adaptive responses.

## Introduction

There are no maps to guide us through the planetary crises we face, yet each person is being called to respond. And responses can vary greatly, including the option to look away. So, what does it take to honestly sit with the already present realities of climate and ecological collapse? How do we step into doing what we can, with what we have, to adapt meaningfully to all that is unfolding? Beyond avoiding the worst consequences before us, how might we contribute to a vital repatterning of life, in our workplaces, our communities, and at home?

The three of us first came together in the summer of 2019, in response to the Deep Adaptation work of Jem Bendell (2018) and at the invitation of Alan Heeks, founder of Hazel Hill Wood. The purpose was to explore what might be ours to do in support of urgently needed and challenging transformations, particularly in corporations.

We have since formed a Community Interest Company, Leading Through Storms, a community for leaders from varied settings. Our common belief is that the massive improv act we are all engaged in during these disrupted times benefits from radical collaboration between diverse actors. To quote Margaret Wheatley (2006), "We cannot hope to make sense using our old maps. It won't help to dust them off or reprint them in bold colors. The more we rely on them, the more disoriented we become. They cause us to focus on the wrong things and blind us to what's significant. Using them, we will journey only to greater chaos."

In this piece - each bringing our own voice - we share some of our LTS experiences, insights and ongoing inquiries. Jake talks about the role of community in creating a space for revelation, and the importance of attending to psychological and emotional adaptation as part of a wider repatterning of life. James explores what constitutes 'right action' at this time, seeing curious, compassionate, citizen leadership as a 'no-regrets' path. Kirstin considers some of the frameworks and practices that can support us as we seek to lead our way through the dilemma-ridden, conflict-laden territories we often face, in our organisations and beyond.

**'Our common belief is that the massive improv act we are all engaged in during these disrupted times benefits from radical collaboration between diverse actors.'**

### Jake's voice: vitality in community

That this is a community endeavour is vital, for community provides connection, reset, inspiration and support. At our inception, community was cited by each of us as a foundational value, and that sense of how essential community is to this work has only deepened over these two years. To start close in, how Kirstin, James and I have worked together and developed as a community of three, has enlivened our understanding of what can support and nourish, and what holds back. Co-creating the climate that enables us to be in our differences has, I'd argue, had greater import than our shared values and starting points. How to describe that climate?

It includes:

- being whole heartedly generous in our listening and offerings into the trio
- bringing all of ourselves and, on the days where it feels tough to be human, that includes tears and bumbling - until they pass
- being alongside in life as well as in our work
- slowing down each time we meet, with a few minutes silence (no matter the long list of things we think we have to do).

Being able to step in from a place of knowing how (and that) I am valued in this collaboration feels a lot like love. And from this place, risk becomes something else - much more a lively experiment in radical wholeness, welcoming it all, including my shadow aspects, polarities, and what I struggle with within myself.

Our work supporting leaders privileges a psychological approach, accepting that physical adaptations (though critical) already draw significant attention. The psychological work of facing into storms is the essential hard work of adaptation, and the work that underpins people connecting with their sense of agency. Though it is hard work it is also enormously liberating to illuminate the multitude of psychological processes that can lead to denial and desensitisation. Though with this must come some important attention to grief. The daily diminishment of habitat, community, cultures, species, our children's futures, and our sense of what it is to be (fully awake as a) human even, surely justifies this emotion. As Francis Weller (2015) puts it, honouring the sorrows and loss is simply good manners.

A key helping factor is that LTS, as an intentional community, not only actively welcomes all actors to the improv act, but also all parts of those actors. As a psychotherapist I hear the critical inner dialogue of many people, "who am I to presume I have something to offer?", "others know so much more", "I'll leave it to the experts". We are so bereft of real, safe community spaces that whilst I may have the angst of my inner dialogue, I know I'm not alone. Creating a community space that welcomes the parts less often seen and voiced enables compassionate inner work and brave outer work (which is perhaps brave inner work, compassionate outer work too?). To say the territory we are walking in (and encouraging leadership through) is unclear is an understatement - unknown is closer to how it feels for me. Being in community to do that walking supports personal regeneration whilst actively engaging in the issues. Our premise is that without community the work is simply too hard and depleting.

### Box 1 - The 4 Rs of Deep Adaptation

1. **Resilience** invites inquiry into what norms and behaviours people, communities and society wish to maintain as we seek to survive; what do we most value that we want to keep and how do we manage this?
2. **Relinquishment** comes to the fore when, in considering what we wish to maintain, it is inevitable that we must also let go of certain assets, behaviours and beliefs where retaining them would make matters worse.

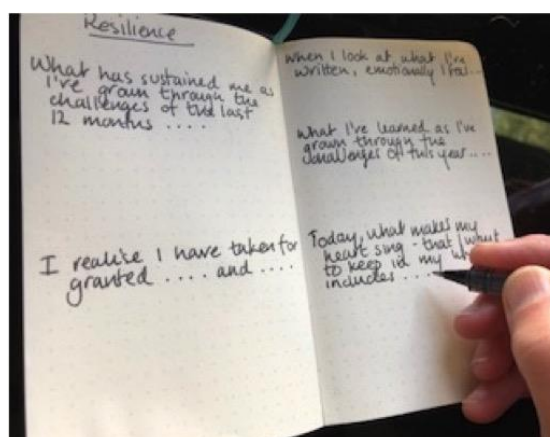


3. **Restoration** invites reflection and rediscovery of attitudes and approaches to living that have been eroded through industrialisation. What can we helpfully bring back to support us with the coming difficulties and tragedies?
4. **Reconciliation** recognises that we do not know whether our efforts will make a difference, yet how we make peace with each other and the predicament will be key to lessening the suffering and avoiding creating more harm by acting from suppressed panic, shame and guilt.

(Bendell, J. 2018, 2019, 2021)

Our processes are therefore designed to enable people to connect deeply with self and outwards in company. If looking at Resilience, for example (the first of Bendell's four Rs – see Box 1), we might offer an inquiry arc along the following lines:

- input to provoke feeling and thinking in relation to the climate and ecological emergency, themed around personal resilience
- free fall writing using sentence stems crafted for individual inquiry and resourcing
- small group collective explorations in the space of action in their inner and outer worlds
- small group exploration and crafting of the next small step - experimentation and action



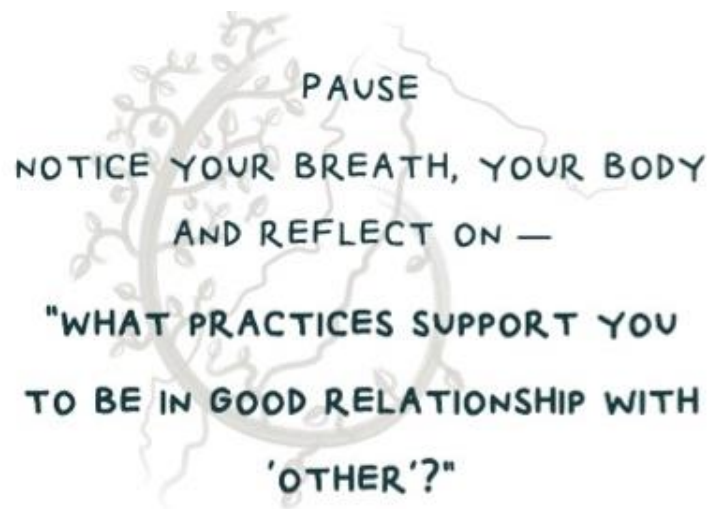
I agree with psychologist and film maker Ty Francis (2020) that resilience is relational, arising from “the quality of our connections and interconnection as well as from our sense of belonging”. The necessary quality of interconnectedness is practised and evoked by inviting a ‘listening’ into a situation from different perspectives in the system. For example “listen to the speaker from the perspective of Earth and all life”, “listen from the perspective of a young climate refugee” or “listen from the perspective of what is being held back”. This requires a quality of listening that is both embodied, deep and subtle. That sense of interconnectedness, with personal inquiry, helps each individual towards their chosen action in the outer world. It helps them find where agency may lie, supported with the provocation of naming our power and privilege, to step in more.

**‘Perhaps it sounds ambitious to say we are creating a space for revelation. But when facing into the unknown, this is what it must be.’**

Annette Hennessy, former CEO of Merseyside Probation Trust, was among those who joined us for our first four month Community of Practice. She says, “What struck me was the internal work we did, facing up to our fears and vulnerabilities, and also the concept of slowing down in an emergency; that less is more, that busyness isn’t always the answer”. If you would like to hear from others, more participant voices can be heard in [this article](#) by another of our alumni, the writer and campaigner Bel Jacobs.

Perhaps it sounds ambitious to say we are creating a space for revelation. But when facing into the unknown, this is what it must be. As Rebecca del Rio offers at the beginning of her poem Prescription for the Disillusioned:

Come new to this  
day. Remove the rigid  
overcoat of experience,  
the notion of knowing,  
the beliefs that cloud  
your vision.



### **James' voice: going through it**

Late in 2019, I was participating in a constellation process with a senior team at a management consultancy. The task was to map and explore certain dynamics within the organisation, in the context of the societal issues it was paid to consult on. We chose to run the constellation without anyone within it knowing who/what they were representing – instead, they simply knew the issue and were asked to orient themselves physically in relation to one another, purely based on what they felt in their bodies.

It turned out that the (unknowing) representative of climate change placed themselves as far from the others as possible and reported feeling unwelcome. None of the other participants faced towards this representative. As the constellation progressed, the still unknowing participants reported being aware of the presence of 'climate change', but couldn't turn to face it, couldn't bear to acknowledge it – it felt too big.

Even as I write this, with COP26 and the IPCC's sixth report in the headlines (and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's COP15 tellingly less so) it seems that we still really can't bear to face into the reality of the lives we need to live now, even though the impacts of anthropogenic climate change and ecosystem

destruction on our ability to live in a viable human society are shocking. Those who hold a view that a full collapse is in prospect are sometimes attacked, seen as nihilistic. In contrast, at LTS we have found something very different to be the case: when we step in to really look - as Jake mentions above - this is enormously liberating.

Michael Rosen's refrain from "We're going on a bear hunt" is a welcome articulation of what this means for us, emotionally, somatically, cognitively:



I'm really curious about why I identify so strongly as somebody who needs, wants to "get a message out" as part of my daily activity. It's important to say that there's no certainty. And we all at LTS have embarked on a 'no-regrets' path – catalysing more 'conscious leadership' from where we stand, with what we have. Modelling a more curious, compassionate, citizen leadership is, for me, a 'no-regrets' path.

Dr. Rene Suša et al, writing about choices in response to the crises, suggest,

"A ... rehab [approach] seeks to explore ways how to wean us off the neurophysiological (neurochemical) addictions and attachments to our current (modern/colonial) unsustainable habits of being".

And the New Citizenship Project talks helpfully about who we take ourselves to be today in society. When are we subjects? When are we consumers? Could we be citizens too? Citizens who are compassionate, communal, curious, creative, consciously connected with the more than human, and acting with self-restraint (or, put another way, a sense of sufficiency)? We offer some ideas related to this in Box 2.

‘We all at Leading Through Storms have embarked on a ‘no-regrets’ path –  
catalysing more ‘conscious leadership’ from where we stand, with what we have.’

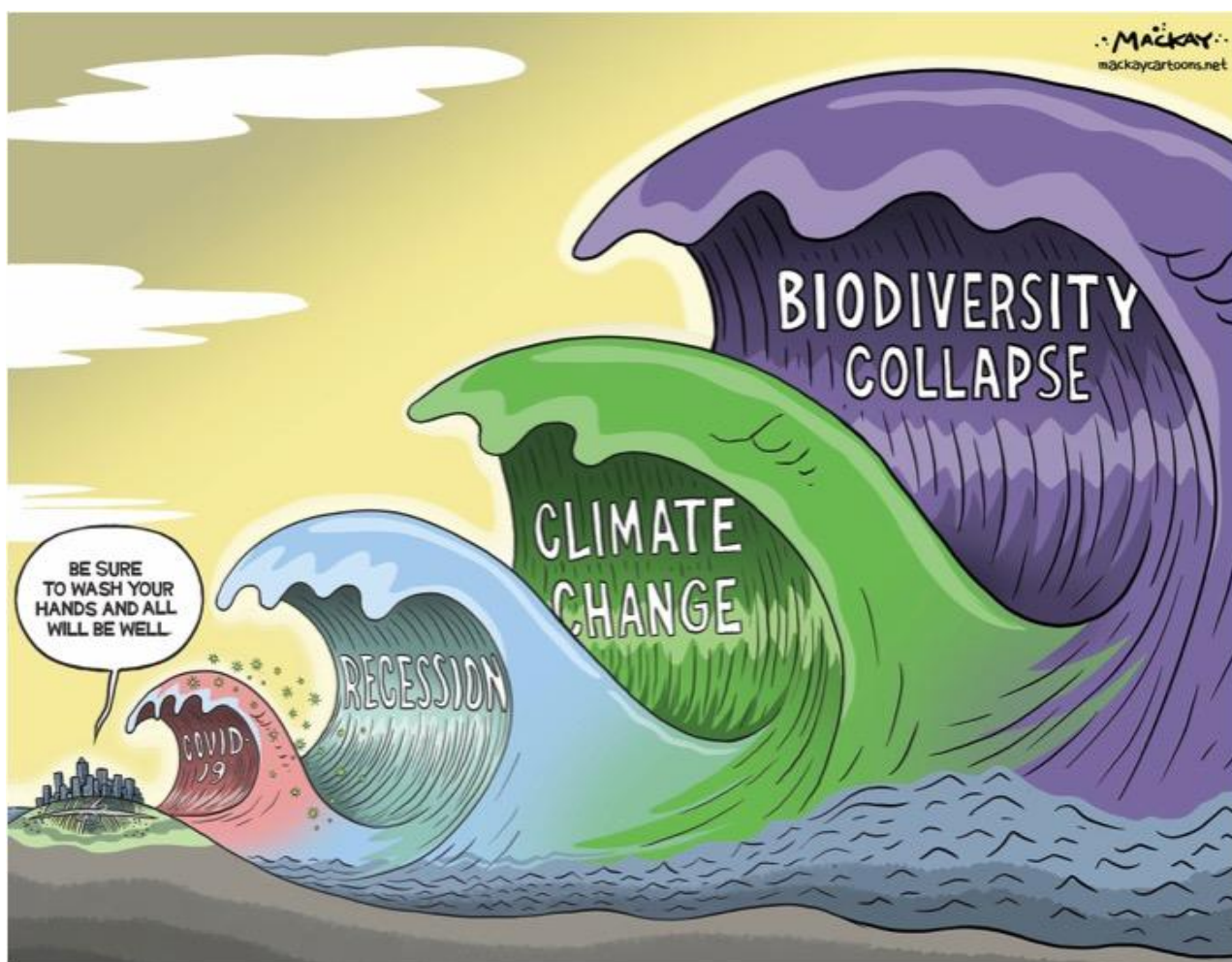
This brings me to the ‘relinquish’ element of Bendell’s deep adaptation frame, which seems to bring us up against our very sense of self. Who am I taking myself to be? Am I refusing to see that my over-consumption is acting as respite from my life’s suffering and pain? And is it my inability to be with what is, that drives my consumption? Such personal leadership questions, we have found, act to embolden organisational leadership. They locate us in the neurochemical territory of the ‘right action’ needed when faced with crises. Ours is a collaborative developmental action inquiry (Torbert, e.g. 2017) and we take this approach as a trio and in our work.

**Box 2 - Leadership transformation: Acting from multiple ways of being - an egoic consumer and an ecological citizen?**

<b>Current mainstream way of being and language - perhaps as an ‘egoic consumer’?</b>	<b>Experiments to glimpse our ‘ecological citizenship’, realising our agency?</b>
Taking myself and others to predominantly need feeding, as a consumer	Acting more like a citizen with agency and skin in the game, and expecting the same of others
Reaching for (consumerist) distraction when feeling lost, empty, alone, bored, scared	Feeling the feelings, sitting with them, talking about them in community, finding our common humanity in our rich inner landscapes, so that we don’t get overwhelmed
Being wilfully blind	Daring to look
Saving the planet	Realising the planet is fine, humanity is probably not so
Seeing nature as a service for humanity	Seeing humanity as a vulnerable part of a greater whole
Being convinced of my individuality	Feeling the interbeing
Seeing life as a competition to succeed in, where there is a destination which excuses the means	Living life, humbly, with presence, being in the moment
Believing it’s not that I’m greedy, it’s just that I need a little more to be secure and safe	Realising that I am already safe, spiritually, and that we are never really safe physically

In a recent collaborative inquiry exercise, using repeating questions to really dive deeply, it was clear that I could class many of my activities as ‘displacement’ activities - designed to distract me from experiencing emotions and bodily sensations part of me does not want to feel. This is “Retreatership” not leadership – hoping the scary monster will go away.

Graeme MacKay of The Hamilton Spectator perhaps captured the consequences of this in his editorial cartoon, which parodies the impact of retreating from the larger societal / systemic frames we need to be concerned with and distracting ourselves from our true “individual” agency. That the cartoon grew collaboratively and virally, from MacKay’s two original waves to the current four, highlights the nerve it struck. It shows us the vastness of a common issue we may have not raised our eyes to notice and draws attention to our perhaps unconscious inclination to sit and wait, then to heroically react to each wave, we - perhaps unconsciously - tell ourselves.



With kind permission of [Graeme Mackay: mackaycartoons.net](http://Graeme Mackay: mackaycartoons.net)

At LTS we are building community to help prevent the waves being generated in the first place: acknowledging that we are enough, that all our feelings are welcome, that consuming stuff is a temporary fix, and even that facing into the reality of death is a liberating (not to be avoided / denied at all cost) activity. Imagine having all of our psychological / spiritual energy, that is currently producing these destructive waves, repurposed for constructive societal building. That would be a regenerative move, a move from ego to eco.

So, as an individual, one key leadership challenge is to work out how to choose NOT to do something even when I have financial resource to do so. Perhaps not to fly, not to continue my existing mortgage or pension arrangements given how they are invested, to cycle rather than drive, to avoid farmed meat and fish. . . and many of these actions benefit from being in community since they can feel so small, insignificant, unheroic, prosaic and not what we should be attending to. And yet, when we do, we are able to be more grounded, integrated and have less need to consume and interact in a less resource intensive way. We are living lighter, more spiritually even, and certainly slightly more in-tune with the pace and capacity of the more-than-human world.

And, as an example, relinquishment may not just mean giving up, sacrifice or discipline; conscious 'sufficiency', as Arnold Schwarzenegger recently expressed, can actually mean we gain something. A BBC science and environment report on his recent wide-ranging Radio 4 interview says:

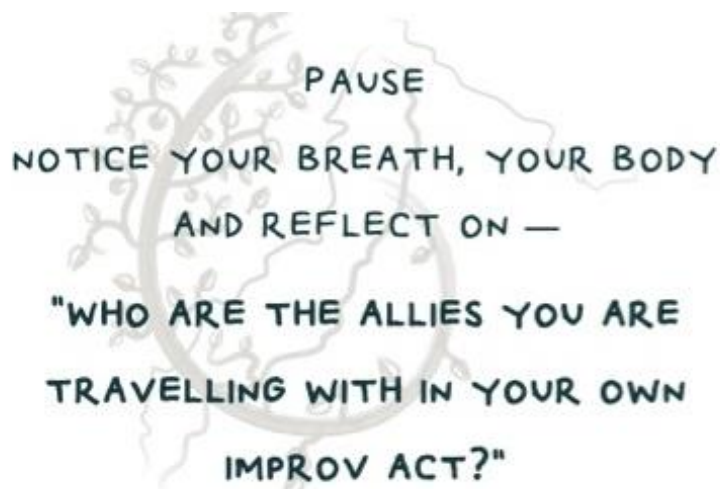
"The former champion bodybuilder says he has reduced his meat intake by around three-quarters in the last few years, but argues he is 'gaining' as a result.

'Since eating more vegetables and plant-based foods my heart doctor said my arteries have stopped narrowing,' he said.

'So how have I given up something? I gained my health, it gave me an extra two years.'"

So, as leaders, what might relinquishment do for our organisations?

When we slow down we, and participants, report experiencing the spaciousness that is available away from the oft-tumultuous inner landscapes we inhabit. The spaciousness supports better citizenship – in human society and, we sense, even within the broader more-than-human ecology. Because this is an emergency. We need clear heads, warm hearts.



## **Kirstin's voice: pockets of the future in the present**

As we face into the increasingly harsh realities of what climate and ecological collapse means for life, corporations are engaging with renewed vigour as well as laboured anguish concerning the major transformations required, and how to realise them. As well as midwifing the birth of something new, there is the need to hospice the dying of old products, services, ways of being – perhaps whole organisations. In some quarters, calls for reparation by the most polluting companies are growing. So, consultants, coaches and facilitators are being called to sit alongside leaders and their teams as they face deepening, potentially existential, crises. It's challenging work. At the same time, an array of energetic start-ups is appearing in the landscape, many representing a bold step towards creating a future we dream of, keeping hope alive.

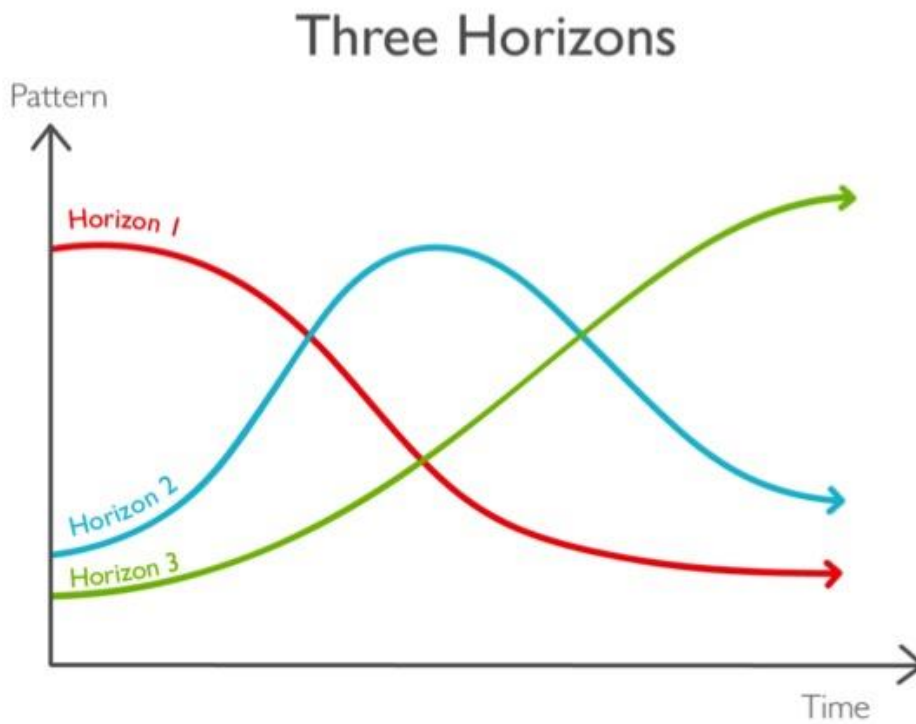
One of the approaches we have found especially helpful in working with pathways through such complexity is Bill Sharpe's Three Horizons (Sharpe, 2013). It frames our exploration of transformation in terms of a shift from Horizon 1 (established patterns) to the emergence of new patterns (Horizon 3), via the transition activity of Horizon 2. One of its particular benefits lies in helping us discover personal agency in an uncertain world, tuning into the patterns we're held in as part of exploring how we might successfully repattern. A degree of collapse is seen as needed, for resources to be released for investment into something new.

It becomes possible to connect with 'pockets of the future, present today', which often engenders a welcome sense of hope. And there is room for all the voices of continuity and change to come into play as part of the process. Like all good improvisation, working with Three Horizons is dynamic, social and generative. It also allows us the great gift, in Bill's words, of being able to disagree more intelligently.

As the kaleidoscope is shaken, our wish at LTS is to support people to recalibrate what it means to live and work with coherence and integrity, to reimagine the future, and then work for it. Figure 1 indicates some elements of established patterns (H1) that we are committed to moving away from, and new patterns (H3) that we wish to be in service to. Our second horizon community experiment is allowing us to explore how we organise ourselves - and support all others seeking to organise themselves - for a future that truly supports life on earth.

**Figure 1 - From Here to There: Horizons 1 and 3**

How might these pattern-shifts map to 'ego' and 'eco'?



H3Uni.org

<b>Horizon 1 Dominant ways of being today</b>	<b>Horizon 3 Balanced in the future to embrace</b>
Power unilaterally exercised	Power mutually exercised
Separation	Interconnection
Individual & competitive	Collaborative & developmental
Trees as assets	Trees as beings
Action orientation	Inquiry-in-action
Cognition most highly prized	All ways of knowing prized
Cleverness	Wisdom



In living our way towards a different future, we also call strongly on Bill Torbert's action-logics framework (Torbert, 2020), and developments of this in the context of teams and organisations (Harcus, 2020). This particular 'understandascope' brings insight into how we and others differently make sense of, and act in, the world. It also provides clues about what we most need to pay attention to for our improv act to have a chance of being successful, when actors can - and occasionally do - span all seven action-logics.

Opportunist	wins for self
Diplomat	wants to belong & fit in
Expert	focuses on logic & expertise
Achiever	driven by personal & team achievement
Redefining	uniquely reframes complex dilemmas
Transforming	generates personal & organizational transformation
Alchemical	integrates material & spiritual transformation

Yet, great frameworks remain just that if we don't attend to building our capacities for how we come into the room to work with the messy, sometimes conflict-laden, situations we face. In the midst of storms, practices can feel like lifelines. My thanks go to both Bills who have taught me and who I work alongside. I am repeatedly struck by their undeniable intellects, but perhaps more so by the fact that almost their entire focus is on practice, because that's where the difference is made. Calling on the work of Bill T and others, our key LTS practices, described in Box 3, support us to build muscle - individually, collectively - for the mature, adaptive and transforming leadership these troubled times call for.

'Great frameworks remain just that if we don't attend to building our capacities for how we come into the room to work with the messy, sometimes conflict-laden, situations we face.'

Commenting on the value he found in our approach, a member of our LTS 'community of disruptors' recently shared that, coming from "a place of steadiness and stillness", he was able to bring a different attention and awareness to his leadership. In his relationship with his team, he noticed the importance of allowing multiple voices: "It isn't necessary for me to have a view on everything or make every decision. Opening up the space for others is vital. We have a team of 160 people. They're brilliant. And it's their brilliance that I want to shine."

One of the practices that I have found most helpful to my own leadership is cultivating a capacity to accept the difficult truths in my life. As someone who has raised their family on the back of over two decades

working in the automotive, airline, oil and gas, financial and insurance sectors, every day I see with new eyes what I have been a part of. I could feel consumed by my complicity, and carry shame for not acting sooner, fast enough, intelligently enough – so it's clear for me that processes of reconciliation are an important part of Jem Bendell's foundational work on Deep Adaptation.

Teachings from Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, and from Pema Chodron on Tonglen breathwork, have supported me to find equanimity in the face of these times. And reconciling to - rather than avoiding, denying or rejecting - difficult truths leads me to feeling somehow restored. Any sense of tightness or constriction gives way to greater ease, openness and curiosity and, at my best, I am able to silence judgement and meet myself and others with compassion. Generative spaces open up, carrying with them the possibility for the regeneration of myself, my relationships, and the wider world. Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us, "If one person keeps calm and smiles at a provocation, the whole world will have a better chance for peace."

### Box 3 - Curated ways of working across the horizons

LTS Practices	Because...
Collaborative developmental action inquiry (Erfan & Torbert, 2015)	Self, relationships and wider systems become changed through communal cycles of review/exploration/experimentation
Exploring, encouraging, developing, the multiple ways of being human (including cognitive, emotional, relational, somatic, spiritual streams we all have) and noticing their degree of (dis-) integration. (New Ventures West, 2020)	More consistently accessing a fuller wisdom may lead to a more compassionate interbeing society
Creative pursuits such as music, poetry, writing, movement and art	They point to understandings beyond and between our words
Conscious embodiment (e.g. Palmer, 2008)	From 'centre' we are more able to meet the world with perception, compassion and confidence, and avoid the unhelpful consequences of seeking control, approval, security for ourselves
Systemic constellations (e.g. Jan Jacob Stam, 2016)	They reveal hidden and intricate dynamics, and new possibilities
Natural cycles of birth and death	That's the nature of life
Of course, slowing down to pay attention to how we are, right here, right now	This is an emergency

The frameworks and practices I touch on here may already be familiar to you, and you will have others of your own. What feels significant for me is the different edge that comes with applying them in our current high-stakes context. Convening and facilitating radical collaboration between diverse actors is mighty work. The strong exchange described in the Appendix - part of an 800-person summit this autumn that brought together diverse voices of continuity and change from NGO, scientific, corporate, artistic, political and activist communities - describes something of the challenge. It also reminds us that the quality of our attention, the inquiries we engage in, how receptive we are, how connected to our deepest seat of confidence we feel all, in some way, critically determine the decisions we make, the actions we take, and the quality of relationships we are able to hold.

## **JOIN US FOR A ZOOM CONVERSATION**

Given the troubles we're in, the high stakes we are facing, what does it take for us to connect with our personal agency in a way that enables us to contribute to a vital repatterning, and to find joy in the process? Who and how are you choosing to be at this time? What is already serving you and the diverse actors in your particular improv act well, and what else might be needed to enable you to create helpful internal and external route maps?

If you are an inquirer, join us and fellow AMED readers for a Zoom conversation on

**Tuesday 8th March, 4 - 5.30 pm** (UK time). [Please register here.](#)

## **For a conversation at any other time ...**

Please contact us directly: [info@leadingthroughstorms.org](mailto:info@leadingthroughstorms.org)

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## About the authors

Trained as a psychologist, **Kirstin Irving** started to wake up to the enormity of the interconnected environmental, social and personal crises facing humanity midway through her corporate career. Taking a no-regrets approach, she is committed to repatterning her own life in service to the creation of a world she wishes she had grown up in. Alongside her work with LTS, she is a trustee of Fermynwoods Contemporary Art, and enjoys growing vegetables and swimming in the sea.

An organisational psychologist, gestalt psychotherapist and coach, **Jake Farr** continues to deepen her personal response to climate disruption and associated emergencies and this is actively guiding her work. Drawing on 25+ years supporting leaders and organisations she is part of a growing field of eco- and climate-psychology, is active in the Deep Adaptation and XR communities, and is closely connected to Hazel Hill Wood where she is a trustee and leads workshops.

**James Barlow** supports fellow human beings to build increased consciousness and more fulfilling relationships with themselves, those they interact with and the more-than-human world. He compassionately listens, coaches and provokes. James has an MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice from the University of Bath and 30 years' corporate experience, including time with Unilever and PepsiCo, much of this as a sustainability professional. He sails on, and swims in the River Thames near his home.

## Appendix - Meeting Places

There are moments when we find world views colliding. How do we stay in constructive conversation through such discomfort when the stakes are high?

### Imagine yourself in the room with this:

A high profile climate leader has walked onto the stage of the auditorium. She stands alongside 3 empty chairs and sets out the unusual, perhaps extraordinary, exchange that is about to take place. Three people with apparently common cause are about to take their seats, each committed to sharing their experiences of leading in the face of climate and ecological collapse: an oil and gas CEO; an impact investor who has had his climate savvy members successfully voted onto the board of another oil and gas giant; and a young climate justice activist.

As the speakers join the stage and take their seats, there is a palpable sense of expectation in the room. The rules of engagement are clearly laid out and the exchange gets underway. What unfolds is both predictable and somehow entirely new.

The oil and gas CEO describes the nature of the situation he and his organisation face, including strategically poor choices of the past. He sets out actions his company is taking and, in acknowledging that it is “not enough”, sets out additional actions that he commits to reporting back on within the month. He makes it personal, looking to a future horizon of how he wishes the world to be for his children. In sharing something of the challenges he experiences, he speaks to what many of us recognise as the dilemma-ridden territory of the messy middle phase of transition.

During this, the climate justice activist is visibly using her outbreath to stay sufficiently calm and focused to engage. When invited to speak, she vehemently describes some of the atrocities the CEO’s company has committed. She leans forward, passionately asserting that, in her view, he is “one of the most evil people in the world”. Her rage and pain transmit viscerally. She refuses to continue to share the podium with him and removes herself from the auditorium, supported by fellow activists.

Throughout, the impact investor remains still, not yet with the opportunity to fully share his beliefs about what it takes to make change happen, the actions he is taking to avert the worst consequences of what we face.

As the facilitator invites everyone remaining in the auditorium to take a pause, to connect with and feel into the pain of what the activist, what we all, are feeling, I sense that something important has just happened. What had it taken, I wonder, for the conveners of this event to include the climate justice activist as a speaker at the 11th hour? How had they, and each of the speakers, weighed the balance of risk and reward, threat and opportunity, that they might have anticipated from this moment?

I am left feeling deeply grateful that the climate justice activist's voice had been included and awed by the facilitator's holding of the space. I wonder what else could have been possible if the activist had decided to engage in dialogue, while carrying no judgement that she did not.

This was a messy, high drama moment that spoke to the activist, CEO and onlooker parts of myself. I reflected: when am I held too strongly by my sense of managerial responsibility for continuity in the short-term at the expense of bold, vital change? What needs to be happening for me to engage, and when do I flee instead? What is the prize, and what is the price, for taking a stand? How might I sit, listen, seek to understand someone who I take as 'other' in a way that honours the truth of what they feel and believe, without me feeling that I have to give up my own truths?

It's addressing questions such as these, constructively, for ourselves and with others, that brought LTS into being. We choose to hold compassion for new awareness - supporting people to find their best adaptive responses in the face of significant challenge, strong emotion, profound uncertainty. What qualities, intentions and practices do you see that make a difference, and how are you able to contribute to the transformations you most deeply wish for? How often are you party to meetings that genuinely hold open the possibility for something new to emerge? Finding and creating pockets of the future in our sometimes contentious present is a vital discipline of our times.

View the full exchange - part of the TED Countdown Summit, October 2021 - [here](#).

# From Ego to Eco: where are we, where are we trying to go?

## Part 1. Overview: Ego- and Eco-consciousness

**Tom Boydell**



When Mike Pedler and I were invited to guest edit this issue of eO&P, I was working with Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer's *Leading from the Emerging Future*, the subtitle of which is *From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies*. I was very struck with this and thought that it could be addressed from a number of directions and perspectives, and thence the theme of the issue.

This piece was initially intended to be an invitation and call for contributions, but it soon created a life of its own and became too long for that purpose. Indeed it then grew and grew even further until I felt that it was becoming too long for a single item - people would probably not want to persevere with reading it. I therefore decided on "serialisation" - with successive instalments not over a period of time but over the length of the Journal. It is therefore now presented in 5 parts.

This means that there are some repetitions in the references at the end of each episode, as there are quite a number of sources that are referred to a number of times. Indeed I have to acknowledge that there are rather a lot of references. In this age of fake news and journalistic inaccuracy I'm keen wherever possible to give a source, even if this be secondary but at least that can be followed up if required. Referencing also gives due acknowledgment and appreciation of those to whom I feel I am grateful for what they have written<sup>1</sup>.

"What they have written." I'm aware that most of my reference material does indeed come from the world of the written word. In that sense I am displaying a certain level of generationalism. As I mention at least three times in the various instalments I was born in 1940 - my age clearly matters to me - and have not really taken to the world of blogs and so-called "social media" (other than emails if they count as such). In a phrase that I have also used a few times - so be it.

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<sup>1</sup> There's also the slightly unpleasant thought that I might be referencing a lot in order to show off - look how much I have read. At least I acknowledge this possibility - even if only in a footnote



I thought that serialising would also suit my own reading style - dipping in and out as my mood suggests - and that others might do likewise. I have tried to make each part a cohesive whole in its own right, not requiring other instalments to have been read previously, nor to be read later. This means there may be a few passages that repeat something from another episode should I feel that would be helpful. The *locations* of the episodes throughout the Journal have, like all the others, been selected at random, but their *sequencing* follows a planned order. Thus this explanation and Overview is the first of the parts of which of my contribution are comprised.

Overall I think it fair to say that the various instalments do paint a somewhat negative or pessimistic view of the current state of the world and of our standing in and relationship with it. I have given some thought as to where to locate some positive ideas about how we might actually move forward - towards thinking, feeling, willing and doing things in an eco-conscious way. In particular, whether to include them in the instalment to which they primarily relate or in a separate one just containing positive actions. In the event I have chosen the first approach, sometimes with a few "what we can do's" within the main body, and usually with more at the end.

### **Ego- and Eco-Consciousness.**

As I see it, ego-consciousness, from "ego" meaning "I" in Latin - refers to ideas, values, feelings, priorities intentions and practices that are focussed at least primarily, quite possibly exclusively, on oneself and one's own reward, gratification, well-being. Very often, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes quite deliberately, this is in first instance at the expense of others - I win, you lose, although in the longer term it very likely rebounds on ourselves too, "collectively creating results that nobody wants."<sup>2</sup>

With human beings the "oneself" in this might be *me* as an individual, *myself*. Or it might be some collective to which I am affiliated, which means a lot to me and contributes to my sense of *who I am* because of *who we are* - my family; my age group; my gender; my sexuality, my race; my religion; my team; my organisation; my industry; my city; my social class, my political party, my country; and so on. Although the "scale" varies, the basic idea is the same - I I I, me me, my my my. Or, of course, we we we, us us us, our our our family, age group, gender, sexuality, and so on. It is thus still basically self-centred, albeit the unit of "self" is now bigger, wider. So although I may be moving away from just me, it is still a somewhat self-centred view, whereby I see *me and my gang* in opposition to other gangs, who like all "others" are undesirable in some way - perhaps inferior, or dangerous, or both.

One way of looking at this is as moving on a spectrum of what I refer to as Stances - ways of standing or being in the world<sup>3</sup>. Stances 1 and 2 are ego-based - me and mine, us and ours; Stances 2 and 3 are eco-based, lots of us~es, all of Us, as in Table 1.

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<sup>2</sup> Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies, Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013: 1

<sup>3</sup> I first came across the term "Stance" in this context in conversations with Chris Blanter, who in turn heard it from Sheila McNamee of the Taos Institute. We first published it in 'The Learning Organization' - Drop the Dead Metaphor!, Blanter, Boydell and Burgoyne, 2013

**Table 1: Four Stances of Being**

	<b>CAPRA<sup>4</sup> Shiva and Shiva<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>STANCE &amp; Modes<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>INCLUDED: in "My" Group</b>	<b>EXCLUDED: Others not in "My" Group</b>
<b>EGO</b>	<b>SELF-ASSERTIVE Separation</b>  <b>Thinking</b> Rational Analysis Reductionist Linear  <b>Values</b> Expansion Competition Quantity Domination	<b>Stance 1</b> Modes 1 & 2	Me	Anyone not me: all of you, all of them
		<b>Stance 2</b> Modes 3, 4 & 5	Me and us - those whom I see as being in "my" reference group: some of you, the you who are the same as I am or I want to be	All others - those I see not as in my reference group: most of you, most of them
<b>ECO</b>	<b>INTEGRATIVE Oneness</b>  <b>Thinking</b> Intuitive Synthesis Holistic Nonlinear  <b>Values</b> Conservation Co-operation Quality Partnership	<b>Stance 3</b> Mode 6	Me, us, quite a lot of you. As Stance 2 plus those from other diverse groups with which I'm prepared to associate, to appreciate, as joint members of a larger We, Us	Those others not in the groups with which I choose to associate, to appreciate: some of you.
		<b>Stance 4</b> Modes 6 & 7	Everybody and everything - WE	Nobody, nothing: none of you

It's important to note that this is very different from "Ubuntu", the African tradition associated with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, which is often taken to be represented by the phrase "I am because you are"<sup>7</sup>, whereby we are all recognised and appreciated for our differences as much as for our similarities, and we are fully human only when these differences are appreciated and celebrated<sup>8</sup>. This is a move into an eco- way of being, a term first used by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel<sup>9</sup> from the Greek *oikos*, meaning house, dwelling, habitation. It thus refers to a recognition of the relationships of organisms with the environments or contexts - including all beings and entities - in which they exist.

<sup>4</sup> *The Web of Life*, Capra, 1997: 10. The mixture of nouns and adjectives in the table is as in the original

<sup>5</sup> *Oneness vs the 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom*, Shiva and Shiva, 2019: 22-31

<sup>6</sup> The Modes form a framework of individual development and are described in Part II - *Relationships With and Within Ourselves*

<sup>7</sup> *The Rhetoric of Ubuntu Diplomacy and Implication for Making the World Safe for Diversity*, Zondi, 2014

<sup>8</sup> Ubuntu played a major part in the South African post-Apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Programme (*Reconciliation*, Battle, 1997; *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Tutu, 1999;), as it is a philosophy of reconciliation and forgiveness that expresses "respect for a person's dignity irrespective of what that person has done" (*The Philosophical Presuppositions of Ubuntu and Its Theological Implications for Reconciliation*, Ntamushobora, 2012:2)

<sup>9</sup> *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen*, Haeckel, 1866.

Thus when considering "from ego to eco" we are concerned with

"a shift from an ego-system awareness that cares about the well-being of oneself to an eco-system awareness that cares about the well-being of all, including oneself."<sup>10</sup>

Now the collective goes beyond the boundaries of my in-group to include others - most significantly those others who are different from me and us. From Stances 1 and 2 into Stance 3 - me, us, you - well some of you anyway. Then into Stance 4 - me, us, and all of you - in which everybody is a diverse member of a unified whole.

### **Oneness and Separation.**

Table 1 also shows what Capra refers to as self-assertive and integrative "tendencies" with regard to thinking and values, and what Shiva and Shiva describe as the two contrasting worldviews of "oneness" and "separation".

Developmental Psychologists see us starting life, as an embryo and then a new-born, with a complete sense of "unaware oneness"<sup>11</sup>. My mother and I are one, as are all objects around me until I soon begin to discover they are separate, not part of me. I then grow or develop into seeing myself first as a separate "me" (Stance 1 in Table 1), and then with a first form of oneness with my particular reference group - family, friends, nationality, gender, race, team, tribe (Stance 2).

Given the right circumstances, I gradually develop into Stance 3 - widening and deepening the range of those with whom I feel connected, for example by developing empathy and understanding - "appreciation"<sup>12</sup> - of those with whom I disagree and, perhaps, whose ideas and behaviour I don't like.

Finally, in Stance 4, I feel connected to - or should it be "with"? - everybody and every living thing.

Unfortunately we tend not to be given those "right circumstances", either as a result of "naturally occurring" trends in the world in which we live or, as Shiva and Shiva see it, trends that are forced upon us by the 1% of their title - the mega-rich individuals, the mega-large businesses, the mega-powerful politicians, the mega-influential celebrities and opinion leaders. These 1%, the richest 1/100th of the world's population,

"now have more wealth than the rest of the world combined. Power and privilege is being used to skew the economic system to increase the gap between the richest and the rest. A global network of tax havens further enables the richest individuals to hide \$7.6 trillion. The fight against poverty will not be won until the inequality crisis is tackled"<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Leading from the Emerging Future, From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies, Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013: 2

<sup>11</sup> Changes of Mind, Wade, 1996: 23-76

<sup>12</sup> Appreciative Inquiry: a Positive Revolution in Change, Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005

<sup>13</sup> *An Economy for the 1%: How Privilege and Power in the Economy Drive Extreme Inequality and How This Can be Stopped*. Hardoon, Ayele and Fuentes-Nieva, 2016.

That was written in 2016. Since then global inequality has worsened - a worsening accelerated by the COVID pandemic. In their drives to maintain the world as they want it to be, the 1% are preventing us from moving to connection, through the way they mould

"our ideas of knowledge, of science and technology, of the economy, production and consumption, of democracy and freedom, and of the way we are, our identities, our purpose, of why we are here on the earth."<sup>14</sup>

Does capitalism have to be like this? Are there other ways of organising economic life or do we have to succumb to what Shiva refers to as "philanthrocapitalism", whereby, she believes:

"global philanthrocapitalists like Bill and Melinda Gates and affiliated entities work to monopolize and privatize sectors of land use, food production, and public health on a global scale ... .

Through various initiatives, sub-organizations, development schemes, and funding mechanisms, the Gates empire in particular weaves an intricate network of power and influence designed to ensnare local communities and traditions in an unwavering pursuit of profit and market expansion."<sup>15</sup>

Or is this an unfounded conspiracy theory? Conspiracy or merely the inevitable outcome of the socio-economic system in which we are currently living? It seems fairly clear that the remaining 99% of us are experiencing one or more of what Shiva and Shiva describe as the three separations that

"have brought us to the verge of extinction as a species"<sup>16</sup>,

namely:

1. separation of humans from nature, creating eco-apartheid.
2. separation of humans from each other
3. separation of humans from ourselves - of the Self from our integral, interconnected being

and therefore, some would argue,

"the only true response to ecological crisis should be to bring about authentic political, social and cultural revolution."<sup>17</sup>

I look at each of these three separations, in more detail, in Part II: Relationships With and Within Ourselves; Part III: Relationships With and Within Nature; Part IV: Relationships With and Between Human Beings; and then I have a brief look at How we Organise Ourselves in Organisations and Society in Part V.

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<sup>14</sup>Oneness vs the 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom, Shiva and Shiva, 2019: 22

<sup>15</sup> Philanthrocapitalism and the Erosion of Democracy: A Global Citizens Report on the Corporate Control of Technology, Health and Agriculture, Shiva, 2022. The quote is from marketing information as the book was not yet published at the time of my writing this piece in February 2022

<sup>16</sup> As footnote 13

<sup>17</sup> The Three Ecologies, Guattari, 2000: 28

Although I have described "separation" before "oneness", I have written the heading of this section with "oneness" first, to suggest that it is the natural state into which we are striving to develop but from which we are being prevented by the current world conditions, which may or may not be created or reinforced by the all-powerful greedy 1%.

So what can be said of "oneness", the recognition of everything being interconnected? My own reflections are that I have experienced this in two ways - through feeling and through thinking.

Thinking about oneness has involved me in talking, reading and writing about it, over quite a long period of time and, more recently and intensely, when preparing my contribution(s) to this issue of the Journal. Thus for me it is possible in the realm of Thinking to come to a cognitive understanding, recognition, awareness of oneness through hearing about it.

Perhaps more significantly, I have had a different form of engagement with oneness for quite a long time, generated through an experience that I had many years ago, whilst engaging in what was for me strenuous physical exercise, I "heard" - became aware of - an inaudible<sup>18</sup> humming and experienced

"a feeling of being merged with the whole world and becoming one with it, yet without losing one's individuality"<sup>19</sup>

and just knew, with absolute certainty, that I am connected with everybody and everything, and everybody and everything else is connected with me and with each other. This knowledge/perception/belief/illusion has remained with me ever since, although at times I do rather tend to forget it.

I told this story at an online conference in 2021, and fourteen of the fifteen members of the group<sup>20</sup> reported experiencing a similar form of oneness in a variety of contexts: various forms of meditation<sup>21</sup>, being in nature, (the most frequently reported, particularly in woods and forests); physical exercise; yoga; listening to music; dancing; gardening.

Fourteen out of fifteen is quite a lot. This may well have been connected with the fact that all of us were members of the worldwide Association for Social Development, management consultants (in this case from various European and South American countries) who connect our work with the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, known as anthroposophy. We were all therefore probably somewhat inclined to, and familiar with, what are sometimes referred to as "supersensible" ideas, practices and processes.

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<sup>18</sup> How could I hear something that was inaudible? I don't know. It's just that "heard" is the best word that's come to me.

<sup>19</sup> *Rudolf Steiner and the Masters of Esoteric Christianity*, Prokofieff 2018: 86, referring to a description in *Esoteric Science* by Rudolf Steiner 1909/[2017]

<sup>20</sup> All of whom were members of the Association for Social Development, management consultants from worldwide (on this occasion they were from Europe and South America) who connect their work with the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, known as anthroposophy, and who were therefore perhaps somewhat familiar with various meditative practices and processes

<sup>21</sup> This is explored in *Understanding the Nature of Oneness Experience in Meditators Using Collective Intelligence Methods*, Van Lente and Hogan, 2020. The paper refers to a further eight studies that use various descriptions or characteristics of "oneness"

But who knows how many other people are also so inclined, but tend not to talk about it? For

"oneness [is] ... the very source of our existence, our inter-connectedness with the universe, with all beings (including human beings) and with our local communities. Oneness is woven through our diverse living intelligence and creativity. It represents the confluence of our rich and vibrant diversities - biodiversity, cultural diversity, economic diversity, political diversity and knowledge diversity"<sup>22</sup>.

And thus

"ecological awareness is an awareness of the fundamental interconnectedness and interdependence of all phenomena and of this embeddedness in the cosmos ... This is where ecology and religion meet ... and ecological awareness at its deepest level is spiritual or religious awareness."<sup>23</sup>

### So What Can We Do? Some General Activities

There seem to me to be some general things we can do to move towards eco ways of thinking, feeling, willing and doing, and some more specifically related to our relationships with nature, with each other, with ourselves. Here I will just suggest a few general approaches, returning to more specific ones later in subsequent instalments.

In so doing I'm reminded of a time before we had word processors and my wife Gloria was typing my handwritten work, which on this occasion was for the long out-of-print *Managing Yourself* - written over 30 years ago by Mike Pedler and myself <sup>24</sup> as one of a series edited by Bob Garratt and published jointly by Fontana and - AMED - yes AMED published books in those days. In this I was describing how one could, as the title suggested, manage oneself in ways that would be universally appreciated. When I came home from a hard day at the Poly<sup>25</sup> I could tell Gloria's mood by the viciousness of her pounding the typewriter keys, to be greeted by welcomes such as

"Damn it Tom, anyone reading this will think you're a bloody wonderful person to live with"<sup>26</sup>.

Indeed I often preach rather than practice. So although in fairness I do practice a few of them, I don't claim to take anything like all the suggested actions in these contributions. But nonetheless I hope that some at least prove interesting and valuable.

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<sup>22</sup> Oneness vs the 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom, Shiva and Shiva, 2019: 9

<sup>23</sup> *Belonging to the Universe*, Capra, Steindl-Rast and Matus, 1992: 70. I don't know if the author is saying that "spiritual" and "religious" are the same, or that they are alternatives. I tend towards the latter, as I have certainly experienced religion that seemed completely devoid of spirituality and spirituality that wasn't connected with any religion

<sup>24</sup> Pedler and Boydell, 1989

<sup>25</sup> Now Sheffield Hallam University

<sup>26</sup> Boydell, GJ, 1989, private communication

It's rather likely that for readers of this Journal it will be in the organisations where we work or to which we consult where we can seek, find and create some of the best opportunities for moving away from separation<sup>27</sup>. Thus in our organisations as well as in our society and community, we can, inter alia<sup>28</sup>:

1. "Find your passion" - the title of Chapter 1 of the excellent How to Become an Accidental Activist by Elizabeth Macleod and Freda Wishinky, published in 2021 by Canadian company Orca Book Publishers. Full of ideas and stories from all over the world, Orca specialises in books aimed at younger readers but I found it inspiring<sup>29</sup>
2. Read A Better World is Possible, by former AMED Executive Member Bruce Nixon. Although now a bit out of date in some respects - for example at times expressing perhaps unfounded optimism at the time of the election of Barack Obama, and before the onset of Trumpism - it is still full of great information and uplifting ideas. At the start he makes, amongst many others, three most pertinent observations that stand out for me:
3. the whole global system has to be transformed to serve everyone, everywhere.
4. We, ordinary people, need to turn our anger into effective action to bring about radical change.
5. Yes we can!
6. Write blogs, poems, limericks, plays, articles, books
7. Paint, knit, crochet, tat (i.e. do tatting), weave, sculpt, pot (i.e. create pottery), compose
8. Play music, sing, dance, act, perform
9. Work on our inner development, moving our consciousness from Stances 1 and 2 towards and into Stances 3 and 4. (See this Introduction and Parts II and V of these instalments). Find a form of meditation or mindfulness that feels right for you, to which you are drawn, which draws you towards it. This might help your passion to find you as in point 1 above
10. Join or form a self-development group of people who want to work on themselves and/or these issues
11. Find opportunities to use some of the Mode 6 and 7 tools referred to in Part II of this serialisation "Co-Initiate"<sup>30</sup>. Keep our eyes, ears and minds open to learn about issues around separation and oneness. Listen, watch, read, associate and converse<sup>31</sup> with others, uncover shared intention, debate, discuss, dialogue. As put by Otto Scharmer, who very much stresses the notion of preparing ourselves for what wants to find us, rather than us struggling to find it.

"Listening is the key."

"Listening to your own intention or to what life calls you to do (listening to oneself)"

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<sup>27</sup> *Change the Workplace, Change the World*, Watkins and Dalton, 2020. I find this to have a much wider relevance than just that of HR, which is the perspective from which it is written. It looks at many aspects of leadership and Organisation Development. Alan Watkins has also written extensively about models of development and Crowdocracy, to which I refer in **Part NN XXX**

<sup>28</sup> The numbers are purely to make it easier to refer to them, locate them, identify them. They are not intended to indicate any sort of priority or sequence

<sup>29</sup> I was born in 1940

<sup>30</sup> *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Action*, Scharmer 2018: 78-130

<sup>31</sup> From Latin "con-versar" - to spend time with, go around with

"Listening to your core partners in the field (listening to others)"

"Listening to what you are called to do now (listening to what emerges)"<sup>32</sup>

12. Help others to listen. Spread the word, make these issues known to others, put them out into the world. Talk, write, share, engage, protest, debate, discuss, dialogue.
13. Speak out, challenge and confront facts that we believe to be untrue, ideas with which we don't agree, practices that we find unacceptable
14. Join campaign/activist groups, online or locally. Sign petitions, make donations
15. Join, support, vote for a political party or an independent advocate that wants to make happen the same things that you want to make happen
16. Subscribe to online publications like The Conversation at <https://theconversation.com/uk/environment>, and to online or print publications such as Private Eye
17. Lobby MPs, local politicians, opinion formers. The City of Sanctuary website has some excellent guidance on how to do this with regard to refugee welfare, guidance that can be applied to other issues. <https://cityofsanctuary.org/>
18. Find local campaigners, pressure groups, support groups, find out what they are wanting to achieve, how you might be able to join or support them
19. Enrol, by yourself or with some friends or colleagues, on the annual MIT/Otto Scharmer U-Lab online course (named after his Theory U process<sup>33</sup>). This is free of charge; it lasts for several months and each year attracts several thousand participants from all over the world. As well as taught inputs it includes help with setting up action groups for people who want to tackle issues that they identify as their priority. See <https://www.edx.org/course/ulab-leading-from-the-emerging-future>. Depending on when you access this it may be referring to "last year's" programme but will enable you to keep up to date
20. Consult The United Nations 17 Goals for Sustainable Development that were agreed in 2019 by all UN member countries and territories, with the aim of achieving them by 2030. In connection with these they publish a list of 56 relatively simple things that we can do as individuals<sup>34</sup>, as well as, for each of the goals, larger-scale targets<sup>35</sup> that require concerted efforts and initiatives by countries, NGOs businesses and other organisations<sup>36</sup>. Each of the 56 might prove useful in helping to generate ideas for individual or local lobbying, influencing, or action<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Action, Scharmer 2018: 78

<sup>33</sup> Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges, Scharmer 2007; The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications, Scharmer, 2018; Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies. Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/takeaction/>

<sup>35</sup> Many don't seem to me to be targets as such, but directions to move in or suggestions for action

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

<sup>37</sup> All of the cited web locations were accessed 16.02.22



The websites related to each of the goals give examples and stories of activities and progress to date, together with some related book. Intended for children many adults will find them attractive and informative. A UN report on Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals can be downloaded from:

<https://undocs.org/en/E/2021/58>.

The goals are:

1. **No Poverty. End poverty in all its forms everywhere** (7 targets)  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/poverty/>
2. **Zero Hunger** (8 targets)  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>
3. **Good Health and Wellbeing.** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (13 targets)  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/health/>
4. **Quality Education** (10 targets)
5. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>
6. **Gender Equality. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls** (9 targets)  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>
7. **Clean Water and Sanitation.** Ensure access to water and sanitation for all (8 targets)  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/>
8. **Affordable and Clean Energy.** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy (5 targets)  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/energy/>
9. **Decent Work and Economic Growth.** Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all (12 targets)  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/economic-growth/>
10. **Industries, Innovation and Infrastructure.** Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (8 targets)  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/infrastructure-industrialization/>
11. **Reduced Inequalities.** Reduce inequality within and among countries (10 targets)  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/inequality/>
12. **Sustainable Cities and Communities.** Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (10 targets)  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities/>
13. **Responsible Consumption and Production.** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns (11 targets).  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production/>

14. **Climate Action** (5 targets. Relatively few due to "acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change"),  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change/>
15. **Life Below Water**. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources (10 targets).  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/oceans/>
16. **Life on Land**. Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss (12 targets).  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/>
17. **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**. Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies (12 targets).  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/peace-justice>
18. **Partnership for the Goals**. Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development ( 19 targets).  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/globalpartnerships/>

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### **Tom Boydell writes**

When I turned 80 I was advised to go part-time. So I'm now a part-time management development consultant, a part-time writer, a part-time actor, a part-time singer, a part-time poet, a part-time weaver and a part-time gardener. I'm glad I'm only a part-timer, otherwise I'd be worn out.

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# Surviving and Thriving

John Burgoyne



## Summary

In this article I put forward the idea that humans survive and thrive through a process of co-evolution with the environment as part of an increasing unit of survival. They survive through a process of survival.

To survive means to exist. This equates to Maslow's lowest level in his hierarchy of needs. Thriving means progressing to Maslow's higher levels of need.

Co-evolution means a combination of Darwinian thought, as in adapting to the environment, and changing the environment to survive, such as developing villages, towns, cities and countries.

The call for contributions requests 'from ego to eco', I believe that my argument here fits this requirement.

I propose critical realism as the ontological background to doing this. This combines changing individual and collective beliefs as in social constructionism and taking action in and on the material world in an engineering sense.

This contributes to ego to eco, the theme of these articles.

## Main Argument

Maslow's hierarchy (A. H. Maslow 1943), though it has its critics, states that there are levels of human needs. The first two levels concern the basic needs of individuals, what I am referring to as survival. The remaining three levels refer to meeting the needs of social life, friendship, self-esteem and self-actualisation, what I refer to as thriving. In order to survive and thrive we ensure those needs are met through a process of co-evolution with the environment as part of an increasingly large unit of survival.

The process of co-evolution is a combination or synthesis of classic Darwinian evolutionary theory (Charles Darwin 1859) – adapting to the environment and changing the environment. For example, humans may adapt themselves to a shortage of water by moving nearer to a water source such as a river. An example of changing the environment would be installing wells and water pumps to supply water to buildings, i.e. adapting the environment to ensure survival.

We can see this co evolution in organisations and companies. Successful firms do both, by adapting to current trends but also innovating new products within them.

Being part of a larger unit, such as family, tribe, village, town, city, country and unions like NATO may help humans to survive. This is because larger groups can do better than individuals and smaller ones, partly because they can specialise, and because they can operate 24/7. Large organisations can be cumbersome, and may be better treated as networks of smaller ones.

The eco crisis requires us to do both too, and to address this crisis as individuals and in larger units, if we wish to survive. We must adapt ourselves, through such things as recycling, using virtual meetings, being aware of resources, reducing travel etc. In addition, we need to change the environment through things such as developing green energy and innovating to avoid plastic waste.

The above is based on critical realism (Burgoyne 2008, Fleetwood 2005), a synthesis of logical positivism and social constructionism. By this I mean that this is a realist view of the world that allows for social constructions with the view that some of these are truer than others.

Logical positivism works better with physics and engineering, social constructionism with the social and political aspects of life. Organisations have both, management science deals with the former, organisational behaviour with the latter, so critical realism is particularly appropriate. Logical positivism takes a 'hard' view of reality, while social constructionism takes a 'soft' one. In the extreme any view is as true as any other. This combination is important as a view on how to take action on systems that contain hard and soft elements.

This ontological position provides a basis for moving from ego to eco. Ontology is about what exists.

The critical realist and pragmatist positions provide a basis for doing this. If the issue was just a social construction it would be a matter of changing individual and collective beliefs. If it were purely a material issue it would require engineering solutions.

Actually we need both: a change in beliefs *and* a way of acting on this in the material world.

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## About John

**John Burgoyne** is Professor of Management Learning in the Department of Management Learning in the Management School, University of Lancaster, of which he is a founding member. He is a Visiting Professor at University Campus Suffolk (jointly owned by the Universities of East Anglia and Essex), and an Associate of Ashridge Management College and Henley Business School.

A psychologist by background he has worked on the evaluation of management development, the learning process, competencies and self-development, corporate management development policy, career formation, organisational learning, knowledge managing, the virtual organization and leadership.

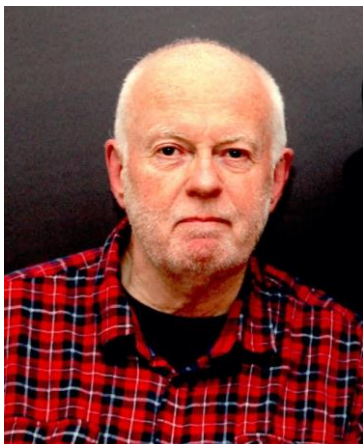
He is concerned to apply ideas from research to the practical reconstruction of contemporary organisations through management, leadership and organisation development, and the evaluation of initiatives in this area.

He is particularly interested in working with organisations that wish to use the formulation and implementation of Corporate Management Development Policy, and the evaluation of its implementation as a cornerstone of their efforts to create their futures. His research interests have recently returned to evaluation, and his current focus is evaluation led management education and development policy and practice. He has been, and still is, interested in learning organization approaches, and at the moment this includes the application of network theory in all these areas.

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# Three ways to manage

Chris Blanter



*Revised Dec. 2017, Nov. 2021 from an original article written in 2006,)*

Over the last 130 years or so there has been a burgeoning movement of those less enamoured with the fervour of the Enlightenment – the idea that scientific realism exhausts our ways of talking about our material and social reality. That we have come to believe that science has discovered nature’s very own language de-authorises other stories. There is no room for them. Scientific realism has tended to name our observations and experience of the world as if we are using reality’s correct words and grammatical sentences – and that we are content to assume that our use of language is somehow non-human. It has led to a view that has elevated ‘humankind’ above a natural world deemed to be ‘other’ than ourselves – a world populated with entities, things we have *in-formed* and named. So sure have we been about our god-like sense of universal objectivity that we haven’t been noticing the effects of what we have been doing to our environment, to other life-forms and to the material planet.

People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what they do does.

*(Michel Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983, p187)*

However the planet is forcefully telling us that we are not separate from her and do not stand above her. The sense that human actions are merely discrete, acultural observations seems to be increasingly, ironically, unrealistic, a little too masculine and certainly unsustainable. We are learning that we, and the ‘things’ we have named in the world, are more usefully characterised as snapshots, stills in the movie, the ongoing flow of generative processes. Selves, society and, if we take anything from quantum physics, the material world itself are composed of dynamic relationships over space and time rather than fixed, discovered things.

From a determinate world of separate things to an indeterminate world of inseparable flowing processes.

*(John Shotter, 2013, p 31)*

This shift is reflected in the sentiment 'from ego to eco'. It reflects a concern that we need to give much more attention to a relational sensibility - '*knowing what we do does*'. It is, though, a sensibility not solely confined to our awareness of climate change and environmental desecration – it applies equally to our participation and sense of the social world. We do not discover the social world somehow existing independently of us so much as we actively generate and reproduce it through relationships – our cultural ecologies. These ecologies are not confined to human actors but include and participate the world around us - other life forms, human artefacts and the material world (Blanter, 2021 – this issue). From this sensibility all our knowings, and actions predicated upon them, are political and, in noticing 'what we do does', we are invited to be more aware of who or what is better or worse off – other people, other species, the planet, the landscape etc. etc. It is what Richard Rorty (1991, p 21) recognised as the shift from universal objectivity to solidarity. From 'ego to eco', then, also recognises that we can no longer claim moral authority for our beliefs and actions because they are 'true' (in the abstract) – but rather because we take responsibility for what they generate – what they make happen – a view long held by the American Pragmatists.

**Here is an example** of a particular situation in a manufacturing organisation. It's offered as a practical way of recognising how we might go on – including how we might manage – from three world views and their successive social era.

Here are three different ways of managing the same event(s) - or perhaps we might say, solving a problem. They reflect and illustrate three different ontological stances. Stances 1 & 2 reflect the philosophy of Realism – single storylines fixed by the manager (the more powerful in the exchange) of the 'other' being 'less than' ideal – in deficit. Stance 3 reflects a poststructural or relational ontology. It rejects the idea that hierarchy is natural and unaccountable for dominating others (othering) and recognises that others' accounts of events are equally legitimate and valuable. Behaviour and identity in this latter view are the product of the dynamics of context, including power– a political ecology.

The first [Stance 1] is from the frame of 'command and control' - where the manager sites 'the problem' as residing within her subordinate Neils. The unadorned rational expectation is that Neils should 'get it right' regardless of the circumstances or any issues Neils is contending with (e.g. being unwell, anxious or distracted). Deviation from desired or expected behaviour can easily be viewed as incompetence or trouble-making. The need for discipline is not an unusual *remedial* approach. Sometimes 'training' is insisted upon as a disciplinary device.

The second example [Stance 2] still positions the problem as an individual failing but is mitigated by recognition of the individual's humanness. This is the frame of 'hearts and minds' (humanism) - that is, an approach to managing and organising that recognises we are all vulnerable, can make mistakes and can be affected, psychologically and emotionally, by the circumstances we experience. People are viewed as generally well-meaning and competent and are recognised as 'being human'. A remedial approach may be characterised by inquiry into Neils' circumstances so as to establish an understanding of the impediments to a better performance and possibly the offer of support. Even so, Neils' behaviour is still cast as in deficit to an ideal and a problem to be overcome.



The third example [Stance 3] is from the frame of ‘dialogue’ or ‘co-production’ and a relational, posthumanist ecology. That is, there is a recognition that the ‘situation’ - the context is shaping the actor’s behaviour. (e.g. the ‘system’, the unspoken expectations, the unchallenged cultural practices, rituals, habits and taken-for-granted ways, ways of talking and non-human actors – like production lines, machines, recording technologies etc. etc. etc). Rather than ‘every dog has his day’ it’s more ‘every day has his dog!’ ‘The problem’ is located in the situation – and the individuals are part of, not separate from, the situation. More, *the manager has the choice to not frame it as a problem*. The approach is not remedial but rather a joint inquiry into how ‘**we** can do things better’ including an examination of systems and procedures, the contribution of non-human actors, how we talk to each other, how we engage cooperatively with each other, what feelings are evoked, what ideas we both/all have for creating better and more helpful conditions. More attention is given to the micro-composition of context, of events and what they make happen and the style of exchange is less authoritative and, rather, more mutually exploratory and invitational. The notion of ‘the ideal’, rather than being deployed as an expression of a (weaponised?) universal reality, is recast as shared imagination to be explored and that requires cooperation for its real-isation.

## The event

The [human] actors are Niels and his manager.

This story takes place on the shop floor of an electrical engineering company (they manufacture electronic units for controlling the temperature of mobile phone mast installations). The Manager is trying to track down a recently issued worksheet which will have the effect of changing a procedure for dealing with defective parts cropping up at a critical point in the assembly line (non-human actor - ‘NHA’). She has approached Niels (the Quality Assistant) and asked him if the Worksheet (another NHA) has been taken to the Production Department. Niels, having had previous difficulties with our Manager, is hesitant and counter-inquisitive.

Here we explore the Manager’s encounter with Niels from the point of view of the 3 stances (above). It is assumed that the Manager is institutionally more powerful than Niels.

### Stance 1

[focus: the problem created by the gap between the observed behaviour and the desired behaviour]

<b>Manager:</b>	Ah, Niels..., when I asked you about the Worksheet this morning you were less than helpful. I wanted a straightforward answer to a straightforward question. It’s really important that we can communicate well on the shop floor and I would be much happier if you could give me direct answers to my questions. Can you make sure that you can do that in future?
<b>Niels:</b>	Err....., well....
<b>Manager:</b>	...can you?
<b>Niels:</b>	...err, yes.
<b>Manager:</b>	Good, I appreciate that. I’d like to be reassured that you are trying to be helpful.

## Stance 2

[focus: the 'problem' behaviour and the way this might be understood through the individual's motivation, feelings and 'psychology' – the 'whole person']

<b>Manager:</b>	Ah, Niels ..., I asked you about the Worksheet this morning we seemed to have some difficulty. Do you agree?
<b>Niels:</b>	... err, I suppose so, yes.
<b>Manager:</b>	Well I came back to let you know that I reacted negatively to what you said – well the whole tone of our conversation actually. The effect it had on me was that I thought you were being deliberately unhelpful and I wanted to check if that was right. How do you feel about it?
<b>Niels:</b>	... I can see how you might have thought that. I wasn't trying to be unhelpful but I was uncertain about what was going on and what you really wanted. I think my uncertainty might have looked like I was being awkward.
<b>Manager:</b>	What was your uncertainty about?
<b>Niels:</b>	... well there's a bit of history between us and I felt defensive because I think you've blamed me before for something that wasn't my fault. It's not straightforward because I also have to do what Jan asks me and he sees things differently from you.
<b>Manager:</b>	I'd like to know more – do you think we can talk about it Niels?

## Stance 3

[Focus: No 'problem people' – only difference. Joint enquiry into the context, the conditions and how things can jointly be made better for mutual purposes. Known as '**Feedforward**' rather than feedback]

<b>Manager:</b>	Ah, Niels ..., I managed to locate the worksheet that I asked you about this morning though of course it did take me rather a long time. When we talked I got the impression that it wasn't easy for you – am I right?
<b>Niels:</b>	Yes you are right – thanks for asking.
<b>Manager:</b>	I'd be very interested in talking to you about how we can keep track of Worksheets and know where they are at any one time. Would this be of interest to you?
<b>Niels:</b>	Well I think so – because I'm involved in distributing them and people think I should always know where they are and what's happened to them – but people don't give me that information even though I ask. Actually, no-one even tells me what they are for!
<b>Manager:</b>	That's interesting. I assumed you knew all this. If we were to put our heads together to come up with a better system, would you be up for that?
<b>Niels:</b>	Yes, absolutely.

<b>Manager:</b>	Good. What kinds of issues do you think are involved?
<b>Niels:</b>	... well, like I said, it would be helpful to know what they are for, where they are at any time and who is doing what. I also think that Jan (Head of Quality) doesn't really know how they work – but don't tell him I said that.
<b>Manager:</b>	OK Niels, that's helpful. If you give me a couple of times this week when you could make a short meeting, I'll talk to all the others. Who do you think is involved? Thanks for your insight about Jan – I hadn't thought of that and I won't repeat what you said.

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“The traditional psychology talks like one who should say a river consists of nothing but pailsful, spoonsful, quartpotsful, barrelsful, and other moulded forms of water. Even were the pails and the pots are all actually standing in the stream, still between them the free water would continue to flow. It is just this free water of consciousness that psychologists resolutely overlook. Every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows around it. With it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead.”

(William James, 1890, pp. 255–256, quoted by John Shotter, 2013 p40)

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## About Chris

Chris is an independent researcher and practitioner specialising in 'organisational change and learning'. He has a particular interest in participative approaches to organising and has developed many practical methods for effective and swift, inclusive and sustainable decision-making (*'people support what they create'*). These methods are informed by foregrounding local inquiry and an increased sensitivity to the effects of joint and several action – for example participatory action research and dialogic practices.

After 30+ years' experience of working in a variety of public sector and commercial organisations Chris has noticed that many, maybe most, organisations tend to promote discipline and control at the expense of curiosity and inquiry – quite often to their detriment. Informed by this experience Chris has, latterly, become interested in the politics of organising, the effects on employees and the role of organisations in propagating cultural norms in society at large.

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# From Ego to Eco: where are we, where are we trying to go?

## Part 2. Relationships with and within ourselves

### Tom Boydell

In Part I of this serialisation I gave, in Table 1, a picture of moving away from ego- and towards eco-consciousness. That table is reproduced here, now with the addition of Torbert's Action Logics, of which more later. The table shows that as we develop, we move away from Shiva and Shiva's three "separations"<sup>38</sup>, of

1. humans from nature, creating eco-apartheid
2. humans from each other
3. humans from ourselves - of the Self from our integral, interconnected being



towards thinking, feeling and willing embedded in a sense of oneness. Now, here in Part II, I will look at the third of these -separation of humans from ourselves - as it seems to me that the other two, that I will explore in Parts III, IV and V, rather depend on this one.

There are obviously many aspects of myself from which I may be separated. Here I will look at the dimension of the way I am in the world, how I stand in it, how I perceive it, how I make sense of it. To do so I will use two frameworks of individual development - Modes of Being,<sup>39</sup> created by myself and colleagues in Transform Development Consultants, and Torbert's Action Logics<sup>40</sup>, also referred to as Meaning-making Frames<sup>41</sup>. I have chosen these two from a number of similar models<sup>42</sup> because I'm fairly familiar with the Modes and Torbert's is probably the one most used in management development - indeed there is reference to it in this edition of the Journal - James Barlow, Jake Farr and Kirstin Irving's *This is an Emergency. We Must Slow Down*.

#### Table 1: Four Stances of Being

<sup>38</sup> Oneness vs the 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom, Shiva and Shiva, 2019: 22

<sup>39</sup> The Qualities of Managing, Leary et al, 1986; Identifying Training Needs, Boydell and Leary, 1996; Doing Things Well, Doing Things Better, Doing Better Things. A Guide to Effective Learning Boydell, 2000; Facilitation of Adult Development, Boydell, 2016

<sup>40</sup> The Power of Balance: Transforming Self, Society and Scientific Inquiry, Torbert, 1991; Action Inquiry: the Secret of Timely and Transforming Leadership, Torbert and Associates, 2004; Seven Transformations of Leadership, Rooke and Torbert, 2005

<sup>41</sup> Personal and Organizational Transformations Through Action Inquiry, Fisher, Rooke and Torbert, 1995/2003

<sup>42</sup> For example Spiral Dynamics, Beck and Cowan, 1996/2005; Post autonomous Ego Development: A Study of Its Nature and Measurement, Cook-Greuter, 2010; Levels of Existence: an Open system Theory of Values, Graves, 1970; *The Evolving Self; Problem and Process in Human development*, Kegan, 1982; *In a Different Voice: Psychology and Women's Development*, Gilligan, 1982/1993; *Ego Development*, Loevinger, 1976; *Changes of Mind*, Wade, 1996; *Integral Psychology*, Wilber, 2000

	<b>CAPRA<sup>43</sup> Shiva and Shiva<sup>44</sup></b>	<b>STANCE &amp; Modes<sup>45</sup> and Torbert Action Logics</b>	<b>INCLUDED: in "My" Group</b>	<b>EXCLUDED: Others not in "My" Group</b>
<b>EGO</b>	<b>SELF-ASSERTIVE Separation</b>  <b>Thinking</b> Rational Analysis Reductionist Linear  <b>Values</b> Expansion Competition Quantity Domination	<b>Stance 1</b> Modes 1 & 2 Adapting, Adhering Action Logic 1 Opportunist	Me	Anyone not me: all of you, all of them
		<b>Stance 2</b> Modes 3, 4 & 5 Accepting, Experiencing, Experimenting Action Logics 2, 3, 4: Diplomat, Expert, Achiever	Me and us - those whom I see as being in "my" reference group: some of you, the you who are the same as I am or I want to be	All others - those I see not as in my reference group: most of you, most of them
<b>ECO</b>	<b>INTEGRATIVE Oneness</b>  <b>Thinking</b> Intuitive Synthesis Holistic Nonlinear  <b>Values</b> Conservation Co-operation Quality Partnership	<b>Stance 3</b> Mode 6 Connecting, Action Logic 5: Individualist/ Redefining	Me, us, quite a lot of you. As Stance 2 plus those from other diverse groups with which I'm prepared to associate, to appreciate, as joint members of a larger We, Us	Those others not in the groups with which I choose to associate, to appreciate: some of you.
		<b>Stance 4</b> Modes 6 & 7 Connecting, Dedicating Action Logics 6 & 7: Transforming, Alchemist/Alchemical	Everybody and everything - WE	Nobody, nothing: none of you

All these are what can be described as Stage Models - that is, they see development as taking place, over a period of time, by going through various stages, each of which is distinct and unique in itself but which cannot be accessed until the previous one has at least been "visited". This can be seen in the "nested egg" model of Figure 1, applied to development on the dimension of personal mobility<sup>46</sup>. Note the "visited" - I can't get into, say, crawling, without having learned to do at least a little bit of kicking and rolling; but I don't have to be brilliant at either of those before increasing my crawling expertise if that's what I want to do.

<sup>43</sup> *The Web of Life*, Capra, 1997: 10. The mixture of nouns and adjectives in the table is as in the original

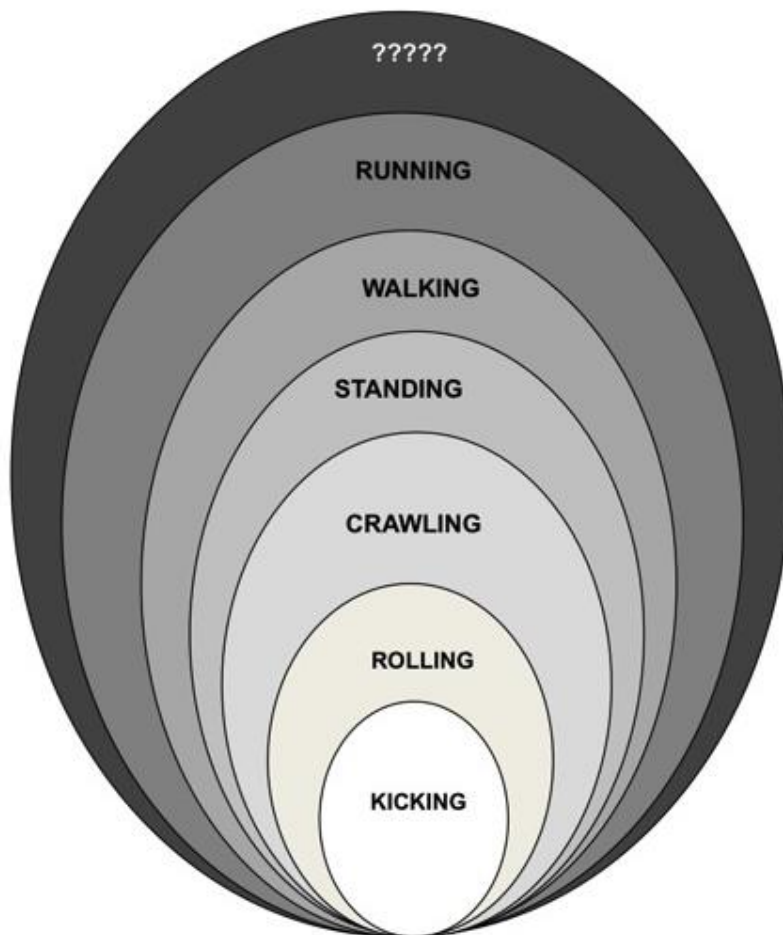
<sup>44</sup> *Oneness vs the 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom*, Shiva and Shiva, 2019: 22-31

<sup>45</sup> The Modes form a framework of individual development and are described in Part II - *Relationships With and Within Ourselves*

<sup>46</sup> *Facilitation of Adult Development*, Boydell, 2016:12. I include a future stage - levitation perhaps?

When developing into a new mode of mobility, I don't lose the previous ones. So, for example, I can still kick, roll and so on even when I can walk and run. But my relationship with those earlier ones changes as I proceed into a later one. For example, crawling when chosen from a repertoire of different mobilities - for example to play with a young child - is very different from crawling because that's the best I can do, or because I am forced to do by my context, such as a low tunnel; or if I'm too ill to stand up. Thus my behaviour at a given time very much depends on the context.

**Figure 1: Nested Egg Developmental Model of Personal Mobility**



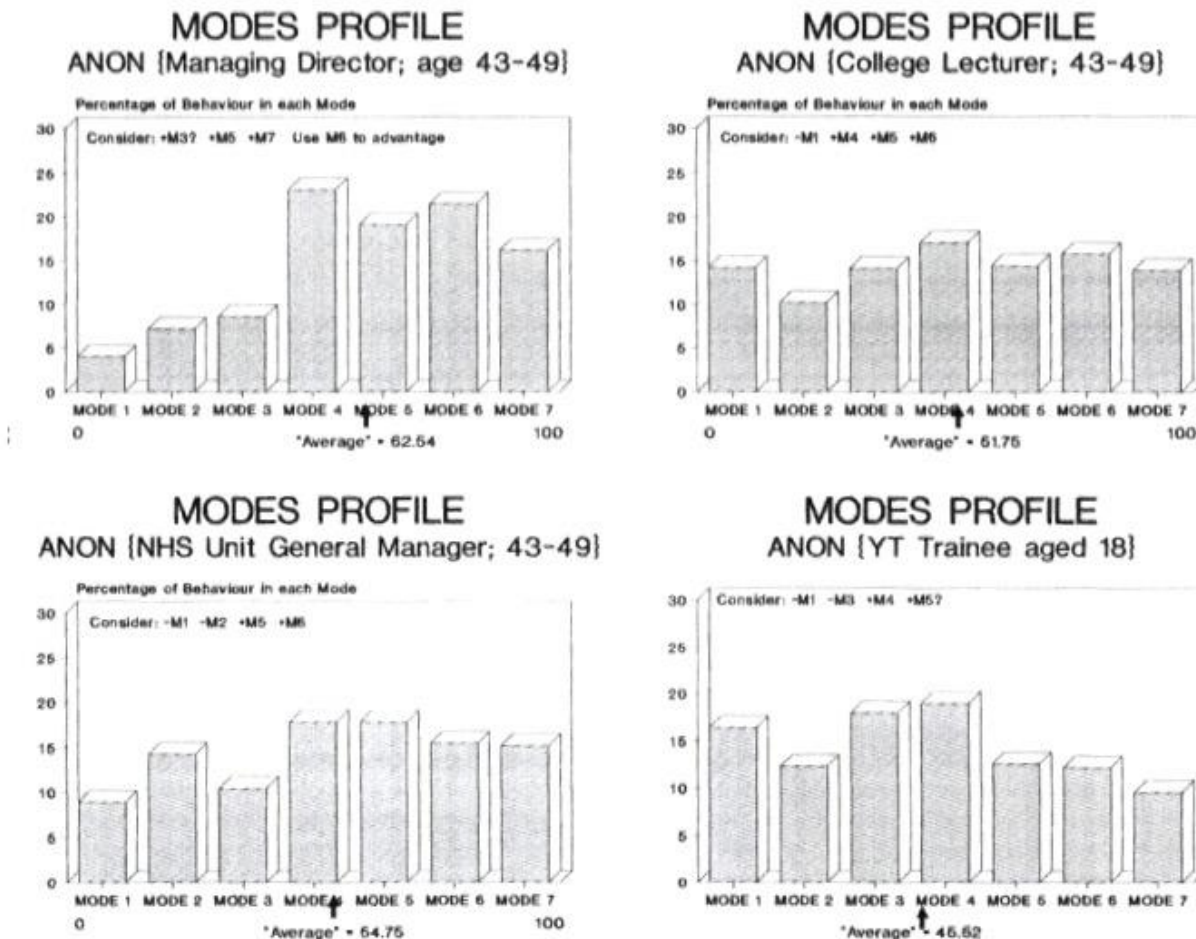
It's important to remember this when helping people to assess where they are on the Modes or Action Logics spectrum. With Modes I created a scale<sup>47</sup> that provided the respondent with a profile, showing the extent to which at that time, and in the role that they were looking at, they were operating at each of the seven. It also gave a "centre of gravity" around which they "pivoted". Four such profiles are shown in Figure 2. For me this presentation provides at least some counter to the accusation that stage models are by their nature hierarchical and elitist when they say "you are a Stage N person" and therefore "better" than a Stage N-1 person.... and by implication deserve more money, happiness, life than they do".

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<sup>47</sup> This was quite some time ago. I'm interested in revisiting this whole topic and would be very happy to hear from anyone who might like to participate in such a project

It will be seen that the profiles in Figure 2 indicate the extent to which the respondent was operating in each Mode. As might be expected, the Managing Director was much less in Modes 1 to 3 than the others - particularly the young YT trainee. Conversely, therefore, she was more in Modes 4 to 7 than were the other three people, with the result that her "average" or balance point along the spectrum of seven was within Mode 5, whilst the others were all in Mode 4 - and the relatively young and junior YTS trainee was not very far from Mode 3.

Figure 2: Four Modes Profiles



That particular study of 253 managers - mainly from local government and the now extinct British Rail - plus a YTS trainee in the Manpower Services Commission - showed that, other things being equal,

- for a given gender and age, scores increased - moved further towards Modes 5, 6 and 7 - as level of seniority got higher. We don't of course know the nature of this relationship - for example what was cause, what was effect? Does the ability to work in Modes 5 to 7 *lead to* getting higher grade jobs? Or does being in a higher grade job *permit or require me* to move away from Modes 1 to 4? Or are there other intervening variables - for example have the experiences that have enabled me to learn to work in those ways been seen as good CV qualifications for promotion? (As noted, the effects of age and gender have been allowed for.)



- for a given gender and grade, scores were higher for older people
- for a given age and grade, women scored higher than men.

Torbert and his associates use a different measure that gives a single-point "centre of gravity" along the Action Logics spectrum.

Some people see such models as hierarchical and thus elitist. This is quite a large question that does, I think, need a detailed discussion but here I'll just observe that perhaps the more important issue is how we relate to people with different levels of ability. For example Olympic Gold Medal winners - high in the running mode of Figure 1 - are not only admired for dedication and for showing what can be done but are given what some might see as excessive levels of adulation and reward as well. It's perhaps this whole system of reward, and of rating, judging, evaluating people that is so much part of ego-consciousness that is wrong. Is a rose more beautiful because it's won a prize in a show? Or does such prize-giving sully the nature of beauty?

It's important to remember that at any particular Mode or Action Logic, the preceding ones are still available to me - as previously mentioned, although I can walk, crawling is still available, when I want to or am forced to. Thus it is possible - indeed likely - that all adults will be able to work out of each one at least to some extent, depending on their gender, age, grade, role and situation or context. With regards to the latter, some of our respondents did the assessment twice - once for when being at work, once for when in an interest or hobby group. In all case their profiles were nearer to Modes 5, 6 and 7 in that "for pleasure" group than when at work<sup>48</sup>.

## Ego-conscious Development

**Mode 1: Adapting:** In Mode 1 I am seeing my part of the world as being there for me to tame, manipulate, get on top of, to my advantage. To this end I am either unaware of rules, norms and expected behaviours or I ignore them, bend them, try to make things work *for me*, get things right *for me*, often by ad hoc unplanned trial and error. "If it works for me it's fine, it's true". I am unaware or unconcerned with possible unintended consequences for myself or others until something happens to my detriment. I learn by trial and error, observing what works well *for me*, and what doesn't, what I can get away with and what I can't.

This corresponds with Torbert's first level - *Opportunist*, whereby I win by any means possible, grasping opportunities and firefighting emergencies. I am self-oriented, manipulative; "might makes right." In the short-term I might be able to cut to the chase, do what's expected of me in an emergency. But deception and manipulation that are used for short-term wins will have longer-term costs such as lack of trust by others.

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<sup>48</sup> In the cases that I have cited, the sequence of Modes was slightly different from that given here. That is, Modes 1 and 2 were "reversed" - the current Mode 2, *Adhering*, was then Mode 1 and current Mode 1, *Adapting*, was Mode 2. Also one of the titles was different - what is now Mode 3 *Accepting* was previously still Mode 3 but termed *Relating*

**Mode 2: Adhering.** Now I acknowledge that my part of the world can sometimes be actually or potentially risky, threatening, likely to go wrong. I therefore decide to look to an external source - people whose knowledge, role or rank can provide me with safety, security, protection, by giving me the "right" answers and things to do. I learn primarily through instruction, perhaps referred to as coaching, sometimes using rote methods such as quizzes and tests. Often however the need to "learn" as such is replaced by the use of checklists, recipes, manuals.

My next orientation is towards...

**Mode 3: Accepting, where** I want to get things right, correct, behave in the "proper" manner, not only due to the instrumental outcomes of so doing but because I want to be really accepted by a significant reference group that matters to me, and therefore I strive to identify with its ideas, norms, values, behaviours - what that group believes to be "right". I seek membership and inclusion.

I learn in similar ways to those of Mode 2 - the difference being that instead of just doing what I need to in order to get by, I now internalise everything, "get things right " not out of fear or for the instrumentality of achieving direct beneficial results but because I believe that "right" is indeed "right" - the way things should be, not only around here but in my life and in the world in general. Instruction and coaching now focus on the reasons why we do things this way, rather than just the imparting of facts. This is a matter of values, of principles, breaking them would be a "threat to society as we know it", to the community to which I want or need to belong, and to my membership of it.

Torbert's second group - *Diplomat* - combines Modes 2 and 3. Here I make sure to meet the approval of significant others, imitate organizational routines and behaviour patterns of high status members. I conform, use the right words, the right behaviour, that are needed to be accepted - by "my" group, to which I am very loyal. Face-saving is essential. I do routine tasks well.

**Mode 4: Experiencing.** I now realise that it is possible and attractive to make my own meanings, rather than to rely on others to tell me what's right, what's true. It's time to become "me", to acknowledge my own feelings, to recognise and act on my own intentions. My context, my part of the world, is becoming interesting, exciting. I seek new experiences, projects, engage with these, am open to opportunities that come my way, use them to learn, to make my own explanations and meaning, create my own way or style of doing things<sup>49</sup>.

This matches Torbert's third and fourth Action Logics - the *Expert* and the *Achiever*. These are where he found that by far the majority of managers are located - some 45% and 35% respectively. As an *Expert* I am no longer content merely to "fit in" but want to stand out, be unique, through my own expertise. Experts are not always good team players due to wanting to "shine", striving for perfection in themselves and in others who report to them. *Achievers*, he observes, tend to make successful entrepreneurs and senior executives.

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<sup>49</sup> A lot of "me" and "my" in there - very much ego-consciousness.

**Mode 5: Experimenting**, which in a way can be seen as building on Mode 4's openness and desire for new experiences. In Mode 5 I am more than just open to experiences - I plan them, consciously and systematically, to discover new knowledge and to improve processes and myself. I tend to focus or specialise on one aspect of my world that I find intriguing. I want to learn by going deeper, and plan, execute, and evaluate ways of gaining *in*-sights, increasing competence and knowledge, improving processes and work systems. In organisations this is where we find Deming's<sup>50</sup> Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle, the use of Statistical Process Control to understand what is going on, avoid the errors whereby tampering with the system actually makes things worse, but instead make continuous improvements. Here too are approaches such as Lean Thinking,<sup>51</sup> Six Sigma<sup>52</sup>, and Business Process Reengineering<sup>53</sup>.

The emphasis in Stance 5, then, is "improving" - improving *me* through various self-development activities and programmes; improving *my* performance, for example through coaching and action learning; and improving *our*, *my* team's performance with relation to customers and suppliers. Although I therefore see Stance 5 as primarily ego-centric, the involvement with others - customers and suppliers - moves it towards the relational and thus in the direction of becoming eco-centric.

Nonetheless Mode 5 is aimed at making us rather competitive as we strive to be the first or best, either individually or in a close and exclusive team or group.

Torbert refers to this as the fifth Action Logic, that of *Redefining* (formerly termed *Strategist*), appreciating complexity, welcoming feedback, keen to achieve goals.

## Eco-conscious Development

Torbert and others refer to those ego-conscious ways of Being as "Conventional", in that they take established ways of doing things as "normal" and attempt to maintain them in various ways. (Mode 1 and Torbert's Opportunist would thus be considered Pre-Conventional). It appears then that ego-centricism is "normal, conventional". But if humans are to survive, we have to change things, become postconventional, eco-centric.

**Mode 6: Connecting.** Modes 1 to 5, then, are very much ego-centric, me centred - my survival, my acceptance, my success and recognition. When I move into Mode 6 I am seeing myself as part of an ever-expanding world, holistic, systemic, comprising diverse, interconnected elements. As expressed in

descriptions of the parallel fifth Action Logic of *Redefining*, formerly referred to as "*Individualistic*"<sup>54</sup>, I am aware that what somebody sees is context-and-perspective-specific, depends on their assumptions, on their

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<sup>50</sup> *Out of the Crisis*, Deming, 1982. I think it a pity that, as a sweeping generalisation, most people in what might be termed behavioural professions seem to be terrified by the S-word and therefore don't get to see how valuable SPC can be to improve human as well as mechanical systems. I have tried to give a reasonably straightforward description of these tools applied to "human" issues, rather than engineering ones, in *Identifying Training Needs*, Boydell and Leary, 1979

<sup>51</sup> *The Machine that Changed the World*, Womack and Jones, 1990; *Lean Thinking*, Womack and Jones, 1996

<sup>52</sup> *The Lean Six Sigma Pocket Toolbook: A Quick Reference Guide to 100 Tools for Improving Quality and Speed*, George et al, 2005

<sup>53</sup> *Business Process Reengineering: Breakthrough Strategies for Market Dominance*. Johansson et al, 1993. I have chosen this one from many as its subtitle epitomises the competitive and ego-centric orientation of Mode 5.

<sup>54</sup> Torbert's labels vary from time to time. One issue is whether they should be verbs - such as Achieving - or nouns - Achiever. The latter rather locates or indeed fixes you as a particular sort of person, whilst the former points to a way of behaving at a particular point

world views; "reality" depends on where you stand, and thus cause and effect are no longer linear but systemic and relational.

Thus in Mode 6, now realising that everything, everyone, is interconnected, part of an intertangled whole, I widen my outlooks, seek diversity, wholeness, Mode 5's seeking of *in*-sight is replaced by need for *over*-sight. I appreciate and empathise with others, explore and work with different assumptions, ideas, meanings and priorities from what Chris Blanter once described as a "montage of different perspectives". I evaluate and judge possible alternative views of what is "right" not by asking if it is objectively valid but, rather, does it enrich or impoverish?<sup>55</sup>. To which I will ask- enrich or impoverish whom? Me? Other specific individuals? Groups? The world? In the long term, ego consciousness - thinking, feeling, willing and acting for me - impoverishes everybody and everything, including me. Eco-consciousness has the potential for "enriching" everybody, everything, albeit the term probably now has a different meaning from that I use from a Mode 4 or 5 standpoint<sup>56</sup>. Thus we move from ego-system to eco-system ways of being, creating communities of activity with multiple stakeholders to "tackle complex problems from the emerging future"<sup>57</sup>.

Mode 6 is where I learn the ability to appreciate - though not necessarily agree with - what and why others think, how and why others feel, what and why others want to make happen. Empathy.

This corresponds with Torbert's sixth Action Logic of **Transforming** - which he previously termed *Strategist* - whereby I recognise that my perceptions are indeed that - perceptions, not realities, (whatever they are). You and I might well have different perceptions of the "same" situation, and if we are to work together we have to understand each other's ways of making sense of it and negotiate a way through these differences. This is quite different from Mode 5, Experimenting, Action Logic 5, *Achiever*, where I would try to persuade you or to fight you into agreeing with me that you are wrong and I am right.

Thus Mode 6 enables us to engage with, to involve, a number of diverse stakeholders who have a variety of multiple viewpoints. Of course the "us" in that sentence involves lots of "mes", each of whom needs to learn to work collectively. The Modes give a framework of development that starts with me on my own, doing my own thing; then becoming part of a group or society; then breaking out again to be the best; then coming together again to achieve things with different people; and finally finding my purpose within a group that

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of time, part of your repertoire. which is how I prefer to see it. *Developing Leadership in Africa*, Palus, Harrison and Prashad, 2016:184, tells how changes were made to later - postconventional - Action Logics from being person-oriented to process-oriented in order to underline their relational nature

<sup>55</sup> Realities and Relationships, Gergen, 1994: 130

<sup>56</sup> A nice activity is having a group conversation, dialogue, about what "enriching" means to each of us; in general, and in the context of this particular team, group, organisation. For us readers of *eO&P*, how do we see that the journal could enrich our lives? How could AMED contribute to this, given that it appears to be seeking a new form?

<sup>57</sup> Scharmer, O and Kaufer, K, 2013, *Leading from the Emerging Future*; Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013; *Leading with Spirit, Presence and Authenticity*, Schuyler et al, 2014

shares that purpose. Hence philosopher Richard Rorty's observation that autonomy isn't the highest form of Being, but solidarity is - a solidarity with all others that does not exclude a sense of self but embraces it.

When we have frequent access to the Mode 6 way of being, it's not only with other people and their viewpoints that we now feel connected. There is often an associated feeling of oneness with everything - with animals, even with plants, as described in Part I of this serial - *Overview and Consciousness*.

Perhaps I should stress that I'm not suggesting that being a vegetarian or vegan is either necessary or sufficient to move you into Mode 6 ways of relating with people! Nor, conversely, that skilfully co-operating together on a project with others, especially others who in many ways are rather different from yourself, will cause you to stop eating meat. But may there be some link, some connection, deep in there somewhere?

**Mode 7: Dedicating.** My sense of connection can lead me to feel that I have a purpose, outside of myself, to achieve which I almost certainly need to work with others. I want to "make the world a better place", bring about some socially/ecologically useful change in a world that is vulnerable, needing and requesting help. I am aware that "better place for whom, and in what way?" are essential questions, and that I must hear and co-operate not only with my immediate co-leagues but also with many stakeholders, whose interests are legitimate and who may suffer from "unintended consequences" of our perceived "solutions". These stakeholders may perhaps include not only a wide diversity of humans but also animals, plants, minerals and Earth herself, calling for the wisdom involved in "balancing various self-interests (intrapersonal) with the interests of others (interpersonal) and of other aspects of the context in which one lives (extra personal)".<sup>58</sup> I have a sense of commitment to what I really want to do, why I am here.

This mostly corresponds to Torbert's Alchemical (previously Alchemist) Action Logic, in which I generate and integrate material, spiritual and societal transformations, working at what I really want to do.

### **How can we learn to cross this threshold from competition to co-operation, from me-and- we to us-and-We?**

1. Most of us are probably quite good at learning and developing in Modes 1 to 4 - too good, some might think, as in general significant problems need to be approached from Modes 5 to 7. So it might be useful to start by considering our individual Modes profile, which Modes are we mostly operating in, and under what circumstances. There's currently no available instrument for doing this, although hopefully there will be in a year or so. Simply reading the descriptions and rating oneself on each one, perhaps with examples, should give a reasonable picture, especially if we do this in conversation with a partner or in a group. It will probably be useful to consider how we are now with respect to each Mode and how we'd like to be in say a year from now.

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<sup>58</sup> Wisdom, Intelligence, and Creativity Synthesized, Sternberg, 2003.

2. A process for obtaining scores for how people see the organisation's Modes Profile is given in Boydell and Leary, 1996, *Identifying Training Needs*<sup>59</sup>, pages 118-124. This shows the extent to which people consider each Mode to be important, and how well they think the organisation is performing in that way. It also picks up differences between each respondent's perceptions, which can form the basis for useful exploration.
3. With respect to Torbert's Action Inquiries, the Center for Creative Leadership has produced a set of visual *Transformations Cards* that can be used in a variety of ways to explore the concepts, locate oneself in the framework, share stories with each other, and so on. The cards, which in the words of Chuck Palus, one of their designers, are intended to be "fun and serious at the same time", are available from the Center for Creative Leadership at <https://shop.ccl.org/usa/transformations-beta.html> or Global Leadership Associates <https://www.gla.global/gla-shop/>. The latter sometimes makes it possible to obtain the cards at reduced or zero fee for use in not-for-profit organisations.
4. I find the various ideas of W Edwards Deming and his Statistical Process Control tools an excellent starting point for developing further into Mode 5. There are numerous courses available as well as books such as those in footnote 12.
5. With the Mode 5 emphasis on *Improving*, approaches such as coaching, mentoring, supervision and action learning can develop us individually and of course help in tackling organisational challenges.
6. It is becoming increasingly recognised<sup>60</sup> that various forms of meditation and mindfulness are important for creating the inner mood or space for Mode 6 and 7 ideas and decisions to come in. There are of course many such approaches and we need to find the right ones that are appropriate for us, or for which we are appropriate.
7. A form of meditation that also helps to get a picture of how I and others are being is to mentally reflect on the day's happenings, or on a particular episode, imagining the events backwards from finish to start. What happened? What happened just before that? And so on.
8. A more "concrete" approach to this is based on Argyris and Schon's three columns process<sup>61</sup>. With regards to an incident, draw three columns. In the left hand one write what everybody involved said and did; in the centre our own thoughts, feelings and intentions as people said and did things; in the right hand one our ideas about what the other person was thinking and feeling. This could include not only the "doer" but others in the situation.

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<sup>59</sup> This is now out of print, though there seem to be a number of second-hand copies in circulation. After more than 25 years I have just noticed a bit of an error in a calculation which could cause puzzlement! If anyone would like a copy of those pages I'll be happy to email them with an explanation of the mistake.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Senge talks about contemplation and organizational wellbeing at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtSeK2MP228> (accessed 24.02.22). He describes how this has changed him from being aware of "what I was thinking" to "there's a thought emerging" (at 7m23s)

<sup>61</sup> This is based on Argyris and Schon, *Theory in Practice*, 1974

9. The idea for the title of this issue of the Journal - and this series of papers - came from Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer's book *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System Economies to Eco-System Economies*, in which they explore Scharmer's Theory U - an overall process for tackling wicked problems by using what they refer to as "Presencing" to allow the future that wants to come in. I recommend reading this and related works<sup>62</sup>.
10. There is an annual programme or course on Theory U - the MIT *U-Lab*. This is free of charge; it lasts for several months and each year attracts several thousand participants from all over the world. As well as taught inputs it includes help with setting up action groups for people who want to tackle issues that they identify as their priority. See <https://www.edx.org/course/ulab-leading-from-the-emerging-future>. Depending on when you access this it may be referring to "last year's" programme but will enable you to keep up to date. Separately the link <https://www.presencing.org/resource/video> (accessed 25.02.22) locates a number of videos by Scharmer and colleagues.
11. There are a great many methods and approaches for organisational transformation and individual development that at the same time both require and develop Mode 6 ways of Being. These include most Mode 5 methods if they are run relationally, thus opening a door into Mode 6. In addition there are a number of methods primarily intended for learning and working in Mode 6<sup>63</sup>. Some of these are intended for group and organisation development, but of course there will be individual learning as well. Others are either designed for individual learning or can be adapted for that, albeit usually within a group setting (for example action learning). Most involve, in one form or another, the fundamental process of listening and appreciating each other - what I refer to as *Integrating* in Figure 3<sup>64</sup> (below).
12. So we have, amongst many others: action learning; actor network mapping; ante-narrative; appreciative enquiry; Bohm dialogue; collaborative enquiry; complexity mapping; critical conversation; cross boundary working; customer and supplier mapping; design thinking; empathic listening; forum theatre; future search; generative dialogue; Goethean Conversation; large group/whole system development; network analysis; non-violent communication; open space; presencing theatre; problem wickedness monitor; Quaker method; relational action learning; relational practice; story telling; talking stick; theatre of the oppressed; Transformations cards; U-process; Visual Explorer; World Café.

I don't know why I particularly mentioned these - probably because I have actively encountered them sometime. There are many others that I have not included. *The Change Handbook*<sup>65</sup> gives summaries and, in many cases, detailed descriptions of 61 methods, most of which are not included

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<sup>62</sup> Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges, Scharmer, 2007; Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies. Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013; The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications, Scharmer, 2018; Advances in Presencing, Gunnlaugson and William Brendel (eds) - volumes 1&2, 2019, 2012

<sup>63</sup> I'm afraid that I have baulked at the thought of tracking down proper references to all of these - online searching should locate most of them; for any "missing ones" perhaps we can search amongst our friends

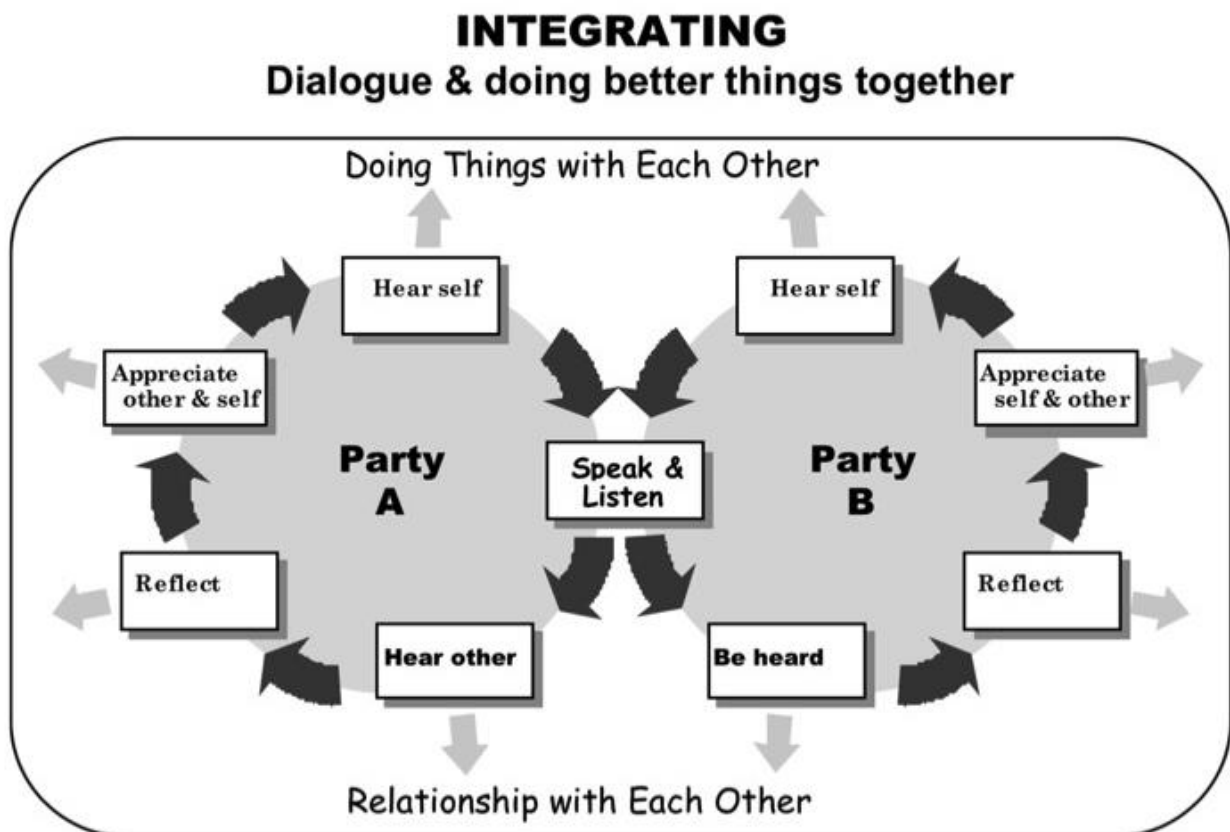
<sup>64</sup> Doing Things Well, Doing Things Better, Doing Better Things, Boydell, 2000: 101

<sup>65</sup> *The Change Handbook*, Holman, Devane and Cady, and Associates, 2007. Although now 15 years old it "feels" very current somehow.

above, for engaging whole systems. It also contains some underpinning theories and guidance on designing programmes of change as well as using the specific methods.

All these provide processes that involve recognising the legitimacy of each others' points of view, of their perspectives. On the one hand they call for us to have empathy. On the other hand they help us to develop that empathy. So this is a nice reinforcing circle - the more we use empathy the greater our ability to develop it.

**Figure 3: Dialogue or Integrating Cycle(s).**



13. Specifically in relation to empathy, there are also a number of things we can do to strengthen this.

*The Charter for Compassion* publishes a useful list on its website at <https://charterforcompassion.org/cei-blog/fourteen-ways-to-develop-empathy>. *The Daily Positive* has not quite as many but goes into more detail at <https://www.thedailypositive.com/how-to-develop-empathy/> (both accessed on 21.02.22)

14. When thinking about our purpose, it can be useful to identify our "given gifts", and keep a log of when we use them, when we don't, and how we might use them more.

15. A broader approach to considering our purpose is often referred to as *Biography Work*, although it should probably be *Autobiography*.

16. Reflect and appreciate the past. Identify key events and periods between events

17. Identify themes that emerge from the events and periods. Are any of those still with me?



18. Unfinished business with regards to themes
19. People in our consciousness - from the past, the present, the future?
20. What questions are coming to me from the future?
21. What opportunities are coming to me or can you create?
22. So what am I going to commit to, to do?

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### **Tom Boydell writes**

When I turned 80 I was advised to go part-time. So I'm now a part-time management development consultant, a part-time writer, a part-time actor, a part-time singer, a part-time poet, a part-time weaver and a part-time gardener. I'm glad I'm only a part-timer, otherwise I'd be worn out.

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# Dear Jen

## A letter to a friend

Christine Abbott



### Dear Jen

It was lovely to receive the letter and photos you sent with your Christmas greetings. How the grandchildren have grown over the past year! I especially love the picture of Jess and Timmy planting an oak tree in your garden, with the thought of future generations being able to climb and make tree houses in the branches.

Our garden looks rather sad with just the Chinese lanterns giving some colour. Like you, I can't wait for the spring and all the bulbs coming into flower and the trees in bud. The wildlife in the garden thrives, we have a hedgehog that has taken up residence, so I hope it survives the winter, the squirrel who uses the veg patch as a store for the hazel nuts taken from the tree, and the variety of birds who entertain us on the feeders.

You said in your letter you had ants in the garden. I remember when we were children, digging nests up in the garden and being amazed at the intricate patterns they had made in the soil and watching them carry the leaves we tore up into little pieces back to their nest. We were such a lively pair. "You two have ants in your pants", your grandma shouted down the garden at us! I also recall our parents pouring boiling water over an ant nest because they were worried we would get bitten and that ant killer spray might hurt other living things.

Those memories got me thinking about ants and finding out a bit more. Did you know that there is a species of ant in almost every corner of the world that we inhabit, from cities to deserts? And that's not the only surprising fact. I read that although we are individually, of course, much larger than an ant, the total biomass of ants is greater than ours – that's astonishing.

We don't really pay much attention to them, except when they interfere with our lives, and they don't cause the destruction to the planet that we do. That's because everything ants do, make, and discard is biodegradable.

They handle their own waste and that of other species returning it to the earth to enrich it. They grow and harvest their own food, at the same time as supporting the ecosystem for others to thrive. For example, leaf cutter ants take decomposing matter on the surface and drag it underground to feed fungi that in turn provide them with food to harvest.

All those tunnels we were intrigued by as children are a complex network of living spaces, cemeteries, food stores, waste dumps all completely biodegradable. The transportation processes that create and use the tunnels also allow for drainage and for minerals and nutrients to feed the soil. Feeding on other small insects they help to destroy pests that threaten other species. Indeed, wood ants are so important in controlling forest pests they are protected by law in some countries. Ants create their own medicines, disinfectants and even, as we found out as we itched after our childhood games, chemical weapons that are biodegradable improving the soil condition for the planet. They are not a problem for the planet even with their density and productiveness because simply everything they make, and use is returned to the earth and enriches it.

The biologist E.O Wilson commented that 'it is the little things that run the world'. It seems that ants run their world - but they **do not overrun** it and in fact their existence makes it a better place for others ...

When we were children we observed ants, learned about them, fascinated by these little creatures on our doorstep, the same creatures that our parents killed as the nuisance who spoiled the family picnic, caused us to itch a bit and created ant hills in the carefully mown lawn.

Perhaps the next generation, will see ants as creatures to learn from rather than about. So, as we approach 2022 let's raise a glass to ants; that we learn from them how to run organisations and communities that don't overrun our planet.

I hope you and the family have a great 2022 ☺

In friendship

Christine

Hollidobler B, Wilson EO (1995). Journey to the Ants; A scientific story of exploration. Harvard University Press

### About Christine

**Christine** is an experienced action learning facilitator and OD practitioner with a background in the NHS and Social Care. She teaches part time with the Open University Business School, designs, facilitating and delivering programmes and courses for the [Centre for Action Learning](#) with a variety of private and public sector organisations across the UK and around the World. She enjoys research and writing and is on the Editorial board for the Journal Action Learning Research and Practice.

She loves ceramics, both collecting and making (latest learning project) and anything else jazz and art.

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# Being Ecological

**Mike Pedler**

How does it feel to be a mountain or a sheep?  
What is it to live as a coltsfoot or a cedar?  
Does this sound daft? And is it worse than  
Compulsive Obsessive Ecological Disorder  
Whose symptoms can easily be seen  
In the torrential rain of climate facts  
Upon the people?

Better try experiential, where everything's connected  
In a different universe from the reality of facts.  
The point is to live the data not to dump it.  
If you live the data, you're being ecological  
Maybe you didn't get it before, but now you know  
There's no away, no magic place where your  
Nuclear waste and other shit just disappears.

It gets worse, because when away is revealed  
As sham, then here also dissolves,  
The solid ground you thought you had, illusory.  
Our anthropocentric facts become  
Factoids, false truths in plain view.  
Like Nietzsche said, that world is dead.  
Nothing is real any more.

That's chilling. Can we get through?  
Our trauma, my terror, your paranoia?  
Can we achieve the transformation  
And find the necessary metanoia?  
Can we join with all the not-humans  
Whose beings make up this earth  
And begin with them to live differently?

## Acknowledgement

This poem owes a great debt to the ideas in Timothy Morton's 2018 book, *Being Ecological*, Pelican Books No. 17, Penguin Random House, UK.



### About Mike

**Mike Pedler** lives at Hathersage in the Peak District National Park and is a member of Hope Valley Climate Action. He was born in Sheffield and has been lucky enough to live for much of his life within 3 miles of Stanage Edge.

He has been a manager, an adult educator, a teacher in Higher Education and a consultant on managerial and organisational learning. Since meeting Reg Revans in 1976, who announced to a group of management teachers that they were doing it all wrong, he works with the action learning idea and has published a number of books and papers.

He is Emeritus Professor at Henley Business School, University of Reading, Honorary Research Fellow at the Department of Management Learning and Leadership at Lancaster University and a Visiting Research Fellow at Liverpool Business School. He is founding editor of the Journal: *Action Learning: Research and Practice*.

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# *Beyond the fifth element: post-human poetry*

Dr Beverley Morris



## Empathy or Die

(Graffiti on a building in Cambridge).

We are the bringers of the Anthropocene, the chapter in the dystopian story where the human species has changed the Earth in an irreversible way, and our own species is fragmenting to satisfy the individual ego that used to be called free will. The new religion of self is, of course, a luxury. If you are a woman in Afghanistan hiding your daughter's schoolbooks from the Taliban, or a homeless man evicted from the meagre warmth of a shop doorway in London, or a farmer in North Korea producing meat for the President's family but not your own, you have little time for anything but survival. This is the core of our ego as humans: we fight to survive and we fight to pass on our genes. We do that at the expense of others. Our leadership challenge, our challenge as humans, is to find a way to become more than the sum of our competing egos.

Every article, poem, podcast, film, play, book, comic, game, photograph we produce to raise awareness of the environmental destruction we are scattering in our wake, is also rooted in ego. I am a product of the Anthropocene Era, and I have been part of the generation that has created it and encouraged the cult of self to emerge. Now I choose to be an Anthropocene Warrior, fighting back in the most middle-class, genteel way that I can: I write poetry and I talk about the needs of others. I have no doubt that my own ego has contributed to the devastation of our world, and I am reimagining myself, my future and my impact on the world so that the noise of my ego is dulled by the needs of our planet. The irony is, of course, that the very act of doing this is an act of ego; to think that I am important enough to speak and be heard. The challenge is to take that egotistical act and find a place where it contributes to a collective good: empathy or die.

This article takes the poems I have written about the environment over many years and recycles them, repurposes them, gives them additional life. It also takes the traditional physical elements of water, fire, air

and earth that are essential to any eco-sensitive work, and adds the Anthropocene elements that will bring about change: reason and beyond. Humans need to have a rationale for change when change demands that they are uncomfortable in the short-term. And change that takes us further than our lived experience will take us beyond the limits of human reality, potentially to a post-human world.

## Water



[Iceberg on water](#). Photo by [Fabrizio Conti](#) on [Unsplash](#)

We live on the blue planet, the one with water, the element that brings life. Without water, we cannot live, and water supplies are already contested around the world. It is such a vital element that I have included two poems here. The first is about the Salton Sea in the US. It is a sea created accidentally by construction work and leading to huge impacts on the surrounding land. From holiday resort to farming pollution, it has decimated the local avian population and other wildlife. The element that created life in a lifeless galaxy, that makes our planet so beautiful when viewed from space, is the element that could tear us apart in a rapidly warming climate.

### Accidental Sea

I shiver as you step inside me  
your toes ripping through my uncertain surface  
shallow from the shimmer to the shore.  
It's your fault, not mine.



We have history,  
you and me.

The Whitewater feeds me,  
the New and the Alamo fill me up and  
I drink them in as you swim along my limits  
feeling for monsters.

You are longing,  
I am sea

and an accident waiting to happen. Again.  
My moods moulded by the rocking of time  
as rotting fish flank your salty thighs and I caress you  
like every carcass that passes through me.

(First published in *Not a Drop: oceans of poetry*, Beautiful Dragons Collaborations 2016)

The second poem was written when I worked with the scientists at the British Antarctic Survey. Their experiences and world view changed the way I thought about the most inhospitable continent on Earth.

### Inside Antarctica

Beneath me,  
oceans packed and stored onto the Brunt Ice Shelf let me walk on water.  
Around me,  
the crevasse, creaking and pregnant with history, hosts an irregular foetal heartbeat.  
Above me,  
the light of another unending day makes me yearn for the green shoots  
of an English spring.

I draw samples from the core of her pristine whiteness,  
her shocking expanse impossible to measure with my eyes alone  
as she shifts with the weight of her burden. I hold my breath.

She creaks.  
She stirs.  
She is ready to calve.

Her labour is a symphony of sonorous groans, polystyrene snaps  
and crackling ripples.  
The sounds of water frozen for so long it does not know how to flow again  
without tearing itself apart and taking us with it.

(First published in *Well, Dam!* Beautiful Dragons Collaborations 2019)

## Fire

While COVID-19 was spreading, so were the fires in Australia and Europe. 2020 gave us the warmest year on record in many parts of the world and wildfires became a terrifying reality for large numbers of people.

But fire is part of purging ground and creating new growth. Fire, at the most primitive level, was what kept early humans warm and gave them a way to cook food. For good reason, we are frightened of fire because it will kill us without mercy. Yet we fail to learn the lessons that fire has brought. In the UK, we are taught about the Great Fire of London and how it spread because of the way houses were built and people were crammed together. In recent times, we've had the catastrophic images of fire spewing out of the Twin Towers World Trade Centre and the horrific scenes as Grenfell Tower was engulfed in flames.

Fire tells us something is wrong in the way we are living our lives as humans.



[Burning wood](#). Photo by [Benjamin Lizardo](#) on [Unsplash](#)

We should heed the signs that fire offers us. This haiku was written during the early days of lockdown in England. The blossom arrived in a glorious flurry, far too early, and the sun burned my cheeks. Today, La Palma is still alight with the lava and fire of a volcano that does not want to sleep. The Earth has an ego too, and our sense of self will never be able to conquer her.

### Apple blossom warmed too early

not yet ready for  
the fire of summer, pink-white  
tipped and blushing red

(First published in the Haiku a Day Group on Facebook, 2020)

## Air



[White clouds](#). Photo by [CHATTERSNAP](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Migration is a natural force, essential to the survival and evolution of many species. Elephants move in deliberate tracks, forming trunk-to-tail chains to keep the young and weak together until they reach food sources or traditional graveyards. Birds rise up in undulating clouds, the newest fledglings find their wings at the centre of the flock that will surround them as they head south, instinct their unwritten map. Early humans drifted across land masses looking for new territory, dominating everything as they went, including other humans. Our human need to take whatever we find, including the lives of others in our own species, shows us a complex interaction between migration, exploitation and extinction. The ego of one tribe of humans demands the subjugation of nature to produce food to feed its growing membership. Simultaneously, that ego sees the opportunity to farm the land, the animals and the people. And it will do this to the point of oblivion.

In the UK, the migration that we see every year is in the skies above us: birds flying south and people jetting off on holiday. Our mechanical flight pollutes the air that we need to breathe and destroys the habitat for the birds. Living near an airport, I've seen the measures taken to cull songbirds and crows so that they don't nest in equipment or fly into engines. Our migration is more important than that of any bird. Our need to breathe different air is our right as we assert our sense of self.

There is a further dimension to this assertion. The complicated interaction between our exploitation of others, in the form of migrant labour and our mistrust of anyone who is not like us, has been intensified during the pandemic. We closed our borders, kept out migrants and avoided breathing the air of others for fear that they would infect us. The skies above us suddenly cleared of planes and vapour trails and the air was cleaner, crisper, more hopeful. It seemed that all the protestations from airlines that the economy would collapse without them were a little overblown. But were we right to keep out migrants, to avoid those people we don't know, to keep ourselves safe from the invisible enemy? What about the migrants already here, the ones keeping us alive in hospitals and care homes? How could we avoid them? Fear is complex indeed.

The interwoven nature of the human and natural world has been the subject of many environmental battles. The RSPB has a 'red list' of birds that are endangered in the UK and together with the Natural History Museum PREDICTS report on biodiversity (Purvis 2020), it is clear that the UK is failing to protect our native wildlife. The reasons are many and the excuses even more plentiful.

I wrote this poem about a warbler, identified by Paolo Savi (a 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian geologist and ornithologist), which migrates to the UK but is now a rare visitor. Last year, only three pairs were sighted. The poem is a reflection on the loss of home and the feelings of isolation in a world that doesn't want you.

### Unwelcoming Shores

*(Paolo Savi's Warbler)*

On the edge of a damp dusk  
she thrums,  
the necessary traffic of the night  
comes and goes, in chaotic clouds, as she  
bides her precious time.

There,  
on her reedy skyscraper,  
head inclined,  
the little passerine holds her Old World heritage  
close to her chest,  
soft brown, unseen, but heard,  
always heard

she throws open her throat and calls, long and deep and forever,  
'Paolo, Paolo, Paolo, oh... Paolo, Paolo, Paolo'  
blown in alone on a migrants' wind,  
framed by rising mist,  
she yearns.

(First published in Watch the Birdie, Beautiful Dragons Collaborations 2019)

## Earth



[White sand during daytime](#). Photo by [Yang Shuo](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The name of our planet and the soil under our feet: earth. We become it when we die and are buried and this is our greatest contribution to the world that has sustained us. Even if we choose cremation, our energy is finally re-integrated with the world. The earth grounds us and gives us our sense of stability. Yet we poison it and take whatever it offers with little given in return. Ultimately, our ego is absorbed by our environment and we are no longer a drain on the world when we die.

The only thing that remains is the emotional pain for those left behind. My best friend, Jackie, was a great environmentalist and the woman who taught me that kindness is limitless. She trod gently on the Earth and her sense of self was in the service of others. She died during the pandemic and I wrote this as I walked in the cold of winter after her funeral.

### Three weeks after your death

silver birch shadows  
the ghosts of our Sunday walks  
resolve into grief

### Reason

Children ask tough questions. Grandchildren ask tougher ones. Step grandchildren take it to another level. I have four step grandchildren and they all view me through cynical, knowing eyes.



[Free Protest](#). Photo by [Zoe VandeWater](#) on [Unsplash](#)

They are the generation who will live with the chaos that our egos have wreaked on the world around them. Their world will be full of new dodos, empty of easy excess, uncertain like a thousand pandemics in a day. They are waking up to too many choices about who they are or who they can be, too many decisions about who should live and who should not, too many frightening futures. So, when the oldest one asked me why I was wearing a pink, pussy cat hat and marching with thousands of women through London in 2017, I wrote this.

### Why do I protest?

because this is  
wrong  
immoral  
stupid  
terrifying  
unethical  
relentless  
exhausting  
increasing  
spreading  
insidious  
viral  
corrosive

evil  
time to stop

## Beyond

Our egos are within us, within our human frailty, within our human limits. Creating a new era, beyond the Anthropocene, means we must transcend our focus on self and find a focus on others.

Shrill arguments on social media, in the tabloid press, in governing bodies around the world are deafening us so that we are no longer able to listen to each other because we are too busy listening to ourselves and the echoes we set up. Fragmentation, dissent and polarisation feed our egos and distract us from a common purpose as a species, constraining our evolution and speeding up the environmental catastrophe that will destroy our home.

Simultaneously, we are leaping ahead in scientific, medical and philosophical thinking, with augmented humans and centenarians becoming increasingly commonplace. We are on the cusp of realising the full potential of the Anthropocene Epoch to define humans and the planet. In itself, this may mean nothing more than adjusting to a world that is hostile to us because of the pain we've inflicted on it. Alternatively, it may be the catalyst for the next phase of our evolution: post-human.

The post-human state may mean that we create augmented arguments, built on the best of human creativity and compassion and improved by the deductive abilities of machines. This form of post-human life may protect us from the vagaries of our flesh-and-bone existence. This post-human world may need to be devoid of ego to be able to flourish, but it cannot be stripped of the one thing we do well as humans: love.

### the heat of attraction

I am a collaborator  
whether you like it or not.  
Whether it sits easily with your  
headlined view of the world and the rot  
in a Westminster window frame:  
wrapped around imperfect glass it filters light  
onto the life that is the same  
as the one to your left, to your right.

I am a collaborator  
and I will carry you along with me.  
No hiding behind Queen and country, with your  
red-topped opinions denying my reality  
and your lazily repeated cognitive dissonance  
standing front and centre of every raucous claim. A part  
of my disquiet and anger and stance  
is to say we matter, we all matter. To start

arguments that ring division bells not  
echo chambers. To hear voices so different  
in the cold light of day and the hot  
heat of the pub, my grubby car, your spartan front  
room. You listen with amused contempt  
to my naïve views. But, like blowflies  
to fresh meat, you're drawn to my clumsy attempt  
to disarm your blunt-bladed lies.

I am a collaborator:  
I hold out my hand to you.

(First published in *Rugged Rocks, Running Rascals: poems for complicated times*, Beautiful Dragons Collaborations 2019)

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## About the author

Bev's a polymath, working across education, pharmaceutical and security industries and writing across form and genre. She was a college Vice Principal and now runs her own consultancy and coaching business, releasing the creativity of extraordinary people through curiosity, kindness and compassion. Bev has been published in literary anthologies (*Smell of the Day* and *Coast to Coast*) and women's magazines (*Australian Family Circle*, *Woman's Own*, *Bella*). In 2019, her first poetry collection was published in *Rugged Rocks, Running Rascals*, in 2020 she was a finalist in the *Write Here Write Now* playwriting competition and a runner up in the *Retreat West* Flash Fiction competition, and in 2021 she was a finalist in the *WOW* Flash Fiction competition. Her academic pieces have been accepted by BERA, SCUTREA and CASAE and her doctoral research into models of coaching and mentoring informs her leadership practice. Currently, she's writing a feminist dystopia, developing a podcast on friendship and looking for a way to be a better human.

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# From Ego to Eco: where are we, where are we trying to go?

## Part 3. Relationships with and within nature

### Tom Boydell



In my opening instalment<sup>66</sup> I gave my picture of moving towards eco- from ego-consciousness, away from the latter's three "separations"<sup>67</sup>, namely the

1. separation of humans from nature, creating eco-apartheid.
2. separation of humans from each other
3. separation of humans from ourselves - that is, from one's own sense of Self

towards thinking, feeling and willing embedded in a sense of oneness. In this episode I will focus on the first of those separations - relationships of humans with and within nature.

### Anthropocentrism

In the Euro-Western world<sup>68</sup> the idea that humans are at the top of a hierarchical ladder of earthly existence goes back to Aristotle and Plato. Later, Christian theologians put humans roughly in the middle of what they termed *The Great Chain of Being*, starting with God at the top, down through various forms of Angels, then humans, followed by animals, plants and rocks.

Thus for many centuries in the West, anthropocentrism

"a [belief](#) in [humans](#) and [their existence](#) as the most important and central fact in the universe"<sup>69</sup>

has been a dominant philosophy, and has grown in strength since what is often known as "The Enlightenment", the "Age of Reason"<sup>70</sup>, which was seen to "prove" the view that humans are far superior to other earthly beings and entities, whilst abolishing the higher supersensible reaches of the *Great Chain*.

The resulting "scientific" knowledge and artistic expression have been used to demonstrate that humans are

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<sup>66</sup> From Ego to Eco: Where Are We, Where Are We Trying to Go?: I Overview: Ego- and Eco-Consciousness, this Journal

<sup>67</sup> Oneness vs the 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom, Shiva and Shiva, 2019: 22

<sup>68</sup> Into which I chose to be born and where I have spent much of my life. I'm therefore aware that I am writing this primarily from a Euro-Western perspective and that there are alternatives about which I know rather little. I am a white male and aware that I therefore have a significant tendency to see things primarily from a white male point of view - a tendency that is so "natural", so "normal" to me, that at times I find it hard to do otherwise - which indeed some would say is impossible, although I can attempt to empathise with other points of view, to gain a picture of the world as they experience it.

<sup>69</sup> Cambridge Online Dictionary - "anthropocentrism"

<sup>70</sup> *The Enlightenment: a Very Short Introduction*, Robertson, J, 2015; *The Enlightenment: The Pursuit of Happiness 1680 - 1790*, Robertson, R, 2020.

far superior to other beings and entities such as animals, plants, and rocks.

According to this view, still prevalent although now becoming increasingly challenged, as the most important living beings on the earth we humans are justified in exploiting all the others to our own physical, economic, social, cultural and spiritual advantage: the first of Shiva and Shiva's three "separations".

Thus the ego-conscious view is that humans are separate from, and more important than, nature and indeed the very planet on which we are currently living, as we see when multi-billionaires are now seeking other worlds - and perhaps other populations of diverse life forms - to exploit, dominate and ruin in the names of adventurous thrills, fame, power and riches. We can thus add "*my/our planet*" or even "*my/our solar system*", "*my/our universe*", to our egotistic catechism.

## **Speciesism, The Great Derangement, Ecocide and The Sixth Extinction**

In 1970 Richard Ryder<sup>71</sup> coined the term "speciesism", akin to "racism" and "sexism". This referred to the view - prevailing then, and still rather dominant today, at least amongst Euro-Westerners - that one species, namely the human, deserves better rights, as it is inherently superior to others, and is the only form of being that has consciousness - a view that continues to have many adherents such as Machan, who, in his 2004 book unequivocally titled *Putting Humans First: Why We Are Nature's Favorite* - confidently asserts that indeed

"we are Nature's favorite ... humans are more important, even better, than other animals, and we deserve the benefits that exploiting animals can provide."<sup>72</sup>

a statement that supports Cambridge Online Dictionary's appreciation that anthropocentrism

"comes close to asserting that humans can do whatever they want to nature and the planet, ruining the world for us and for every other form of life."<sup>73</sup>

It seems that one of the things that humans want to do to nature is to forget about it.

In 2007 The Oxford Junior Dictionary had a number of words associated with nature and the countryside removed. Thus adder, ash, beech, bluebell, buttercup, catkin, conker, cowslip, cygnet, dandelion, fern, hazel, heather, heron, ivy, kingfisher, lark, mistletoe, nectar, newt, otter, pasture and willow were replaced in the new edition included by attachment, blog, broadband, block-graph, bullet-point, celebrity, chatroom, committee, cut-and-paste, MP3 player and voice-mail.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Speciesism*, Ryder, 1970

<sup>72</sup> *Putting Humans First: Why We Are Nature's Favorite*, Machan, 2004

<sup>73</sup> Cambridge Online Dictionary - "anthropocentrism"

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/27/robert-macfarlane-word-hoard-rewilding-landscape> accessed 22. 2.22

Is it indeed true that

"an anthropogenic mass extinction is under way that will affect all life on the planet and humans will struggle to survive the phenomenon"<sup>75</sup>.

If so, then if we don't take radical steps to change the way we relate to the world we live in - respect and love it - as a race we are in the grips of "the great derangement"<sup>76</sup>, committing ecocide<sup>77</sup>, heading for the "sixth extinction"<sup>78</sup>, namely that of many species including humans - ourselves.

Professionals known as Planetary Boundary Scientists have started to identify and determine a number of highly interdependent environmental limits beyond which humanity cannot operate safely<sup>79</sup>. We are now beginning to exceed some of these limits, cross these boundaries, which include

- climate change and resultant phenomena such as heat waves, drought, storms, loss of ice fields, crop failure; animal and plant extinctions<sup>80</sup>
- depletion of the ozone layer
- ocean acidification
- deforestation
- drying up of lakes and rivers and, conversely, flooding
- soil erosion and degradation.
- And of course, we can add to this "secondary" effects such as fires, famine, large-scale migration, and general mayhem

It's clear then we have been - and still are - treating the natural environment not as being made up of co-existing life, but, rather, as consisting of "resources," the only value of which is in their ability to be extracted and used in the service of human lives.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The Sixth Mass Extinction and Chemicals in the Environment, Mason, 2015

<sup>76</sup> The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable, Ghosh, 2017

<sup>77</sup> Ecocide: Kill The Corporation Before It Kills Us, Whyte, 2020; Oneness vs the 1%, Shiva and Shiva, 2019

<sup>78</sup> The Sixth Extinction, Kolbert, 2015; An Antenarrative Amendment to the Learning Organization: Theories to Avert the Sixth Extinction . Boje and Rosile, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet. Steffen et al, 2015. This is an update of an earlier paper of which Steffen was second author, namely A Safe Operating Space for Humanity Rockström et al , 2009.

<sup>80</sup> I have relabelled some of these terms, which in the original use somewhat technical language. For example, what I give here as "animal and plant extinctions" is referred to as "changes in biosphere integrity".

<sup>81</sup> An Antenarrative Amendment to the Learning Organization: Theories to Avert the Sixth Extinction, Boje and Rosile 2019: 433

Thus we have moved on from agri-*culture* to

"the self-centred orientation of modern agribusiness, [that] produces profits and increases productivity at the expense of the *environment, society and human health*, ... [through] increasing dependency on energy, fertilizer inputs and transportation; fewer jobs in the countryside; increasing levels of environmental pollution; ever-greater distrust of food by consumers, and insecurity of farmers.<sup>82</sup>

Hence for example Monsanto's business strategy of copyrighting and then creating a monopoly for genetically modified seeds that produce infertile plants, thereby forcing farmers to purchase new seeds every year, rather than save some from their own crops. The charging of high prices for these monopolised seeds is leading to increasing numbers of Indian farmers committing suicide.<sup>83</sup> Shiva and Shiva give a number of other **xxx** questionable business practices. These include - alleged but denied - cancerous effects of the ubiquitous weed killer *Roundup*, and genetically modified cotton in parts of India where again they held a 99% monopoly of cotton seed sales that eventually failed due to a worm that was resistant to Monsanto's genes. They also recount how Monsanto paid a farm in Australia to contaminate their neighbour's organic rapeseed with Monsanto's so that his crop became unsalable and, to add insult to injury, Monsanto then sued the victim for breaching their patent and growing from their seeds without obtaining a licence for them!<sup>84</sup>

### **Moral and Ethical Issues With Regard to Nature**

As well as practical issues around wanting to avoid an upcoming extinction, there is also a growing recognition of the ethical and moral grounds for looking after the wellbeing of nonhuman entities. There is a long history of questions and concerns about the treatment of animals. Although they differ in a number of aspects around the relationships between humans and animals, major religions are in accord in teaching that animals should be treated kindly and with respect. In Europe the first legislation against animal cruelty is thought to have been in Ireland in 1635<sup>85</sup>. The anti-cruelty movement grew in the 19th Century, supported by a number of writers including Friedrich Nietzsche, Charles Darwin and Isabella Beeton of *Household Management* fame.

After the Second World War there was a large growth in the use of animals in laboratory experiments for medical, military and cosmetic purposes. This led to organised protests against not only these but also factory farming, blood sports and hunting. Such campaigns have continued to increase, along with significant growth in both vegetarianism and veganism.

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<sup>82</sup> *Community Supported Agriculture*, Zsolnai and Podmaniczky, 2010: 140. Italics in the original

<sup>83</sup> *Big Rise in Farmer Suicides in Four States in 2016*, Mukherjee, 2016.

<sup>84</sup> *Oneness vs the 1%*, Shiva and Shiva, 2019: 60.

<sup>85</sup> *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes Towards Speciesism*, Ryder, 2000

Rudolf Steiner, in as early as 1909,<sup>86</sup> and Ernst Schumacher some 50 years later,<sup>87</sup> talked of the growing levels of consciousness as we move through the three "kingdoms" of humans, animals and plants, and Itzhak Bentov<sup>88</sup> added rocks or minerals too, seeing them also as having limited degrees and forms of consciousness - the first time I had come across this notion.

### Consciousness of Plants and Other Entities: Pansychism

There is now increasing evidence that, as well as humans and animals, plants do indeed have their own forms of sensing and then responding to what they sense, as well as ways of communicating with each other. Matthew Hall<sup>89</sup> goes into considerable detail, discussing the moral background of plants in western philosophy and contrasting this with other traditions, including eastern and indigenous cultures. He describes how plants

- are communicative, relational beings
- influence and are influenced by their environment; they can "see" their neighbours through responding to Far-Red light reflected by green tissues<sup>90</sup>
- have their own purposes, intricately connected with finding food and producing offspring
- exhibit intelligent, purposeful movement
- possess brain-like entities - meristems - in the root tip
- learn by trial and error<sup>91</sup>

How might this affect the way we treat plants? And what about rocks and minerals?

Although "spoken about in dismissive tones by many orthodox philosophers"<sup>92</sup>, pansychism, the belief that pretty much everything - animals, plants, rocks, microbes, possibly inanimate objects - has some form of mind, derived from basic levels of consciousness possessed by atomic and subatomic particles, is a growing field of serious study, in both the disciplines of philosophy and neurobiology.

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<sup>86</sup> An Outline of Esoteric Science , Steiner, 1909, [2017]

<sup>87</sup> A Guide for the Perplexed, Schumaker, 1977

<sup>88</sup> Stalking the Wild Pendulum, Bentov, 1977

<sup>89</sup> Plants as Persons: a Philosophical Botany, Hall, 2011. Hall describes in some detail how much of the early research in this area was carried out by Charles Darwin and his son. For a literally more down to earth description of the same phenomena see What a Plant Knows: a Field Guide to the Senses in Your Garden and Beyond, Chamovitz, 2017, which contains chapters entitled What a Plant Sees, Smells, Hears, Remembers, How a Plant Knows Where It Is

<sup>90</sup> Is this "seeing"? Is it different in principle from the human "seeing" process of perceiving light in the red to violet spectrum?. And we consider that bats can "see" and respond accordingly through their use of reflected high frequency sound

<sup>91</sup> To see adaptive learning in action watch your runner bean tendrils when you move the support, to which they are advancing, before they have managed to reach it. And a recent David Attenborough programme on the BBC showed how the Venus Fly Trap plant has learned to wait until a fly has disturbed its trigger response five times, in order to avoid attempting to catch and devour an errant piece of twig or a rain drop

<sup>92</sup>Panpsychism in the West, Skrbina, 2017:2.

It

"is not a formal theory of mind, [but] rather, it is a conjecture about how widespread the phenomenon of mind is in the universe"<sup>93</sup>

and thus not just on planet earth. If a "conjecture", then it is one that has been around for a long time, being

"consistent with spiritual and philosophical traditions that span cultures and centuries – from Plato's world soul to the claim that everything has a Buddha nature. The idea that all things have at least rudimentary consciousness is also a staple of Romanticism – see Wordsworth's nature worship – and, through the work of palaeontologist and philosopher Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, has even [*sic*] found a home in Christian theology ... . People throughout history have had momentary experiences of the *cosmic consciousness* – glimpses of reality as an ordered, living whole – that complements panpsychist claims. Such experiences aren't proof, but they are, perhaps, evidence, and surely have a role to play in the case for panpsychism"<sup>94</sup>.

In my own case this is consistent with the experience that I recounted in Part I of this series of papers in pages, when I experienced

"a feeling of being merged with the whole world and becoming one with it, yet without losing one's individuality"<sup>95</sup>

and just knew, with absolute certainty, that I was connected with everybody and everything, as were everybody and everything else - knowledge that has more or less remained with me ever since.

A readable overview of pansychism is provided by Hurt <sup>96</sup> in a piece that is more open to the idea than the impression given by its title. Skrbina<sup>97</sup> gives a more rigorous and detailed history and explores a number of related issues and challenges. He includes a list of what he refers to as "active lines of enquiry" into pansychism, along with many names of such enquirers, included amongst whom are a number that are probably familiar to readers of this paper - for example John Dewey, Gregory Bateson, David Bohm, Arthur Koestler, Ken Wilber.

Of course you don't necessarily have to have a panpsychic mind set to believe that it's important to treat plants, let alone animals, with care, with dignity, with love. For many years I have talked to plants in my garden, and I avoid the common instruction to sow seeds close together and then "thin out" the apparently weakest, which feels to me like plantslaughter (a lesser charge perhaps than manslaughter?) or even murder.

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<sup>93</sup> *Panpsychism*, Skrbina, no date

<sup>94</sup> *Private Lives of Rocks*, David, 2016

<sup>95</sup> *Rudolf Steiner and the Masters of Esoteric Christianity*, English translation, Prokofieff, 2018:86, referring to *Esoteric Science* by Rudolf Steiner 1909/[2017]

<sup>96</sup> *Panpsychism: The Trippy Theory That Everything From Bananas to Bicycles Are Conscious*, Hurt, 2021.

<sup>97</sup> *Panpsychism*, Skrbina, no date

For me relating to my garden in this way is consistent with Skrbina's perhaps over-confident assertion that "the viability of panpsychism is no longer really in question. At issue is the specific form it might take, and what its implications are"

and that

"Panpsychism suggests a radically different worldview, one that is fundamentally at odds with the dominant mechanistic conception of the universe. Arguably, it is precisely this mechanistic view - which sees the universe and everything in it as a kind of giant machine - that lies at the root of many of our philosophical, sociological, and environmental problems ...

"... By undermining the mechanistic worldview, [panpsychism] promises to resolve not only long-standing philosophical problems but persistent social and ecological problems as well. Many great thinkers ... have recognized the potential for the panpsychist view to fundamentally alter, for the better, our outlook on the world. An animated worldview is not only philosophically rigorous, but it can have far-reaching and unanticipated effects".

So if entities other than humans possess such varying degrees of consciousness - albeit in rather different forms from that of ours<sup>98</sup> - what does this mean about ways in which we might consider ourselves morally obliged to treat them, as well as serving our self-interest through avoiding our extinction?

As well as issues of kindness and avoiding cruelty, what should be the legal position of animals, plants, rocks - a question posed in the rather brilliantly titled *Should Trees Have Standing?*<sup>99</sup> by Professor of Law Christopher Stone. This explores legal issues around the rights not only of trees but of other non-human entities such as animals, rivers, the environment in general. Whilst at first this idea may have seemed somewhat strange, he pointed out that a number of other non-humans, such as business organisations and ships, already possessed such rights. Now, some fifty years later, these are being extended to rivers<sup>100</sup> in a number of countries. For example, New Zealand's Whanganui river was granted legal rights after a campaign, lasting nearly 150 years, by the local Maori people, who see the river as "an indivisible and living whole" and who treat it as their ancestor, seeing themselves as its legal guardian.

Grant Wilson<sup>101</sup> describes how "Earth lawyers" in over 25 countries are working on giving

"rights of nature protections, [whilst] artists, philosophers, writers, and filmmakers are showing the world that humans are part of nature, not separate from it ....

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<sup>98</sup> The Philosophy of Plant Neurobiology: a Manifesto, Calvo, 2016

<sup>99</sup> Should Trees Have Standing? Stone, 2010

<sup>100</sup> Should Rivers Have Same Legal Rights As Humans? A Growing Number Of Voices Say Yes. Westerman, 2019

<sup>101</sup> Humans Have Rights and So Should Nature, Wilson, 2021

"Rights of nature corrects shortcomings of modern environmental laws. Environmental laws operate as a tourniquet, creating rules to prevent nature's loss but doing little to address root causes - such as an economy that incentivizes the maximum exploitation of nature for profit. By contrast, rights of nature establishes a legal duty for humans to protect and restore ecosystems to health because that is their right".

Note the "restore"; we now have regeneration, not just alleged "sustainability", let alone the dangerous illusion of "sustainable growth".<sup>102</sup>

## Posthumanism

This seems to lead into the emerging perspective known as "posthumanism", although it is a term with a number of contradictory descriptions, interpretations and definitions. Perhaps the simplest is that used by Boje and Rosile<sup>103</sup>, namely "non-human centric" - that is, not putting humans at the centre of everything. However, for many of its proponents it has come to mean challenging the current "normality" of only certain privileged humans being at the centre of everything.

It's fair to say that many Humanists would deny that Humanism does put humans at the centre or "above" everything - see Paul Harrison's contribution to this volume. When I was an undergraduate the "Humanist Society's" main message was atheistic - there is no God and we don't need to believe in one in order to live moral lives.

There seems to be considerable ambiguity around terminology in this area. For some "posthumanism" involves replacing parts of human bodies with technological gadgets and machines and thus giving "us"<sup>104</sup> literally superhuman strengths, whilst for others this is known as transhumanism. Complicating the matter somewhat, these terms are sometimes transposed, with transhumanism referring to no longer seeing humans at the centre of everything, and posthumanism involving technology.

And then again, there is "feminist posthumanism", which focuses on the way "we" create and value an imbalance of power, influence, justice and fairness not only with regard to humans and nonhumans but also to a multiplicity of relations between "superior-humans and lesser-humans"<sup>105</sup>.

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<sup>102</sup> As recounted in my piece in the Winter issue of *eOandP* (Boydell, 2020) AMED Executive member Colin Hastings was a pioneering advocate of disabusing ourselves of the notion that "growth" could at the same time be "sustainable". In the 1970s he promoted various initiatives to that end. For example, together with Judi Marshall and Cary Cooper he organised the 1974 ATM/AMED Annual Conference with the theme of Social Responsibility, and ran many workshops on this theme.

<sup>103</sup> *An Antenarrative Amendment to the Learning Organization: Theories to Avert the Sixth Extinction*, Boje and Rosile 2019: 440

<sup>104</sup> in these cases are "we" still "we", or have "we" become "its"?

<sup>105</sup> For example see *Posthuman Feminist Theory*, Braidotti, 2016; *Sustainability, Feminist Posthumanism and the Unusual Capacities of (Post)humans*, Fox and Aldred, 2020; *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, Adams and Gruen (eds), 2022



## Philosophy, Science and Culture of Indigenous Peoples

To repeat, far from treating the natural environment with respect, recognising it as being made up of co-existing life, we have been seeing it as consisting of "resources," the only value of which is in their ability to be extracted and used in the service of human lives.<sup>106</sup> This is very different from the science, philosophy and culture of many indigenous peoples, who maintain so-called "primitive" connections with earth and nature, and do not think of the natural world - animals, plants, rocks, rivers, mountains and other geographical and geological features - as separate from human life but rather as living beings. To them the Earth is "Mother," to be respected as a source of both nourishment and also of wisdom<sup>107</sup>, and we owe her our care and respect. From this perspective we human observers are in no way separate from the world and its creatures and forces, which are all related and therefore should all care for one another.

Introducing what is here shown as Table 2<sup>108</sup> Rosile and Claw note that

"there are by some estimates over 500 such tribal cultures among Native American Indians alone and there may be more differences than similarities among these various tribes, yet there are some common elements ... drawn from a variety of tribal cultures, and are common to most American Indian tribes".

I have added to the original table, first by including the terms "ego-" and "eco-centric", and then including extracts from further elaborations on the aspects from later in their chapter. It will also be seen - well I hope it will - that the Tribal Wisdom aspects map on to Modes 5 and 6 in Part II of this series, whilst Euro-Western matches Modes 1 to 5.

With regards to their table, they comment that

"the eight aspects of traditional tribal values and practices ... are numbered only for organizational purposes for non-indigenous minds. The eight aspects could be best thought of as a hologram, where each part contains the whole. In fact, for some indigenous experts, it was difficult to separate one aspect from another, since all are so closely interrelated around the concept of 'relationship'."

Thus the presentation of Table 2 in this way is itself an example of Euro-Western culture. I only realised this when I read the preceding passage. It's another example of the fish saying "Water? What water?"

Rosile and Claw make no reference to what might be termed the "width" of tribal wisdom - that is, how far beyond one's own tribe does it spread? Does the sense of collectivism extend beyond my tribe to yours and to all tribes, or is it restricted to mine - an example of the ego-centric view of "us" compared with "you"? What was - and indeed what is now - the nature of inter-tribal relationships?

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<sup>106</sup> An Antenarrative Amendment to the Learning Organization: Theories to Avert the Sixth Extinction, Boje and Rosile 2019: 440

<sup>107</sup> An Antenarrative Amendment to the Learning Organization: Theories to Avert the Sixth Extinction, Boje and Rosile 2019: 433; Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World, Yunkaporta, 2019/2020

<sup>108</sup> Eight Aspects of Tribal Wisdom for Business Ethics, and Why They Matter, Rosile and Claw, 2016: 5-9

**Table 1: Tribal Wisdom compared with Euro-Western Values/Practices<sup>109</sup>.**

<p align="center"><b>Eight Aspects of Tribal Wisdom [Eco-Centric]</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>Euro-Western Values/Practices [Ego-Centric]</b></p>
<p><b>1. Relationships are an end in themselves.</b> This refers not only to social relations, but to human relations with the natural environment, and with the universe of all that is. Indigenous cultures view business as a means to the end of enhancing a harmonious balance of relationships among humans and the planet. The other aspects in this Table may all be interpreted as aspects of, or contributions to, the primary value of relationship.</p>	<p><b>Relationships are a means to an end.</b> "Business is business" - profit is at best unrelated to, or in the worst case, takes precedence over, social relationships. The Euro-Western world often views humans, plants and animals as a means to an end.</p>
<p><b>2. Gifting is valued more highly.</b> A person who gives back to the community earns more respect than one who makes a profit from the community. Profit is not avoided or disdained, it is simply less important than generosity.</p>	<p><b>Getting/acquiring is valued.</b> "Greed is good".</p>
<p><b>3. Egalitarianism is preferred.</b> By definition the tribe is more important than the individual. Many tribes use verbal shaming of any individual who gives the appearance of being better than others.</p>	<p><b>Hierarchy is preferred.</b> Business, along with competitive sports, is the arena where one proves one's superiority to others.</p>
<p><b>4. Non-acquisitiveness is valued, not greed.</b> American Indians tend to see accumulation of wealth as a community-eroding greed. Taking only what one needs is valued as a way to assure that all have enough.</p>	<p><b>Accumulation of wealth.</b> Euro-Western capitalism is rooted in the idea of accumulation of wealth as a good and desired end.</p>
<p><b>5. Usefulness or access to use is valued.</b> What is important is not so much the ownership as the access to, or use of, something (e.g. a car pool).</p>	<p><b>Ownership is most valued.</b> Ownership of something is important, even if I never actually need or use it.</p>
<p><b>6. Barter for what is needed.</b> A barter economy is compatible with a non-acquisitive, user-oriented economy (point 5 above)</p>	<p><b>Acquire according to supply/demand.</b> A monetary economy more easily accommodates accumulation of wealth.</p>
<p><b>7. Trust and Buyer Trust are valued.</b> The importance of trust carries over to business practices that emphasize keeping one's word, being honest, and following through on commitments.</p>	<p><b>Buyer Beware still exists.</b></p>
<p><b>8. Disclosure is full and voluntary.</b> The historical practice in traditional American Indian trading was a seller-initiated voluntary full disclosure of the flaws and shortcomings of any item in trade.</p>	<p><b>Truth to the extent required by law</b> - if that - it's more a question of what you find expedient and what can get away with<sup>110</sup>.</p>

<sup>109</sup> *Eight Aspects of Tribal Wisdom for Business Ethics, and Why They Matter*, Rosile and Claw, 2016: 5-9. They give further references in connection with each of the eight items

<sup>110</sup> At the time of writing (January 2022) this seems to me to be an accurate reflection of the current notion, in politics and other fields, of the notion of "truth" in many if not all parts of the world, including the district of London known as "Whitehall".

Certainly Drake (2000) describes various types of pre-colonial North American inter-tribal conflict, many connected either with revenge for some perceived slight or with kidnapping males from other tribes in order to boost population numbers. European contact ushered in an era of greater warfare by intensifying competition for resources for trade, with settlers and the American armed forces agreeing treaties with various tribes, often in opposition with others. In the case of Australia the picture I have gained to date is that there were local conflicts before the arrival of the Europeans but that these were on a rather limited scale, mainly for local revenge or to abduct women for purposes of increasing the population - which appears to be the converse of North American practice where it was young men who were kidnapped. In general loss of life was rather little, although when the white settlers arrived they engaged in large-scale massacres of the indigenous peoples.<sup>111</sup>

I think it's fair to say that by and large indigenous ways of knowing are

"labelled as primitive and nonsensical, ... illogical nonsense to Western science, ... Few critical scholars are willing to investigate knowledge that is outside the borders of academic disciplines, [although] Western science has pilfered many aspects of indigenous ways of knowing as evidenced by pharmaceuticals, food-ways, cosmology and more. Although most scholars and scientists will admit there is a vast unknown, they fear banishment and ridicule ...when exploring these kinds of knowledge"<sup>112</sup>

and I rather imagine the same applies to panpsychism.

Contrary to this view, Noam Chomsky believes that at last the rest of us are taking serious notice of indigenous views

"Indigenous people across the world are the ones keeping the human race from destroying itself and leading earth to a disaster as they gain voices in countries in Latin America, the United States and Australia. ... That's a tremendous step forward for the entire world. It's a kind of incredible irony that all over the world the leading forces in trying to prevent a race to disaster are the Indigenous communities...It's phenomenal all over the world that those who we call 'primitive' are trying to save those of us who we call 'enlightened' from total disaster."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *Forgotten War*, Reynolds, 2013

<sup>112</sup> *Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Quantum Science for Business Ethics*, Pepion, 2016

<sup>113</sup> Noam Chomsky: Indigenous people are our only hope for survival. Contributor, Ecologise.in, 2017

## World Economic Forum Global Risks

The 2021 World Economic Forum Report<sup>114</sup> contains a chart, reproduced here as Figure 1, showing their estimate of the likelihood and impact of a number of potential risk factors. It's not clear how they define "risk" - i.e. risk of what? They may be talking mainly but not solely about risk to economic development. Similarly I can't find a clear indication as to who "they" are, other than "an extensive network of academic, business, government, civil society and thought leaders" (there is a list of people who have contribute to the Report but no explanation of the nature of those contributions). This is rather important - what countries were they from? What gender? What ethnicity? What sexual orientation? What disciplines? What occupations? Who paid their salaries and fees? And so on.<sup>115</sup> These must have a big effect on their responses<sup>116</sup> and without this information the data might perhaps be viewed with reservations.<sup>117</sup> As indeed must all data, always. So why include it at all? Well perhaps simply because it is a picture that I find interesting, as may others.

The WEF - who let's face it have a rather poor reputation among many of us for their luxuriating annual beanfeasts for the multi-wealthy - have been producing this survey for 17 years. However in 2022 they changed the scoring and presentation formats - no longer this two-dimensional chart but a single list of the top 10 risks. In Figure 2 I have created a "head-of-the-river"<sup>118</sup> diagram showing the movements of the "top ten" in 2019, 2021 and 2022.<sup>119</sup>

In the 2019 and 2021 surveys the "top five" - in terms of high likelihood together with severe impact - are what might be termed "environmental".<sup>120</sup> Using a different measure - simply the "most severe" risks then six of the top ten are what might be deemed environmental. Many of all the thirty are also almost certainly mutually inter-related - for example nearly all of the effects are probably contributing to "mental health deterioration" and also to that termed "youth disillusion". And all of them can be seen to be the result of ego-centric thinking, feeling and willing.

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<sup>114</sup> World Economic Forum 2021: 12

<sup>115</sup> I do know that I was not included

<sup>116</sup> For example if a large majority were from the military it's rather likely that "weapons of mass destruction" would not only show a high impact but also be considered rather more likely than in these data. The methodology involved the respondents being asked to score or rank a total of 30 factors. I can't see an indication of how these 30 were identified.

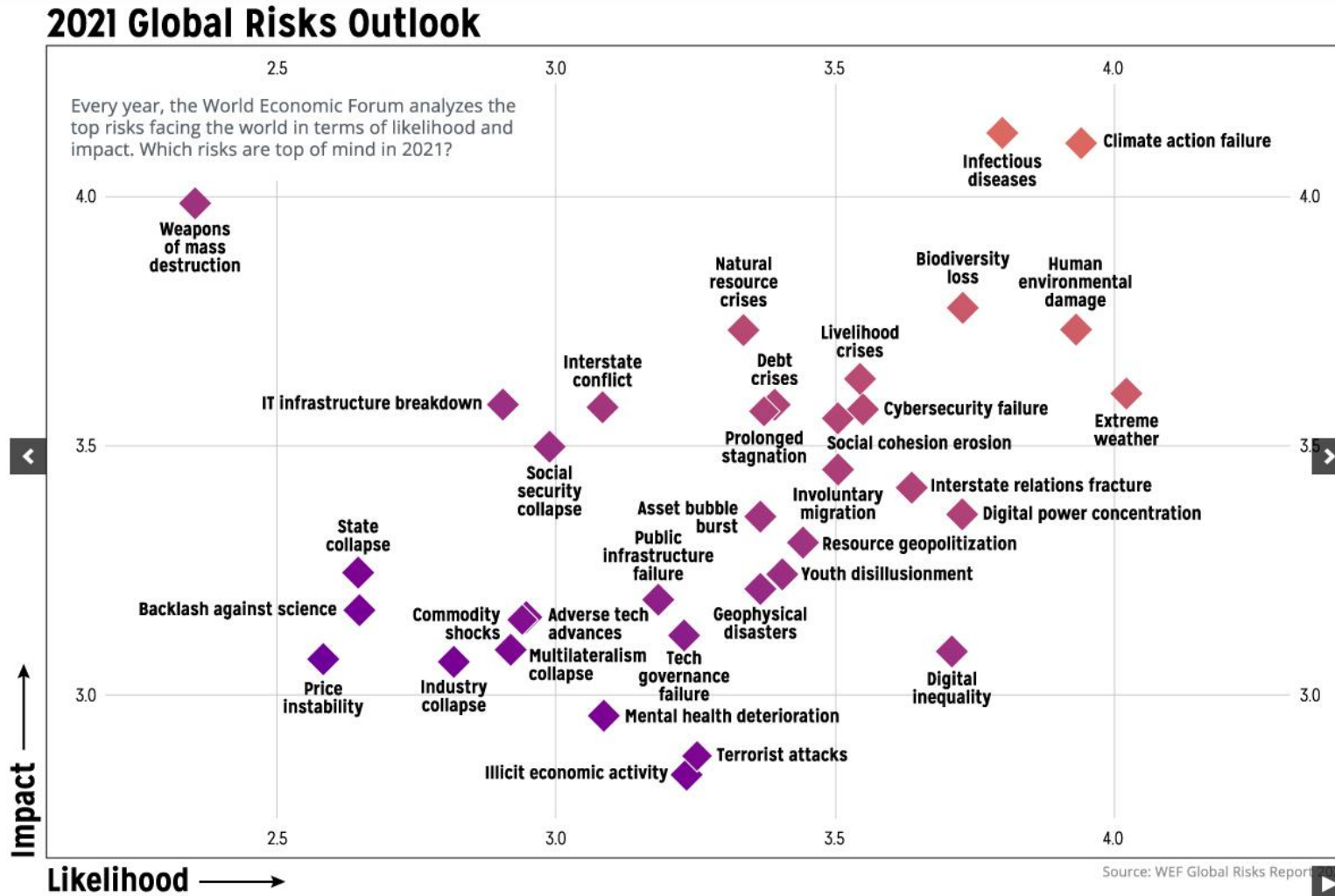
<sup>117</sup> As perhaps because of the source - the World Economic Forum, a body which has many critics and is seen by some as a "billionaires club". At [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_Economic\\_Forum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Economic_Forum), in a piece that admits that it has "many issues", as well as a somewhat hagiographic praise for the WEF, Wikipedia gives a number of examples and references to such critics

<sup>118</sup> So-called after charts showing the way that rowing clubs climb or fall in the rankings at the Henley Regatta

<sup>119</sup> The identifying labels of a small number of items were changed over this four year period - I have kept them the same for consistency.

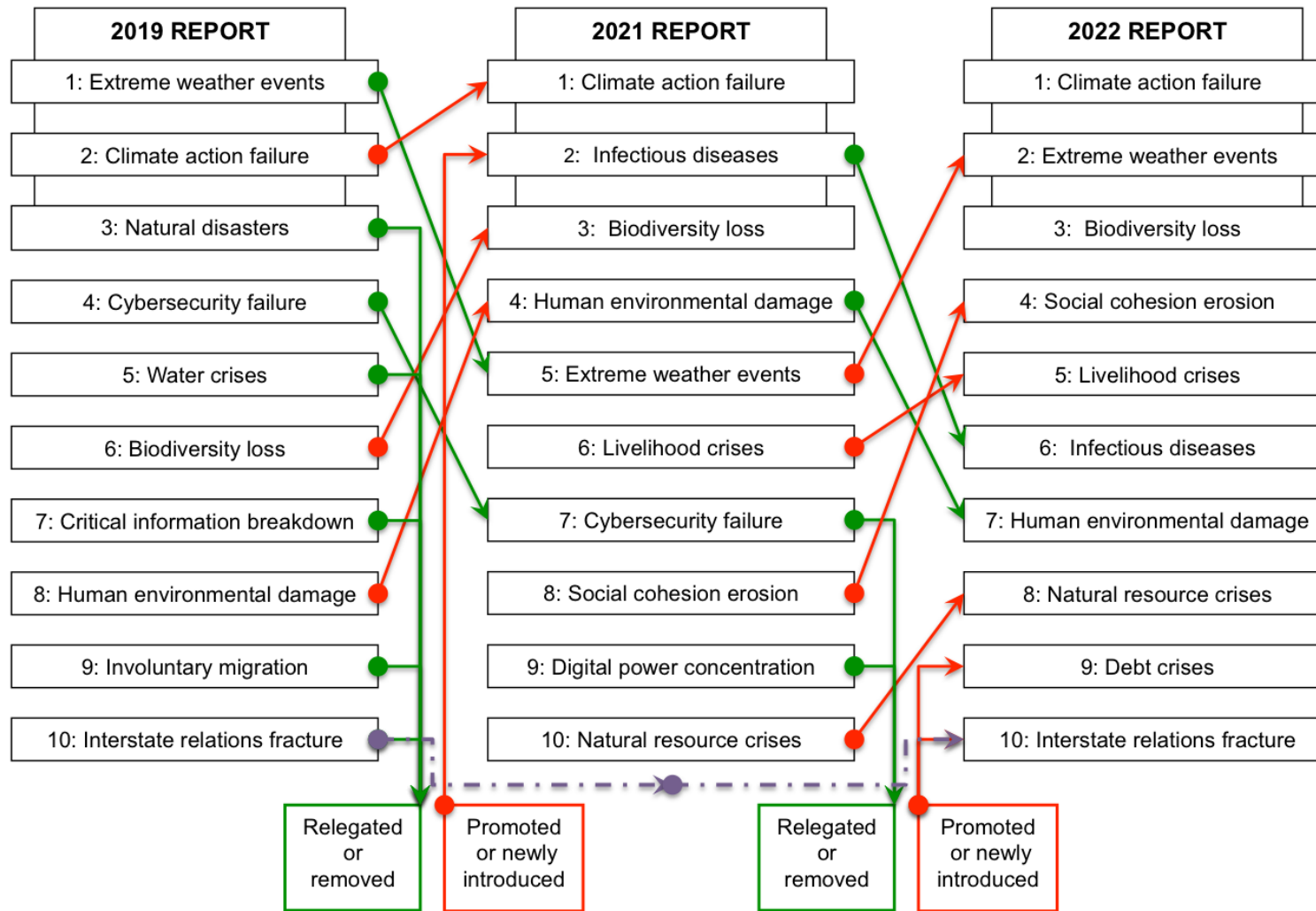
<sup>120</sup> The reports themselves refer to them in this way

Figure 1: World Economic Forum's 30 Global Risk Factors as in 2021 Report<sup>121</sup>



<sup>121</sup> The Global Risks Report 2021, World Economic Forum, 2021:12

Figure 2: World Economic Forum's Ten Worst Risk Factors 2019, 2021 and 2022



## So what can we do? Reducing our separation, increasing our oneness with nature

In spite of what might appear to be a somewhat depressing picture that I have been painting, there are in fact many things that we can do to make a general move towards eco-ways of thinking, feeling, willing and doing, and some more specifically related to our relationship with nature. Given the limitations of time, space and; above all, my knowledge and creativity, I will just refer to a few. I have located the general ones in Part I of this serial; here I mention some that are more specifically related to our relationship with nature.

There is in fact a lot that we can do, from creating or joining large projects, getting involved in lobbying schemes, talking with each other, changing the way we look after our domestic window boxes or gardens. An excellent resource of numerous ideas for individuals, groups, teachers, businesses and others can be found in the *Ecosystem Restoration Playbook: a Practical Guide to Healing the Planet*, published by The UN Decade on Eco Restoration for World Environment Day 2021 and freely downloadable from <https://unenvironment.widen.net/s/ffjvzcfldw/ecosystem-restoration-playbook>. Some of its suggestions are incorporated, with others, in the points that follow. (The numbers are purely for ease of reference when referring to these. They are in not meaningfully sequential).

### We can raise our voices, and we can listen to voices of others:

1. Organise, take part and speak up in private and public discussions and debates about how to improve the local, national and international environment, the ways in which we treat nature, and how we can make our communities, societies and economies fairer and more sustainable
2. Put on or participate in an exhibition of posters, photos or art showing the beauty and effectiveness of local ecosystems
3. Find, create and tell people about further such sources and resources
4. Hold discussions about the value of ecosystems and the threats they face
5. Stage online campaigns to draw attention to climate change, nature loss and what can be done to reverse these trends
6. Write blogs, poems, limericks, plays, articles, books,
7. Paint, knit, weave, sculpt, compose, sing, perform
8. Write letters to local and national newspapers and other publications
9. Use social media
10. Download the *Ecosystem Restoration Playbook* referred to above, from <https://unenvironment.widen.net/s/ffjvzcfldw/ecosystem-restoration-playbook>
11. Listen to podcasts such as those on the BBC's *Fixing the World* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04d42vf>

12. Sign up to organisations like the *Global Landscapes Forum* at <https://www.globallandscapesforum.org> and the Society for Ecological Restoration and
13. Follow the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. For example access *Biodivercities by 2030: Transforming Cities' Relationship with Nature* at <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/publications/biodivercities-2030-transforming-cities-relationship-nature>

#### **We can make eco-conscious choices:**

14. Pledge a donation or other support for restoration or conservation initiatives
15. Change our behaviour and spending to shrink our local and global environmental foot-print and divert resources toward companies and activities that bring back nature instead of harming it. We can encourage others around us to do the same.
16. Halt purchases of products and services that are not certified as sustainable
17. Start a new diet or catering policy based on our preferred combination of seasonal, sustainable, locally-sourced and plant-rich products

#### **We can take some action:**

18. Volunteer for an existing restoration effort
19. As an individual, a business or another form of organisation, start our own on-the-ground initiative, join an existing restoration or conservation effort, or help build an alliance to give a bigger boost to nature's comeback
20. Clean up a lake, beach, park or other natural area
21. Make our home, balcony, garden, school, roadside, public space more eco-friendly with composting and planting, perhaps using organics, or Permaculture<sup>122</sup>, which as well as not using chemicals avoids disturbing the soil and uses mulches instead. (<https://www.permaculture.org.uk/>).
22. Another approach we can explore is Biodynamic Agriculture<sup>123</sup>, which can be applied to gardens as well as farms. The Biodynamic Association can be located at <https://www.biodynamic.org.uk/>. A bit like Permaculture but it includes somewhat more esoteric practices such as sowing according to the calendar and using natural substances in homeopathic dilutions, for example to enhance the efficacy of compost heaps. An internationally known community created in the Sinai desert using Biodynamic principles is SEKEM; a description of this and other worldwide biodynamic enterprises is given in *Biodynamic Preparations Around the World: Insightful Case Studies from Six Continents*, Hurter, 2021
23. Have a go at trying some of the ideas put forward by The Green Cuisine at
24. <https://www.greencuisinetrust.org/RESOURCES>

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<sup>122</sup> Permaculture: a Beginner's Guide, Burnett, 2003; *The Minimalist Gardener: Low Impact, No Dig Growing*, Whitefield, 2017.

<sup>123</sup> Koepf's Practical Biodynamics: Soil, Compost, Sprays and Food Quality, Koepf, 2012. Case stories of applications of Biodynamic Agriculture in different parts of the world are given in *Biodynamic Preparations Around the World: Insightful Case Studies from Six Continents*



25. Make our business, school, roadside or a public space more eco-friendly with indigenous trees or plants
26. Mow our lawns less frequently and intensively
27. Enhance the ecosystem functions of our own homes and work spaces
28. If involved with an organisation or a business, make our procurement, production and distribution policies more eco-conscious to reduce the footprint of our products and operations.

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## Tom Boydell writes

When I turned 80 I was advised to go part-time. So I'm now a part-time management development consultant, a part-time writer, a part-time actor, a part-time singer, a part-time poet, a part-time weaver and a part-time gardener. I'm glad I'm only a part-timer, otherwise I'd be worn out.

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# In Defence of Humanism

## Why humanism is a solution, not the problem

**Paul Harrison**



*The purpose of this short article is twofold. Firstly, to challenge the idea that one of the root causes of our current problems is the humanist perspective - and by extension that it is necessary to ditch that perspective by adopting a 'post-humanist' approach; and, secondly, to put forward the argument that in fact the humanist worldview (as currently and - the author would argue - correctly understood) offers the best opportunity for solving our current problems.*

The invitation to contribute to this edition of the journal set out the idea this article is intended to challenge, and it is worth summarising that provocation as follows. The full text of the invitation can be found [here](#).

The following is intended to be a fair summary of the text in that invitation:

### The problem statement

Major changes are required to the ways we live to avoid destroying the planet along with every living thing, including ourselves. Human habits must change radically, especially in how we organise businesses, communities, societies and economies.

This seems relatively uncontroversial and, for the purposes of this article, is accepted as a reasonable statement of the problems we face. They are serious, existential and require radical change.

### The suggested root causes

Our view of the world is humancentric, focused on ourselves. A belief in humans and their existence as the most important central fact in the universe (referred to as 'Anthropocentrism') can be seen as a legacy of the Humanism which emerged during the Enlightenment. Whilst adoption of this perspective led to dramatic progress in many fields it has, in part at least, led to some very undesirable things: exploitation of the planet, subjugation of other forms of life, dangerous separation of people by race, gender, sexuality, religion, ability etc.

### The suggested solutions

We need to move towards a post-humanist perspective which places people back together with the rest of planetary life. In doing so we can better address not just the environmental dangers we all face but also the pernicious effects of e.g. patriarchy, racism, classism, and inequalities in power, income, wealth, property, well-being etc.

In other words, a humanist perspective is the root cause of the problems we face and, by implication, those with a humanist perspective should change their worldview in order to be part of the solution.

### Defining what a humanist believes (and seeks)

To defend Humanism in the context of the above it is first necessary to be clear as to how being humanist should be defined and described; and, in particular, how components of that definition and description link to the implications referred to above.

The Amsterdam Declaration, first published by Humanists International in 1952 and updated in 2002, represents the fullest definition to have a measure of international agreement.

The full text of the Declaration can be found [here](#):

The Declaration includes the following statements insofar as it connects to the issues raised above (author's emphases):

Humanists have a duty of care to all of humanity **including future generations**.

Humanism seeks to use science creatively, **not destructively**.

Humanism ventures to build a world on the idea of the free person responsible to society and **recognises our dependence on and responsibility for the natural world**.

If these statements can be interpreted to imply that humans are considered as somehow separate from the natural world (which, it is suggested, would be a very strained interpretation) then there can be little doubt that humanism thus defined incorporates clear obligations towards sustainability.

Humanists UK, affiliated to Humanists International, is a charitable body which campaigns for humanist causes and represents humanists in the UK. Humanists UK recognises that 'definitions abound' and summarises its own definition as follows (<https://humanists.uk/humanism/>) (author's emphases):

Roughly speaking, the word humanist has come to mean someone who:

- trusts to the scientific method when it comes to understanding how the universe works and rejects the idea of the supernatural (and is therefore an atheist or agnostic)
- makes their ethical decisions based on reason, empathy, and a concern for human beings and other sentient animals

believes that, in the absence of an afterlife and any discernible purpose to the universe, human beings can act to give their own lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life and helping others to do the same.

## Implications of being humanist (equality, animal welfare & the environment)

It seems clear that defining what it means to be humanist in this way leads to certain concrete consequences for the kind of society a humanist would prefer to see. For example, [Humanists UK](#) states the following (author's emphasis):

We are a human rights charity bringing together tens of thousands of people with a shared humanist outlook on the world to influence public debate and policy, **in support of human rights, democracy, and equal dignity and treatment of everyone** – including those with whom we disagree. **That includes being committed to ending racism, sexism, and LGBT discrimination.**

Further, Humanists UK states the following in relation to animal welfare ([full text here](#): author's emphasis):

Sometimes people think that because humanists are called humanists that they are unduly or narrowly concerned with the rights and welfare of human beings. But this is a fundamental misunderstanding of the word 'humanism': **most humanists are strong supporters of animal welfare and recognise the necessity of sensible policy that respects and acknowledges animal sentience and their capacity to suffer. Humanists are called humanists because as human beings we try to make ethical decisions on the basis of our human capacity to reason**, rather than looking to sources outside of human experience for guidance about what is right and wrong (in this sense, humanism contrasts with theism).

In relation to the environment and sustainability, Humanists UK recently launched a climate action group, led by [Richard Norman](#) (Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy, University of Kent).

The rationale for this group and how its aims are grounded in humanism are explained in a statement issued by the group which includes the following. The full statement for the group can be found [here](#):

Humanists are in a position to present insights into the interdependence of humans and the natural world in clear and compelling ways, drawing on scientific knowledge of the climate and ecosystems and on people's shared and well-attested experience of what makes our lives go well.

Humanists look to scientific enquiry to understand the causes and consequences of natural processes. We do so not from an uncritical acceptance of scientific authority, but on the basis of an understanding of how the scientific method works, appealing to evidence and the experimental testing of explanatory hypotheses. As humanists, we have a duty to defend the scientific consensus on the human causes of climate change against the so-called 'sceptics' who are motivated not by intellectual rigour but by wishful thinking and vested interests.

Humanists know that we cannot look to a higher power to solve our problems for us. We have to take responsibility for our own lives, for the lives of others. We believe that this life is the one life we have, and similarly, this is the one planet we have. We are therefore all the more keenly aware that our finite human lives are given meaning and purpose by our membership of an ongoing human community and the legacy we bequeath to future generations.

One important aspect of this statement is that it recognises the true position of humans in the ecosystem. We are not given power over the natural world by some supernatural being but we do occupy a unique and undeniable place within the natural world – one which places a significant obligation on us to behave in ways which are grounded in reality, which accepts our role in creating the problems we face and the imperative that we as humans must be the driving force of the solutions.

This is distinct from a more passive view of our future role – where we merely place ourselves alongside other animals, plants and the rest of the natural world. Such a passive view would deny our active role in creating the problems we face and undermine our agency now to do something about it.

## **Humanism in the workplace**

The notion that a humanist worldview is in part responsible for inequalities in business organisations and cannot therefore be part of how we address such inequalities is not borne out by evidence; nor can it be supported by reference to the statements made by Humanists UK and their emphasis on human rights.

Much has been written about the role of humanistic management in promoting fairness and dignity at work: readers are referred to the work of the [Humanistic Management Network](#) as a ready source of material in this regard.

Whilst there may be room for debate about whether ‘humanism’ as defined in this article is exactly similar to ‘humanistic’ as that term is used in the humanistic management literature, one need not look much further for more explicit examples of how a humanist worldview is applied in practical ways in the workplace to reduce inequality – notably in the burgeoning field of inclusion and diversity.

For example, in her book ‘Applied Humanism: How to Create More Effective and Ethical businesses’ (Business Expert Press, New York, 2019), Jennifer Hancock addresses how it is necessary to combine humanist philosophy, science and education to create more diverse workforces. Hancock proposes that since the humanist philosophy positions people as members of the same ‘tribe’ it provides a framework that minimises the negative impact of ‘othering’, which can manifest itself through conscious and unconscious biases in e.g. recruitment and reward systems, and also in workplace behaviour more generally; that looking to the scientific method (a key tenet of humanism) is most likely to provide evidence-based methods of reducing biases and therefore provides the soundest foundation for choosing strategies in the workplace for optimising inclusion and diversity; and that providing the necessary education and training around the humanist outlook and the evidence based solutions is required, especially to those individuals in positions of responsibility (leaders and managers).

## Conclusion

This article is unashamedly a defence of humanism against the notion that it is a root cause of our current problems and cannot therefore be part of the solution. The article has set out how the humanist worldview as currently understood by organisations that represent humanists around the world and more particularly in the UK sees humans as not only part of the natural world but under clear obligations to act to preserve the natural world for future generations; to behave responsibly and with compassion towards other living things; and to fight for human rights and equality, including in the workplace. In particular, the article makes the case that a humanist worldview demands practical action by us all, working together, to address the serious problems that we face, combining our unique agency as humans on this planet with a worldview that values reason, logic, compassion and kindness.

## Web site references

The Amsterdam Declaration: <https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/>

Animal welfare: <https://humanists.uk/campaigns/public-ethical-issues/animal-welfare/>

Climate action <https://humanists.uk/humanist-climate-action/why-humanist-climate-action/>

Ego to Eco Call for contributions e-O&P journal:

<https://storage.ning.com/topology/rest/1.0/file/get/9740181666>

Humanistic Management Network publications: <https://humanisticmanagement.network/publications>

Humanist view of society: <https://humanists.uk/campaigns/humanist-view-of-society/>

Professor Richard Norman: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/european-culture-languages/people/1673/norman-richard>

## About the author

**Paul** is a senior tax consultant working for a global professional services firm. He is also volunteer coordinator for Humanists in Business (under the auspices of Humanists UK, the charity and campaigning organisation), and a Member of the Humanistic Management UK Chapter Steering Group.

E: [paul.harrison@humanism.org.uk](mailto:paul.harrison@humanism.org.uk).

# Facilitating out of the four walls ceiling

## The ecology of the facilitation environment

**Nadia MacArthur**



Our clients trust us to facilitate them with their developmental processes, this is a privilege which comes with a responsibility. I often wonder if I am giving my clients the best I can possibly offer or if there is something better that I am overlooking. In my network of facilitators we often discuss how we can enhance the facilitation environment and methodologies. There seems to be a sense of competition in wanting to offer something new, profound and high impact. Pre-Covid I worked in A locations, with the sentiment that a great location should enhance the training/facilitation experience. I have facilitated in hotels, conference centres, event halls, former churches, and other extravagant locations with their equally extravagant catering.

Till the beginning of this year my main client was an agency for which I facilitated international corporates in the Netherlands. Simultaneously I sought knowledge in Buddhism, circular economy, threefold economy, environmental awareness and community building. The two worlds (corporate and spiritual/theoretical ??) collided. So much so that I decided to end my collaboration with the agency. I needed to detox from the corporate world and sought refuge in nature. As I did, the situation felt contradictory. I experienced nature as the ultimate location for rejuvenation and healing, while at the same time I assumed that I needed to do my client work within four walls and a ceiling.

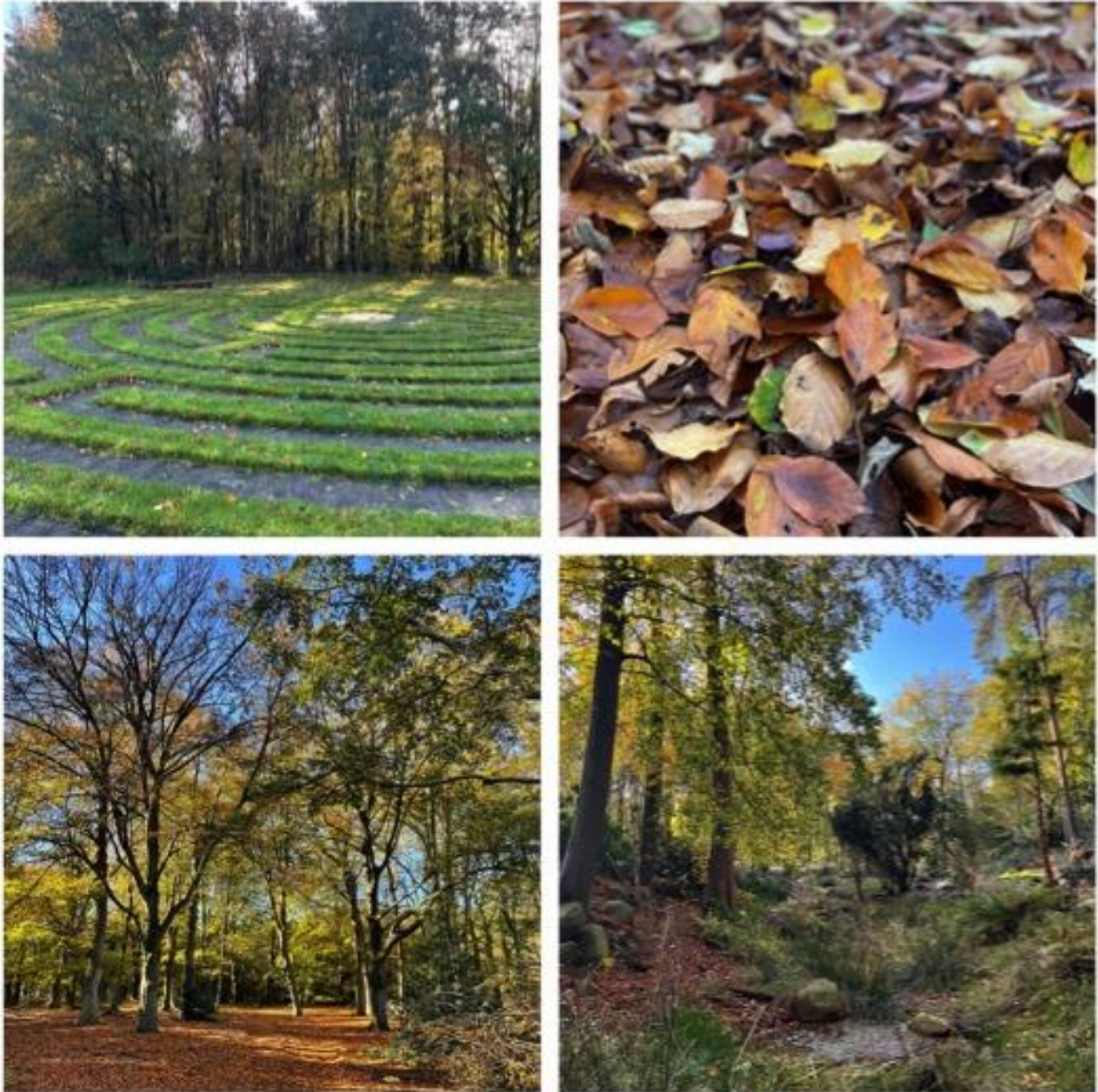
### **Nature-led facilitation**

I gradually formed what I now call nature led facilitation. With a few of my most innovative clients I started experimenting. We would meet in nature and work on the same work topics as we would normally do, but without the white board, premium coffee, catering or any other comforting facilities. Initially, as a facilitator, this way of working felt threatening. I struggled with not having a fixed, predictable and solid physical/built (?) environment to work with. Facilitation in nature is unpredictable.

Facilitation in nature is without fail rewarded by the added aspects of synchronicity and emergence. The client's theme is often illustrated by a movement or change within the natural surroundings. The struggling client noticing a beetle on its back. A nuthatch hugging a tree, creating a childhood memory and a fresh



impulse. The shriek of a buzzard during a breakthrough moment, right on cue. Butterflies landing and fluttering on an arm during the closure of a session, as if applauding the bravery of the client's words. During the facilitation we search for stones, rocks and twigs as props to the scenery of the client's topic of investigation. With these natural props I can systemically guide the process in the under-stream.



\*The Monnikenberg estate (on the outskirts of Hilversum in the north of the Netherlands) is part of a listed monastery for the sisters Augustinessen of Saint Monica

When given the choice of in- or out- doors my, clients now only want to work outside in nature, there is a lot of excitement in advance of the unknown synchronicity.

## Being a nature-led facilitator

Besides the knowledge in the classical sense, what do we need to be a nature-led facilitator?

Based on my experience, characteristics include:

- Knowledge of the location or area
- Acceptance of all weather conditions (invest in good outdoor clothing)
- Awareness of the slightest of changes in natural surroundings which could enhance the facilitation session
- Letting go of wanting to control the natural environment or the situation
- Willingness to encounter nature, to understand one's own nature and the nature of the client
- Welcoming in the vulnerability of standing on equal footing with the client. The situation for the facilitator is just as unpredictable

## COP 26 and nature-led facilitation?

In the light of the COP26 climate summit I wonder if nature-led facilitation could have assisted in the change? What if all corporations, besides investing in the implementation of new policies, would invest in their leadership and decision makers by giving them access to a nature-led facilitator? A facilitator who assists in the organisational and developmental topics we are accustomed to, in the unpredictability of nature. A facilitator who can illustrate circular economy by using the examples of growth and decay in the changing of the seasons. Facilitator and client both working fully with their intelligence and senses as opposed to two sets of minds between the four walls and a ceiling. I wonder what impact this could have in these transitional times where our egos are being challenged and where action is needed in our eco system?

## Some inspirations

During my transition to working in nature, I was inspired by the following books.

- Building the Bridge As You Walk On It: A Guide for Leading Change by Robert E. Quinn
- Soulcraft - The Shamanic Journey to Nature and Your Soul's True Purpose by Bill Plotkin
- Women Who Run With The Wolves by Clarissa Pinkola Estes
- Photography and footage: The Monnikenberg\*, in Hilversum, where I work with nature-led facilitation.

\*The Monnikenberg estate (on the outskirts of Hilversum in the north of the Netherlands) is part of a listed monastery for the sisters Augustinessen of Saint Monica.

## References

Estes, C.P., 2008. Women who run with the wolves: Contacting the power of the wild woman. Random House

Plotkin, B. and Grgach, R., 2017. Soulcraft. Tantor Media, Incorporated.

Quinn, R.E., 2004. Building the bridge as you walk on it: A guide for leading change (Vol. 204). John Wiley & Sons.

## About Nadia

I am a Dutch/Surinam organisational development consultant with a UK background. I live and work in the Netherlands. Previously I worked in corporate communications and change management assignments.

Three years ago I chose to become an independent consultant. I train, coach and facilitate (international) corporates in the Netherlands. Pre-Covid I travelled up and down the country to facilitate sessions. During the Covid pandemic I did the majority of work online and now I work in nature (locally) when possible, preferably in a supervision format. I believe that impactful change can be achieved in nature for wholehearted personal and societal recovery and development.

I am an applicant of the ASD International (anthroposophical organisation) and I am working on a community building project in my local area.

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# From Ego to Eco: where are we, where are we trying to go?

## Part 4. Relationships with and between human beings

Tom Boydell



*Having considered, in Part III of this series, the first of Shiva and Shiva's three separations - between humans and nature - let's now turn to the second, namely that between humans and humans. This is a vast area, encompassing social inequality in general, within which there are classism, sexism and patriarchy, racism, slavery, the plight of refugees, colonialism, imperialism, terrorism, warfare, - you name it, it's linked to the separation between humans and the process known as "othering"<sup>124</sup>.*

### Othering

As far as I can tell, the ego-conscious concept of "othering" was originally introduced in 1985 by Spivak<sup>125</sup>, in the context of the way the British saw and treated the inhabitants of land that they<sup>126</sup> had colonised - in this particular case India. It has since been extended to apply to the way I or we see people who are different from me and us. Although "different" may sometimes mean "somehow better than me", it usually has negative connotations, such as generally inferior, less important, less powerful, less able or competent, less trustworthy, less deserving (of earnings, rights, liberties, life). Or of course more - more dangerous, more malevolent, more anti-social, more evil - than me and mine. Thus, as described by Spivak,

"Othering is a phenomenon in which some individuals or groups are defined and labeled as not fitting in within the norms of a social group. ... [It] also involves attributing negative characteristics to people or groups that differentiate them from the perceived normative social group. It is an 'us vs. them' way of thinking about human connections and relationships.

This process essentially involves looking at others and saying 'they are not like me' or 'they are not one of us.' Othering is a way of negating another person's individual humanity and, consequently, those that are or have been othered are seen as less worthy of dignity and respect ... On an individual level, othering plays a role in the formation of prejudices against people and

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<sup>124</sup> It seems tragically relevant that as I am checking this paper for typos, Ukraine is being invaded by Russia. s

<sup>125</sup> *The Rani of Sirmur: an Essay in Reading the Archives*, Spivak G. C, 1985

<sup>126</sup> This sentence, by using "they" instead of "we", might be seen as an example of othering, whereby I'm denying that as an 81-year old Britisher I was in any way involved in colonising. But of course I was in that I enjoyed colonial benefits such as sugar, chocolate, cotton and so on.

groups. On a larger scale, it can also play a role in the dehumanization of entire groups of people which can then be exploited to drive changes in institutions, governments, and societies. It can lead to the persecution of marginalized groups, the denial of rights based on group identities, or even acts of violence against others"<sup>127</sup>.

As I have indicated, I see othering as clearly being an ego-conscious process. I and the groups to which I owe allegiance, to which I feel I belong, are "us". The rest of you are different and therefore "others". Spivak focused particularly on race, gender and social class, but "the other" can apply to any characteristic that the otherer sees as significant - sexuality, age, tribe, profession, religion, political party, football team, eye colour<sup>128</sup>.

In Part III of this series of papers I described one view of "posthumanism" as meaning "not human centred", thereby giving more importance to other (life) forms such as animals, plants, mountains, rivers and other natural features. Another version, often referred to as feminist posthumanism, sees that the fields of science, politics, law, religion, art, literature have by and large been dominated by white Western heterosexual able-bodied males, who have othered or marginalised women, other ethnic groups, colonials, gays, transsexuals and indeed *any others* who do not fit into dominant privileged categories. This form of posthumanism therefore seeks to redress this imbalance of power, influence, justice and fairness not only with regard to humans and nonhumans but also to a multiplicity of relations between "superior-humans and lesser-humans".<sup>129</sup>

I imagine that we all other various others - I know that I do, and that at least for some of them I'm trying not to<sup>130</sup>. It might be instructive to identify some "favourite" othering targets - your own, or those of a group with which you are affiliated.

- Who are some of those you "other"? What do you think about them? How do you feel about them? What do you want to do in relation to them? What do you actually do? Can you explain any difference between what you want to do and what you actually do?

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<sup>127</sup> "What is Othering?". *Very Well Mind*, Cherry, 2020.

<sup>128</sup> "Othering" is normally used in relation to other people. It could be used as a framework to explore how humans relate to other species - animals, plants and rocks, that - whom? - we humans treat as others to be used to our advantage

<sup>129</sup> For example see *Posthuman Feminist Theory*, Braidotti, 2016; *Sustainability, Feminist Posthumanism and the Unusual Capacities of (Post)humans*, Fox and Aldred, 2020; *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, Adams and Gruen (eds), 2022

<sup>130</sup> Those that I find particularly difficult include some groups of politicians; "celebrities" who are famous for being famous (that was an example of an othering statement); supporters of certain football teams; and so on. I'm not proud of this and see it as something I need to do more work on, but ...

- Why is this? Where do these thoughts, feelings and intentions and behaviours come from? What feeds them?
- When does it happen? All the time? On particular occasions? Are there certain "triggers"?
- What effects do those thoughts, feelings, intentions and behaviours have - on those others? On yourself? On yourselves? On the world in general?
- How would your life, their lives, the world's life be different if you stopped thinking, feeling, willing and behaving with regard to them in these ways?
- Do you want to stop othering them or does it make life easier, more comfortable, for you? What would you lose by trying to stop, by succeeding? Would this be too painful?
- If you do want to stop, how and when can you do so? What help might you look for in doing this?
- And how might you work to help *others* to begin to stop?
- How will you notice progress in those directions?

Whilst checking this text for errors, I have learned from Chris Blatern of a sort of "opposite" to Othering, namely Mattering, although this seems to refer to feeling that I matter to somebody else - thus it's a passive rather than active verb. We can however make it active. What do I do, could I do, that makes somebody else feel that they matter to me? to our group? to the world?<sup>131</sup> And who are those somebody elses?<sup>132</sup>

### **Social Inequality: Haves, Have-nots and Injustice**

Explorations of social inequality very often focus on financial differences - income and wealth. These have in fact been shown to be related to differences on many other dimensions. For example Wilkinson and Pickett<sup>133</sup> show quantitative connections between income inequality and a number of societal issues, as shown in Table 1 - in which many of the items are inter-related. And of course, this table leaves open the question as to which is cause and which is effect - does higher income inequality lead to more mental illness, or does mental illness lead to more inequality, or do they both contribute to each other in various vicious circles or spirals?

It's important to note that we are looking here at the effects of *unequal* income - difference between rich and poor in a society, not of actual levels of income as such. Taking for example life expectancy, studies show that within a given society - say a country, or a state in the USA, or a geographical area in the UK, then poorer people die significantly younger than richer people. There are many contributing factors to this -

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<sup>131</sup> My eye is particularly caught by Mattering in the Later Years: Older Adults' Experiences of Mattering to Others, Purpose in Life, Depression, and Wellness, Dixon, 2011; sadly I cannot open the link that was tantalisingly proffered to me

<sup>132</sup> We can also ask this with respect to mattering oneself

<sup>133</sup> *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Much Better*, Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009 and the same authors' *Income Inequality and Wellbeing*, 2014.

quality and location of housing, medical care, sports facilities, leisure activities, holidays and so on and so on. But perhaps more surprising is that where inequality is high, the reasonably well-off also have shorter lives than their equivalents in places with lower inequality. It seems that no matter how well off you are, it's better to live in a more equal place.

**Table 1: Wilkinson and Pickett data on Relationships Between Income Inequality and Health and Social Problems**<sup>134</sup>

HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS THAT ARE WORSE BY BEING <i>HIGHER</i> WHEN INCOME INEQUALITY IS HIGHER	HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS THAT ARE WORSE BY BEING <i>LOWER</i> WHEN INCOME INEQUALITY IS HIGHER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ prevalence of mental illness</li> <li>✓ status anxiety</li> <li>✓ conspicuous consumption and consumerism</li> <li>✓ use of illegal drugs</li> <li>✓ infant mortality</li> <li>✓ obesity in adults</li> <li>✓ overweight in children</li> <li>✓ teenage pregnancies and births</li> <li>✓ violence and homicide</li> <li>✓ bullying and conflict between children</li> <li>✓ harshness of penal system and numbers in prison</li> <li>✓ number of working hours</li> <li>✓ prevalence of "guard labour" (armed guards to properties)</li> <li>✓ number of heart attacks*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ child wellbeing</li> <li>➤ societal levels of trust</li> <li>➤ status of women - their political participation, employment, earnings</li> <li>➤ spending on foreign aid</li> <li>➤ life expectancy</li> <li>➤ scores on maths and literacy tests</li> <li>➤ waste recycling</li> <li>➤ social mobility</li> <li>➤ participation in groups and local organizations</li> <li>➤ happiness *</li> </ul>

## Dorling's Five Social Evils

Danny Dorling talks of "injustice rising out of the ashes of social evils"<sup>135</sup> - of which he identifies five.

**1: "Elitism is Efficient"**. Dorling describes elitism as an unintended consequence of providing the best educational resources to those whose parents had generally themselves received the best. It is seen as a positive move by many, including those who rather misunderstand Michael Young's *The Rise of the Meritocracy*<sup>136</sup>,

<sup>134</sup> The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Much Better, Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009 and the same authors' Income Inequality and Wellbeing, 2014. The wording of some items is slightly altered following their Foreword to Injustice: Why Social Inequality Still Exists, in Dorling, 2015: xviii-xxi.

\* Items marked \* are from The Inequality Organization at <https://inequality.org/facts/inequality-and-health/>

<sup>135</sup> Injustice: Why Social Inequality Still Persists, Dorling, 2015: 20 and then the whole book

<sup>136</sup> *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870-2033*, Young, 1973. The full title is rarely cited, the dates being omitted

"...a sociological fantasy set in the twenty-first century and portraying a sinister, highly stratified society organised around intelligence testing and educational selection. After some difficulty getting published, it was an immediate success and became very widely read. But it does not seem to have had the influence that Michael most wanted for it, over Labour Party thinking. The story was intended to help turn Labour away from meritocracy, by reminding it of the importance of communitarian values. Curiously, though, half a century later we have a Labour Government declaring the promotion of meritocracy as one of its primary objectives<sup>137</sup>.

This was exemplified to me when I heard Jack Straw, at the time the UK's Foreign Secretary, say that he thought the Labour Party's greatest achievement was replacing Aristocracy with Meritocracy. That is, a switch from being governed by those in positions of power due to breeding, family and social connection to those in power through having had the right education, with an emphasis on the intensely private public schools and Oxbridge.

**Table 2: Synonyms and Antonyms of "Elite"**

<b>"ELITE"</b>	
<b>SOME SYNONYMS</b>	<b>SOME ANTONYMS</b>
Highborn	Bad
Upper class	Dregs
Gentry	Herd
Aristocratic	Second rate
Exclusive	Low life
Noble	Working class
Champion	Poor
Best	Common
Thoroughbred	Unwashed
Elect	Trash
A1	Inferior

An online dictionary<sup>138</sup> gives a number of synonyms and antonyms of "elite" as in Table 2. How would these affect you - your thinking, feeling, willing and behaviour - if you constantly heard them being applied to you - or indeed regularly apply them to yourself<sup>139</sup> Table 1 has shown some of the effects on the "inferior second rates " as described by the antonyms to "elite" partly brought about by the loss of self-image and social face through being perceived as a "loser" by society and by oneself.

Michael Sandel<sup>140</sup> suggests that this humiliation of those seen as "losers" corrupts institutions of higher education, creates a cynical and arrogant elite, and leads to populist backlash and thence the emergence of Trumpism and Brexit.

<sup>137</sup> The Rise and Rise of Meritocracy, Dench, 2006.

<sup>138</sup> Though the same site they each had their own url, namely wordslike.org and antonymswords.com, accessed 03.02.22

<sup>139</sup> And what norms and values do they reflect of the way the dictionary compiler sees the society in which these words live? Who is the compiler? How do they decide on these synonyms and antonyms? All I can discover is that the list is from a company registered in Las Vegas

<sup>140</sup> The Tyranny of Merit, Sandel, 2020



**"Exclusion is Necessary".** A fundamental feature of ego-consciousness and manifested through othering is competition - the strong urge or felt need to strive to prove that I or we are better than you or they, and therefore I/we deserve a better and happier life style than you/they. A doctrine on which the whole capitalist system is based, it is not only manifested in popular culture and entertainment by numerous awards and competitions, but is also the basis of our education system and of course much business practice. Alfie Kohn<sup>141</sup> describes these as MEGA - Mutually Exclusive Goal Attainment in which "my success depends on your failure" and shows how in fact in education and business we punish and demotivate people through seemingly incentivising reward systems that actually reduce performance and output, for example by leading to mental health crises and dissuading teamwork.

Kohn is a strong advocate of the work one of the founders of Total Quality Management, W Edwards Deming<sup>142</sup>. Both of them strongly stress the dysfunctional aspects of competition in education and business, seeing it as a guarantee of lower morale, motivation, quality and productivity. This contrasts with the views of Jack Welch, at one time CEO of General Electric, who was a keen believer in elitism and decreed that those of his staff whose performance was in the bottom 10% should automatically be dismissed, no matter how good or bad that 10% figure actually was, nor what the reason for their relative performance.<sup>143</sup>

**3: "Prejudice is Natural".** The ego-centric process of "Othering" is based on prejudice - the forming and holding of pictures of others that I choose to hold, either pretty much unconsciously or via deliberate, thought-through views - views based on combinations of ignorance, unawareness, peer pressure and propaganda.

Although not an essential prerequisite for prejudice, a deeply held belief that others are somehow inferior, undeserving of pleasures, of the basic necessities of life, or even of the right to live at all, makes it easier for me to ignore or justify - to myself as well as to everybody else - gross injustices<sup>144</sup>, the benefits that I gain from these, and my unwillingness to do anything to attempt to counteract or overcome them. These beliefs may indeed be so deeply held that I'm completely unaware that I hold them. My basic education was at a so-called public school, where I learned, not through direct "teaching" but by h ever-so-subtle indoctrination processes, that the "working classes" [sic; aka "the lower orders"] were both unintelligent and idle, and therefore their relatively poor existences were the natural way of things. It therefore came as something of a surprise to me when I went to University - Manchester not Oxford - and discovered that the majority of my fellow students were not only "working class" but rather cleverer than me.

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<sup>141</sup> No Contest: The Case Against Competition, Kohn, 1986, and No Contest: the Case Against Competition, , Kohn ,1993.

<sup>142</sup> Out of the Crisis, Deming, 1982

<sup>143</sup> Winning, Welch and Welch, 2005

<sup>144</sup> "Just" is said to be derived, via French, from Latin *iustus* "upright, righteous, equitable; in accordance with law, lawful; true, proper; perfect, complete" - <https://www.etymonline.com/word/just>, accessed 06.02.22. As an unashamedly proud "Latin scholar" - I just scraped an O Level pass with 51% in the days when you knew where you were and marks were marks, I sometimes wonder where Latin came from

When it comes to gender, of course there continues to be worldwide prejudice and discrimination against women. The World Economic Forum produces an annual Global Gender Gap Report on four key dimensions (Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment), and tracks progress towards closing these gaps over time.

The gap score ranges from 100 - slightly non-intuitively this means there is no gap, women and men being totally equal, no difference between them - and 0 - a more or less unattainable score (hopefully) whereby women have no possibilities at all on those four dimensions. There is also a combined score that takes all four dimensions into account.

**Table 3: Some 2021 National Gender Gap Scores**

<b>RANK IN 2021</b> in descending order from lowest gap - least difference	<b>RANK</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>GAP</b>	<b>COMPOSITE GENDER GAP SCORE</b> the higher the score, the lower the gap 100 = no gender gap at all
	1	Iceland	89.2	
	2	Finland	86.1	
	3	Norway	84.9	
	4	New Zealand	84.0	
	5	Sweden	82.3	
	6	Namibia	80.9	
	7	Rwanda	80.5	
	23	United Kingdom	77.5	
	30	United States	76.3	
	50	Australia	73.1	
	150	Iran	58.2	
	151	Democratic Republic of Congo	57.6	
	152	Syria	56.8	
	153	Pakistan	55.6	
	154	Iraq	53.5	
	155	Yemen	49.2	
	156	Afghanistan <sup>145</sup>	44.4	

<sup>145</sup> I don't know when the data were obtained with reference to Afghanistan, but it was probably before the Taliban took over in 2021, which I imagine may have changed the score somewhat disastrously

Some rankings and those combined scores, from the 2021 Report, <sup>146</sup> are shown in Table 3. It's perhaps not surprising that the top five include four from Scandinavia - though Denmark actually comes 29th, just slightly better than the USA. Also the bottom seven - out of a total of 156 - more or less confirm my stereotypical views of the world, which, however, on the face of it are rather challenged by the positions of Namibia and Rwanda, which rank six and seven. However these scores say nothing about the *absolute* quality or level of, for example, educational attainment, or health and survival. It shows the extent to which these *differ* between women and men. So a high gap score (a low gender gap and perhaps would be better referred to as an equality score) could be obtained through women and men achieving almost equally brilliant educational attainment, or conversely if they were both equally dreadful - it's the comparison that is being measured, not the actual level as such.

These statistics provide one form of picture of prejudice and discrimination. Another approach is to hear from women how they experience the world in general, or the workplace, or the society and community in which they live. Many such descriptions are available <sup>147</sup> - I have just selected a couple, one of which is about being a black woman and a trainer<sup>148</sup>nearly 40 years ago. Are things changing?

Many of these stories and descriptions will be more than familiar to women readers of this piece, but men may not be so aware of them. They - perhaps I should say "we" - might benefit from reading and hearing more about them, as in the references that I have just given. Also we could try talking with women relatives, friends and colleagues about their experiences, if we think we can do so with appropriate levels of awareness and sensitivity.

It was the result of some such conversations that at the age of 42 I discovered that I am a man. Of course I had some vague awareness that this was so for quite a long time, but I had never given it much thought. It was when running some *Women and Men Working Together* programmes in the Civil Service with Pauline Farrell, Kirsty Ross, Myrtle Berman and Mike Pedler that I began to realise that not only am I a man physically, but also psychologically, socially, spiritually. This came about through a process that we called *Speak Out*. We divided into two groups - one for the women, the other for the men. The women's task was to prepare and deliver to the men a presentation that addressed three issues:

29. What it's like being a woman in this organisation
30. Things we'd like men never to say or do again
31. Changes in ourselves that want to make and would like men to help us with

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<sup>146</sup> *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, World Economic Forum. It's not clear - to me at any rate - quite how these scores are calculated

<sup>147</sup> *12 Things About Being A Woman That Women Won't Tell You*, Moran, 2016/2019.

<sup>148</sup> *Reflections on Being a Black Woman and a Trainer in Britain in 1985*, Douglas, 1985. This was published in *Management Education and Development*, the long-ago predecessor to this Journal, and was posted by David McAra in connection with my piece *Fifty Years On* in the Autumn/Winter 2020 edition

and conversely the men were invited to explore and present to the women on

1. What it's like being a man in this organisation
2. Things we'd like women never to say or do again
3. Changes in ourselves that want to make and would like women to help us with.

Two things became very apparent. The first was that we men couldn't do the task - it didn't make sense to us. "We're not men in this organisation, we're just people" - subtext "we're normal". When we presented this to the women many of them became rather angry, accusing us of refusing to share how it was for us, keeping it a locker-room secret.

The second thing was that the women found it extremely easy to do the task, and shared a whole host of things - talking about them, performing role plays, writing poems, drawing pictures. These sharings were shockingly revealing to all of us men, including me.

It was through this that I began the never-ending process of understanding how I live in the world, see it, feel it, experience it, from the position, the perspective, of a man. I'll never fully live it as a woman, never fully understand it, but at least I can make an effort to gain some understanding, some appreciation, of how women live it.

Of course we can ask ourselves similar questions with regard to other Others. If you are white - "what's it like being a white person in this organisation, this community, this neighbourhood, this country, this world?" Well for those of us who are indeed "white", (whatever that means) it's probably so "normal" that the question has no meaning - I can't answer it. If you are black and asked "what's it like being a black person in this organisation, this community, this neighbourhood, this country, this world? - you'll probably have rather a lot to say. Or Asian? Moslem? Hindu? Buddhist? Christian? Jew? Chinese? Or Able-bodied? Not Able-Bodied? Or Refugee? Asylum Seeker? Or neither?

And so on.

Ego-conscious prejudices around class, race and gender certainly played, and continue to play, a key part in capitalism's siblings, colonialism<sup>149</sup> and slavery. In the words of a colonialist who in the UK at least remains well-known and indeed still much revered as a great hero by many - namely Cecil Rhodes, "founder" of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe):

"We must find new lands from which we can easily obtain raw materials and at the same time exploit the cheap slave labour that is available from the natives of the colonies. The colonies would also provide a dumping ground for the surplus goods produced in our factories".<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Although some sources see what might appear to be a slightly technical difference between colonialism and imperialism, but here I am taking them to be much the same under the rubric "colonialism"

<sup>150</sup> *Development as Colonialism*, Goldsmith, 2000: 20

Let's hear it for those gallant colonies!

Of course Rhodes was speaking in the late nineteenth century, but his view of other lands as valuable dumping grounds appears to be very much alive, certainly in bodies such as the World Bank, whose president in 1991, Lawrence Summers, proposed that it develop a scheme to export rich nation garbage, toxic waste and heavily polluting industries to Africa. Thus, in a memo originally intended to be confidential

"I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that ... I've always thought that countries in Africa are vastly under polluted ... Just between you and me shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the Least Developed Countries?"<sup>151</sup>

Unlike Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal* of 1729 that the children of poor people in Ireland be sold as foodstuff in butchers' shops in order to "prevent them from being a burden to their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the public", the World Bank president's suggestion was not intended to be satirical, and certainly large amounts of waste have been exported, legally and illegally, from a number of countries, including the UK, to Africa and elsewhere, although those damned under-polluted countries are, for some inexplicable reason, defying the Euro-West's economic logic and resisting being dumped upon.

Rhodes didn't appear to be aware that slavery had supposedly been "abolished" some time before his call to action. Or perhaps he was just an observant realist, a true son of Empire. But whatever the legal positions in different parts of the world, slavery, although considered by many in the Euro-West to be a somewhat embarrassing historical aberration, best forgotten and not talked about in polite company - except when commemorated by statues of earlier multi-billionaire slave-traders - is a major element in today's ego-capitalism.

Indeed today there are more slaves - people held in enslavement - now than ever before. True they are not being manacled and shipped across the Atlantic as "black ivory", although many are flown across Europe to wealthier countries such as the UK with promises of well paid jobs as nannies and au pairs, only to find themselves held captive - trafficked illegal immigrants manacled by having their passports stolen - and forced to work for little or no wages in nail bars, as domestic servants, as car cleaners, as sex workers.

In 2017 there were an estimated 40 million people throughout the world who were considered to be held in some form of modern slavery - 25 million being held captive and working for no wages, 15 million in forced marriages. 71% of the total considered to be held in slavery were female, with 25% being children.<sup>152</sup> More formally or legally, in England and Wales over 5000 modern slavery offences were officially recorded in 2018-19<sup>153</sup>. During this time consumers in the UK supported - possibly unwittingly? - the use of slavery world-

wide, importing 18 billion US dollars' worth of goods produced using slave labour - the fifth largest such importer. The largest was the USA, with 144 billion dollars' worth. By far the main types of imports were

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<sup>151</sup> *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Nixon 2011; 1. Nixon refers to processes such as these as "Slow Violence" - as opposed the fast violence of armed invasion and warfare

<sup>152</sup> *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery*, The International Labour Office and The Walk Free Foundation, 2017

<sup>153</sup> *Modern Slavery in the UK*, Office for National Statistics, 2020

electronic goods (laptops and mobile phones) and garments, followed, albeit a long way behind, by fish, cocoa and sugarcane.

And what about modern colonialism? As I spell-check this there is the all-too obvious example of Russia and The Ukraine, with others such as the Chinese occupation of Tibet, and the forcible expulsion by the UK, between 1968 and 1973, of the indigenous inhabitants of Diego Garcia and other Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean.<sup>154</sup> This expulsion was carried out by the UK Government so that a joint US/UK military base could be established on the island and is currently considered by "us" to be permanent, in spite of a number of United Nations rulings to the contrary and efforts by Mauritius to regain them. Is this colonisation, occupation or worse?

I will shortly come to Dorling's fourth evil - "greed is good" - which highlights growing inequalities of wealth and of income, one of the effects of which is the increasing political power of the wealthy and very wealthy, leading to what Savage refers to as "the return of plutocracy to the political table"<sup>155</sup>. These "economic elites who strut up and down the political stage" typically have little or no experience of political office, their success being due to the electorate's disillusion with established politicians by whom they feel they have long been ignored.

"Wealthy and authoritarian leaders - now the dominant form of dictatorship - use democratic vehicles for their own purposes, and to enhance their business opportunities ... it is completely explicable why xenophobia becomes the most potent issue in this new plutocratic politics, often manifested by the mobilization of anti-immigrant sentiment"

and the separation, the othering, of the despised yet feared foreigner<sup>156</sup>.

Some see the United States, Israel, Australia and New Zealand as colonial states due to the displacement of their indigenous peoples by settlers<sup>157</sup>, and the USA, often helped by the UK, is a sort of proxy-coloniser by what's known as "regime change" using force, assassination or punitive sanctions on 15 independent countries at the latest count. The main sufferers of course are the already impoverished bulk of the civilian population (again especially women and children).

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<sup>154</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08sfyf2> Accessed 15.02.22

<sup>155</sup> *The Return of Inequality*, Savage, 2021:303-306

<sup>156</sup> *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration and the Future of White Majorities*, Kaufmann, 2019, explores this in some detail

<sup>157</sup> Perhaps most countries are; for example who were the original inhabitants of various parts of the UK, and who were the invading colonists? How far back is it useful to go? Who were the "original" inhabitants of the UK, and where did they come from? A 4000 year old body at Amesbury, near Stonehenge, has been shown to be that of a man who came from what is now Switzerland. Damn those economic migrants! [https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/archaeology/king\\_stonehenge\\_01.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/archaeology/king_stonehenge_01.shtml) accessed 15.02.22

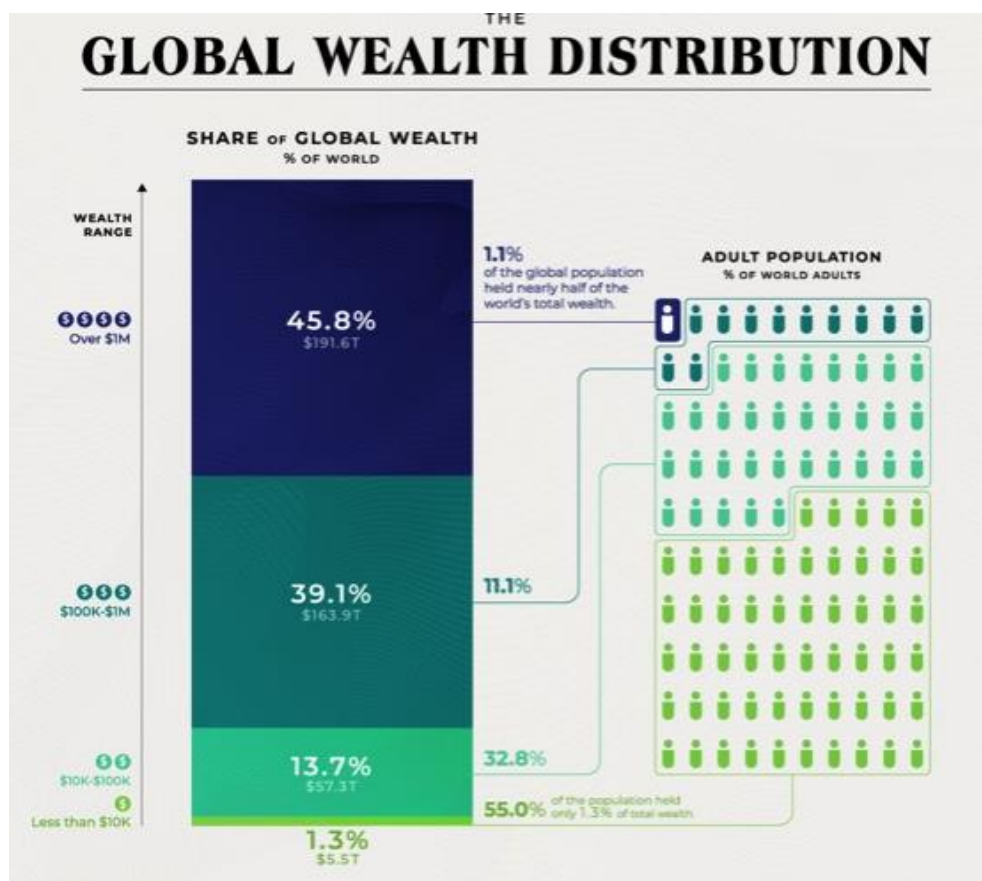
4: "Greed is Good". One of the problems when writing about *Ego to Eco* is that

"at the deepest level, ecological awareness is an awareness of the fundamental interconnectedness and interdependence of all phenomena"<sup>158</sup>

which makes it difficult to separate those phenomena into a neat, linear sequence. Thus although Dorling identifies Greed is Good as a distinct "evil" it is clearly linked to his other four - as they all are to each other. Here I will follow his framework by making it the place to consider wealth inequality, to which I have just referred in connection with the growth of plutocratic economic elites.

Figure 1 shows the global distribution of wealth at the end of 2020. With recent changes due to COVID such statistics are changing by the day, but it seems that the proportion of wealth owned by the top 1% or less is currently increasing. The combined wealth of the 700 or so billionaires in the US has so far risen during the pandemic by around 70%, from an average of about \$3 trillion to \$5 trillion. The top five saw their combined wealth during the pandemic increase by 123% to \$779 trillion.<sup>159</sup>

Figure 1: World Distribution of Wealth at the End of 2020<sup>160</sup>



<sup>158</sup> Belonging to the Universe: New Thinking About God and Nature, Capra, Steindl-Rast and Matus, 1992: 70

<sup>159</sup> <https://inequality.org/facts/global-inequality/#global-income-inequality> accessed 13.02.22.

<sup>160</sup> Reproduced with permission from Visual *Capitalist* at <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/distribution-of-global-wealth-chart/> accessed 09.02.22

Then there is income inequality, which again varies from country to county. In the USA, whilst the wealthiest 5% people own no less than 70% of the wealth, the top 5% of income earners take 30% of all income earned. In the UK the top 5% of income earners take 20% of all income earned, and the wealthiest 5% own a relatively mere 32% of the total wealth. Of the ten countries cited<sup>161</sup>, Finland has the lowest inequalities of both wealth - the top 5% owning only 30% - and income, with the top 5% income earners bringing in 12% of all income.

Am I in danger of displaying what's known, particularly in somewhat right-wing circles, as "the politics of envy"? Well, in 2019-20, in the UK, 4.3 million children lived below the government's own definition of poverty<sup>162</sup>: is wanting to change this a sign of envy? Maybe - but I don't think so. And 75% of those children were living in households where at least one adult was in employment: is noting this a sign of envy? Maybe - but I don't think so.

More like the politics of justice - and hence the politics of survival. Of the human race.

**5: "Despair is Inevitable".** The issues of inequality that I have been describing are, by and large, seen by many as inevitable side effects of capitalism, which is nonetheless by and large taken to be the only economic system that works well - that is, it works well for some of us, including those with political and social power. The fact that it leads to ever-increasing levels and rates of anxiety, depression, suicide is seen as just one of those things, that we can address not by having to change the overall system, but, as I know<sup>163</sup>, by creating and prescribing "better" medication<sup>164</sup> and other therapies.

But are despair and sticking plaster remedies indeed inevitable? Do we have to create coping mechanisms and processes? Or can we change the way we relate to the world, the way we relate to each other, by moving away from ego towards eco?

## So What Can We Do? Reducing Our Separation, Increasing Our Oneness with Human Beings

In Part I of this series of papers - *Overview and Eco-Consciousness* - I suggest a number of things that we can do individually and collectively to bring about a move from ego- to eco-consciousness. Here I will add some pointers to things specifically related to increasing our oneness with regard to other human beings.

1. Become aware of our own "-isms" - sexism, racism, whatever. Try to "catch yourself" when these click in. Is there a pattern to this?
2. Ask some others to help us by telling us when they experience us "ising"

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<sup>161</sup> The Return of Inequality, Savage 2021: 80, referring to data in The Wealth Inequality of Nations, Pfeiffer and Waitkus, 2019

<sup>162</sup> <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>; accessed 13.02.22

<sup>163</sup> I'm not criticising these, but the conditions in which we live that cause them to be necessary. Some years ago I was helped to come out of a clinical depression through my trusty Serotonin, my supportive counsellor and my loving family and friends

<sup>164</sup> Forming other highly competitive, highly profitable, industries



3. Do the *Othering Activity* that I have described - on our own, in our affinity groups. It can be completed as a purely verbal process or, perhaps in a group, we could use pictures from magazines, newspapers and so on to create collages that show examples of othering - ours, journalists', politicians', peoples'. Or instead of pictures, use extracts from articles, emails, letters, quotes from radio and television programmes, podcasts, blogs. Or create role plays. Or perform a short play to another group - ask them to "spot the isms."
4. Do the same but with the converse of *Othering* - namely *Mattering*. Who could we matter - how, when, why? How can we matter ourselves?
5. If we want to considering ways of supporting refugees and asylum seekers, see if there is a City of Sanctuary near us and if there is contact them to see how we might help. If there isn't, consider setting one up. The City of Sanctuary website has a lot of information, advice, tools and resources including guidance on lobbying MPs that can be applied to other areas of interest as well as issues concerning refugees. <https://cityofsanctuary.org/>
6. Again with reference to working with refugees and asylum seekers, if interested in various art forms, especially poetry and theatre, *Good Chance* runs groups mainly for refugees but with others - like me -as well.
7. <https://www.goodchance.org.uk/stories/tag/Poetry>
8. and
9. <https://www.goodchance.org.uk/theatres-what-we-do>
10. One of the pictures on the cover of this issue is of *Little Amal*, a 3.5 meter tall puppet of a Syrian 9 year-old girl who walked from The Syrian-Turkish border to Manchester. In the picture she is in Sheffield where she was greeted by a crowd of thousands and was danced a welcome by a group that included me
11. Practice developing and experiencing empathy and ways of being that are called Modes 5, 6 and 7 in Part II - Relationships With and Within Ourselves - of this serialisation
12. Consider joining or enrolling with organizations and online groups that match our interests. There are many of these - I'm just indicating a few of those with which I am connected.

YES!	<a href="https://www.yesmagazine.org/">https://www.yesmagazine.org/</a>
Global Justice Now	<a href="http://www.globaljustice.org.uk">www.globaljustice.org.uk</a>
38 Degrees	<a href="https://home.38degrees.org.uk/">https://home.38degrees.org.uk/</a>
The Conversation	<a href="https://theconversation.com/uk">https://theconversation.com/uk</a>
The Refugee Brief from UNHCR	<a href="mailto:info@news.e-unhcr.org">info@news.e-unhcr.org</a>

13. Listen to BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*. I find it extremely informative on a number of issues, including discrimination and injustice in many forms -such as, but not restricted to, sexism, patriarchy, racism, modern slavery
14. Follow up some of the references indicated in this paper's footnotes and given in full below

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### **Tom Boydell writes**

When I turned 80 I was advised to go part-time. So I'm now a part-time management development consultant, a part-time writer, a part-time actor, a part-time singer, a part-time poet, a part-time weaver and a part-time gardener. I'm glad I'm only a part-timer, otherwise I'd be worn out.

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# From Ego to Eco: where are we, where are we trying to go?

## Part 5. How we organise ourselves

Tom Boydell



### "Change the Workplace, Change the World".

the title of a book by Alan Watkins and Nick Dalton<sup>165</sup>. Although its subtitle is *The HR (R)Evolution*, it is rather more than a book for HR specialists and focuses, amongst other things, on many of the issues that I have been exploring in this series of papers. Supported by ideas and examples, they describe some of the challenges we are currently facing and say that "we have two paths ahead of us:

"One leads to 'back to the future': consolidation of industry, less employment, greater inequality, social unrest, and at worst a decimated ecosystem. The other leads to a new paradigm: a world where social capital counts more than financial capital, a world where sustainability matters, and potentially we can all enjoy an abundance and move beyond scarcity"<sup>166</sup>

or in the terms we have been using in this Journal, we can choose an ego- or an eco- route forward.

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<sup>165</sup> Change the Workplace, Change the World, Watkins and Dalton, 2020

<sup>166</sup> Change the Workplace, Change the World, Watkins and Dalton, 2020, page 9

For Watkins and Dalton it is the path that businesses take that will determine the future of the earth and every-body, every-thing, that lives on it. In previous episodes of this serialisation I have given some examples of what we as individuals might do, and now in this final part I will look first at the evolution of how we organise ourselves in organisations, and then touch upon some similar moves in the field of politics.

I will start with Table 1, from Part I of this series.<sup>167</sup>, that shows, from an individual point of view, some aspects of the move from ego- to eco-consciousness. In table 2 I follow by looking at what this means for an organisation and in the world of politics, again moving from self-assertive separation and competition to integrated oneness and co-operation.

Here, then, we have what I am calling Organisational Stances. Equivalent to the individual Stances in Table 1, these are now the ways in which the organisation stands, how it perceives the world..

For some time I considered there to be three Stances<sup>168</sup>, but my current picture is that there are four,<sup>169</sup> although as will be seen the last two have many similarities. I used to think in terms of identifying an organisation as.."being in" one or other stance - that is, "a Stance 1, 2, 3 or 4 organisation". I now see this as quite unhelpful - any one organisation will very probably do some things in a Stance 1 way, others in a Stance 2 way, still others in a Stance 3 way, and perhaps a few in a Stance 4 way. It may be that we don't do in the way of one or two Stances. Indeed I would suggest that this might be quite a common occurrence, with most organisations currently doing most things as in Stances 1 and 2.

Of course it's quite possible - indeed highly probable - that different stakeholders will have different pictures of the organisation's Stance profile, whether these be different people from within that organisation, or others from outside organisations.

The way we handle these differences will themselves be attuned to the Stance that we take to transforming our organisation. Thus a Stance 1 approach to such change might involve only the senior managers in giving their picture of how things are now and how they would like them to be, and then deciding what they think should be done as a result - possibly by the Stance 1 technology of reorganisation.

By contrast, a Stance 3 approach would involve many stakeholders in creating and sharing pictures of how they experience the organisation, how they would like to experience it, and how to move forward, how to make that transformation - perhaps. using one or more of the approaches shown in the table or adapting, designing, their own.

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<sup>167</sup> From Part I: Overview and Consciousness

<sup>168</sup> Leadership Development; Current Practice, Future Perspectives, Burgoyne, Boydell and Pedler, 2005; 'The Learning Organization' - Drop the Dead Metaphor!, Blanter, Boydell and Burgoyne, 2013

<sup>169</sup> Learning Company", Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell, 2019; The Future of the Learning Organization, Boydell, Pedler and Burgoyne, 2019

In this series I have tried to indicate steps that we can do - individually and with others - to reduce Shiva and Shiva's<sup>170</sup> separations between us and nature, between us and each other, between our selves and our Selves. In face of all the challenges that Earth and all of us who live on and in her this these may seem rather small steps. However, apart from the following tables, I will end with two - observations? slogans? exhortations? I'll say HOPES. The first is from Chapter 1, *Principles of Progress*, of Koch and Hooks' *Believe in People*<sup>171</sup>; the second is the title of a book by Servigne, Stevens and Chapelle<sup>172</sup>. Between them these give us a positive, optimistic message, namely.

**PROGRESS HAPPENS FROM THE BOTTOM UP**

**and**

**ANOTHER END OF THE WORLD IS POSSIBLE.**

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<sup>170</sup> Oneness vs the 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom, Shiva and Shiva, 2019: 22

<sup>171</sup> Believe in People, Koch and Hooks, 2020

<sup>172</sup> Another End of the World is Possible, Servigne, Stevens and Chapelle, 2021

**Table 1: Four Stances of Being**

	<b>CAPRA<sup>173</sup> Shiva and Shiva<sup>174</sup></b>	<b>STANCE &amp; Modes<sup>175</sup> and Torbert Action Logics</b>	<b>INCLUDED: in "My" Group</b>	<b>EXCLUDED: Others not in "My" Group</b>
<b>EGO</b>	<p><b>SELF-ASSERTIVE Separation</b></p> <p><b>Thinking</b> Rational Analysis Reductionist Linear</p> <p><b>Values</b> Expansion Competition Quantity Domination</p>	<p><b>Stance 1</b> Modes 1 &amp; 2 Adapting, Adhering Action Logic 1 Opportunist</p>	Me	Anyone not me: all of you, all of them
		<p><b>Stance 2</b> Modes 3, 4 &amp; 5 Accepting, Experiencing, Experimenting Action Logics 2, 3, 4: Diplomat, Expert, Achiever</p>	Me and us - those whom I see as being in "my" reference group: some of you, the you who are the same as I am or I want to be	All others - those I see not as in my reference group: most of you, most of them
<b>ECO</b>	<p><b>INTEGRATIVE Oneness</b></p> <p><b>Thinking</b> Intuitive Synthesis Holistic Nonlinear</p> <p><b>Values</b> Conservation Co~operation Quality Partnership</p>	<p><b>Stance 3</b> Mode 6 Connecting, Action Logic 5: Individualist/ Redefining</p>	Me, us, quite a lot of you. As Stance 2 plus those from other diverse groups with which I'm prepared to associate, to appreciate, as joint members of a larger We, Us	Those others not in the groups with which I choose to associate, to appreciate: some of you.
		<p><b>Stance 4</b> Modes 6 &amp; 7 Connecting, Dedicating Action Logics 6 &amp; 7: Transforming, Alchemist/Alchemical</p>	Everybody and everything - WE	Nobody, nothing: none of you

<sup>173</sup> *The Web of Life*, Capra, 1997: 10. The mixture of nouns and adjectives in the table is as in the original

<sup>174</sup> *Oneness vs the 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom*, Shiva and Shiva, 2019: 22-31

<sup>175</sup> The Modes form a framework of individual development and are described in Part II - *Relationships With and Within Ourselves*

**Table 2: Four Stances of Organising**

CHARACTERISTIC	STANCE 1 IMPLEMENTING: Doing things well	STANCE 2 IMPROVING Doing things better	STANCE 3 INNOVATING Doing better things - together	STANCE 4 INTERTWINGLING Doing things that matter - to the world
<b>Leaders and leadership</b>	<p>"Leaders as managers": top management sets mission, vision, objectives for the organisation and may or may not inform others of these.</p> <p>Leadership style: <i>command and control</i></p>	<p>"Managers as leaders": top management "inspires" others who in turn "inspire" their subordinates and so on down the hierarchical chain, all managers creating enthusiasm and commitment from their teams - "delegated leadership"</p> <p>Leadership style: <i>Winning hearts and minds I</i></p>	<p>Emphasis not so much on leader with a specific job title but on the <i>process</i> of leadership - the act of helping to make sense, make meaning together from what's happening in a community of practice<sup>176</sup> - which anybody may exercise in a given moment. This may be termed "distributed leadership".<sup>177</sup> It requires an appropriate overall organisational climate or system, involving as it does "relational dialogue, having conversations across boundaries between different world views." <sup>178</sup> Such dialogue may call upon us to use <i>presencing</i> - "letting go .... [of the past] ... letting come the future that wants to emerge"<sup>179</sup>.</p> <p>Leadership style: <i>Making meaning together</i></p>	

<sup>176</sup> Making Common Sense: Leadership as Meaning Making in a Community of Practice, Drath and Palus, 1994; Distributed Leadership, Business Balls, 2022 <https://www.businessballs.com/leadership-philosophies/distributed-leadership/>

<sup>177</sup> The term "distributed leadership" has many diverse meanings, some quite disparate. See for example Distributed Leadership, Bolden, 2007

<sup>178</sup> Leadership Development; Current Practice, Future Perspectives, Burgoyne, Boydell and Pedler, 2005:19. See also Creating Leaderful Organizations: How to Bring Out Leadership in Everyone, Raelin, 2003

<sup>179</sup> Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges, Scharmer, 2007: 366



<p><b>Purpose</b></p>	<p>Decided or assumed by owners, national or local government policies, top managers</p> <p>Commercial Sector: profit; survival</p> <p>Public Service: meeting specific user needs and statutory obligations; pleasing legislators and voters; survival</p> <p>NGOs and Voluntary Organisations: meeting the needs to which the organisation is dedicated; survival</p>	<p>Decided or assumed as in Stance 1 but now explicitly competitive, moving from Stance 1's surviving into winning - beating the internal or external opposition, "beating" our own previous performance, being the best in the business.</p>	<p>Purpose as in Stances 1 and 2 - profit, statutory obligations, meeting specified needs - but with the proviso that we don't damage the planet and may indeed regenerate damage already done.</p> <p>In so doing it is appreciated that many diverse stakeholders want to achieve things together, to participate in the creation of an unknown future.</p> <p>At the same time it is recognised that all stakeholders have their own legitimate, diverse, traditions, histories, purposes and aspirations and that these need to be incorporated as far as is possible into the overall purpose of working together</p> <p>Stance 2 emphasis on competing and winning shifts to become co-operating, although as a collective we may still want to do better than before, better than other collectives</p>	<p>Converse of Stance 3: now we want to heal the world, make it a better a better place - doing " the good, the true, the beautiful, the heroic" 180 - without making a financial loss, without failing to meet our statutory obligations, without failing to meet our specified needs</p> <p>Tackling issues of separation from other humans (injustice, inequality, racism, sexism, slavery) and from nature [See Parts III and IV of this series]</p> <p>NB: there are many government agencies and not-for-profits who have this as their stated purpose but actually operate with Stances 1 and 2 ways of doing things</p>
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<sup>180</sup> Conscious Capitalism, Mackey and Sisodia, 2014: 59-67

<p><b>Recognised stakeholders - i.e. those whose views are listened to</b></p>	<p>Commercial sector: owners, investors, senior managers. To a limited extent, customers - e.g. through marketing surveys</p> <p>Public service, NGOs and Voluntary Organisations: legislative and regulatory bodies; senior managers; to a limited extent, voters and public in general - e.g. results of opinion polling</p>	<p>As Stance 1 plus all internal stakeholders (e.g. employees), customers, suppliers</p> <p>Much consultation, survey feedback, evaluation,</p>	<p>Owners, investors, employees, suppliers, customers, neighbours, interest and pressure groups, government departments and agencies, regulatory bodies, local communities, competitors, future generations</p> <p>Also awareness and acknowledgement of human, natural, environmental, ethical "stakeholders" such as those represented by The United Nations 17 Goals for Sustainable Development<sup>181</sup></p> <p>More than just consultation - stakeholders are actively engaged, involved, working together with us</p>	<p>We want to make the World our prime stakeholder - a better place.</p> <p>Stance 3's awareness and acknowledgement of human, natural, environmental, ethical "stakeholders" now become a priority.</p>
<p><b>Distribution of power</b></p>	<p>Held according to position in hierarchy - the more senior you are, the more power you should have</p> <p>In practice there is often unofficial power, e.g. due to specific expertise or influence</p>	<p>Strategic power held by those at top of hierarchy. Power delegated to employees to make operational improvements - thus I am empowered to meet your objectives -, "I empower [want] you to do better that which I want you to do"</p>	<p>The diverse stakeholders have legitimate strategic and operational power within the overall community of practice - and can use this to make things happen as well as not happen</p>	

<sup>181</sup> See Part I: Overview and Consciousness in this series. Also 17 Goals for Sustainable Development, United Nations, 2019

<b>Distribution of knowledge</b>	<p>Assumed that the more senior you are the greater knowledge you have. In practice, many employees have considerable knowledge but this is often ignored or rejected</p>	<p>It is recognised and appreciated that all those stakeholders who are involved - such as employees, customers, suppliers - have much significant knowledge. They are consulted and involved to determine the best way of achieving the hierarchically determined purpose</p>	<p>As Stance 2 but with more diverse stakeholders who are now engaged and involved rather than just consulted. This involvement includes jointly determining our purpose.</p>	<p>As Stance 3 and now with wider range of stakeholders as described above</p>
<b>Organisation structure</b>	<p>Designed for central and hierarchical control. Clear lines of authority and accountability</p>	<p>Designed for central control of direction and local empowerment of operations. Overarching hierarchy which attempts to retain clear lines of authority &amp; accountability whilst recognising practical limitations e.g. "dotted line" relationships, matrix management, teamworking</p>	<p>Designed to support the co-operation of communities of practice. Different structures for specific purposes - meeting legal regulations, implementing and improving (Stances 1 and 2) within the overall context of doing better things and things that matter</p> <p>Structures may take any number of forms - hierarchy, lattice, matrix, flexible network of local organisations, groups and teams, forming and dissolving around changing business and community needs and corporate relationships</p>	
<b>Decision making</b>	<p>By the leader and top management</p> <p>Others' decisions are about how to carry out the rules and procedures that we have been taught</p>	<p>Policy decisions made by senior managers, after consultation and discussion with others.</p> <p>Operational decisions made by those who will implement them - in line with policies from above - as in Stance 2 Organisation Change and Development Programmes below</p>	<p>By many stakeholders, using various processes of working together, as in Stance 3 and 4 Organisation Change and Development Programmes below</p>	

<b>Picture of people</b>	"Hands", human resources,	Resourceful humans	Resourceful, purposeful, co~operating humans	Resourceful, purposeful, co~operating, committed humans
<b>Focus of training and development</b>	Individual competence	Individual and team competence	Individual and team competence plus cross-boundary working with a number of stakeholders with whom we feel related	As Stance 3 but with a wider range of others with and to whom we now feel related, connected
<b>Organisation change and development programmes</b>	Restructuring, reorganising; Quality Assurance	Briefing groups; teamwork development; Business Process Re-engineering; Deming approach to continuous improvement and Statistical Process Control; Lean thinking; Six Sigma; Balanced Scorecard	Action learning; actor network mapping; ante-narrative; appreciative enquiry; Bohm dialogue; collaborative enquiry; complexity mapping; critical conversation; cross boundary working; customer and supplier mapping; design thinking; empathic listening; forum theatre; future search; generative dialogue; Goethean Conversation; large group/whole system development; network analysis; non-violent communication; open space; presencing theatre; problem wickedness monitor; Quaker method; relational action learning; relational practice; story telling; talking stick; theatre of the oppressed; Transformations cards; U-process; Visual Explorer; World Café.	
<b>Organisational metaphor</b>	Machine, to be run smoothly and efficiently	Organism, a living problem to be solved	Network of conversations to explore a mystery and create a story together	
<b>Underpinning disciplines</b>	Engineering. Behaviourism	Humanistic psychology. Statistical Variation	Systems Theory. Social Constructionism. Adult Development. Pragmatics. Anthroposophy	Threefold Social Order. Posthumanism

<p><b>A somewhat prejudiced and selective sample of underpinning influencers</b></p>	<p>Taylor 1911;<sup>182</sup> Fayol 1949;183 Skinner 1971<sup>184</sup></p>	<p>Maslow 1954<sup>185</sup> McGregor 1960<sup>186</sup> Rogers 1969;<sup>187</sup> Deming 1982<sup>188</sup></p>	<p>Follet 1918;<sup>189</sup> Bateson 1972;<sup>190</sup> Rorty 1979;<sup>191</sup> Senge 2010;<sup>192</sup> Gergen 1994;<sup>193</sup> Scharmer 2007<sup>194</sup></p>	<p>Steiner 1917;<sup>195</sup> Douglas 1920;<sup>196</sup> Perlas 2000;<sup>197</sup> Scharmer 2007;<sup>198</sup> Large 2010<sup>199</sup>; Braidotti 2013;<sup>200</sup> Latour 2018<sup>201</sup></p>
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<sup>182</sup> Principles of Scientific Management, Taylor, 1911

<sup>183</sup> General and Industrial Administration, Fayol, 1949

<sup>184</sup> Beyond Freedom and Dignity, Skinner, 1971

<sup>185</sup> Motivation and Personality, Maslow, 1954

<sup>186</sup> The Human Side of Enterprise, McGregor, 1960

<sup>187</sup> Freedom to Learn, Rogers, 1969

<sup>188</sup> Out of the Crisis, Deming, 1982

<sup>189</sup> Mary P. Follett: Creating Democracy, Transforming Management, Tonn, I 2003

<sup>190</sup> [Steps to an Ecology of Mind](#), Bateson, G, 1972

<sup>191</sup> Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Rorty, 1979

<sup>192</sup> The Necessary Revolution. Senge et al, 2010

<sup>193</sup> Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction, Gergen,

<sup>194</sup> Theory U, Scharmer, 2007

<sup>195</sup> Towards Social Renewal, Steiner, 1917/1999; Common Wealth, Large, 2010; Free, Equal and Mutual, Large and Briault, 2018

<sup>196</sup> The Clifford Hugh Douglas Institute for the Study and Promotion of Social Credit, <https://www.socred.org/> accessed 28.02.22

<sup>197</sup> Shaping Globalization: Civil Society, Cultural Power and Threefolding, Perlas, 2000

<sup>198</sup> Theory U, Scharmer, 2007

<sup>199</sup> Common Wealth, Large, 2010

<sup>200</sup> The Posthuman, Braidotti, 2013

<sup>201</sup> Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime, Latour, 2018

<b>Approximate date when actively practised or emphasised in organisations</b>	Since the Industrial Revolution. More consciously from about 1918 to present <sup>202</sup>	From about 1965 to present	From about 1995 to present	From about 2000 to present
<b>Related Political Governance Systems</b>	Autocracy, Tyranny, dictatorship from time immemorial to present	Democracy - universal suffrage.	Holacracy, Crowdocracy <sup>203</sup>	Green parties may promote Stance 4 policies but operate mainly in Stances 1 and 2 ways  Financial System: Universal Basic Income and Universal Credit <sup>204</sup>

<sup>202</sup> In 2017 Fayol and Taylor came first and ninth respectively in 12 Manage's list of "Ten Top Management Concepts". The following year Fayol remained at number one and Taylor was promoted to third, on his way down as he doesn't feature in the 2020 list at all - unlike the unassailable Fayol who was still hanging on in there at number one. Plus ça change. 12 Manage's list of "Ten Top Management Concepts, [https://www.12manage.com/description\\_top10.html](https://www.12manage.com/description_top10.html) accessed 28.02.22

<sup>203</sup> Crowdocracy: the End of Politics, Watkins and Stratenus, 2016

<sup>204</sup> Where do we Go from Here? Chaos or Community? Martin Luther King Jr, 1967; The Politics of Money: Towards Sustainability and Economic Democracy, Hutchinson, 2002; Universal Basic Income, Peters, 2021;

<b>Organisational and political examples/ experiments in practice</b>	Many world-wide, e.g. currently Syria, Saudi-Arabia, Russia, North Korea	Many world-wide, Finland was the first in 1917. Some countries profess to have it but with rules that appear to make voting difficult for certain sections of the population (e.g. some States in the USA are alleged to make it difficult for Black Americans to vote <sup>205</sup>	Mondragón Co-Operative, Spain <sup>206</sup> WL Gore <sup>207</sup> The Irish Citizens' Assembly <sup>208</sup> Iceland Constitution <sup>209</sup> Preston, UK <sup>210</sup>	SEKEM - sustainable development in the Egyptian desert <sup>211</sup>
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<sup>205</sup> Why It Is so Hard to Vote If You're Black, Poor or Elderly in America, Gidda, 2017

<sup>206</sup> Mondragón Co-operative Corporation: Participatory Business Management, Participedia, nd

<sup>207</sup> Workplace Democracy at W.L. Gore & Associates Inc, nd >2019

<sup>208</sup> The Citizens' Assembly, Government of Ireland, 2022

<sup>209</sup> Will Iceland Get a New Constitution? A New Revision Process Is Taking Shape, Hudson, 2018

<sup>210</sup> Preston Model: Community Wealth Generation and a Local Cooperative Economy, Cannon, Thorpe and Emili, 2020

<sup>211</sup> Sustainable Development Since 1977, <https://www.sekem.com/en/index/>

## Tom Boydell writes

When I turned 80 I was advised to go part-time. So I'm now a part-time management development consultant, a part-time writer, a part-time actor, a part-time singer, a part-time poet, a part-time weaver and a part-time gardener. I'm glad I'm only a part-timer, otherwise I'd be worn out.

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# Ego to Eco

## A joyous and enriching journey

Nick Heap



### Introduction

Every day we hear more about the dire situation our unthinking treatment of our planetary home is causing. It is profoundly depressing. Then we hear that we will have to give up so much of what we take for granted and think we need and deserve to fix it. This message adds another layer of anger, despair, and hopelessness. The only way out of it is a painful struggle which is an unattractive prospect.

I want to challenge this narrative. Perhaps the way to a sustainable future where we live in harmony with nature and each other could be joyous and fun. Learning to live together on a small planet will enrich us all. Let's choose to find a way that uses and brings out the best in ourselves and each other. We can do it. We know how to do this on a small scale. Let's find out what is working and see how to do more of it joyfully.

My thoughts on some simple, scalable, practical actions follow.

### Listening

If you talk to someone who listens and is present, you think and feel better. Listening is the basis of all coaching, counselling, mentoring, and therapy. It works very well when two people *take turns*. As we do more of this, we solve our immediate worries and think about the bigger picture. We also act to make our world a better place.

This simple process is infinitely scalable. Anyone who can listen can do it. When people feel heard, they want to listen to others. Listening is a good virus. It deserves spreading.

It's easy to test. Just ask a friend or colleague if they would like a good listening to and listen as though there is nothing you would rather do instead. Then say you would like a turn. Great things will happen.

Mutual listening is enjoyable and rewarding. You will get closer to each other and understand each other's worlds. You will both become inspired to act and learn.

Listening is even more enlightening and consequential when the person you listen to is different from you. Once you know one person from another group, you can never again stereotype that group.

I have the privilege of listening to people in five African countries. Their kindness and wisdom are an utter revelation.

[A short video about listening \(http://bit.ly/amedij1\)](http://bit.ly/amedij1)

[Listening to a Kenyan farmer talking about climate change \(http://bit.ly/amedij2\)](http://bit.ly/amedij2)



## Imagining

One of our core qualities as humans is boundless imagination. We want to build the positive images we create. There is an “Imagine” movement, starting with “Imagine Chicago”, where people across a community have conversations about what is good and great about their community and how it can be better. Because the exchanges make people feel good, they have the confidence to make things better. The “Imagine Chicago” movement is generating positive and transformative initiatives across the city.

This idea is also infinitely scalable. It's easy to “Imagine” a village, a town, a region, a country or even “Imagine Earth”.

How about contacting someone in your network who is different from you? They might do different work, have a different world view or politics, or live in another country or all of these. Just ask these questions and listen. “What do you love about planet Earth?”, “If you were revisiting planet Earth in 100 years-time and thought, this is amazing, it's what I had always dreamed the world would be like, what would be happening?” “What sort of world do you want to leave to our great-great-grand-children?” “How would you feel?” “What is one thing, however small, that you will do this week to move it in the direction you want?” “How would you feel if you knew you had made a positive difference?”

These conversations work even better if you share the results in a small group. Then people support and encourage each other. It is counter-cultural and feels scary to take power and responsibility. It can also be enormous fun if we do things together and don't take ourselves too seriously. Many small actions can and will make a positive difference. The present state of things is also the result of billions of small steps.

[Video of three of us "Imagining Earth". \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj3\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj3)

## Connecting

One thing is clear. We are not alone in seeing that we need to work together for the good of ourselves and the fellow inhabitants of our home. In "Blessed Unrest," Paul Hawken talks of at least *two million organisations* (Note organisations, not individuals) worldwide with similar or compatible aims. Although collectively this is "The biggest movement the world is unaware of", it is not yet joined up.

Many years ago, I ran a Networking the Networks event in London. People from thirty developmental networks met to connect, listen to each other, cooperate, and learn. We discovered our common purpose was "Creating Transformation".

We could replicate this online or face to face in communities. It could lead to joint projects and effective action.

As well as networking organisations, networking individuals with common interests in positive change is possible. How about building or joining a networking organisation that is searchable by skills or interests? Then it would be easy to find people to work with creatively. We could do this online and worldwide, and local networks in a community would help a lot. When the people in a community, even a small one, work together, their joint abilities, contacts and skills can create significant change and have done so.

We can do much more connecting informally. It's fun doing random acts of listening where you connect with strangers to understand their worlds from their point of view. It helps you appreciate the richness of the people around you (and your prejudices). Let's also have more conversations about what sort of world people want. What do we want our great-great-grandchildren to inherit? I have done this, and I sense there is agreement on a just, sustainable, and peaceful world. If this is so, let's think together about what we need to do to get there and challenge each other to do it.

Connecting is also infinitely scalable.

## Organising

Any formal structure for organising a worldwide change effort risks wasting energy by political infighting or protecting itself from attacks. Managing it will consume more effort than delivering the outcomes. So what is the absolute minimum necessary?

I don't think we need a structure. What we can do is to bring people together. Let's get together people of goodwill who make good things happen, whether organised or not. We can create a space (virtual or physical) where those people can talk to each other, support each other and work out what to do to make our world a better place.

Let's have lots of these groups. Let's light many fires. Some people think they have a vested interest in keeping our failing system. They won't be able to keep out the light.

This idea is also infinitely scalable and easy to test. All we need is two or three positive people who we would love to spend time with, create a space, light the blue touch paper, and stand well back. It could be FUN (which is where we came in)

## Fulfilling

To "fulfil" means "to bring into effect". It's lovely to do this when the whole experience is enjoyable. There is almost nothing better than doing great work together.

Bill, a colleague in the lab where we were graduate students, had just moved into a brand-new house. The garden was a complete mess, full of debris and half-bricks. He invited eighteen friends to a garden(ing) party. They brought their spades and forks, and on a hard-working and sweaty day, they landscaped the garden. They then had a bit of a celebration.

Bill glowed as he told me about how much fun and satisfaction everyone had had. It seems perfectly possible and reasonable that we would have just as much fulfilment and happiness working together to restore our world.

We can start this locally. We only have to decide to do it.

[A short video on deciding \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj4\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj4)

[Helping a Kenyan farmer decide what to do \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj5\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj5)

## Happiness

Change can be joyful. It does not have to be a struggle. If you ask people to tell stories about when they have been happy, they almost always are about experiences that cost little. Sharing happy stories also makes you happy. Even more remarkably, when people tell stories about when they have made someone else happy, their energy and enthusiasm rocket. It looks like the simplest way to be happy is to make someone else happy. You can do this with a smile or being appreciative, or just listening.

We can spread this practice of sharing happy stories without limit. When people know they can be happy without needing even more stuff, the excessive demand that drives climate change will fall.

Less demand will reduce the need for “work”, which will, at last, increase the amount of discretionary time to look after each other and the planet and live and learn.

[Video of people sharing happy stories \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj6\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj6)

## Hope and Appreciation

The potential and actual environmental problems we face are real and daunting. It would be easy to despair and give up. “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.” Despair is a choice anyone can make. I prefer the opposite hopeful option.

We can all do something. One of the simplest things is to catch people doing things *right*. Simple appreciation is powerful and costs nothing. Suppose we see someone picking up litter in our street. Saying, “Thanks for looking after our street and the planet we all live on”, will encourage that person to do more. Appreciation of good things grows good things and spreads.

We have a choice. Let’s choose hope. Let’s decide to make a difference. If not us, who?

## Finally

If enough of us can do these simple things, we will stop thinking that moving from ego to eco and solving the climate crisis is something we “ought” do. Instead, it will be rewarding and joyous doing these both individually and together.

The “hard” things like conscious consumption and effective campaigning will turn out to be not so difficult after all.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you, Zahida Din ([linkedin.com/in/zahida-din/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/zahida-din/)), Duncan Maina ([linkedin.com/in/duncan-m-9abb4835/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/duncan-m-9abb4835/)) and Robert Zarywacz ([linkedin.com/in/robz2z/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/robz2z/)) for your generous help with the videos. I appreciated your wit and wisdom.

Thanks also to Bob Mackenzie, Mike Pedler and Tom Boydell for your encouragement and practical help. I would not have written it without you. Thanks to David McAra for getting this issue into print.

## Resources

### Listening

[Listening \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj7\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj7) and [Re-evaluation Counselling \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj8\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj8)

### Imagining

[Imagine Chicago \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj9\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj9)

## Connecting

[Blessed Unrest](http://bit.ly/amedjuj10) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj10>) and [Random Acts of Listening](http://bit.ly/amedjuj11) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj11>)

## Organising

[Open Spaces](http://bit.ly/amedjuj12) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj12>) and [Idea Ping Pong](http://bit.ly/amedjuj13) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj13>)

## Happiness

[Happiness Exercise](http://bit.ly/amedjuj14) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj14>)

## Hope and Appreciation

[Appreciation](http://bit.ly/amedjuj15) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj15>) and [The New One Minute Manager](http://bit.ly/amedjuj16) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj16>)

### **Note for readers of the print edition**

Please type the bit.ly links in the text or the resources section into any browser to access the materials.

## About Nick

I am a facilitator of change, development and learning. I help people think about and work on issues that don't have one right answer.

I have worked with people from large and small organisations and in the private and public sector, sole traders and private individuals on many issues including motivating teams, improving working relationships, influencing upwards, developing soft skills, career and crisis counselling, managing time, profiling excellent performers and conflict resolution.

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# Two poems

Tom Boydell

## *How can I walk on by?*

How can I walk on by  
When fear shows in your eyes?  
How can I walk on by  
When still I hear your cries?

How can I walk on by  
When a friend you want to see?  
How can I walk on by  
When with me you want to be?

How can I walk on by  
When you put your hand in mine?  
How can I walk on by  
When our lives begin to twine?

How can we walk on by?  
For thus we won't survive.  
We both need each other  
Only that way can we thrive.



[Sheffield. City of Sanctuary welcomes Little Amal.](#) Image by kind permission of [Becky Payne](#), @beckypaynephotography

## *In pandemic voice*

In pandemic voice  
Earth - betrayed, forsaken -  
Shouts, loud and clear,  
"Enough! Enough!"

Shall we hear her?

Or do we prefer  
The misplaced comfort  
Of beguiling jabs,  
That inoculate us  
Against the will to act?



### **Tom Boydell writes**

When I turned 80 I was advised to go part-time. So I'm now a part-time management development consultant, a part-time writer, a part-time actor, a part-time singer, a part-time poet, a part-time weaver and a part-time gardener. I'm glad I'm only a part-timer, otherwise I'd be worn out.

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# Practical Hope

## The most vital resource?

Julie Allan



There were many things that needed paying attention to at COP26, but keeping hold of an active form of hope, to stay engaged, seemed among the necessities. It seems that the work of becoming ecologically aware and then acting on the arising understanding has many difficulties in our prevailing circumstances.

I used to quote Vaclav Havel on the topic of hope. He wrote, “hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.” Havel, a playwright who saw both prison and presidency during a period of huge change and upheaval for the former Czechoslovakia, must have needed hope a lot.

These days, granted that ‘sense’ is a somewhat subjective construct, it is hard to hold any notion of certainty. Hope, however, remains of great importance, particularly in times of difficulty of any sort that can and does arise in any human lifetime. There is continuing evidence for its helpfulness and, in particular, for those aspects of hope that are active and engaged.

So, for these and other reasons, the facilitated session I offered adjacent to this year’s AMED AGM in September 2021, drew on the work of Graham Leicester at the International Futures Forum and of Joanna Macy, to explore Practical and Active Hope. It was not recorded at the time, as it was for personal reflection and free conversation. However, I have re-recorded it and [this is the link](#).

Grab a pencil and paper and give yourself perhaps up to half an hour – I speak for around 10 minutes, to introduce some thoughts about hope that I have found very resourcing. And the rest is space for your own thoughts and reflections, with some prompts, to connect with your own wonderful hope and consider what that means for you.

Do get in touch with me and/or amed.org if you'd like to consider the questions in company – I'd be happy to host a coffee conversation - or maybe convene your own, with online screen share or in-person meeting.

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### About Julie

Julie Allan is an AMED trustee and a chartered occupational psychologist with a focus on leadership, wellbeing and wiser ways. A former journalist, she has written non-fiction books and chapters about story, coaching psychology, ethics, gestalt and supervision. Her work is founded in the science and practice of human development, and draws on the ancient wisdoms of story and the perennial wisdoms of poetry to seek sustainable futures in the present.

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# Community practices

## A vocabulary for an age of community sustainability

Peter Bernays



*I see 'conversation' as one of the necessary practices of community itself. How do you become community? You talk about it. How do you do community? You talk about it ... and in the talking you come to moments of community consciousness itself!*

*Here is a list of community enhancing: activities, ideas, opportunities, pursuits, movements, inventions, tools, art, art forms, games, pastimes ... on and on ...*

I have been drawn to lists and listings all my life. I am aware of the huge diversity of community activities that are as much a hallmark of community as the communities themselves: Communities of Interest; Communities of Place.

How do you **be** community personally? You pursue Community Consciousness. How do you **do** community actively? You participate in and activate the Community Practices ... and goodness knows, there are enough to choose from, including co-housing and eco-village schemes!

The list contributes to what I think of as "Community Ecology". It has come from my 50 odd years' involvement with many facets of community. Like conversation, this list of practices is community. How do we know that? Because the communities that stop doing them cease being communities and revert to insular, competitive, everyday life in exile.

### About Peter

Peter convenes weekly "Community Conversations" Zoom groups with people involved in the Communities movement at several levels including: Quaker online worship meetings, Intentional Communities, developing existing neighbourhoods. Some groups simply explore the idea of Community Consciousness, about individual personal attitudes, behaviour and a way of life. The zoom groups are going very well, and their own group communities are growing and coming together nicely.

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PS – [Click here for a list of points to talk about](#) to people who are not particularly supportive of Community

# A VOCABULARY FOR AN AGE OF COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

By Peter Bernays

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**A** Abilities, Ableism, Abseiling, Action, Action Learning Sets, Activists, Adventure Playgrounds, Adventure Sports, Adze, Agency, Agile Communities, Agile Learning, Agile practices & processes, Alexander Technique, Algorithms, Allotments, Alternative Intermediate Appropriate, Alternative Technology, Alternatives to Violence Project, Altruism, Amateur Dramatics, Angels, Animal Rights, Anthropocene, Anthroposophy, Apartments, Apprenticeships, AQUAL All Quadrants All Levels, Aquarian Age, Archives, Aspirations, Assumptions, Astrology (a proto psychology), Astronomy, Attention & Appreciation, Attunement, Auctions, Aural History, Auvergne Dances, Awareness Raising,

**B** Baggage, Baking, Bal, Balfolk, Ballet to Poetry, Ballooning, Barbecue BBQ, Barefoot Doctors, Bark Rubbing, Barter, Basket making & weaving, Becoming Indigenous, Beekeeping, Being Differently Wired, Being a Good Ancestor, Being in Your Element, Being Present but not Speaking (especially at mourning), Bell Ringing, Belonging, Bicycle Electric Power & USB Chargers, Bicycle Trailers - passengers or goods, Bicultural Process, Bio Dynamic, Biofuels, Biomass, Biomimetic Architecture, Biophilic Design, BioRegions, Bird Hides, Bird Reserves, Birdsong, Birdwatching, Bitcoin, Blacksmithing, Blended Meetings, Boat & Ship Building, Bonding, Bonfires, Botanical Gardens, Boules, Bourrée, Box System vegetable delivery, Branle, Brass rubbing, Bread making, Breton Dancing, Bricks and Mortar - nuts & bolts - concrete material & physical, Bridal Paths, Bridges, the Bristol Pound, Bring & Share meals (lunch, tea, or supper), Bubbles, Buffalo milk, Building Bridges, British Wool Insulation, Building Community, Balcony Gardens, Busking,

**C** Cabinet Making, Camper-Trailers, Campervans, Campfires, Campfire Discussions Conversations Stories Songs, Canal paths, Canals Boats, Candle-making, Canopy Walks, Capacity Building, Caravans, Carbon Footprint, Carbon Neutral, Carbon Trading, Car Free Streets, Caritas, Carpentry, Carol Singing, Casting, Cavity Insulation, Celebrations, Centres, Chain Dances, Chair Bodging, Challenges, Change (there is nothing novel or radical about change - change is everybody's purpose - of all political & economic flavours), Charcoal Burning, Chat Boxes, Chess, Chestnut Flour, Chestnut Honey, Chopping Wood - Carrying Water, Circle Dancing, Citizens' Basic Income, Citizen Science, Citizen's Wind farms, City Farms, Clamshells, Climate Cafes, Climate Change, Climate Emergency, Climbing Kilns, Close Friendships, Clothes Making, Cloughjordan Ecovillage Ireland, Clubs Societies Groups Networks, Coastal Footpaths, Cobble stones, Co-Counselling, Co-Creation, Coding, Co-Evolution, Cohesiveness, Co-Inquiries, Collaboration, Collaborative Projects, Collective Goals and Individual Initiatives, the Collective Ideal, Colours of Empowerment Cards, Common Interests, the Commons,

Community Accounting, Community Architecture, Community Arts, Community Banks, Community Cohesion, Community Communications, Community Currencies, Community Development, Community Dynamics, Community Ecology, Community Gardens, Community Integration Meetings (Councils), Community Led Projects, Community Mapping - Researches Studies, Community Media (social media), Community Music, Community of One, Community of Two or Three, Community Studies, Community Supported Agriculture CSA, Community Wealth Building - the Preston Model, Companion Planting, Companionship, Compatibility, Complementarity, Complementary Therapies, Compostable Bags, Composting, Composting Toilets, Conciliate, Consilience, Confest (conference festival), Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution Methods, Conflict Transformation, Connectedness, Connecting with Other People, Connection, Consensus, Container Complexes - Storage Workshops Markets Housing, Contra Dance, Conversations, Co-Operatives, Coppicing, Coracles, Core Intentions, Cork, Corporate Planetary Responsibility, Cosmology, Cottage Industries, Counter Cultural, Courage, Craftivist, Craft Markets, Crafts, Creative Activities Summer Camps, Credit Unions, Crop Formations - complex geometric patterns & images inexplicably but empirically appearing in field crops, Cross-country ways and paths, Crowd Funding, Crowdocracy (perhaps not!), Cultural Change, Cultural Environment, Culture, Curiosity, Custodians, Cycle Paths & Routes, Cycle Rickshaw, Cycles of Life, Cyclic Corridors,

**D** Dark Sky Parks, Day to Day Community Meetings, Decentralised Communities, Decision Making Tools, Deep Ecology, Deep Sharing, Deep Time Walks, Delegate Ownership at an Emotional Level, De-Schooling, Design for Community Living, Development Studies, Dialogic way, Diatonic Accordion, Discernment, Discussion phase - Decision phase, Distributed, Diverse Learners, Diversity, Diversity of All Forms of Life, Divination, DIY, Dowsing, Draft Insulation, Draughts, Dreams, Dream Sharing, Dream Work, Drones, Dynamics,

**E** Early Adopters, Earthenware, Earth Walks Acclimatisation, Eating Flowers, Eating for Health, Eating Together, Echo Chambers - your own ideas uncritically sounding back to you, Eclectic, Eco Building Site, EcoCities, Eco Consciousness, Eco Homes, Eco Houses, Ecologists, Ecology, Economic Environment, Eco-renovation, Ecotourism, EcoTowns EcoVillages, Economics of Trust, EcoSystemics, EcoVillage Community Experiential Camps, Ecumenical Community, Edible Cities, Edible Landscapes, Elderflower & Acacia Fritters, Elders, Electric Bikes, Electricity Storage Systems, Electric Milk Floats, Embroidery, Emotionally & Contextually Comprehensive Language Interpretation & Learning, Empathy, Empowerment, Energy Efficiency, Energy Storage, Enterprise Hubs, Enterprise Incubators, Entertainment, Enthusiasms, Entry points, Environment, Environmental Rights, Environmental Visitor Centres, Epigenetics, Ethical Investment, Ethnomusicology, European Dance & Music, Everyday Life, Evolution by Group Selection - not Individual Selection - Existential Psychology, Exoplanets, Exotic Flours Pancakes, Expanded Cinema, Expeditions, Experiential Empirical Evidence based Experiment, Experiential Learning, Experimental Archaeology, Experimental Film, Experiment with Light, Exploratory Play,

**F** Facilitation, Facilitator, Fallow Ground, Farmers' Markets, Farm to Table, Fasting, Feedback, Feels Like Home, Fellowship, Fermacell Boards, Film Co-ops, Financial Tools, Findhorn Foundation, Fishbowl observation meeting process, Five Rhythms Movement & Dance, Flash Mob, Flat Structure, Flower Arranging, Flowforms, Focaliser, Focal Point, Folk Music Songs Dance, Folk Medicine & Remedies, Followership, Food Banks, Food Mapping, Footpaths, Foraging, Forest Gardens, Forum, Forums (Zeg), Fossil Fuel reduction, Fractals, From each according to their ability - To each according to their needs, Future of Work, Futons, Future Lifestyles, the Future of Work,

**G** Gamers, Games, Gamification, Gaming, Gathered Meetings, Gender Diversity, Genetics, Geodesic Domes, Geothermal Heating Systems, Geotourism, Gift Economy, Gliding, Global Wind Day, Glue of Community, Goals of Social Change, Goat's milk & cheese, the Goldilocks Principle - Process - Zone, the Good Life, the Good Old Days, Governance Structures, Graffiti, Gravitational Water Vortex Power Plant, Greenhouses, Green Burials, Green Funeral Director, Greening Schools & Colleges in S E Africa, Green Roofs, Green Oak Building, Grey Water Irrigation, Group Projects, Groundsheet Weed Control, Guerrilla Gardening,

**H** Habitable Zone, Habitat Restoration, Hammocks, Hands-on, Hang Gliding, Hanging out, Hardanger Fiddle, Hardware Software Interware & Applications, Healthy Building, Heart Sharing Meetings, Heat Pumps, Hedge Laying, Herbal Medicine, Herb Gardens, Heutagogy, Highly Sensitive People, Hillwalking, Historic Sites, Holacracy, Holistic Gathering, Holistic Health, Holistic Spectrum of Human Faculties, Holon, Homemade, Home Schooling, Homoeopathy, Horse riding, Horse Plowing, Horse Power, Horse transport, Hostels, Hostile Environments & Climates Inhabitation, Hot Air Balloons, House Boats, House Busses, Household Remedies, House Trucks, Hubs, Human Ecology, Human, Humanity, Humanity's Instinct to Community, Human Rights, Hurdy Gurdy, Hybrid and Hydrogen Cars, HydroAutos, Hydroelectric Power, Hydro Power

**I** Ignatian Meditations, Inclusion Inclusive, Inclusive Church, Income Sharing, Incredible Edible Neighbourhoods, Incubator, Indian Giver, Indigenous Peoples, Individual Growth & Development, Individuation, Infographics, Information Literacy, Inhospitable Habitat Habitation, Inner Inter Outer, Innovators Early adopters Mass adoption, Insulation, Insulate well, Integral Theory, Integrity, Interest Based Learning, Interfaith, Inter Faith, Interfaith Monastic Community, Internal Sociocracy, Intersectionality, Intertwined, Intertwining, Intimacy, It Takes a Village to Raise a Child, Iron Age Village, I am because we are, I see you,

**J** Jams & Preserves, Japanese Gardens, Japanese Urban Living Small Units, Jerusalema dance, Job Sharing, Johari window, Joinery, Joyful Activities, Justice,



**K** Keyhole Gardens, Keystone Principles, Keystone Species, Kiln building, Kindness, Kitchen Medicine, Kite Flying, Knitting, Known Knowns - Unknown Unknowns, Koans, Kora,

**L** Labyrinths, Land for What?, Land Sailing, Language Acquisition, Leadership, Leading & Following (partner dancing), Learning Conversations, Learning Curve, Learning Exchanges, Learning Styles, Left Brain - Right Brain, Legal Structures, Lenses for magnification, LETSystem, Ley Lines, Library, Lifeboat Biscuits, Like Mindedness = not similar but affectionate approval, Liminal, Line Dancing, Lino Cuts, Listening - 8 types, Listening Skills, Litter Clean-ups, Live Mouse Traps (& relocation), Living Lightly on the Earth, Living Machine, Living On Site, Living Off Site, Living Willow Structures, Local Exchange Trading, Local Food, Localisation, Local Materials, Loft Insulation, Long Handled Heart shaped Spades, Long term Conflict Resolution,

**M** Magnifying Glasses, Mahjong, Maker Education, Maker School, Maker Spaces, Managing Common Resources, Managing Your Own Emotions, Maturity, Marionettes, Mazes, Mazurka, Meaning, Meaningful Rituals, Mediation, Mediation Council, Meditation, Meetings for Worship, Meeting Stroll - one on one dialogue, Memes, Men's Groups, Men's Sheds, Mentoring, Meta, Metal Smelting, Micro Homes, Micro Loans, Milk Deliveries, Milkmen, Mime, Mindfulness, Minimalistic Lifestyles, Mision, Mobile Homes, Moderation, Moderator, Models, Montessori Education, MOOCs Massive Open Online Courses, Morality of Poverty, More Diverse Groups, Morphic Resonance, Motivation, Mother Earth - Source of Nourishment & Wisdom, Mourning, Movement Gesture & Song, Movements - Campaigning Creative Innovative, Mulching, Mural, Musical Instrument Making, Mutuality, Mysticism,

**N** Narrow boats, Nasturtiums, Natural Building, Natural Environment, Natural Swimming Ponds, Natural Water Management, Nature Reserve, Nature study Tables, Needs, Neighbourhoods of Affinity, Networking, Networking the Networks, Neurodiversity, New Angles, New Economics, New Monastic Communities, New Work Ethic, Nexus of Communities, Niche Construction, No Digging Gardening, Nomadic Communities, Non-Creedal Church, Nonprofit Organisations, Nonviolent & Compassionate Communication, Nyckelharpa,

**O** Observation Beehive, Observatory, Ocean Arks, Ocean Arts, Off Grid, Offshore Wind Farms, Open Days, Openness, Openness to New Leadings, Opportunities, Oracle, Origami, Oral History, Organic Food, Organic Growing, Otherness, Outreach, Outward Bound,

**P** Package Reduction, Paper Bags, Paragliding, Participatory Decision Making, Participation vs & Performance Arts, Partner Dancing leading & following, Passive Solar Heating, Patchwork, the Paths that Cross, Pay what you can Grocery CoOps, Peace Education, Peace Studies, Peaces (multiple types & applications of peace), Peasants, Pelton Wheel, People of Country, People's History, People Skills, Performance Poetry,

Permaculture, Personal Relational Collective, Philanthropy, Philosophy Groups, Physic Gardens, Picnics, Pilgrimages, Ping-Pong, Planet Earth, Plant Rights, Plastic Clean-ups, Plastic Use Reduction, Platforms, Platform Cooperativism, Play, Play Streets, Plurality, Poetry, Pole Lathes, Polytunnels, Pop-up things & places, Positive Money, Positive News, Post Human - ism, Pottery, Preserving, Pressed Flowers, Preston Model - Community Wealth Building, Process Work, Psychedelics, Pump priming, P4C Philosophy for Children - for Community,

**Q** Qigong, Quaker, Quakernomics, Quilter, Quiltmaking,

**R** Raised Beds, Rain Harvesting, Raku, Rammed Earth Building, Rainwater Filter, Rainwater Harvesting, Rap, Rare Breeds, Reality, Reciprocity, Recognition, Recording Studios, Recumbent Bikes, Recycling, Recycling centres or hubs, Reed Beds, Reframing, Regenerative Community, Regenerative Projects, Renewable Energy, Repair Cafes, Repair Shops, Repertoire, Resilience, Resources, Responsibility, Restorative Dialoguing, Restoring Relations, Retrofitting, Rewilding, Rewilding Society, Rhizome - an image of thought that apprehends multiplicities, Right Brain, Right Livelihoods, Risograph, Role of Faith in Community, Roller Skating, Romantic Feelings, Roof Gardens, Roundhouses, RSO, Rule of Life, Running,

**S** Sacred Sites, Sacred Springs, Sail Training, Salsa dance, Sawubona, Scandinavian Dance & Polska(s), Scratch Orchestra, Sculpture, Scythe mowing grass & cereals, Seasonal Fruit Vegetables Produce, Security, Self Actualised, Self Archaeology, Self Build, Self Builders, Self Directed Learning, Self Education, Self Help, Self Relational & Collective Actualisation, Self Realisation, Self-Sufficiency, SETI Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, Setups, Sewing, Sex club, Shamanism, Shaman's Hut, Shared Community House - Centre - Hub, Shared Economic Systems, Sharing Circles, Sharing Groups, Shoemaking, Simplicity (is complicated and expensive to do - Gandhi), Sites of Scientific Interest SSIs, Sitting Around Campfires, Sitting Shiva, Situation, Skateboarding, Skills, Sky Gardens, Sleeping Platform, Slow Food, 'Small is Beautiful', Small Railways, Smart Urban Forests, Social Dancing & Music, Social Eating, Social Inertia, Social Enterprise, Social Enterprise Hubs, Social Environment, Social Incubators, a Social Wage, Social Washing & Clear-up, Sociocracy, Solar Energy, Solar Panels, Solar Water Heating, Solidarity Based Communities, Solidarity Funds, (for rents), Songlines, Spiritual Environment, Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, Stained Glass, Standing on One Leg for 5 Minutes, Steaming Vegetables, Steam Punk, Steam Power, Steam Trains, Stepping Stones, Stereotyping, Stoneware, Stories, Street Food, Straight Speaking with one another - not gossiping, Strategies, Straw Bale Building & Insulation, Street Light Wind Turbines, Street Parties, Striving For, Studios, Subscription Systems, Succession & Evolution, Sunscreen, Supported By - not always Provided By, Surf Boarding, Survival of the Fittest = Appropriatist not Competitivist, Survival Skills, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Energy, Sustainable Innovation, Sustainability, Suzuki Method Instruments Acquisition, Sweat Lodges, Swimming Ponds, Swing Dance, Sympathy Groups, Synchronicity, Synergy, Systemic Thinking Working Playing & Design,

**T** Tai Chi, Tall Ships, Tea Gardens, Table Tennis, Teamwork, TED Talks, Telescopes, Temporary Temples, Temporary & Nomadic Dwellings, Terracing, Thatching, Theory U, Think Tanks, Tidal Mills, Tidal Power, Timber Frames, Time Banking, Time Sharing, Tiny Houses, Tipis, Tipping Point, Tools, Toolkit, Tool Sharing Library, Tow Paths, Transcendence, Transfer Cultures, Transformation, Transformative Creative Spaces, Transition Network, Transition Towns, Tree Climbing, Tree Houses, Tree Ropes, Tree Surgery, Tree Tents, Triadic Universe, Trial & Error, Trial Process, Tribe, Tricycles, True Self, Trust Meetings, Turbulent Times, Twice Exceptional or Gifted People, the Tyranny of Structurelessness,

**U** Ubuntu - I am because you are, Umbrellas, Underground Dwellings, Unconventional Wind Turbines, Underfloor Heating, Unintentional Communities, Universal Basic Income, Universal Basic Services UBS, Urban Farms, Urban Planning and Design, Us and Them (not),

**V** Veganism, Vegetarianism, Vertical Axis Wind Turbines, Vertical gardens, Video, Vision, Vision Quest, Volunteering, Volunteerism, Volunteer Management, Voting Systems, Vulnerability,

**W** Walter Segal self-build method, Waltz, Washing the body corps - a last service of hands-on love, Warmcell, Water Clock, Water Purification, Water Supply, Water Wells, Water Wheels, Wave Power, Wave Power Ship, Weaving, Webinars, Weekend University, Weekly Conversations & Discussions, Weekly Zoom Discussions, WEIRD Societies - western educated industrialised rich and democratic, West Gallery Singing, Whike, Wholefoods, Wilderness, Wilderness Dwelling, Wild Flower Meadows & Gardens, Wild Flower Walks, Wilding Farms, Wilding Society, Wildlife Photography, Wild Swimming & Bathing, Willow Plantations, Wind-farms, Window Boxes, Window Displays, Windsurfing, Wind Turbines, Win-Win Solutions, Woks, Women do things in Circles - Men do things in Ladders, Women's Groups, Woodburning Stoves, Wooden & Outdoor Platform Dancefloors, Wood-fired Brick Ovens, Woodland Crafts, Wood steam bending, Working Bees, Working Dogs, Working Horses, Working Oxen, Work Life Community Balance, the Work that Reconnects, World Café Discussions, Writer's Workshops, Writing Sheds,

**X** XR Extinction Rebellion,

**Y** Yoga, Youth Hostels, Yurts,

**Z** Zegg Forum, Zen, Zen Gardens, Zen Koans, Zip Wires, Zoom Conversations & Discussions, Zooniverse,

**#** 3D Printing, 8 Types of Listening, 21 Hour Working Week

# Colonialism and Extractivism

## A Tale of Two Commodities

Anna Fairtlough



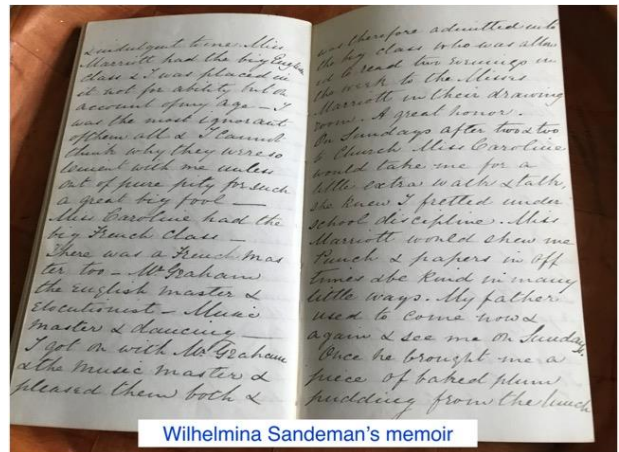
*In this article I reflect on researching and writing a piece of fiction based on a family document set in India in 1861. It is increasingly clear to me that climate injustice, whereby those in the Global South who have contributed least to the climate and nature emergency are suffering most from its effects, is one of the enduring legacies of colonialism. I employ the idea of extractivism, i.e. the taking of natural and human resources without renewing what has been extracted or repairing any harm caused by the process, to explore stories of two commodities - coal and tea - that feature in my characters' lives.*

### Key words

Imperialism, Colonialism, Extractivism, Climate and nature emergency, British Raj, Documentary Fiction

I've spent the Covid years writing a piece of documentary fiction. As an undergraduate I studied the history of Colonial India and the Indian Independence struggle. I have long been interested in exploring imaginatively my own family's relationship to and participation in this history. Sanghera (2021) describes the selective amnesia of the British about their past empire. We cast a hazy glow over our history, remembering that we built the railways in India, glorifying our role in abolishing the trafficking of enslaved people, and believing, in a vague way, that our empire must have helped spread prosperity, freedom and the rule of law around the world. However we rarely systematically study the history of our empire in schools and universities. Unlike Germany, which after the second world war has, Sanghera argues, undergone a process, however incomplete, of "working off the past", we in Britain have not done something similar about our own history of imperialism and colonialism. What I have learned from the work I have done over the past two years has helped me, as an individual ego, to recover some lost memories of my own family history. I hope that whatever I put into the world as a result of this work through writing or other action can contribute to diminishing our (e)collective amnesia. Of course colonialism and imperialism is not just a British invention but as a White, British woman from an upper middle class background, at least on my father's side, this is what is of particular interest to me in this project.

I have a memoir of her childhood written by Wilhelmina Sandeman - my great aunt's godmother's mother. In 1861, after her parents could no longer support her due to their financial 'ruin' she was sent to Calcutta to join her brother, Hugh, an ambitious member of the Indian Civil Service, no doubt with a view to finding her a suitable husband. The memoir ends when she is on the steamship to India with the words 'as all girlhood ended with me at 17. I do not care to recall any more.' This is the jumping off point for my novel, in which I imagine what she might have



recalled had she allowed herself to do so. I aim to evoke the social and material world Wilhelmina would have found herself in the early days of the British Raj, after the assumption of Crown rule in India by Queen Victoria. Some of the characters in my novel are invented and others real. I have found out as much as I can from the historical record of the lives of the real characters and have supplemented this with more general research about the social history of that period.

The European system of colonialism that emerged from the fifteenth century onwards has been described as being 'both a practice and a worldview' (Böröcz and Sarkar 2012). The practice of colonialism typically involved:

- invasion and conquest of large areas of the globe often resulting in the death of indigenous people through war, disease or famine.
- displacement of indigenous people and their forced labour and transportation.
- temporary or permanent migration of European people to the colonised areas and the expropriation of indigenous land.
- imposition of unequal trading regimes, the undermining of local economies and the introduction of extractive enterprises such as mining or plantations.

The worldview that enabled and justified these activities included:

- acquiring 'scientific' knowledge of the geography and resources of the colonised lands and the culture and traditions of indigenous people.
- establishing educational institutions and public discourses that promoted the idea of the superiority of European cultures and framed colonised people as inferior or backward.
- recruiting of 'scientific' racism to promote white supremacy.

Of course, since its inception colonialism has been resisted and challenged. Virtually all former colonial territories are now, at least ostensibly, independent. Nonetheless the legacy of colonialism persists in the many economic and political injustices between the Global South and North and in enduring racial and class inequalities within many countries across the world.

As I have done the research for this novel the connections between this history and the accelerating climate and nature emergency have become increasingly apparent. Awareness of environmental inequalities is lacking in some traditional accounts of colonialism and imperialism. Those parts and peoples of the world, predominantly White and wealthy, that have benefited most from colonialism have historically contributed most to the greenhouse gasses in our atmosphere. Hickel (2020), analysing whether and how far different countries have exceeded a 'safe' per capita share of emissions (estimated at 350 ppm atmospheric carbon dioxide), reports that countries in the Global North have contributed 92% of the existing excess emissions. There continue to be vast inequalities in greenhouse gas emissions across the world. In 2015 the richest 10% of people, again disproportionately White and Western, produced 49% of global carbon emissions, whereas the poorest 50% were responsible for just 7% (Horton 2022). The average Briton produces more carbon in two days than the average Congolese person does in a whole year (McVeigh 2022). Those who have contributed least to the burning of fossil fuels and benefitted least from the accrued economic advantages will therefore have the fewest resources to deal with the consequences of climate breakdown that they have played little part in causing. It is predominantly the poor and those in the Global South that are experiencing and will experience the worst impacts of global warming such as increasingly destructive flooding, storms, drought and heatwaves. These are already leading to direct deaths, the destruction of homes, businesses and farmland, forced displacement of groups of people, disruptions to food supply and war.

Scholars and activists have developed the concept of extractivism to demonstrate the relationship between the colonial practices described above and the global ecological crises we face (McKenzie 2020). Extractivist cultures and practices extract wealth from the planetary system and the living things, including humans, that depend on that system without renewing what they have extracted or repairing any damage they have caused. Regenerative cultures and circular economies attempt to do the reverse. Extractive enterprises initiated during the European colonial period and which now extend across the world are contributing to a potentially catastrophic depletion of biodiversity. It is estimated that two out of five wild plant species face extinction (BBC 2022). Bridget McKenzie of the Climate Museum who facilitated a memorable and inspiring workshop for the AMED writers' group has created a model that illustrates the processes - material and intangible, direct and indirect - that sustain this 'Great Acceleration of Extraction'.

@bridgetmck



From [About Stories of Extraction](#): Bridget McKenzie (2020)

In this piece I write about two commodities - coal and tea - that feature in the novel and whose production is implicated in these extractivist processes. When I first thought about my contribution to this edition I wondered if I might use some characters in my novel to speak about their perspectives about these things. However I found that I (they?) resisted being recruited to serve this purpose, resisted being held to account as it were, for the perhaps unintended consequences of their actions and thoughts. But I also wanted to give a flavour of the novel so I have selected a few extracts in which these commodities are mentioned.

## Coal

### Extract 1

Behind her Wilhelmina could hear Hugh and Nicol continuing their conversation. More talk of money and business and things that always interested men.

*'The Empire's not treated you so badly though, I understand,'* said Hugh,

*'Aye that's true enough. There's been opportunities I'd nae have had in Greenock. I saved a bit before the shipyards closed...the railway stock's a safe bet. With what I've put in Bengal Coal,'* said Nicol.

*'I'm sure you've been very prudent.'*

*'The mines are making a tidy profit now...and demand for coal will only increase...'*

In this extract Nicol, one of Wilhelmina's suitors, is talking to her brother Hugh. Nicol (McNicol), one of the real characters I referred to above, was from Greenock. I'm sure Nicol would have been proud of James Watt, also from Greenock, who re-engineered the steam engine, greatly improving its efficiency and transforming it into the machine that would come to revolutionise all aspects of the economy and of daily life in Britain and, later, the world. One of Nicol's ancestors ran a coffee shop in the same street that Watt was born. I like to imagine that Watt had formative conversations there about engineering, science and philosophy before he went to Glasgow to begin his career as an instrument maker.

The steam engine was of course powered by coal. That black, concentrated, energy-rich substance, formed under great pressure and heat from plants that grew hundreds of millions of years ago. Of course we know now that coal is the most dangerous of the three fossil fuels, emitting much more carbon when it is burned than either oil or gas and that it can also release other harmful pollutants such as sulphur, nitrogen dioxides and mercury into the atmosphere and water supply. Then, though, coal would have been seen as a miraculous substance, the substance that was powering the British Empire. Coal powered the steam ships that enabled British officials, merchants, planters, soldiers, missionaries and women like Wilhelmina, pejoratively dubbed the 'fishing fleet', to reach India in weeks rather than months. Steam ships too took the goods manufactured in Britain to India and the raw materials extracted from India back to Britain. Coal also powered the railway engines that transported these people and goods throughout India.

I discovered from his will that Nicol died a fairly well-off man, certainly much richer than he would have been if he had remained a boat builder in his native town. Much of his capital was in the form of stock in the Bengal Coal Company Ltd, which was formed in 1837 to purchase and manage the Raniganj coalfield in Bengal. This coalfield, which by 1886 covered some 500 square miles, was transported by and supplied coal for the expanding railway network. Throughout the nineteenth century the Raniganj Coalfield was the largest supplier of coal in India (Hunter 1886, reprinted 2005). Coal is still mined there today. In 2019 Kolkata (then Calcutta) had the highest number of premature deaths from coal plant pollution in a study of 61 global mega-cities (The Statesman, Kolkata, 2021).

## Tea

Although the mining and burning of coal is an example of extractivism par excellence, as Bridget McKenzie's model makes clear, extractivism involves more than just extracting minerals. It also involves the biotic, i.e. the sphere of life that relates to plants. Nearly 70% of people in Britain drink tea every day. I am one of them. I've always loved tea - the fragrance, the bitterness, the bright clear feeling it gives me. For me tea has associations of conviviality, of warmth, of childhood meals with my grandmother's sandwiches and home made cakes. I imagine tea also to play an important role in the family life of the characters of my novel. This leads me to research the development of the tea industry in India. I discover that these cosy familial feelings are associated with a brutal, and sometimes illegal, history that is entwined in complex ways with Britain's imperial relationship not only with India but also with China (Rose 2010).



In the eighteenth century tea was becoming popular throughout Britain. At that time only the Chinese knew how to cultivate tea, thus ensuring that it had to be obtained from China. The Chinese Government insisted that tea be paid for in silver bullion. To finance this the East India Company (EIC) facilitated the cultivation of opium in Bengal, which was sold for silver to merchants in Calcutta to be smuggled into China. Gradually these illegal opium imports became nearly sufficient to cover the cost to the EIC of purchasing the tea. When, in an attempt to stem a wave of opium addiction, the Chinese Government seized and destroyed these illegal opium stores the British reacted by declaring war (National Army Museum, no date). The so-called First Opium War (1839-42) ended with the Chinese defeated and being forced to legalise opium importation and cede the island of Hong Kong.

Despite achieving their commercial aims with regard to opium through the war with China the EIC, having lost its monopoly on trading tea, was determined to experiment with producing tea in India. In 1848 they employed Robert Fortune, a Scottish botanist, to go to China to learn the secrets of tea cultivation. As an inducement to undertake the mission, which was illegal and could have cost him his life were he to be uncovered, the EIC paid Fortune five times his salary as the curator of the Chelsea Physic Garden. Fortune disguised himself as a Chinese Mandarin and for three years travelled throughout the 'forbidden zones' of China. He removed tea seeds and plants from celebrated tea growing areas and extracted knowledge and folklore about tea cultivation from his hosts. He was able to recruit a number of Chinese experts to accompany him back to India to advise the nascent tea industry. Through this act of what we would now call bio-piracy: i.e. 'the unethical or unlawful appropriation or commercial exploitation of biological materials (such as medicinal plant extracts) that are native to a particular country or territory without providing fair financial compensation to the people or government of that country or territory' (Merriam Webster dictionary) the tea industry in India was established.

## Extract 2

*'Sandeman. Now that's a familiar name,' the bungalow keeper was saying. 'Your husband, I think, cut his teeth in the Honourable Company around here...'*

*'Possibly,' Rosie said. 'That would have been long before we were married...We've lived in Calcutta for some time now...'*

*'But where are my manners? You've had nothing to drink.'* He pushed himself out his chair and hobbled towards the door calling for the *khit'mut-gar*. *'Bring cold tea for the ladies. Make sure it's not too strong.'*

Wilhelmina exchanged a glance with Rosie. Rosie must have sensed her discomfort. Hugh had told her to avoid getting into conversations with strangers. But how to extricate themselves without appearing rude?

The door opened and the khit'mut-gar came in. The glasses clinked on the brass tray as he set it down in front of them.

*'The very best thing to quench your thirst after such a journey...'* The bungalow keeper lifted his glass towards Rosie. *'So Mrs Sandeman, we were talking about your husband. He's done very well for himself...'*

### Extract 3

Wilhelmina heard the clatter of footsteps. Probably it was Rosie and the children returning from their excursion. She peeked through the wooden lattice at the end of the veranda. It was the postman. He couldn't see them but they could see him, trudging up the stony path. She imagined the route the letters must have taken, on the railway, along the endless bumpy tracks up into the hills and through the burnt scrub where trees lay in their hundreds, cut at their roots, fallen where the wind and their weight willed.

In extract 2 Wilhelmina and her sister-in-law Rosie are staying in a 'dâk-bungalow' (equivalent to an Airbnb) en route to the chapters in the book that are set in the hills just below Darjeeling. I need to find out about when the tea plantations were established there in order to imagine what the terrain would have looked like then. I find an article that describes the development of the tea industry in Darjeeling (Akhtar, S. & Wei, S. 2021). In 1861 tea production was just beginning and many of the early plantations were being cleared and planted (extract 3). I read that the Colonial government has designated the land in these hills as 'wasteland'. The word immediately triggers an image in me of an industrial wasteland such as that around the Raniganj coalfields. But of course this is not what the word signifies. It was not such a wasteland but a forest full of trees and animals and birds. Not a wasteland but a diverse living ecosystem that would have been drawing down carbon from the atmosphere, storing water, keeping the soil from eroding. Not empty of people either. The local Lepcha people, though they didn't 'own' it, used the land for their swidden agriculture (previously called 'slash and burn') (Besky 2017). It would also have been place to gather wood, food, plants for medicines, a place of spiritual significance where their ancestors and gods resided. My teacher at university, Ranajit Guha, (see, for example, 2013) taught me to locate colonial historical sources in their context, to delve between apparently neutral and uncontested words, to 'interpret' how colonial power was established and enacted.

Wasteland. This is the legal concept that the colonial government has used to give itself the right to dispossess the indigenous people, to sell the land, to distribute it to British plantation entrepreneurs, to open up the land so British capital can extract value from it. It is similar idea to that of 'res nullius' applied in Australia and North America to legitimise the appropriation of land from indigenous people. It occurs to me that this process marks a point of transition not from ego to eco as in the title of this edition, but the reverse, from eco to ego, from wild to tame, from ecological diversity to monoculture. It also occurs to me that for the

colonisers the word 'Wasteland' would then have been understood not only in a material way but also in a moral one as the 'waste-of-land'. The addition of two letters implies a duty to use land 'productively' thus justifying the taking of this land for extractive purposes. Whitehead (2010) argues that the distinction developed in colonial India between wasteland and value-producing land drew from Locke's theories about the moral and economic benefits of private property. We can see in this concept a further transition from 'eco to ego': from common to private.

There is an addendum to this story that relates not only to the 'eco' of the sphere of minerals, biotics and animals in McKenzie's model but also to the 'eco' that includes relationships between humans. As the number of tea plantations grew so the demand for labour increased. The British considered the Lepcha people "unsuitable" for labour in the plantations (Besky 2017). In contrast, in a categorisation that Chatterji (2001) describes as "the colonial typology of labour", Nepalis were deemed to be "hard workers", the men described as "amiable, brave and industrious" and the women "comely" (Besky 2017). The Sardari system, whereby Sardars (high ranking local people) were paid on a per capita basis to recruit labour from (mostly) Nepal but also Sikhim was established. British policy encouraged the recruitment of whole families, as women and also children were considered to be "better pickers". Initially Akhtar, S. & Wei, S. (2021) present this as a benevolent endeavour: life in the estates resembled life in the villages, thus "avoiding the worst features of town life". Housing, medical care and education services were provided. It is only at the end of the paragraph I am reading about this that I learn that these Nepali people who now call themselves Gorkhas (Nepali speakers resident in India) were in fact more like bonded labour. They were not free to leave and a paramilitary force known as the North Bengal Mounted Rifles was placed at the plantations to prevent them from doing so. The portion of the Great Acceleration of Extraction that refers to the enslavement and exploitation of people is demonstrated here. Das Gupta (1992) argues that the use of "unfree labour" is an essential component of all colonial plantation systems.

### **From eco to ego and back again?**

So far in this article I have suggested that the colonial period in India - and by extension colonial societies across the world - was characterised by the practice and ideology of extractivism. This represents a key transition from 'eco' to 'ego' both in relation to direct extraction from the material environment and indirect extraction through the exploitation of human beings' labour, culture and knowledge. I have told some stories about two commodities that illustrate different components of McKenzie's model of the Great Acceleration of Extraction. I could, of course, have chosen other commodities to illustrate this. Currently the extraction of oil and gas, the clearing of tropical rainforests for ranching, producing animal feed or for palm oil, are all processes fuelling the climate and nature emergency. I believe that if human beings are to have a habitable future on the planet, we will have to learn how to reverse extractivism both as a material activity and mindset. What can we do to reverse this process, to go from ego to eco?

I said above that I did not want to charge the characters in my novel as guilty parties for the colonial world they were involved in creating. Nonetheless I can hear their ghosts whispering at me. A few grow quiet, are prepared to listen, look serious, nod. Others, though, bluster, become defensive, assure me that I am mistaken, that I have not understood how things really were for them. Others still are angry, deny responsibility, accuse me of ingratitude for the material benefits and freedoms I have enjoyed, disloyalty to my country and class and, if they were to know the word, of unbearable 'wokeness'. Their voices make me doubt myself. What is the purpose of learning about such things, of trying to emerge from our selective amnesia of the consequences of colonialism and imperialism? What can I as an individual (ego) do to change such a complex, long standing system, so embedded in every aspect of our lives and our economies and supported by so many powerful vested interests?

It is easy to despair. I tell myself that all I can do is to consider what effect this knowledge should have on what I can control: my own behaviour. My responses to the two commodities I have written about are different. It is now abundantly clear that globally we have to stop using coal. I have done some things to reduce my own emissions. We have blocked up our chimney and stopped burning coal, have put up solar panels, use a renewable energy supplier. I don't think, however, I will stop drinking tea. My favourite tea pot was made by my aunt. I love the way it looks as if the horse is leaping up and away from the pot. It was made to celebrate the Chinese Year of the Horse. In that belief system the horse signifies enthusiasm, action and energy. I can use this image as a reminder to use these qualities in my



life. I am determined to use 2022 to take the next steps towards improving the insulation in our house and replacing our gas boiler with a heat pump. I can work within all the networks and organisations to which I belong to raise awareness and enact (distributed) leadership. I am a director on the board of our local community energy co-operative that installs community-based renewable energy, supports people in fuel poverty, and promotes energy efficiency and, through that, hope to make a small contribution to social and environmental justice in the place where I live.

On a wider (eco) scale we have to transform our profit-based economic system that disregards its impact on people and the planet. Kate Raworth's (2017) well-known model of 'doughnut economics', where the outer edge of the doughnut represents our planetary boundaries, the hole in the middle the place where no human being should fall and the doughnut itself an "environmentally safe and socially just space in which humanity can thrive" provides a framework with which to assess the benefits or otherwise of our activities.

It seems to me that, amongst all of the myriad things that we need to do to enable nature and humans to thrive, two key priorities are the rapid curtailing of carbon (equivalent) emissions in the Global North and the payment of climate reparations from the Global North to the Global South to recognise their vastly unequal contribution to and experiences of global breakdown. The land rights of remaining indigenous people must be protected. Research in Brazil (Baragwanath & Bayi 2020) has demonstrated that where indigenous people have full territorial rights not only are their human rights better protected so too are their forests. I can protest and campaign with others to try to achieve these things. The fifth and final episode of the BBC's (2022) Green Planet Series presents the living bridges created by the Khasi people in Meghalaya, North East India. These bridges, woven from the roots of the fig trees planted on the river banks, allow the Khasi to cross otherwise impassable rivers and to maintain relationship within their communities. As the roots grow they share nutrients and resources thus making the whole much stronger and more stable than a single root could be. Shining Star Kongthaw, one of the builders of these bridges, likens the connections between these roots to the ways in which people become stronger when they help each other. This is perhaps an apt metaphor for how we might build a bridge away from an extractivist mindset towards a more socially just, regenerative and sustainable one.

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# Re-balancing Nature's Inclusional Dance

Dr Louie J N Gardiner



## Marking out the ground I tread

♪ ♦ Everywhere I am, I am. I am everywhere. I am nature. I am not apart from it nor a part within it. The very idea of thinking in 'parts' and 'wholes' is, I suggest, another incarnation of reductionist and linear thinking, revealed in the binary proposition embedded in the notion that we should or could be moving 'from ego<sup>xvii</sup> to eco' to 'save the planet'. This framing perpetuates the myth that 'human' is outside of planet and can do things to it; can control what happens to it. This belies the reality that we are inextricably enmeshed with all that is planet. In othering planet we miss the point – planet is us. Saving planet is saving ourselves; to save ourselves we need to re-turn to what throws us out of balance: Ourselves, in context; and what we make of ourselves, in context – recognising that what we make of ourselves in context, finds context changing. This is acknowledging the principles of autopoiesis and natural inclusion at play in our natural world. In what follows, I illuminate these principles, showing that a practice of self-centering is neither egotistical nor contrary to eco; rather it is essential to re-balancing the patterns that are carrying us towards schismogenesis (see below).

## Attending to ourselves

♦ To turn our attention away from attending to ourselves and onto that which is outside ourselves, is to do more of what we have been doing for centuries – believing and acting as if we can bend nature to our design. Doing more of what we have been doing (i.e. the excessive emphasis and/or repetition of particular behavioural patterns), ultimately leads to schismogenesis (Bateson, 1972: p. 71-82), i.e. breakdown and self-destruction. What could help us avert the destructive trajectory in which we (humanity) find ourselves? I suggest that we need to change **the way we attend to our interior dynamical realms** to inform what else or more we do beyond the previous skin of our material selves (Gardiner, 2021, PhD pending publication).

♦ My emboldened phrase above may make my suggestion seem complex; really it is simple, though not easy. Why not easy? Because we are called to lay down common constructs/abstractions and cartesian

ways, long enough to re-member inherent ancient wisdom and re-turn to naturally inclusional, sensemaking ways – self-centering ways that attune us to our relational, situated selves.

▶♦ Do we have time to re-balance before cataclysmic planetary breakdown (i.e. self-annihilation)? I have no idea. But here, I offer what is mine to offer... without attachment to what becomes.

## Presence in Action

▶ In this article, I introduce some of what brought the self-centering praxis of Presence in Action (PIA) into being. When practised in community, in context, PIA engenders personal and collective response-ability, i.e. [seeding symmathesic agency](#). My realisation of this entangled relationship helped me comprehend that we cannot remove the intrapersonal from context without compromising the wellbeing of both.

[Click to HEAR](#) 🎵 **Re-membering me**

Music smooths my ragged edges  
cut and hacked by jagged barbs  
that spit from lips untrained and  
unconstrained by misdirected rage.  
She puts me in the villain's dock.  
Her darts that drip with toxic hate  
enchained by pain from kin's mistakes,  
shoot through thin skin and devastate.  
But wait! What she believes she sees  
reflects my own perceptual block.  
I take a breath. I pause for more.  
I see my frame across the floor  
and fall in – Feelings first, afore  
the rush of Fictions opens more,  
to Facts that halt my current shock!  
Upon the mat my weaving spins  
into view what's mine within  
to hold; just long enough to bring  
me home. Re-membering Me begins  
to break the lies that keep us locked.  
This is my way; my place with you –  
to deal with what is mine to heal.

(Gardiner, 2021)



▶🎵 PIA arose through a lifetime of personal sensemaking and professional/relational practice, enriched by academic foraging in third-person domains – the last of which, for seven years, has had me immersed in an unconventional inquiry anchored in systems studies. I mention this because my doctoral contributions – and indeed this article – rest on the **confluencing and communion of first-person (intrapersonal), second-person (interpersonal) and third-person (impersonal) sources of so-called knowledge**. I have come to realise that coherent sensemaking arises through the interrelating between all three; and that for this interrelating to occur at all, there has to be persons engaging with themselves, **reflecting on what they are making of all they encounter**, in their intrapersonal, relational and wider world realms. The philosophy of Natural Inclusionality (Rayner, 2017b, 2020d, 2021) exemplifies the stance I have inhabited.

[Click to HEAR 🎵 Inclusionality](#)

The space between defines the place of immateriality.

The thing you see is no such thing, as no such thing can be.

That which we see in time in space is concentrating energy  
that flows in form in place through space, informing receptivity.

For space imbues; embraces all without exclusivity.

This grace-ful flow is nature's way, it's called inclusionality<sup>xviii</sup>.

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▶ I recognised that 'what I was making of my encounters' and the 'ways in which I was making what I was making' mattered, even though for a long while, I had no idea why. Nor did I anticipate what my 'makings' would or could illuminate about the import of my inquiry within my primary discipline, in the Academy, and most crucially for me, in the wider social/global context.

### Knowing expressing itself

▶ As my inquiry unfolded, I found new knowing insistently arising in me and expressing through a range of modalities. I noticed that all of my being was engaging in what I was doing. I coined a new word for these 'ways' that were showing up in and through me: statewaves (Gardiner, 2021, PhD pending publication: Thesis, p. 34-39). In time, I came to realise why these statewaves mattered... they too were showing that **coherent sensemaking needs all of them; and that when one or more are silenced or drowned out by another, non-sense prevails**. I mention them here and signal their presence using their associated icons:

🎵Aesthetic-Poetic; ≈Visual-Kinaesthetic; ♦Intellectual-Theoretic and ▶Navigator-Narrator.

▶ Rather than explaining them, I shall leave you to experience their distinctive natures as they show up in all you find herein. In so doing, I invite you to engage more of your being – more of your noticing, sensing, sensemaking faculties, to see what comes alive in you along the way.

[Click to HEAR](#) ▶ 🎵 **Ahead of the read...**

...take heed, as I invite you to enter into an experience of Attending Responding Becoming by engaging with the strange and familiar in the pages that follow. As you proceed, hold this in mind:

🎵 ♦ No element, whatever form, alone conveys what's held by all.

No wordy tomes do knowledge state, 'til human beings assimilate.

All knowing flows through interchange as Beings engage with what's  
in range.

Such knowing cannot be maintained – for each who learns is always  
changed.

What's been has gone; there's more to come – yet none can know what  
will Become.

I open up, welcome you in. If you respond...our dance begins...

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## Working systemically

▶ ♦ One of the questions catalysing my research was: *how to engage systemically with Self in systemic intervention?* My fascination carried me forth, not least because in the world of systems thinking and practice, most interventions are framed around working with groups with a driving imperative for 'scaling up'. *But what about individuals as complex living systems, in their own right?* I felt concerned that the individual was becoming 'part-itioned' and side-lined. I also had an inkling there was something awry in the way many so-called systemic interventions were positioned, realising that many are entrapped by the mechanistic mindset indicative of linear causality: *if we do this, that and the other, with as much of the 'system' as possible, then we will achieve the 'necessary' systemic change!* The contradiction between accepting the world as complex, ambiguous, unpredictable and volatile, juxtaposition to such thinking, perturbed me. I stepped up to my own challenge: *what would 'become' if I relinquished the dominant cartesian paradigm that infuses academic convention and, instead, attempted to fully embrace and embody 'not knowing' where my research would end up; and de facto, not presuming to know what I could or should do to get to 'somewhere'?* I realised that what was being called of me was, simultaneously, to be the research, be the researcher holding the research, be a participant in the research, and be an instrument of it. To attend to this complexity, I believed I needed to fine-tune the instrument that is me, to better comprehend what moved the Being that is me to do what I was (repeatedly) doing, not all of which was helpful!

[Click to HEAR](#) 🎵 **Particular Abyss**

Whether we gaze out through heavens to the stars

or drive our eyes into the Particular

abyss for answers of the universe; do

we not simply perceive what we are apt to  
see? Patterns of imagination? Defined  
manifestations made so by eyes and minds  
that cannot not craft worlds of explanation?  
Is 'all in all' our most profound delusion?

Perhaps, matter and matters of scale are nought  
but orderly illusions made real by thought;  
by those who meddle in realms beyond their Selves  
in search of truth which lies in etheric shelves?  
What consummate distraction by magician  
minds who avert our gaze by reaching out and  
out; and down and down, to what? For what? Where is  
THE place these searching souls don't dare to quiz?

As jet black nights fuel our fears, deluded minds  
with unrelenting pace, drive us wild with blind  
demands to play the tunes; so devilish hands  
can pull our puppet strings and command our dance.  
Those veiled rampant powers that yank our clanking chains  
have us trip and choke and burdened by our shame,  
for what we did and did not do. Shocked. Bemused.  
Caught by fear of blame. Bewildered and confused

that once again – to make the change, we fail.  
So on, on and on we chase horizon's tail -  
to catch the holy grail of hidden truths.  
And so the mirage beckons; teases sleuths  
who'll be seduced by promises of fame  
and grandeur. Make your name! Court worldly acclaim!  
Or choose the Noble Quest: Risk ruthless enmity  
over fame or vapid anonymity?

© Louie J N Gardiner 15th October 2014

▶ This poem, arriving at the very outset of my doctoral journey, shows 🎵Aesthetic-Poetic grasping what was beyond my 💎Intellectual-Theoretic reach. *Particular Abyss* proved to be a prescient anchor for all that was to become – and in more ways than the words it contains, and the meaning(s) it conveys. I did not intend to use poetic form, yet 🎵Aesthetic-Poetic repeatedly took charge. I did not set out to deploy visual, audio and animated formats, yet ≈Visual-Kinaesthetic drew me aside to scribble, create and extend my multi-media capabilities. I found myself admitting<sup>xix</sup> rather than censoring all that was coming through me. I gave myself permission to follow what showed up, trusting that ‘something’ would be revealed to me along the way. In this article I do not share all my ‘becomings’. Instead, I focus on that which seems most relevant to the ‘ego to eco’ theme: a way to attend to our internal processing, situated as we always are, in a relational and wider-world context. Amongst an incrementally growing group of practitioners engaging together as a community in practice, this has come to be known as the praxis of Presence in Action (PIA).

### Ego in eco

▶ ♦ In my poem ‘*Re-remembering me*’ I refer to a framework called the P6 Constellation, the representation which found its first instantiation in the form of a bespoke circular rug, upon which I invited people to walk as they talked.



Figure 1: Louie walking the mat (Photo Heshani Sothiraj-Eddleston, 2017)

▶ This is the central artefact that enabled the praxis of PIA, over innumerable iterations year upon year, to reveal itself to those of us 'having a go'. Within a, now extant, community-in-practice, it has become an accepted way of working systemically with individuals. It is an approach we learn, first by being hosted and supportively witnessed by others; and later, with practice, finding ourselves able to 'host' ourselves a) reflectively (looking back on challenging situations), and increasingly b) reflexively, attending to what arises in the here-and-now. This recognised praxis, came to be what it is – not because 'I decided' to make 'something' – but because I followed the invitation from others to share what I was noticing and drawing upon, as I worked with them. Our emerging dance evolved through this relational context that wove back and forth between our own personal processing, professional practice and our lives more generally. PIA came to be dynamically alive in us **before** we recognised it as a dynamical, patterned inquiry that, eventually, we were able to name.

◆ Engaging in PIA, releases us from being caught in and by our own habituated, sometimes destructive patterns of thinking and doing. It invites us to illuminate what is current in all that is present in the here-and-now situation; opening us up to ourselves and bringing us back into relationship, moment-to-moment, day-to-day, interaction-by-interaction. PIA is profoundly contextual and relational yet it relies on each of us centering in on ourselves, in context:

“the self-centering<sup>xx</sup> (reflective-reflexive, receptive-responsive) capacity of individuals to attend to what is present and current, in place in space in time”

(Gardiner, 2021, PhD pending publication: Chapter-Five-as-Appendix, p.301; Gardiner & Wilson, 2019).

◆ Self-centering, in this description, is neither selfish nor self-centered. My deliberate use of the active present participle, verb form, avoiding judgmental adjectives, acknowledges our dynamic reality: that we are always somewhere, and always moving – not separated by space but imbued, embraced and influenced by it. Everywhere we are, we are being–doing Beings. The principle of Natural Inclusion and primal animation<sup>xxi</sup> (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, 2009, 2016a, 2016b) both acknowledge that 'moving' is the foundational indication of our living.

◆ Engaging in this self-centering praxis of PIA has us extending the scope and focus of our acuity (within and beyond our material selves), giving rise to ever-increasing agility, fluency and artistry in our lives. It illuminates and frees us from self-perpetuating delusions and non-conscious reactivity that perceptually and emotionally separate us, first from ourselves, and then de facto from others and the wider natural world in/of which, we are inextricably entangled. In attending to whatever is going on within us, we find ourselves increasingly able to re-engage with greater awareness of how we are impacting and impacted by all that is within and beyond us. [PIA seeds in us](#), the potential for ≈ [Symmathesic Agency<sup>xxii</sup>](#):

“the **meta-conscious capacity** to engage in mutual contextual learning through self-centering interaction, in place in space in time”

(Gardiner, 2021, PhD pending publication: Glossary)

▶ ♦ In sum, PIA re-attunes us to being individually and relationally in and of nature, rather than apart from it. Symmathesis<sup>xxiii</sup> Agency becomes possible when individuals in community, attend to themselves, bringing into awareness and being released from, that which (non-consciously and often destructively) plays out through them.

▶ ♦ Now, is it really possible to invoke this meta-conscious capacity by focusing on ourselves? Let me tease out from an entangled mass, a single trace-line of what carried me to this realisation! To reiterate: what has arisen, is a fusion of dedicated, diligent intrapersonal, inter-personal and impersonal inquiry undertaken by me [using all of my Being](#) (i.e. re-incorporating subjective empiricism in systemic intervention theory and practice). To be [coherent](#) with this re-incorporating philosophical stance, I am called to write predominantly in first-person – using myself as the instrument expressing new knowing arising in me, as the researcher/practitioner engaged.

### **Self-centering is NOT self-centred**

▶ I am but one individual. I have done stuff. I have written stuff. I have played and worked; lost and gained; loved and learned; struggled and overcome my own mental health challenges. I have striven to make change happen in communities, organisations, teams, relationships. And for many years, I was non-consciously<sup>xxiv</sup> trapped in a grand delusion until I stepped back to reflect on my and our present and past reality:

“While the earth keeps spinning, we as human beings find ourselves flailing and roiling in self-made messes that threaten not only our own extinction but the potential destruction of a planet that sustains all of life as we know it. We have separated ourselves from ‘it’; and elevated our species to a god-like status under the mistaken illusion that we are grand masters who control the world. How can this be possible when most of us can barely control what happens in our own lives and relationships?”

(Gardiner, 2019: p.1)

▶ In every presumptive external intervention I undertook, I failed at ‘God’s’ game; yet succeeded in changing the only thing I can – though not because I set out to do it! Reflecting on myself and my failed attempts at changing ‘others/organisations/communities’, I found myself changing. Now, I have been told by many that they’ve benefitted from what I did with them. For a long while, I accepted their flattery, inflating my ego, believing that it was me who was making the difference. But the more I explored my own interior dynamical processing, contemporaneously with other lenses drawn from natural, systems, complexity and cognitive sciences, the more I came to recognise the limitations of my assumed power to effect (desired) change in/of others. In particular, I found resonance with the theory of autopoiesis (Froese & Stewart, 2012; Maturana, 1975; Maturana & Poerksen, 2004; Maturana & Varela, 1980, 1987; Varela et al., 1974; Varela, 1992) – which suggests that, whilst an external realm may shift in some way, it is living entities that determine the nature of any change they undergo, by what they make (interiorly) of that external shifting terrain. Similarly, terrain shifts in its own way, in accordance with what it encounters. Living beings and niche co-evolve in nonlinear fashion.

As living beings, we learn/change by what we do with what we encounter, and not because some omnipotent presence makes us change in ways they think would be good for us! Yes someone can push us across the floor or physically harm us using brute strength, but transformational (state) change is determined from within, not by forces beyond us. I experienced profound relief, when I finally realised that I cannot change anyone. Beyond physical force where Newton's laws do actually apply, I cannot make others think, feel, do, learn just because I want them to. To put this in the context of this exchange with you, dear Reader: I write what I write; but what you make of what I write, will arise because of all that is in you which will determine how you engage with what I offer on the page, i.e. your current meaning-making patterns and perceptual filters will have you look for what is familiar/different, evoking ease/discomfort or resonance/resistance within you, ultimately determining what you do with what I offer. If you are unaware of what you are (not) noticing, you are more likely to be caught in your own perceptual filtering, rather than curious and open to what is unfamiliar.

▶ 🎵 When I was a little girl living in Lusaka, Zambia I loved reading adventure stories for girls – books my mother bought me for Christmas each year. I remember thinking:

“When I grow up I want to be the heroine!”

▶ 🎵 I wanted to be the one who would save the day, save others, save the world! When I let in what I witness playing out across the world today, that little girl with her dreams of being the saviour, returns to me in full magnitude.

▶ 🎵 Through my childhood and on into my adult life, this drama played me over and over again... until, after years and years of recycling introspection, I began to recognise that my wanting to “save you and the world” was not really about you or the world. I discovered previously inaccessible, deeply rooted emotional drivers based on fragments of experience woven into patterns of imagined narratives – fictions presented as if they were irrefutable, factual accounts of my childhood. My repeating behaviours revealed to me how desperate I was to prove that I was worth having around... because, if I could do that, then I would protect myself from what I was holding as FACTS but which were actually beliefs that “I was ALL wrong” and that “everyone I loved left me behind and never came back”. I had come to believe that if I proved my worth, then all those people would stay! None of this was an objective reality – although there is a kind of illogical logic at play that is grounded in some of the facts<sup>xxv</sup> of my early life as a colonial child born and living in Africa.

▶ ♦ My meaning-making was non-conscious. I did not engage in a rational, linear thinking process that led to decisions which I then choice-fully enacted. To suggest we human beings process like this is a myth that, some say, took root in the time of Descartes; and it has been promulgated in the name of so-called ‘good’ science ever since!

▶ ♦ The insights I have since gained through understanding complex living systems have helped me appreciate the nonlinear, self-organising dynamics that play out, not only between individuals but within each of us – me and you included. The framework of the **P6 Constellation** within the context of the praxis of PIA,

along with its accompanying **Acuity Practice** helps us explore this interior realm in a manner consistent with this complexity thinking paradigm. I call this consistency [metallogic coherence](#) (Gardiner, 2021, PhD pending publication): i.e. where the form/framework/metaphor (NB. I introduce the neologism ‘metaphorm’) used in an intervention, the nature of the practice/process(ing) and the paradigm and principles enforming<sup>xxvi</sup> them are mutually consistent with each other. Put simply, undertaking research about complexity but doing it by applying mechanistic protocols founded on principles of linear causality, would not be metallogically coherent. What we actually do and the structure of metaphorm we deploy reveal the embedded assumptions driving us. Our words often do not match what we claim or espouse. My research laid bare this dissonance and the concept of metallogic coherence illuminates with such simple clarity, why so many transformational change projects fail: because despite the words and concepts used, the actual processes, methods and approaches deployed remain squarely constrained by non-conscious mechanistic assumptions, i.e. that complex change can be engineered or built by humans.

### **Beyond dualist delusions**

▶♦ What is happening within each of us in the context of our relationships and wider world, is simultaneously way more complex and way more simple than the Cartesian delusion, i.e. that reductionism and cause-effect thinking can augment man’s abilities to bend nature to his will. Yet, on the face of it, when we look around at our cityscapes and landscapes, human impact suggests otherwise. What we see belies the imperceptible nonlinear causal consequences running beneath the surface; until such time as unanticipated effects begin to seep and break through uncontrollably. To release ourselves from the Cartesian constructs, we need to engage differently from the inside out. I dedicate the rest of this article to a way of exploring and illuminating this interior realm – Presence in Action.

♦ Let’s start with how the Cartesian illusion sets us up for the consequences of the binary game: bad/good; wrong/right; ugly/beautiful; lose/win; friend/foe; and how easily we may be drawn into pursuing the ‘true, good and beautiful’. Elevating positive psychology and championing approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry, all too easily, can have us slide into rejecting anything we judge as false, bad and ugly. These binary propositions are the fruits of simplistic meaning-making. For example, some people believe Donald Trump is a good and [trustworthy](#) individual because they AGREE with him and what he says and does. The same is true about Boris Johnson with regard to the Brexit debate in the UK. And yet, who says any of us has the right to be the arbiter of what and who is good, fair, just and right? This is tricky territory, made more so, when we present such notions as if they are absolutes – Facts or Truths that are irrefutable, when in actuality they are not. They are meanings people are making about situations, events, people etc. Some people may make the same meanings. Equally, different people make different meanings about those same situations, people, events; and some people make the same meanings about different situations, people, events.

▶♦ Now I am not advocating an ‘anything goes’ mentality that will have us all fall into the black hole that is fake news - where just because you utter something somehow means it’s true! Far from it. I am saying that we gloriously messy, muddled, emotion-fueled, meaning-making, relational beings can develop and leverage



our capacities to be more **metalogically coherent in and with ourselves and our world**. We are living in a world which seems to be straining to maintain its coherence amidst the reverberating consequences of our actions. I am making a case for recognising that we ARE nature and that when we act in ways that are not coherent with being nature, we harm ourselves first... and this ripples out into all that is beyond our enmeshed, entangled, being-doing bodies. If we remain blind to our own agency and impact – we separate ourselves and turn our attention onto others, blaming them for all that we judge as wrong, bad, ugly, irresponsible etc. In separating ourselves we imply that they did the bad things and we – (who **never** would do what they have done!) are the righteous victims. This seemingly gets us off the hook, because it means it is they – not us – who have to put right the wrongs. If we maintain that we are not culpable, we invoke the contradictory myth that we are powerless and they are all powerful. And so the binary dilemma stares back at us: How can we be all powerful in changing the world to our demands, yet powerless in the face of getting others to change? In truth, in this entangled complex reality where *everything is interrelating tangibly and intangibly*, we are both. We are implicated everywhere we are; and with that, in my view, comes responsibility: radical responsibility to enhance our response-ability, enabling us to act from a state of metalogic coherence.

▶🎵 It took me years to realise that in many challenging situations in which I found myself, I had neither recognised nor accepted responsibility for the part I had played. Over years, I came to appreciate the flaws in this meaning-making dance within me; and discovered that anytime I fell into making another person wrong or bad, this was a clue to what was awry and off-centre in me! When I opened up to what I was noticing and started attending to my own meaning-making, something rather amazing happened. A [naturally incorporating sensemaking](#) brought me home to myself, free of judgement, full of compassion and with a renewed ability and commitment to engage with those I had been blaming, with loving, bold humility. Now I am not saying I am 'fixed'. I am engaged in continuing process(ing). Each time I **admit**<sup>xxvii</sup> my own internal dissonance and all that is bringing this alive in me, I find myself responding to the situation with greater, clarity, self-assurance – a sense of trusting that how I am responding is fitting for the situation and me in it.

▶♦ Gaining such awareness does not come easy – at least it did not for me. And to imagine we can be fixed once and for all, is to fall again into the Cartesian trap. While ever we are alive, we are attempting to make sense of all that is going on around us, in a way that helps us know what to do. The key question for me, is do we want our processing to be driven by reactive, fast thinking (Kahneman, 2011) or enformed by increasingly attuned, responsive sensemaking that helps us attend to that which is unfamiliar?

### **Symmathesic agency born of personal processing**

▶🎵♦ As I alluded to earlier, I struggled emotionally for many years. Over the decades of my life, I sought explanations and solutions to fix the me who, back then, I believed was broken and all wrong. I chased after models and theories which I believed would provide me with **the** answer to my problems. Some were so abstracted from my lived experience as to be distressingly useless to me. Others afforded useful insights; yet most were largely impractical in helping me cope with what was going on in me, moment-to-moment. Increasingly, I found myself drawing upon my own sensemaking whilst interacting with others, and finding

resonances with various bodies of work. The arrival of the praxis of PIA bears testament to this interplay between personal knowing (first-person), interpersonal (second-person) and impersonal (third-person) knowledge sources. I came to the realisation that these cannot be split apart without imbalance, discordance and systemic perturbation arising. Yet the imperative to split, sits at the heart of the philosophy of science. This contradicts the principle of natural inclusion (Rayner, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2020b), denying us access to metalogically coherent approaches such as PIA, which are attuned instead, to the philosophy of Natural Inclusionality (Rayner, 2020c, 2020d).

► Nowadays, I am but one of a growing number of PIA Practitioners. We engage regularly in our community-in-practice, deepening and extending our acuity, agility, fluency and artistry in our daily lives. We do our personal processing; support each other 1-1, informally and in praxis-development triads; we engage in supervision and support new people to experience this work as practice partners in formal training sessions; and we participate in up to four community-in-practice gatherings each year. These take place in person and online depending on what is possible. This extending learning ecosystem co-evolves as our learning needs shift with the wider contexts in which we find ourselves. We constantly experiment with new ways to organise and take action, alone and together, in ever-shifting configurations. In January 2019 we established ourselves as a Community Interest Company – PIA Collective – to bring PIA to people everywhere we are. Our economic exchange model is based on what we call a ‘Sufficiency Principle’ in which we, along with many others, recognise that [enough is enough](#)<sup>xxviii</sup>.



Figure 2: Enough is Enough, performed at COP26, Glasgow, (Photo Dave Hammond, 10 November 2021)

▶🎵 Through PIA Collective's Sufficiency Principle we are offering an alternative to Corporate Social Responsibility that is **attuned to natural needfulness** (Rayner, 2011, 2017b, 2020a) i.e. **the flow dynamic evident in nature, where energy, invoked by receptive space, flows from full to empty**. The flow dynamic playing out in global economies, **is perverting this natural flow** in at least two ways: a) by **those who have more than enough**, seeking to **accumulate more and more**; and b) by **those who have nothing other than themselves, e.g., migrants from war-torn/impooverished states, 'flowing to where they believe there is plenty'**. Noticing what I have just written, I tune in to myself. What is going on within me, when this reversion of natural flow shows up in my ways of being-doing? In the first, I judge myself as 'greedy'; in the second, as 'needy'. Neither judgement is helpful because they distract my attention from what else is going on within me. In daring to sit amidst the rushing tumble of feelings that I want to run away from (e.g. shame, disgust, embarrassment, guilt etc.), I finally tap into what is driving both patterns when they show up in me: **my perceived or actual fear (believing) that I will 'not have enough to survive'**. Such meaning-making is non-consciously derived from past experiences when my natural needfulness (e.g. for shelter and/or physical or emotional sustenance) was not met.

▶ Whenever I find myself turning to judge others, I now know that this is a sign that I am (non-consciously) accusing and trying to protect myself from **facing something in/about me**. Until/unless I engage in this interior inquiry, I compromise my own trustworthiness. What helps me? Continuing to engage with others equally committed to safeguarding their own trustworthiness. Being part of the PIA Collective community-in-practice, is re-shaping what it means to be in relationship as friends, partners, peers, parents, colleagues, siblings, supervisors, artists, mediators, managers, musicians, coaches, therapists, teachers, learners, facilitators, hosts. Through PIA we are equipping ourselves to attend with more attuned response-ability in the heat and immediacy of everyday encounters. And in so doing, we are liberating ourselves into engaging more freely, joyfully, responsibly and coherently with others, in all we do in our lives, everywhere we are. This is [≈Symmathesic Agency](#) revealing itself in and through us as the living-learning individual and collective symmathesies we are becoming!

## A taste of PIA

▶ I am aware that my knowing about this way of being-doing (PIA) is in **and of** me, and my writing about it can only give you a glimpse of what it is, how it works and what it might bring to you. ▶🎵 ≈ However, let's see if I can open the space for you to get a taste of PIA.

≈ ♦ I invite you to walk into the shallows of this way of engaging and illuminating the content and dynamics that run within you. Below, I introduce you to some distinctions about a few words used in the P6 Constellation framework. There are key words in six outlying 'portals', held in self-centering communion by a space called 'Presence'. Here, I introduce you to the foundational four<sup>xxix</sup> that open a place for us to play:

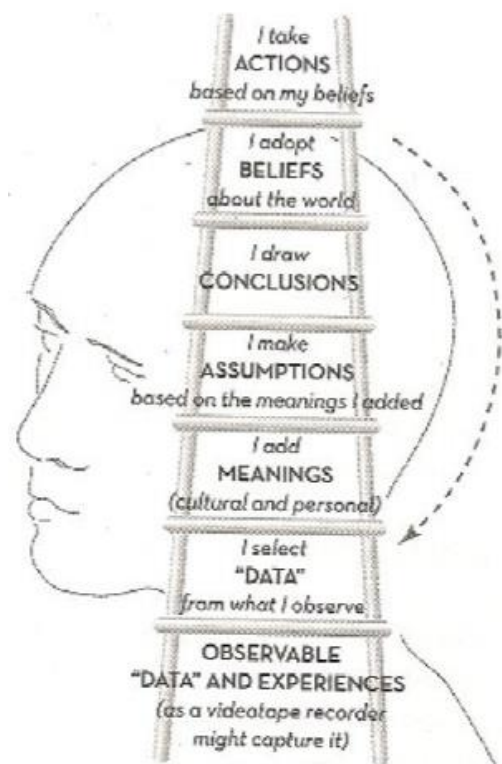
PRESENCE: becoming present to what is 'present' and 'current' within and beyond us, in any given situation in which we find ourselves. Imagine standing in the 'still point' at the centre of a vortex like a hurricane, seeing all that is spinning around you, yet remaining free of the turbulence. Presence, to some, affords a sense of being connected to the Divine. In the P6

Constellation, we understand Presence as a state of being in which we may be free of attachment, yet wholeheartedly connected to all that is in and around us. This portal represents a place in which we invite ourselves or another into a receptive state of 'acuity' – invoking our capacity to 'notice', using all the faculties known and, as yet, unknown to us.

- ◆ The space of Presence invites us to notice what we notice, and to use the surrounding portals of the framework to illuminate the content and nature of what is showing up within us. Through a simple acuity process (how we enquire), aided by the visual representation and a receptive, nonlinear way of holding our process(ing), we find ourselves noticing more than we usually do.
- ◆ The 3Fs within the P6 Constellation include: FACTS, FEELINGS and FICTIONS. The distinctions we make between these are crucial. Everything finds a place within the P6 Constellation and all – tangible and intangible – is considered data:

**FACTS:** Past and present events/happenings - including what was said/done, or not said/done and by whom. This is a type of data which is available to all of us; only some of which is accessible to each of us. Accessibility is limited by our proximity to what is happening; our perspective in relation to what we witness; and by the way in which we 'filter' what we notice, which is affected by our past experiences and what we make of those experiences. Put simply – we find what we are looking for, thereby proving it is there!

**FEELINGS:** a simple, catch-all term that includes our physical and physiological sensations i.e., somatosensory (muscles, connective tissue, skin); proprioceptive (movement and posture) and interoceptive (our internal organs e.g. heart, lungs, guts); AND what we ordinarily call 'emotions' such as anger, joy etc. Only the person feeling the feelings knows what their feelings feel like!



**The Ladder of Inference:** Argyris (1982) and Senge (1994)

And finally

**FICTIONS:** "what my mind does with...." This is about the meanings we make of what we notice, feel and experience. In the P6 Constellation we use this catch-all term for all the labels which refer to 'different types' of meaning-making e.g. beliefs, conclusions, assumptions, interpretations, myths, stories, values, memories from the past, future imaginings.

♦ Why use the term FICTIONS? In our super-fast internal processing (see Daniel Kahneman's book 'Thinking Fast and Slow'), we do not (have time to) differentiate between numerous sub-divisions and abstractions such as we might find in philosophy and academic disciplines; nor indeed in practice-oriented offerings such as those identified in Peter Senge's image of the Ladder of Inference (Senge, 1994) - building on the work of Argyris (1982).

♦ We also do not internally process in the progressively linear, seemingly objective manner as is implied by Argyris's ladder metaphor on the previous page – which you might note, makes no reference to emotionality. In the P6 Constellation, the middle five steps of this ladder are held within the Fictions portal. This distinction matters! This accounts for the reality that our inner processing is chaotic and nonlinear, with recursive interdependencies over which we have no fundamental control. We filter what we notice and make meaning of what we see, hear and feel even though (until we become practised) we are usually unaware of the details of what we have noticed and what we have missed.

♦ So – we are subject to the complex interplay between: our past-influenced, filtered 'noticings' (partial FACTS); the FEELINGS we feel amidst our noticings; our meaning-making (FICTIONS) of our filtered noticings; and our meaning-making of our meaning-making (more FICTIONS)! As you can see, often we are not reacting to WHAT factually happened, or is happening in the here and now. The more these patterns replay, the more they become locked in. Our fast-thinking patterns persist until we slow down sufficiently to become aware of the content and dynamics keeping them in play.

▶ ♦ What I have found through the praxis of PIA, is that our stuck patterns of meaning-making substantively change only WHEN we illuminate new or unnoticed 'data' which, through their revelatory arrival, serve to disrupt our previously locked-in, meaning-making patterns. Fragmentation/disintegration is a requisite for reconfiguration into new patterns. All this all is simply and elegantly scaffolded in the praxis of PIA, through which we become 'Presences' in action.

♦ Within the framework of the P6 Constellation, we accept FICTIONS, FACTS and FEELINGS as 'raw data'. These simple data-types keep us as close as is possible to our experiences – made accessible to ourselves and others in the words, gestures and representations we adopt as we attempt to comprehend what is manifesting; and as we attempt to communicate with each other about it all. In using, sharing and witnessing what unfolds as we deploy the P6 Constellation, people come to recognise that these three core types of data (the 3Fs) are necessary, yet not always sufficient for a clear, clean, coherent exchange between us<sup>xxx</sup>. When we omit one or more of these, the listener fills in the gaps with their personal and/or intergenerational experiences, meaning-making and future projections. This dramatically increases the likelihood of misinterpreting and misunderstanding.

### **Now let's put these distinctions to work...**

▶ In the pages that follow, I share several quotes. I invite you to discern Facts, Feelings and Fictions in these statements. As you use your cognitive faculties to identify the 3Fs distinctions, notice what else begins to show up within you. Hold these three questions in mind:

- Which of the 3Fs are evident in the quote?
- What FEELINGS do you notice arising in YOU as you read these quotes?
- What FICTIONS do YOU make of what is said and who said it?

## The Quotes

### Quote 1: Nicola Sturgeon, 24.6.2016

“Yesterday, Scotland - like London and Northern Ireland - voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU. We voted to protect our place in the world's biggest single market - and the jobs and investment that depend on it. We voted to safeguard our freedom to travel, live, work and study in other European countries. And we voted to renew our reputation as an outward-looking, open and inclusive country.”

*Which of the 3Fs are evident in the quote?*

FACTS	FEELINGS	FICTIONS

*What FEELINGS do I notice arising in me as I read this quote?*

*What FICTIONS do I make of what is said and who said it*

### Quote 2: Katie Hopkins, 08.09.2019

“I think women are really vicious in the work place, they’re really jealous, really competitive. Women are emotional, they cry in toilets. The sisterhood only extends as far as the kitchen door. Men talk in logic and rational terms, they don’t squark and make a noise.”

*Which of the 3Fs are evident in the quote?*

FACTS	FEELINGS	FICTIONS

*What FEELINGS do I notice arising in me as I read this quote?*

*What FICTIONS do I make of what is said and who said it*

### Quote 3: Osama bin Laden, 2005

“Every Muslim, from the moment they realise the distinction in their hearts, hates Americans, hates Jews, and hates Christians.”

*Which of the 3Fs are evident in the quote?*

FACTS	FEELINGS	FICTIONS

*What FEELINGS do I notice arising in me as I read this quote?*

*What FICTIONS do I make of what is said and who said it*

► Do go to the [Appendix](#) if you want to check your acuity in discerning the 3Fs. You might even have some fun going through this with a pal!

Before moving on, I invite you to ponder these questions. As you went through the above quotations:

- What did you notice? What did your pal notice?
- What did you notice about what you (each) noticed?
- What did you discover about yourself and each other?

### And the point of practising?

► ♦ Now, how does fluency in the 3Fs and PIA support us to address climate change, Brexit, religious and political fundamentalism, or spiraling Mental Health challenges?

► 🎵 To answer this I first want to refer to one of my favourite films, “Karate Kid”. Daniel wanted to be a karate expert in an instant. My Miyagi knew that there was no fast-track to that level of artistry – the art of defence in the face of offense. He set out Daniel-San’s learning path which the young boy, at first, resisted. First he got Daniel to paint the very large fence surrounding his Japanese garden, alternately using both hands and arms using the brush in a motion straight up and straight down. Brush up; brush down. Brush up; brush down. Brush up; brush down. Then, when Daniel thought he was done, Mr Miyagi put him onto his next task: to wax and polish all the cars in the parking lot, again using both arms – wax on, wax off. Wax on, wax off. Wax on, wax off. Daniel started to believe that Mr Miyagi was taking advantage of him (Fictions) and walked off (Facts) in frustration and anger (Feelings). Only on coming face to face with his bullies, did Mr Miyagi’s tangential teachings reveal their worth to Daniel. Practice. Practice. Practice, until it becomes your practice. The movements he did repeatedly in painting the fence and polishing the cars, were the core components of karate – defending himself when under attack.

▶ In PIA Collective, our community-in-practice gatherings, supervision and triad practice sessions are our equivalent of 'wax on, wax off'. They afford opportunities to practice personal processing; practice hosting each other; practice witnessing and holding the space for others as they practice processing and hosting.

▶ 🎵 The joys and unanticipated benefits of practising our praxis arise as we connect, open and expand in all our humanity together. We access the true that is raw, messy, unpredictable and fallible in each of us. This liberates an essential goodness in each of us, expressed through humility, compassion and forgiveness for ourselves and each other. And we burgeon with the undeniable beauty of the life-force of Nature that cannot not express itself when we access acceptance of who we are and what IS. We unlock none of this when we 'choose' to remain suffocating beneath the deluge of fake news in our own minds, coming out of our own mouths; as well as the sanitised positivity and pursuit of pretence-ful success and happiness. Such myths maintain the tyranny that has us judge ourselves and each other, as somehow mad, bad or deviant if we experience feelings such as shame, rage, guilt, despair, anxiety, resentment and bitterness. Rejecting these naturally occurring, energetic-affective states denies us accessing curiosity and intrigue which can help us discover what (non-)sense we may be 'making' of the past, present and future situations, relationships and contexts in which we find ourselves or imagine ourselves to be.

◆ Many approaches seek to categorise people, behaviours or conditions. [Presence in Action](#) does none of this. In essence, it enables each person to admit what is presenting within them; to meet and attend to whatever is showing up. This naturally inclusional approach is profoundly accepting, and it is this acceptance that enables the illumination of what previously was inaccessible to us. Such revelations ultimately free us from non-consciously recreating our self-made messes – messes we are co-creating through flawed perceptions, misconceptions and reactivity.

### **PIA seeding symmathesic agency**

◆ This self-centering dynamic of PIA may not look like a way of reverting and averting the damage human kind is having on the world. Certainly, those who venture here initially do not come because of their concerns about the planet. They come because they have witnessed change in others or they have reached a point in their lives when they know something has to change. They no longer want to be experiencing life as they currently are.

▶ 🎵 ◆ In coming into this space, they are able to meet themselves in ways they have never done before. In so doing, they begin to recover their relationship with themselves. What is changing in them trickles into their relationships. They begin to manifest this meta-conscious capacity: noticing what they did not notice previously, shifts their interactions with family, friends, children, colleagues. This catalyses changes in others but not in ways anyone can invoke on demand; nor trace through direct causal links.

◆ No one engaging with this praxis need know anything about the theoretical explanations that illuminate what and how it seems to 'work'. It does work. People pick it up without necessarily realising, because it is metalogically coherent with their/our inherent, natural ways of processing. This makes sense of the fact that children grasp it easily.



♦ The personal-relational context provided by PIA Collective is crucial. The mutually supporting, relational realm of this community-in-practice affords the space within which we each can meet ourselves, wherever we are. Practising together incorporates the notion of “complex self-identities” which recognises that we each have the capacity to act both individually and relationally (Mead, 1934; Rayner, 2005; Tesson, 2006); i.e. that when we hold ourselves as being in and of nature, the actions of ‘collective others’ do not preclude or deny the actions/agency of ‘ones’. The praxis of PIA and the existence of the PIA Collective community-in-practice are living manifestations of this: individuals practising collectively seeding [symmathesic agency](#).

Yes, we are in this together, and no, we cannot leave what is ours to do, to anyone else.

## Closing invitation

Given that I may be opening up rather than resolving curiosities, please do feel free to [email me](#) for more information, check out my [website](#) or sign up to [experience PIA](#) for yourself.

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## About the author

**Louie** is Founding Director of Potent 6, PIA Collective CIC and Crucial Difference

She has been passionately involved in liberating human potential for 30+ years. Her pioneering approaches are born of an enduring commitment to act for the wellbeing of all and to safeguard her own trustworthiness in whatever she does. Her body of work represents the fusion of real-world practice and academic research. Presence in Action and Symmathesic Agency are at the heart what she offers. This integrating body of work – underpinned by principles of natural inclusion, complexity thinking and primal animation – brings together radically different approaches to catalysing and nurturing personal and collective capacities for generative change – consciously, creatively, playfully.

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# Appendix – Differentiating the ‘3 Fs’

[Return to main text](#)

## Analysis of quotes

### Quote 1: Nicola Sturgeon, 24.6.2016

“Yesterday, Scotland - like London and Northern Ireland - voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU. We voted to protect our place in the world's biggest single market - and the jobs and investment that depend on it. We voted to safeguard our freedom to travel, live, work and study in other European countries. And we voted to renew our reputation as an outward-looking, open and inclusive country.”

<i>What is present &amp; absent in the quote?</i>		
FACTS	FEELINGS	FICTIONS
Yesterday, [a majority of people in] Scotland - like London and Northern Ireland – voted... to remain in the EU.		Overwhelmingly ... we voted to protect our place in the world's biggest single market - and the jobs and investment that depend on it. We voted to safeguard our freedom to travel, live, work and study in other European countries. And we voted to renew our reputation as an outward-looking, open and inclusive country.

### Quote 2: Katie Hopkins, 08.09.2019

“I think women are really vicious in the work place, they’re really jealous, really competitive. Women are emotional, they cry in toilets. The sisterhood only extends as far as the kitchen door. Men talk in logic and rational terms, they don’t squark and make a noise.”

<i>What is present &amp; absent in the quote?</i>		
FACTS	FEELINGS	FICTIONS
I think ...		... women are really vicious in the work place, they’re really jealous, really competitive. Women are emotional, they cry in toilets. The sisterhood only extends as far as the kitchen door. Men talk in logic and rational terms, they don’t squark and make a noise.

### Quote 3: Osama bin Laden, 2005

“Every Muslim, from the moment they realise the distinction in their hearts, hates Americans, hates Jews, and hates Christians.”

#### What is present & absent in the quote?

FACTS	FEELINGS	FICTIONS
		Every Muslim, from the moment they realise the distinction in their hearts, hates Americans, hates Jews, and hates Christians.

### Notes

<sup>xvii</sup> 'Ego' in common vernacular has become a short-hand pejorative term indicating selfishness or self-centredness in a person. In some psychological traditions, Ego has been 'thingified' – i.e. it is an abstract concept made into a noun, but when used, it is pointing to particular patterns of behaviour.

<sup>xviii</sup> Inclusionality: (Gardiner, 2018; Rayner, 2004a, 2004b, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Shakunle & Rayner, 2009) Alan Rayner first used this term in 2004 to illuminate reality as he has come to know it. His revelations/synthesis challenges the assumptions on which Darwinian thinking is based. He also exposes the assumptions that pervade mathematics and physics. Alan now uses the term 'Natural Inclusionality' (2016, 2018).

<sup>xix</sup> Admit: I leverage all meanings of this word, to let in, recognise, accept, accept as valid.

<sup>xx</sup> Self-centering refers to past-oriented (reflective) to in-the-moment (reflexive) acuity and adaptability; 'receptive-responsive' acknowledges the flow dynamics between receptive-responsive presences according to the principle of natural inclusion (Rayner, 1997, 2004a, 2011, 2017b, 2018) where "receptive space invokes in-flowing responsive energy" (Gardiner, 2021, PhD pending publication: Chapter-Five-as-Appendix, Figure A-63, p.524)

<sup>xxi</sup> According to Sheets-Johnstone, animation is the fundamental condition of/for life. While ever we are alive we are animate i.e. moving, even in sleep; when all that is us, stops moving, we will in fact be dead!

<sup>xxii</sup> ▶ Please do follow the hyperlink for an introduction to the notion of Symmathesic Agency, carried by ≈ Visual-Kinesthetic and ♪ Aesthetic-Poetic

<sup>xxiii</sup> Nora Bateson (Bateson, 2016: p. 169-194) coined the term symmathesy for trans-contextual, living-learning systems.

<sup>xxiv</sup> I deliberately adopt this term instead of 'subconscious' which is associated with psychological theories and particular meanings which do not align with what I mean here: a neutral descriptive term of that which is outside our awareness.

<sup>xxv</sup> I recount some of the facts of my earlier life experience, in this video link: [A mask is the sign of a dead soul.](#)

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Erforming*: meaning 'to form or fashion' what is becoming. This archaic word is more fitting than the present day term 'informing'

<sup>xxvii</sup> In using this word, I take to mean all that it means: acknowledge that something is there, accept it, let it in and accept that it has validity i.e. it is there with something to 'say'.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Song written by Karine Polwart, sung by her, the Soundhouse Choir, Oi Musica and Govan Primary School, COP26, Glasgow, 10 November 2021.

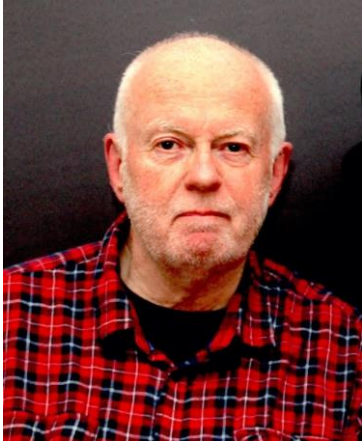
<sup>xxix</sup> The remaining three portals – Purpose, Outcomes and Decisions - help us access the deeper patterns that play within and through us beyond our conscious awareness. The way these come to life in practice cannot easily (if at all) be conveyed through written explanation. (Gardiner, 2021, PhD pending publication)

<sup>xxx</sup> The other three types of internal contents in the P6 Constellation come into play alongside the 3Fs. They are essentially nuanced Fictions. They are harder to access as they run more deeply in our non-conscious processing, linking what is present in the here and now, to past experiences and future projections. Surfacing all that is running in us **initially** requires being supported by experienced hosting, although with practice, becomes accessible to anyone.

# From eco to ego

## A limerick

Chris Blatern



### From eco to ego

They gathered at COP 26  
The climate they'd promised to fix  
But self-interest forgets  
So they flew in in jets  
Yet more blah, blah, blah politics

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# What's Next?

## *The small stories that are shaping a new sustainable narrative*

### Rosemary Cairns



[A whale in the sky \(Starling roost at Otmoor UK\)](#) Photo by [James Wainscoat](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The new sustainable future that is emerging all around us is not easy to see because it is made up of thousands of small stories that emerge from the grassroots even as our societal narrative seems to be stuck in a much different, and older, big story.

[Seawater greenhouses](#)? Shared [energy grids](#)? Paper from discarded [agricultural straw](#)? Water from the [air](#)? Making [glass figurines](#) from discarded pop bottles? [Kangaroo care](#) for babies? [Plumpy'Nut](#) treatment for starving children? [Mobile money](#)? [Plastic roads](#)? Buildings that [cool](#) themselves? [Doughnut economies](#)? [Barefoot solar engineers](#)? The list is long. For many people, they are nice 'one off' stories that make them feel better about what seems like an unrelenting flow of negative news. I look for them because for me, they reveal the shape of what's next - a new narrative of sustainable growth and living.

Other people seem to be doing the same thing. Robinson Meyer suggested recently that while we argue the 'big picture', people and companies are adopting climate action as simply good practice and are thus achieving the grand goals set by governments - he calls it the [green vortex](#); Stephen Cohen, former director of Columbia University's Earth Institute, [says](#) a climate action economy is simply a modern economy.

## The 'two loops' model

These ideas seemed similar to where I had arrived as I pondered why good news stories don't seem to get traction in the public imagination. I had turned to the ['two loops model'](#) of system change developed by the Berkana Institute as a way of understanding why.



Graphic by [The Outside](#). Used with permission.

In essence, the dominant system – our idea of how the world works – shapes our collective thinking, until it begins – like every natural system – to break down and eventually collapse. As that loop begins to run down, a whole range of experiments develop, and one or more of them will eventually form a new system to replace the old one that is dying.

Thinking about how to describe this, I thought of the dramatic opening ceremony of the London Olympics, in which Danny Boyle [choreographed](#) the journey from England's 'green and pleasant land', when most people lived an agricultural life on the land, to the pandemonium of the Industrial Revolution. Somehow, it made the societal paradigm shift so clear. The gentle rural scene was dramatically and violently disrupted, as smokestacks and factories sprouted from the ground. But then I realized that when Abraham Darby used coke to smelt iron in a blast furnace in 1709, he was not part of the then dominant agricultural model – his was a small emerging and unusual story. Through many small stories, he and his ilk collectively changed the world's paradigm from rural and agricultural, to urban and industrial, and shaped our idea of the world as a machine rather than an ecosystem of relationships. Now as that industrial system runs down, solar energy, wind power, biomass and biogas are the equivalent of Darby's smelted iron as we move towards a world that will be powered, much more sustainably, by renewable energy. What is it going to look like? We don't really know, because people build on change and keep experimenting to find ever newer ways to do things. In 1709, who could have predicted today's world from all those many small experiments?





[Group of longhorn cattle at Knepp Wildland](#). Photo by [Julie Mac](#). [Wikimedia Commons](#) and [Flickr](#)

## The outline of a sustainable future

It seems to me that is the promise, and value, of all the small stories that don't seem to fit into today's dominant narrative. They provide hints of what's next:

- We will value nature's ecosystem services, not the ability to extract minerals and substance from the earth and the ocean.
- We are much more likely to have a much more individualized approach to power generation, via renewable sources.
- Animals' ability to shape our land and water will be valued and recognized, and together we will co-create landscapes that are more wild than domesticated.
- We will repair damage to the land by restoring the full water cycle and thus recharge aquifers below the surface, and remove many dams that have disrupted many natural systems.
- We will use natural systems to protect our coasts from storm damage rather than building ever higher sea walls, and we will recognize the value of 'blue forests' as much as trees in capturing carbon.
- We will use indigenous strategies like 'cool burning' as tools to manage forests sustainably.
- We will reuse many things we now discard and replace the slaughter of animals with laboratory created meat, fish, and chicken.

Recognizing that there is a sweet spot (Kate Raworth calls it the 'doughnut') between ensuring everyone has what they need, and exploiting natural systems beyond their tipping point, we will reshape our societies in

terms of governance, corporate ownership, relationships between north and south, and our idea of the global and local commons.

But because this is happening below that collapsing dominant narrative, we don't see all those small stories as the weft and woof of a new narrative. I see at least five reasons:

- We think the power is at the top
- We operate from a 'deficit' mindset
- We prefer the 'single story'
- The power of the machine metaphor
- We don't see the emerging narrative.

### **We think the power is at the top**

While we pay lip service to grassroots bottom-up action, many of us still behave as if the power is at the top of the system. When we think about addressing climate change, we focus on the top of the system - governments, and corporations - rather than the grassroots or community level. Thus our focus is on Paris Accords, government commitments, court decisions, and corporate pledges of change, rather than the community and the city. And we tend to think that participatory activities such as peoples' assemblies are 'new' phenomena rather than how we used to organize ourselves before we privileged individual land ownership, extractive technologies, and a focus on individual profits and not societal costs.

[Michelle Nijhuis](#) argues in a recent essay called *The Miracle of the Commons*, that despite the claim that the 'commons' was dead, commons management principles actually underlie hundreds of conservation efforts worldwide which - unlike top-driven conservation activities - reduce costs and deliver significant benefits to people and nature.

"Many have revived and adapted conservation practices developed centuries ago, developing new rules suited to current circumstances," she says. "Their creators cooperate in the management of coral reefs in Fiji, highland forests in Cameroon, fisheries in Bangladesh, oyster farms in Brazil, community gardens in Germany, elephants in Cambodia, and wetlands in Madagascar. They operate in thinly populated deserts, crowded river valleys, and abandoned urban spaces."

Basil Davidson argues that many African religious beliefs were actually conservation principles framed so they could be easily grasped by widely-scattered peoples, and that perspective helps us see principles of indigenous conservation as practical strategies wrapped in story, not myth. [Cool burning](#), for example, now is used extensively in northern Australia in concert with 'modern' fire management strategies. Scientists have found that forests managed by their indigenous residents are managed at least as [sustainably](#) - if not more so - than forests managed by foresters and governments. [Human-wildlife interaction](#) is managed much more effectively when rural communities help develop and manage such strategies in relationship and as part of an

ecosystem - think chilli peppers and bee hives rather than electric fences. Finally, when [peoples' assemblies](#) are used to discuss climate change, participants often choose much more dramatic strategies than governments. Once people grasp the situation holistically and in context, they are willing to make choices and tradeoffs that governments find difficult.

### **We operate from a 'deficit' mindset**

Decades ago, management consultant [David Cooperrider](#) dramatically changed how we examine systems. Rather than seeing it as a machine that needed to be 'fixed', he began looking for what gave life to a system. And that required asking quite different questions (Appreciative Inquiry).

Yet the deficit model is a powerful one. It is easier to look for what doesn't work than to look for what is working. When I worked in community development internationally, I would divide a flipchart in two columns - "What works" and "What could be done differently" - and then ask project staff to share what they saw. Invariably, people wanted to start with 'what didn't work'. But also invariably, once the 'what works' ideas finally started, ideas for what could be done differently burst forward in the narrative context of what was working.

When we argue that the public must hear a dire story of climate change, we are not starting from 'what works'. If we start from the narrative of nature as a living system whose ecosystem services make it possible for us to live sustainably and still make a living, we would have a quite different picture, and make different decisions.



[Reef sharks momentarily mirroring each other](#). Photo by [David Clode](#) on [Unsplash](#)

If we see a shark as a [million dollar resource](#) for our country's tourism, for example, we become willing to spend money to find livelihood alternatives for fishers, because it is in everyone's long term interests to let the shark keep attracting tourists. Or if we think of an elephant as providing ecosystem [services](#) worth \$1.75 million per animal, we treat poaching differently.

Similarly, financing 'blue carbon' projects is simpler if we compare the value of how [mangroves](#) protect coasts from erosion naturally with the cost of building artificial sea walls and raising houses high on stilts.

Such conversations generate inventive new possibilities. When conservation organizations in California looked at how to [restore bird migration](#) in the context of the whole system, they came up with a 'win-win-win' solution. When rice farmers began flooding harvested fields rather than burning stubble, birders noticed that migrating birds began to land in the flooded fields which mimicked what existed before the state channelled mountain water to agricultural fields. Drawing on the ideas that created Uber and Airbnb, conservation groups researched exactly when and where the land was needed and paid farmers to keep the fields flooded for that time period, at rates the farmers bid. The birds started to come back, the farmers' bottom line benefitted, and the conservation project was affordable and practical. (Additionally, salmon for which rivers are now too warm can feed on the stubble as they grow.)

Changing our thinking from 'deficit' to 'appreciative' also means we can see waste of all kinds as a resource and not as a problem. Human and [animal waste](#) is used to generate electricity via biogas, for example. Human waste is reprofiled as '[toilet resources](#)' by industry, which sees huge opportunities in new ways to treat sanitation - including mining minerals from human waste. Paper is generated from [agricultural waste](#), saving trees. Plastic waste is shredded and added to the [asphalt for roads](#), improving road surfaces and reducing carbon emissions.

## **We prefer the 'single story'**

We don't like complexity even though it is a characteristic of what Amanda Ripley describes as 'good conflict' vs. 'high conflict'. We prefer the 'single story', despite its misleading nature, because it is simple.

'Solutions journalism' grew out of the idea that in their desire to reflect 'both sides', many journalists were heightening conflict by simplifying stories that were much more complex. Ripley, whose powerful questions inspired this new approach, has just written a [book](#) that examines what she calls 'high conflict' and 'good conflict'.

High conflict is binary, argumentative, and largely performative because it shuts down our curiosity about others. Good conflict, by contrast, happens when we are curious about other peoples' views and ask questions without assuming we know the answers, thus helping to generate solutions we cannot see when we are stuck in the 'tunnel vision' of high conflict. Nigerian writer [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#) talks about the 'danger of a single story', which is in many ways the same thing. And as [James C. Scott](#) says in *Seeing Like A State*, the map is not the territory. It is easier, and simpler, to tell that single story as if it is *the* truth. This simplicity/complexity dichotomy makes it more difficult to put all the 'small stories' together into a new narrative.

International development activities are particularly prone to categorizing issues in silos and seeing development as a vertical 'expert to novice' process rather than a 'neighbour to neighbour' one, despite much evidence to the contrary.

[Ngwenya Glass](#) in Swaziland, now known as Eswatini, began with a South African family who collected small glass figurines that had been made in a factory established with Swedish aid. When the supply dried up, they discovered the factory had shut down, and bought it. The project now covers so much that many international organizations see in separate silos - job creation, community economic development, recycling glass, environmental conservation, and tourism - but which make complete sense from a holistic community-level perspective.



[Elephant](#). Photo by [Ngwenya Glass](#) – [Wikimedia Commons](#).

A school principal in Lesotho whose idea to use school land to grow crops to feed her students influenced an entire region, without international funding, because people heard about it from others and decided to copy it - an example of what the South African NGO [CDRA](#) calls 'horizontal development' because it spreads organically from neighbour to neighbour.

### **The power of the machine metaphor**

Our narrative is still driven powerfully by the idea that humans, and society, are machines or engines with parts that can be interchanged, rather than natural systems which have their own order and ability to heal.

I hadn't fully grasped how powerful the machine metaphor has been in shaping our image of ourselves and our world until I read [Norman Doidge](#)'s books. He was telling stories about the work of neuroplasticity researchers and their revelations about the brain's capacity to learn, change and adapt. Parts of a damaged brain could take over for other parts, for example, and people who suffered strokes could return to full functioning. It seemed miraculous. But I was even more astounded by the reluctance of the medical research establishment to give up its attachment to the old idea of the brain as machine.

Most indigenous science is rooted in an understanding of the world and nature as a living, self-organizing entity that we can communicate with, and learn from. We are learning that the earth can heal itself if we understand the principles of its organization. Indigenous Australian techniques of fire management, for example, use fire in specific ways, and at specific times, to reduce wildfire damage, support natural growth, and manage land.

Nature has a great ability to heal itself if we let it, as we know from [Chernobyl](#), the [Demilitarized Zone](#) between the two Koreas, and the Green Line in Cyprus. Local communities around the globe are using such self-healing capacities to heal the [water cycle](#) and recharge underground water aquifers, regrow tropical [forests](#) and make the land [fertile](#) again.

It is the natural equivalent of what researchers call 'post-traumatic growth' - the idea that traumas can help us learn and grow in ways we would not achieve without those experiences.

### **We don't see the emerging narrative**

The consequence is that we think of small stories of achievement, no matter how substantial, as anomalous blips in the existing narrative rather than an emerging new narrative. When our story is a single and deficit-based one, rather than an appreciative one full of complexity, we struggle to fit all those stories of individual achievement - if they're known at all - into that deficit view.

Yet this is not how we humans actually behave in real life. We are moved by individual stories, as [Kiva.org](#) discovered when its founders began exploring how to create a lending platform that would allow North Americans to lend small amounts of money to Africans who were trying to make better lives. It was the stories that motivated the lenders, they learned.

Marine scientist [Nancy Knowlton](#), who created the [OceanOptimism](#) hashtag, did so because offering students a dire picture of the ocean [depressed](#) them, and also because many scientists [did not know](#) stories of achievement even in their own field. Her work inspired the Earth Optimism summit in Washington and as she noted in [2020](#), that was the first time participants had been at a meeting where the entire focus was on 'what works'.

This larger perspective is vital, because our view of what is working in the ocean, for example, becomes different if it is linked directly with what is happening on land and in community livelihoods. Recent research on the [tourism value of surfing](#) to Mexican communities, for example, shows that protecting the ocean from pollution or waste is an investment in keeping those tourists and their money coming.

## The emerging new 'meta-narratives'

The challenge is recognizing the new overall narrative which those stories are shaping - and that is the value of the '[doughnut economy](#)', the '[circular economy](#)', '[biomimicry](#)' (design from nature), the '[ecosystem services](#)' perspective, and now, the '[green vortex](#)'. These meta narratives create frameworks that allow the small stories of achievement to be seen as building blocks, rather than as blips, and situate the 'what doesn't work' side of the ledger in a more holistic context. While some are critical of putting a dollar value on ecosystem services, many conservation scientists say it allows them to sit at the table with [bankers and financiers](#) and ensure that decisions are made in a more accurate and holistic financial context. People and corporations come to conservation from many perspectives. Walmart, the world's largest retailer, has become [very green](#) because its business model depends on a reliable supply chain. It started with fish. When Walmart notified its suppliers that it would in future only stock canned fish that was certified as coming from sustainably-managed fisheries, the marine community took notice. Recently it has taken a similar approach to investing in and supporting [regenerative agriculture](#).

[Rewilding projects](#) in Britain are restoring apex predators which shape the land naturally to landscapes whose soil fertility has been damaged by intensive cultivation, recreating an older narrative of farming that is both ecologically and economically healthier.

Projects to [re-green deserts](#) and land damaged by [disruption of the water cycle](#) have begun to show strong and viable results, with work done locally and in a participatory way. One village in India, for example, rebuilt its soil and its economy when it changed how it managed water and made collective decisions about which crops to grow. The [miracle water village](#) now has many wealthy people whereas before, it had lost many people to the city and those left behind were barely surviving.

The Berkana two loops model offers us a way to work within the collapsing and emerging paradigms - by offering hospice to the dying industrial system, connecting the many emerging experiments, and deliberately building a bridge for conversations about the transition from the old to the new. And that means seeing and sharing the small stories of sustainable achievement as guideposts for the future rather than temporary respites from a bleak picture.

## About Rosemary

Rosemary maintains the [Hopebuilding](#) blog, keeping track of the 'small stories' she shares here. She has a gift for seeing patterns - and she draws on a wide range of experience to do so, having been a journalist, information officer, community worker, board member, evaluator, and observer of elections in faraway places.

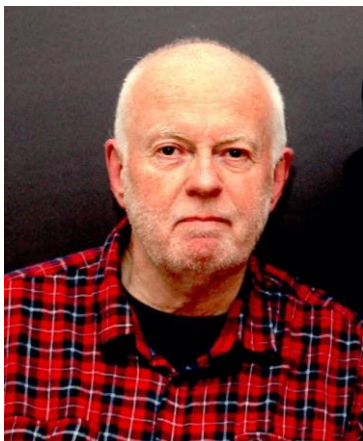
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# Steps to an ecology of agency

## Organising to live well together - a 'grammar' of collective well-being(s)

Chris Blanter



### Prologue

'Ego to eco' is a witty aphorism that draws our attention to the way [some] humans have exploited the natural environment, over the past 200 years or so, without giving much thought to the ecological consequences. Many, especially the young, are anxious and united about the need for change but what is it that needs to change? This paper proposes that we humans, particularly in the techno-driven industrial 'north', are not only responsible for the condition of the planet and biodiversity but also for the ways we treat each other.

Exploitation of 'others' is a normalised style of thinking and action that applies equally to the condition of society, the cultural environment, as well as the so-called natural environment. These spheres cannot be separated. They are the entangled outcome of normalised, taken-for-granted, social [micro] practices. Feminist theorist Donna Haraway suggested that 'nature has long been culture's 'Other'' and this paper proposes that 'othering', of the planet, other life forms and other humans, is central to our anxieties, distress and yearning for living better together – for sustainable wellbeing.

Culture is reconfigured as including not only humans but also other life-forms, materiality and the planet. If the era of the Anthropocene is to be shouldered then it must include a human sense of responsibility – not only for the planet but for a social environment in its more thoroughgoing ecological sense.

"I want to defend society and all its inhabitants from all ideologies, science included. All ideologies must be seen in perspective. One must not take them too seriously. One must read them like fairytales which have lots of interesting things to say but which also contain wicked lies, or like ethical prescriptions which may be useful rules of thumb but which are deadly when followed to the letter."

(Feyerabend, P. 1981, p 156)



## Cultural ecology

We are confronted daily with news of what were once called 'natural disasters'. Now such climatic disasters are more likely to be characterised as 'man<sup>xxxix</sup>-made' rather than natural. Such is our generalised growing awareness of the effects of humankind's<sup>xxxix</sup> activities on the planet and biodiversity – our developing eco-consciousness. The devastating effects of the Covid pandemic too, reinforce the re-cognition that our wellbeing is connected to the wellbeing of others. In this industrialised, digitally observed and communicated era we are more globally sentient than our ancestors had the opportunity to be. Our cultural conditions and technological artefacts have foreshortened time and space and we are increasingly confronted with the global as well as local effects of our activities – our connectedness.

This shift towards greater eco-consciousness is resonant though it has more extensive implications than the contemporary sharp focus on 'environmentalism'. Here I want to explore how that awareness might inform the development of a 'cultural ecology' that could enable us to live well, or at least better, together. There is no dearth of texts and missives that implore us to inherit the 'sustainable' earth but doing it, animating joint and several agency, is of a different order of change – for this is an ecological issue too. An important question is: 'what constitutes joint and several agency?'

To talk about cultural ecology is to re-cognise some issues that may well challenge our assumptions about the world and the ontological status we grant to, for example, facts, truth, objectivity, the role of science, what's real, what's natural, hierarchies, human nature, things, selves and society, what's [ab]normal, what's right/wrong, rights and obligations, anthropocentrism and the role of non-humans and the material world – and so on. These are the kinds of phenomena that both characterise and animate or enervate our capacities to co-exist well – or not.

“To call something ecological is to draw attention to its necessary implication in a network of relations, to mark its persistent tendency to enter into a working system.”

(Bennett, J., 2004, p 365)

First, a cultural eco-consciousness recognises the inhering performative action of relationships. Relations are not seen as passive and inert coexistences – but as generating vibrant intra-active<sup>xxxix</sup> effects.

“... reality [is] made up of relations rather than objects.”

(Bagnini, 2021)

So, secondly, such relations are not so much seen as being occupied by already existing entities - like humans, animals, plants and physical things – but rather that relations per-form, come to constitute, what we take to be entities.

“NAME OF ACTION: An expression used to describe the strange situation – such as experiments – in which an actor 'emerges out of its trials'. The actor does not yet have an essence. It is defined only as a list of effects – or performances – in a laboratory. Only later does one deduce

from these performances a competence, that is, a substance that explains why the actor behaves as it does. The term 'name of action' allows one to remember the pragmatic origin of all matters of fact.”

(Latour, 1999, p. 308)

We humans are acculturated into communities of relational practices – where our learning - how we are informed – is bound up in cooperation with cultural actors including other humans, non-human beings, cultural artefacts and materiality, in the everyday cultural relations that “participate”<sup>xxxiv</sup>, or “real-ise”, us.

“[Dewey] rejected the idea that humans have a fundamental essence, and all that this involves in terms of the ends towards which their lives are directed, and the means employed to attain these ends, arguing instead that human beings are constituted in their interaction with the multiple aspects of their environment. Humans are through and through the product of a lived practice.”

(Independent Premium,2021)

Thirdly, our active relations with each other, non-humans and the material world are integral to who, even what, we are and as such we do not stand above or beyond these ‘others’ in our worlds. We are co-constituents. A classical, humanist anthropocentric view of existence is turning out to be both arrogant and counterproductive.

“This is not a world, in the first instance, of subjects and objects, but of various materialities constantly engaged in a network of relations. It is a world populated less by individuals than by groupings or compositions that shift over time.”

(Bennett, J., 2004, p354)

Fourthly and consequent upon the above, cultural eco-consciousness is inherently political. Hierarchies, priorities, sense of worth/value, status, rights and obligations and what we take to matter – are not pre-existing, structural features of the cosmos. When we describe the effects of our actions in the world we are not discovering the way nature speaks – but rather using our cultural sensibilities and tools, especially (but not exclusively) language, to attribute competence. The meanings of actions that endure are those that serve the most influential and powerful and in those normalising accounts we elide, or contribute to the forgetting of, the [micro] intra-actions, attributions and actors that constitute the detail of relational cultural performances.

“... the bodily disciplines through which ethical sensibilities and social relations are formed and reformed are themselves political and constitute a whole (under-explored) field of "micropolitics" without which any principle or policy risks being just a bunch of words. There will be no greening of the economy, no redistribution of wealth, no enforcement or extension of rights without human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles hospitable to these effects.”

(Bennett, J., 2010. Preface xii)

## Truth – a false prospectus

There is much to be gained by examining the taken-for-granted character of ‘truth’ – that is the everyday assumption that there is only one way of talking about phenomena and events. This is not a proposition in support of conspiracy theorists or anti-science proponents – but it is an invitation for us to be more discerning about the way we use science and claims to truth. More specifically I refer to truth of the ‘natural kind’<sup>xxxv</sup> – the assumption that worldly phenomena exist prior to, and in character identical to our subsequent descriptions. More, that we have found the very pre-existing vocabulary of which the cosmos is made. For many, and it is the stance taken here, this kind of realism is seen as a bizarre pretension and one that has furnished an arrogance and a sense of legitimised mastery for and of the human condition – a supremacy which measures all difference from it as in some way inferior.

To begin with here is a vexing exemplar of this kind of thinking. Let’s suppose there are privileged people who see their ‘success’, status and exceptional worth as a capacity, even a genetic pre-eminence, of the individual themselves. Unnoticed or dismissed is the assemblage of cultural networks - such as well-furnished upbringings; inherited wealth and opportunity; favourable opportunities arising from attending elite schools; privileged systemic power (I can get you a job in ‘X’ or know someone who can); access to the latest technology and possibly servants (people as ‘our things’); social mobility - the choice to migrate between social networks (‘social capital’); conveying and conferring membership of such networks through material possessions and clothing (status passports), skin colour and modes of speech; proximity to markets (business owners/first and first-hand knowledge of investment opportunities); having the reinforcement of historical accounts (written by the privileged); enjoying superior living conditions (diet, lived environment, health care and choice) and, of course, having money and time at their immediate disposal (non-human actants – ‘money talks’; ‘time waits for no-one’?). Like the fish that doesn’t know it’s in water these features of cultural assemblages generally go unnoticed by those who dwell therein.

We do not need to ‘suppose’. If you are not already familiar with this video take a look at this footage, from a 2012 BBC documentary series ‘The Guest Wing’, of Baronet Sir Edward Humphry Tyrrell Wakefield espousing the ‘natural’ inevitability of elitism. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWwxiiulv\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWwxiiulv_A)

Here is the salient passage.

“Quality is everything but in general, to be elitist, I think the quality climbs up the tree of life [gesture: hand moves from low to high position] and therefore, in general, higher things in the tree of life have quality, have skills and they get wonderful degrees at university - and they marry each other and that gets them better again. .... one is the subject of one’s genes and I like the idea of them being successful genes.”

This ideological stance is known, more formally, as eugenics. It is a stance that social reformists say is used to justify hierarchies of worth, acts of injustice, horror and suffering and even genocide. I use the present participle, ‘is’ because the doctrine of eugenics is not confined to the past. As recently as 2019 it made its way into the heart of the UK Government as espoused by the Prime Minister’s former ‘special advisor’

Dominic Cummings<sup>xxxvi</sup>. Another adviser, whom Cummings recruited, Andrew Sabiski proffered even more entrenched eugenicist<sup>xxxvii</sup> views. Oh, and Sir Edward Humphry Tyrrell Wakefield is Cummings' father-in-law. If elitism is claimed as innate then so is the condition of the poor<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

“If he is blue collar, he is likely to be drunk, criminal, aimless, feckless and hopeless, and perhaps claiming to suffer from low self-esteem brought on by unemployment ... If he is white collar, he is likely to be little better.”

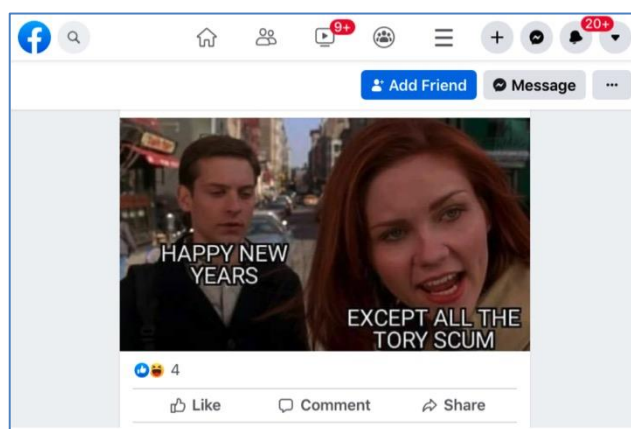
(Boris Johnson, Spectator, 1995)

Conventionally, the opposition to eugenics and its claims that there is scientific foundation for a 'natural' hierarchy of worth, has been the invocation of 'nurture' or socialisation. What we take to include as nurture - accident of birth, the historical accumulation of an individual's experience, childhood support, life path, social and economic positioning and opportunity, access to education and health care and so on, are seen as more formative – yet still culminating in the individual as the locus and fount of agency. More, these encounters and opportunities are most often explained in terms of underlying social structures within a domain of predominantly human agency. Not much attention is given to the present, momentary assemblage of relations with humans and non-humans and their performative effects arising in events. Typically, proponents of the 'socialised' view will turn, too, to natural and social science, or at least to some non-human authority like 'reality', to assert the truth that legitimises this stance. Vocabularies of emancipation, including management and organisation development often refer to 'true', 'core' or 'essential' selves – as if the nurture argument gives way to a natural, given essence or structure at some point - what point? However, what sets the respective legitimacy of these two positions apart is not their ontological foundation (which truth is true?) but rather their performed effects and our purposes in adopting one or other of these positions.

Clearly the latter stance promises respect for all humanity, as distinct from being restricted to the 'naturally worthy' or 'chosen few', and is the foundation of humanistic approaches to social progress, social psychology and of course the human relations school of management and organisation development. However, summoning scientific realism as the ultimate warrantor of validity is the 'Modern' equivalent of going to war with the assurance that 'God is on our side'. Each side mirrors the other's appeal to a non-human, higher authority for ultimate legitimacy.

In the more acculturated, humanistic view we are orientated towards respect for all – except those who don't agree and who seek to undermine us. We have respect for all humanity – as long as they endorse our view!

Convinced that our science, our truth, is the correct and only one, and therefore exhaustive of all other characterisations, how are we disposed to positioning 'others' in our encounters who do not speak like we do or do not seem like us?



Retrieved from a Facebook feed at the time of writing

What position can we offer them in our world(s) once we have evaluated them against this self-evident 'truth'? Most likely we choose from a 'worthiness' menu to place them as mistaken, indolent, ignorant, unprincipled, stupid, devious, malevolent, evil or mad. Of course, such a reckoning does not only apply to the exemplar chosen here – but to all treasured 'matters of fact', or even points of view, in dispute - especially those arising in our everyday encounters which the adoption of social media seems to have amplified.

In a world witnessing enormous social challenges - from the climate crisis, industrial pollution, mass migration, extreme poverty, political and armed conflict, through to racism, misogyny and other hate crimes - are these just the unfortunate consequence of truths, warranted by some higher, non-human authority, or have we fashioned, like the eugenicists, a cultural prosthesis to support our various privileged claims to exclusive legitimacy – to power and control? The point here is that the unexamined deployment of claims to natural truths (phenomena of a 'natural kind') are, though quite normalised in our everyday affairs, problematic and divisive.

"... the term "intrinsic nature" is one which it would pay us not to use, an expression which has caused more trouble than it has been worth."

(Rorty, R., 1989, p8)

Again – this is not a denial of science or its value – but a critique of the misappropriation of what science does.

"The best way to get into this way of thinking is to become an epistemological sceptic — to start worrying about whether human language is capable of representing the way Reality is in itself, whether we are calling Reality by the right names."

(Rorty, R., 2021, p 8)

We cannot know what words nature would use to describe herself. We have deluded ourselves if we can be so easily convinced that nature speaks in grammatically correct sentences and has chosen the vocabularies we use.

"The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that."

(Rorty, R., 1989, p. 6)

Rorty's explication casts further relief on Latour's notion of 'the name of action' (above) yet the implicit, operative belief that we are 'speaking Reality' is deeply embedded. As long ago as 1616 Galileo was sure that nature's language is mathematics<sup>xxxix</sup>. More recently Bill Clinton opted for a different language when he said, upon the announcement of the initial sequencing of the human genome, .....

"Today, we are learning the language in which God created life. "

(Clinton Whitehouse Archives)

Once we think we know how nature speaks then the explicit or implicit author-ity of universal objectivity is assumed by many, including many trained scientists, to be supreme. We are excused, even dissuaded, of further inquiry. It has been exhausted and we are taught to sanction against it ('you can't argue with the facts!').

"For once we have discovered truth – what else can we do but follow it?"

(Feyerabend, P., p157)

### **Endemic divisiveness and otherness – look what 'truth' made me do**

But here's the problem. When our ideology is sacrosanct "others" (people, other life forms and the material planet) measured against it, are easily reduced to instrumental objects in our worlds – resources to be controlled, used and exploited.

A recent BBC radio 4 programme (Archive On 4) exploring the relationship between scientists and popular culture included an excerpt from 1960s TV series 'The Ascent of Man' presented by Dr. Jacob Bronowski. He was featured lifting human ashes from a waste pool at Auschwitz and passionately imploring...

"Into this pond were flushed the ashes of some 4 million people.... .. it was done by arrogance; it was done by dogma; it was done by ignorance. When people believe that they have absolute knowledge – with no test in reality – this is how they behave. This is what men do when they aspire to the knowledge of gods. Science is a very human form of knowledge...."

(Archive on 4, 09/10/21, 41.47 mins)

Characterising others as worth-less has a self-fulfilling trick. It blames others for their otherness, so doubling-down on their difference. Not only are 'they' not like us we are also, rationally, not defending our rights if we don't treat them as 'less than' us. America First?

'Otherness' is created – even when the intention is to do good. We should not be exonerated from our own othering talk just because we believe our line is more true or more moral. By doing so we are affirming the rules of the game – the social grammar<sup>xl</sup> that propagates the normalised cultural practice of treating others as 'less than'.

Here, Rosi Braidotti offers a poststructural, feminist, posthumanist view of the way the configuration of 'others' serves to bolster the historical human ideal of the Eurocentric, straight, white male and 'his' naturalised entitlement.

"These others were constitutive in that they fulfilled a mirror function that confirmed the Same in His superior position (Braidotti, 2006). This political economy of difference resulted in passing off entire categories of human beings as devalued and therefore disposable others: to be 'different from' came to mean to be 'less than'. The dominant norm of the subject was positioned at the pinnacle of a hierarchical scale that rewarded the ideal of zero-degree of difference. This is the former 'Man' of classical Humanism."

(Braidotti, R., 2013, pp. 27-28).

“... social theorist Donna Haraway has suggested, nature has long been culture’s ‘Other’”

(Fox and Aldred, 2020, p. 122)

### From ‘otherness’ to inclusive solidarity

We would be better off revising the endemic idea, that the language of science offers us a superior, God’s-eye view of worldly phenomena.

“There is nothing wrong with science, there is only something wrong with the attempt to divinize it, the attempt characteristic of realistic philosophy.”

(Rorty, 1991, p. 34)

"Scientism is a matter of putting too high a value on natural science in comparison with other branches of learning or culture."

(Sorell, 1994, pp. 1)

The divination of science, as universal objectivity (nature speaking universal truth), has the effect of excluding, ignoring, forgetting, eliding, that how we come to know the world is through our engagement in relational encounters – cultural ecologies. If we think we have bypassed culture and found the ‘true’, authoritative expression of worldly phenomena our moral sensitivity to the effects of what we do – to each other, to other life forms and the planet, stops right there. There is no need to ask further questions and in such acquiescence we have also given away the vibrancy and acuity of our own agency. Hierarchy, as a principal tenet of social grammar, relies on the squandering of local agency and, along with it, the abandonment of social responsibility and the passive yielding to ‘otherness’.

“The tradition in Western culture which centers around the notion of the search for Truth, a tradition which runs from the Greek philosophers through the Enlightenment, is the clearest example of the attempt to find a sense in one’s existence by turning away from solidarity to objectivity.”

(Rorty, 1991, p. 21)

What we regard as ‘facts’ are seen, more usefully, as the performance of cultural ecologies – replete with their human and non-human actors, emphases of power, control<sup>xi</sup>, explicit-implicit cooperation and resistance. Instead of seeing knowledge as revealing of the neutral ‘nature of things’ we would be better off recognising that established knowledge, that which has survived its political challenges so to speak, functions as the operative grammar of social organisation. Objectivity is re-viewed as intra-objectivity<sup>xiii</sup> or ‘agential-realism’ and relies on cultural, micro-political cooperation to sustain it and maintain its regularity.

“Discursive practices produce, rather than merely describe, the ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ of knowledge practices.”

(Barad, 2003, p. 819)

The function of inquiry, then, is not the pursuit of ‘truth about reality’ but of how we can find the experience of better ways of living cooperatively, living well together.

Here's Rorty, again, writing about the origins of American Pragmatism and in particular the contribution of William James and John Dewey...

"Pragmatists do not think inquiry can put us more in touch with non-human reality than we have always been, for the only sense of "being in touch" they recognize is causal interaction (as opposed to accurate representation). So in their view the only question is: will human life be better in the future if we adopt this belief, this practise, or that institution? "

(Rorty, R. 2021, p 16)

### **'Ego to eco' or from autonomous selves to agency as cultural ecology – 'only connect'**

In addition to inviting us to reflect on what our self-ish activities have done to the planet, 'ego to eco' is also a solicitation to inquire into the intra-activities that lead us to characterise cultural phenomena as 'natural' – as just the way things are. Principally, the conception of cultural ecology is an overture to shift from seeing selves, the 'I', ego or mind and society as 'given things', natural kinds – plastic but existing independently of human characterisations, towards a notion of such 'realities' as per-formed, in ongoing dynamic relationships – intra-active events. As Rorty points out, there is no way of characterising a neutral reality for to do so is to attempt to bypass the detailed politics of our relational, cultural activities. This is the poststructural shift – that what we take to be neutral observations of the structural features of reality are revised as cultural practices – and inescapably political.

Over the last 130 years or so, scholars have invited us to give more attention to how and what is performed in relationships with others. From this kind of noticing the micro cultural practices constituting events and their participants are more apparent. Initially we might look to the 1970s and a prescient warning from Gregory Bateson in his seminal work 'Steps To An Ecology of Mind' in which he sought to collapse the destructive distinction between nature and human society.

"If, now, we correct the Darwinian unit of survival [individual organism, species or subspecies]<sup>xliii</sup> to include the environment and the interaction between organism and environment, a very strange and surprising identity emerges: the unit of evolutionary survival turns out to be identical with the unit of mind.

Let us now consider what happens when you make the epistemological error of choosing the wrong unit; you end up with species versus other species around it or versus the environment in which it operates. Man [sic] against nature.

There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds, and it is characteristic of the system that the basic error propagates itself. It branches out like a rooted parasite through the tissues of life, and everything gets into a rather peculiar mess."

(Bateson, 1972, pp 491-492)



We have been talking about the wrong units<sup>xliv</sup>, the independent ‘nature of things’, including autonomous ‘Man’, for at least the last 250 years.

When it comes to noticing what cultural relations participate there have been different emphases. Perhaps the more readily accessible are characterisations of the way language-in-use resolves agency.

J L Austin, in his seminal work ‘How To Do Things With Words’ (1962) illuminated the difference between the descriptive use of language (‘constative’ - how the world ‘is’) – ego-laden and hitherto dominant, and the enacting function of language (‘performative’ - what we, knowingly or unknowingly, make happen). Here are some examples to highlight this distinction.

“I think I am, actually, humble. I think I am much more humble than you would understand.”

(Donald Trump – CBS, 60 Minutes, 2017)

...and one for devotees of self development....

“Don’t you see? Your learning should be self directed.”

(Overheard on a self-managed learning programme, circa 1990)

These kinds of utterances make us smile because they illuminate both constative and performative functions of speech. We might not be able to name them – but we recognise that the statement of how the world is, or should be, is directly contradicted by the act performed; Trump claiming humility but acting arrogantly; the programme tutor directing the learner to be self-directed! Talk and texts are intra-action and constitutive of participants.

Others have recognised this function of language. Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher of language, offered the difference between ‘dictionary meaning’ and ‘the sense of the situation’; Bruno Latour spoke of the difference between talking ‘about’ organising and talking ‘for’ organising (i.e. doing organising); John Shotter characterised ‘aboutness’ (descriptive) in contrast with ‘witness’ (our exchanges making a difference to our worlds) and linguistic pragmatists generally refer to the difference between ‘dictionary meaning’ and ‘people meaning’.

Sociolinguists like Erving Goffman, Norman Fairclough, Rom Harré and Bruno Latour too, recognised that the performative function of utterances and texts shapes the kinds of responses available and that are expected, from the ways we are positioned in exchanges. Along with them, and their contingent disciplines of social grammar, an emergent, contoured sense of agentic identity and ‘event reality’ is occasioned.

Goffman explored the performance of agency and social order through the concepts of ‘face’ (presentation of self) and ‘frames’ (type of situation – frame of reference)

“He [sic] must ensure that a particular expressive order is sustained – an order that regulates the flow of events, large or small, so that anything that appears to be expressed by them will be consistent with his face”

(Goffman, 1982, p 9)

Fairclough developed the notion of 'subject positioning' to account for the affordances of situational agency – a concept echoed by Rom Harré in his exposition of 'positioning theory'.

“The discourse types of the classroom set up subject positions for teachers and pupils and it is only by ‘occupying’ these positions that one becomes a teacher or a pupil. Occupying a subject position is essentially a matter of doing (or not doing) certain things, in line with the discursive rights and obligations of teachers and pupils – what each is allowed and required to say....”

(Fairclough, 1989, p38)

“Presumptions about rights and duties are involved in fixing the moment-by-moment meanings of speaking and acting, while both are influenced by and influence of the taken-for-granted story line.”

(Harré and Moghaddam, 2014, p 134)

... and Latour on how texts, signs, images and objects inscribe place-holders for participants...

“I invented possible readers whose reactions and belief I anticipated ... In doing so, I built up an inscribed reader to whom I prescribed qualities and behaviour, as surely as a traffic light or a painting prepare a position for those looking at them. “

(Latour, 1995, p 230)

Other leading post-structuralist philosophers like Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault were concerned with how power is established, distributed and maintained through social encounters and, in particular, how social discourse positions participants in both the historical and contemporary flow of events.

“Even the simplest linguistic exchange brings into play a complex and ramifying web of historical power relations between the speaker, endowed with a specific social authority, and an audience, which recognises this authority to varying degrees...”

(Bourdieu, 1989, p46)

Bourdieu was sure that it is our 'mis-recognition' of the political function of all social relations that enables power and its effects to be manifest and legitimises them as – 'just the nature of things'. Because of this mis-recognition we fail to see our own role in the social reproduction of domination and subordination.

“Therefore, symbolic violence can occur through the mundane processes and practices of everyday life.”

(Thapar-Björkert, Samelius & Sanghera, 2016, p9)

Similarly, Michel Foucault understood hierarchy and the formation and maintenance of power not as given structures but as real-ised in the intra-actions of cultural cooperation.

“The summit and the lower elements of the hierarchy stand in a relationship of mutual support and conditioning, a mutual hold (power as a mutual and indefinite 'blackmail').”

(Foucault, 1980, p159)

However, once we begin to dwell in (as distinct from 'dwell on') a post-structural sensibility of the world around us and are increasingly open to noticing a world 'made up of relations rather than objects, then what kind of sense does it make to see our realities, our actions and behaviours as somehow separate from a material world? Nearly 75 years ago Ludwig Wittgenstein was asking these questions ...

"What does behavior include here? Only the play of facial expression and the gestures? Or also the surrounding, so to speak, the occasion of this expression?" "... the word 'behavior' as I am using it, is altogether misleading, for it includes in its meaning the external circumstances"

(Wittgenstein, 1980, no.314).

Remember Bruno Latour's reference to the way a traffic light 'prepares a position' for us, how it acts-into a social situation? Latour, through the devices of Actor-Network-Theory, has insisted that to see our cultural relations as existing only between humans is to ignore the 'vehicles' of transformation<sup>xlv</sup> that we would find useful to take into account (Latour, 2005, pp 130-131). For Latour the non-human and the material act into events and participate in the performance of any active political ecology.

"...the word "politics" is not limited to humans but includes all the elements or entities deemed part of the composition of the common world. This is what allows one to speak, for instance, of the "politics of the soil" because the world to consider is made just as much out of humus as it is made out of EU subsidies for maize, fermentation in the gut of earthworms, pluviometry<sup>xlvi</sup> or the consumers' appetite for "bio" food."

(Latour, 2014, p 1)

'Society' then is taken to include the multiform relations with other living things and the material world. Here experimental psychologists, Hajo Adam and Adam Galinsky (2012) assert the difference wearing a lab coat can make to the wearer's behaviour.

"In Experiment 1, physically wearing a lab coat increased selective attention compared to not wearing a lab coat. In Experiments 2 and 3, wearing a lab coat described as a doctor's coat increased sustained attention compared to wearing a lab coat described as a painter's coat, and compared to simply seeing or even identifying with a lab coat described as a doctor's coat. "

Here's a link to an audio extract from a BBC Radio 5 Live feature on the 45th anniversary of the Ford Transit van (May 2010) and its contribution to 'white-van-man' syndrome.

[Click: White van man](#)

In this recent piece, also from BBC radio, Will Coleman is talking about the assemblages that establish and maintain 'Cornishness'.

"When you ask 'em why they love Cornwall 'the landscape' is usually in the first sentence or two – and of course that landscape is rooted in the geology, which then leads to the biology, and all of

that incredible geological and biological diversity has shaped ‘agan tavas, nei’ (our tongue, us) - our language, it’s shaped our music, our song; it’s shaped our sport; it’s shaped our culture our very identity.”

(Open Country, 2021)

This inclusion of the non-human world in a cultural ecology is, after Latour, a theme taken on by feminist posthumanism and ‘new materialism’. Here Karen Barad, affirming the link between the vocabularies of quantum physics and the humanities, extends the constitutive performance of cultural relations beyond the linguistic.

“Discursive practices produce, rather than merely describe, the “subjects” and “objects” of knowledge practices ... And the primary semantic units are not “words” but material-discursive practices through which boundaries are constituted. This dynamism is agency. Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world.”

(Barad, 2003, p 819 & 818)

In a more cautious inclination we could say that the extension of cultural performances to include other entities does no more than to re-invoke a historical convention of merely reflecting on humans’ active adaptation to items caught up in our inter-actions – ‘things get their meaning from the way they are used’. This is a traditional view that determines things and people to be ‘complete’ prior to their encounter (inter-action) rather than the encounter in some way expressing their immanence and capacity to transform and per-from each other (intra-action). If we do settle for this former, traditional stance then we might equally say the same about language-in-use and other humans – ‘they’re just objects caught up in my world’ - ‘less than’. Are non-verbal objects-in-use any less capable of acting into the constitutive performance of any context, any event? Once we act in relation to some-thing, words or material objects, they ‘participate’ agency – a ‘persistent tendency to enter into a working system’. These non-humans were acting before we came into the world (mostly) and they are acting now in our every-day activities. Think of the co-relating effects, for example, of religious icons, of food and drink, electricity, water-supply and sewage systems, domestic appliances – like refrigerators and vacuum cleaners, modes of transport and traffic management (e.g. double yellow lines and give-way markings), walls and fences, manufacturing machines, hand tools, medical equipment etc., etc., and the now ubiquitous digital devices - oh yes, and the climate! We all have, too, very recent experience of how viruses can participate in the flux of ecologies that realise our agency. We have, historically, drawn an arbitrary line between humans and language on the one hand, and the rest of existence. Whether we have been talking about the wrong semantic or ecological units and pushed the non-human and material into a passive world – we have got ourselves into trouble by ignoring their performative effects. For Bruno Latour – a sociologist of sociology – this is a criticism of traditional sociology in general...

“They are still strongly Durkheimian: the social is the social made of social ties among social humans. Period. So they have never been able to see social movements in science, technology,

law, and of course not in ecology. All of that is exterior to the social. No wonder nothing moves much in their view! “

(Latour, B., 2018, p360)

## **Towards a grammar of ecological well-being(s)**

When it comes, then, to reconfiguring a sustainable, mutually liveable world, we might rethink the normalised, obsessive quest of ‘discovering the language of nature’ (truth of the ‘natural kind’) is all there is and worth the consequential damage we do to each other and the planet. The insatiable deferment to some higher authority beyond ourselves has left us with an endemic sense of ‘look what it made me do!’. As Paul Feyerabend has noticed, a rigid obedience to the phantasm of realist ideology has relieved us of any responsibility for whether our activities are deadly or not. If the era of the Anthropocene is to be shouldered then it must include a human sense of responsibility – not only for the planet but for a social environment in its more thoroughgoing ecological sense.

So, adopting Karen Barad’s material-discursive view of agency, how might we re-configure our ways of configuring the world – our social grammar - in particular the ways we organise for our collective well-being(s). First, we are invited to embrace this political, eco-consciousness.

“It is to do with re-situating ourselves—as spontaneously responsive, moving, embodied living beings—within a reality of continuously intermingling, flowing lines or strands of unfolding, agential activity, in which nothing (no thing) exists in separation from anything else, a reality within which we are immersed both as participant agencies and to which we also owe significant aspects of our own natures. .... then we can no longer think of ourselves as the only organizing agencies at work in the larger world within which we live out our lives; other agencies than the “one” we each (mis)name as “I” are at work within us, and all around us.”

(Shotter, J., 2014, p306)

Mindful of Paul Feyerabend’s fear and Bateson’s warning of the ‘ecology of bad ideas’, the following are suggested as heuristics rather than tablets of remedial truth. In the Pragmatic tradition of John Dewey and William James – they are, perhaps, hopeful rules of thumb, or cultural grammars, worth trying for better ways of living well together. As William James reminds us “truth is what is good for us to believe”, and to so believe we are encouraged to enhance the acuity of our agency in the form of local inquiry rather than settling for the superficiality of the headlines of life. The irony of ‘taking back control’ of ‘taking back control’ is not lost!

“Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects.”

(Paulo Freire, 1973, p 85)

**a) From ‘the name of action’ to ‘the effects of action’ (from ‘thing’ to ‘relational effects’).**

“... the only sense of "being in touch" they [Pragmatists] recognize is causal interaction (as opposed to accurate representation).”

To grant ‘the name of action’ (static order), rather than the ‘effects of action’ (dynamic events), universal legitimacy is to abandon our responsibilities for and of our own agency – and to normalise everyone/thing that doesn’t speak, or speak ‘the truth’ (like me), as ‘less than’. To continuously reproduce and reinforce the social grammar that bestows ‘otherness’, masquerading as ‘the given truth about the world’ is to continue to generate the turbulence of divisions that erect constraining boundaries, and even deny the value of life.

Hierarchies are not ‘natural kind’ – as Foucault and Bourdieu pointed out - they are cultural. Here Nick Fox and Pam Aldred refer to the work of Latour and also feminist Post humanists and their ‘new-materialist’ stance.

‘A flat ontology also marks a re-focusing of attention away from hierarchies, systems or structures beyond or beneath the surface of everyday activities and interactions. In new materialist ontology there are no structures, systems or mechanisms at work; instead there are ‘events’ – an endless cascade of events comprising the material effects of both nature and culture that together produce the world and human history. Exploring the relational character of these events and their physical, biological and expressive composition becomes the means for social science to explain the continuities, fluxes and ‘becomings’ that produce the world around us, rather than via structural or systemic ‘explanations’ of how societies and cultures work.

(Latour, 2005: 130).

This has implications for research, requiring a focus upon the specific inter-actions that occur within events.

(2018, p3)

We would be better off if we regarded ‘facts’ and ‘findings’ as potentially being of some value – rather than ‘true’. We have come to believe that only experts, the anointed, can do science and its divination has given it a rarefied and opaque character somehow beyond our reach. For Dewey, science emerges from and is continuous with everyday processes of trial and error – localised inquiry. Cooking and small-engine repair count as “scientific”. Arguably, we have squandered this vital aspect of our agency. Certainly, asking questions in organisations is often seen as subversive. The history of whistleblowing might endorse that. In any kind of social hierarchy, too, questioning norms or inviting people to be curious is too easily frowned upon. However, as Feyearbend, Bateson, Frere and Bronowski strikingly pointed out, if we stop evaluating the performative effect of others’ (and our own) intra-actions we can find ourselves, our brothers and sisters, other life forms and the material world in a deadly mess.

Perhaps that's where we are and it is what the era of the Anthropocene is coming to mean? We should reclaim science as normalised, everyday practice for the sake of social hope. This is not to say that expertness is bad – on the contrary it is enormously helpful so long as we remember it is not impervious to scrutiny and socially amenable to local inquiry. We would be better off seeing everyday inquiry, rather than universal objective truth, as a principal feature of social grammar.

To make the shift to inquiring into effects gives us opportunities that the assumption of universal objectivity denies us. After the Pragmatists we are more able and likely to ask, when presented with models, facts and theories, – 'who/what benefits and who/what is worse off?' and give ourselves permission to explore the ecological implications – if you like, exhuming the [micro] actions elided or forgotten in the course of their original naming (see Latour above).

“Thus a critical question to be put to various accounts of the world, is what kind of practices do they support? Do they enable us to live in ways we hold valuable or do they threaten these patterns? For the social epistemologist, a major question to be asked of, let us say, Skinnerian behaviour theory, is not whether it is objectively valid; it is, rather if we adopt the theoretical language proposed in this domain, in what ways are our lives enriched or impoverished?”

(Gergen, K., 1994, pp130)

Put another way – wherever our discursive actions wield the instrument of 'natural truth' in order to dominate others, wherever we seek to deny others their voice and contribution, we should 'fess-up' and acknowledge that this is an act of bald political power rather than disguising the idea that 'this act is moral because it is true'. 'It's not me mate, it's the cosmos.' or, more outwardly, 'this is for your own good'!

The universalising of truth leaves no room for other accounts, rendering unremarkable that we, with the 'right names' for reality, think we can know others better than they know themselves. This is experienced, for example, by mental health 'survivors' when they are attributed with an 'illness' of a 'natural kind' granting institutions the authority to know them better than they know themselves and with it the loss of the ability to determine the legitimacy of their own story – to be heard, to matter. We will find it in our systems of justice too and indeed wherever power and authority is deemed unquestionable.

## **b) Empathy, severality and participation**

We might then be more wary of the routine obsession with single storylines and instead be more open to the idea that others' accounts – especially of their experience – have the same validity as ours. We may think we know more – but we can choose to avoid the implicit convention that this means we know better. We can allow ourselves to see difference as augmentary rather than conflictual. Once the notion of regularity in the world shifts from the implication of 'underlying universal structures and systems' to material-inclusive cultural performances then events and their dynamic composition become increasingly important. Micro political functioning becomes more apparent normalising, rather than problematising, differing accounts and their significance. However – this is a strength. Hearing multiple and detailed accounts of what participants,

near and far, are 'struck by' helps us to assemble usefully, as Fox and Aldred point out, 'the relational character of these events and their physical, biological and expressive composition'. Our attention then, shifts from the arrogance of defending a single, ideological storyline to one of openness to gathering the effects of our collective relational activity. There could be no 'gaslighting' if the endemic, implicit grammar of the power-laden single storyline was expunged.

Letting go of the single, true storyline also enables us to be more predisposed to empathising with 'others' – especially if we are trying to collaborate. We are more able to hear their stories – **and believe them.**

This is a [social]grammatical insight expressed by the Russian sociolinguist Mikhail Bakhtin who, over 60 years ago, drew attention to the distinction between monologue and dialogue. Monologue is similar in its ontological warranting to Austin's 'constative' function of language - an assertion of how the world is with the authoritative implication of universality.

"With a monologic approach (in its extreme pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change anything in the world of my consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word."

...in contrast with 'dialogue' with its situational and empathetic performative force....

"To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his [sic] whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium"

(Bakhtin, M.,1984, pp.292-293)

This is a manifest echo of the shift from dwelling on a world of described, 'discovered' order of things to dwelling in a world of mutual performance. It is an affirmation of Bronowski's rejection of God-like knowledge and if we want to enrich our lives, live better together and, importantly, ground our knowledge in 'testing' the effects of our actions then we would be better off adopting an inclusive approach to our more detailed cultural noticings.

The standard, and possibly lazy, critique of such an inclusive orientation is that it all takes too much time and creates indecision. Well, that can be a valid appraisal if we continue to think that the task is to find the truth before we can do anything differently. The search for a unitary truth also has the capacity to anchor us in the past. It seems we are inculcated with the idea that historical accounts of events must be agreeable and singular before we can look forward, predisposing us towards a persistent focus on making differences



troublesome – making them barriers rather than gateways. The more we hold up troublesome differences as the frame for our engagement the more likely it is that they are deemed irreconcilable – with command and control or win-lose the only way out.

So when parties espouse the need for collaboration hopes rise, in an invitational spirit, that others might not be quite so immovable in their stance. I feel less defensive when others seem to be making an offer. Yet those hopes are dashed when collaboration turns out to mean ‘just cooperate with what we/I want.’<sup>xlvii</sup> – a semantic ‘Trojan horse’ and just monologue in disguise. So now, not only are there irreconcilable differences but we now know we cannot trust them. With such prevailing conditions the turn to hierarchy and control – as distinct from a more dialogic collaboration – becomes a self-justifying, self-fulfilling grammar with the most powerful fixing the meaning of what has taken place<sup>xlviii</sup>, determining what can happen – and delegitimising or ignoring any other consequences (more ‘less than’). That’s us choosing the wrong ecological unit again!

However, participative approaches orientated towards exploring the effects of action, like action research, dialogue groups and action inquiry, are forward facing, avoid dwelling on differences and their associated othering and invite people to be more agentially engaged with their situated, political ecology. There are many quick and effective practices predicated on more dialogic grammars where curiosity is preferred over the destructive editing of instant judgement. When it comes to social and organisational change there is much to be gained by desisting from rejecting these approaches ‘on ideological sight’ and, instead, trying them out for the mutual enhancement of agency – for better living. Neither do we, in general, need to invest in heroes and the myth of special people to generate leadership....

“We can have leadership without pre-establishing the occupants of leadership roles. We are not dependent on particular individuals to mobilize and make decisions for others. Leadership can be a process of co-creation. The effort is intrinsically collective. The parties to the practice engage in dialogical and nonverbal exchange, in particular, they display an interest in listening deeply to one another, in reflecting upon new perspectives, and in entertaining the prospect of changing direction based on what they learn.”

(Raelin, J., 2020) p 1.)

In so doing, together we generate and migrate towards the vocabularies that are ‘good for us to believe’ and that meet our dim<sup>xlix</sup> sense of purpose. (Rorty, R., 1989, pp5-8)

“The dialogue in a collaborative agentic leadership not only considers its democratic and emancipatory processes but the effects of the practice under consideration so as to preserve a sustainable future. This is likely to occur because the outcome of any dialogue is often a new or unique way that had never been conceived prior to the collaborative engagement.”

(Raelin, J. A., 2016, p 255)

“People support what they create”

(Gergen, K., 2009, p323, quoting Stephen Littlejohn & Kathy Domenici)

There are implications, of course, for the ways we organise and manage and for how we organise as societies. Formal organisations, their legal constitutions and their practices act into our cultural activities. Just as the political ecology of the self, 'I', shows us how we, as embodied individuals, are not separate entities so it is the case for organisations. They remind us, through organisational schooling (Blanter, 2021), what hierarchical, monological games we are 'supposed' to play and what the taken for granted cultural grammars are. Cultural ecologies are political organisations at large.

### c) Propagating cultural eco-practice

In light of the foregoing then, there are some rules of thumb, social grammars that we might want to give more attention to.

First, as we have explored, is the idea of lifting the camouflaged notion of universal objectivity – 'natural kind' – from its seemingly matching surroundings. As Bronowski pointed out, science is a very human activity not an Almighty one, and as Rorty advised we might want to start worrying about whether human language is capable of representing the way Reality is in itself. It is this grammatical reflexivity that draws back the curtain on cultural ecological relations. It is this move that helps us to remember that what we take to be the inherent nature of things is produced and reproduced in 'material-discursive' cultural relationships. It opens the door to a reality structured not so much by the world – but by our living in it! There is no higher authority insisting that truth is more legitimate, more valuable than our concerns for each other and the planet.

To reiterate, this does not devalue science. Rather we should treat findings, models and theories like Dr Johnson's notorious hot potato. That is, it is likely to be nutritious but we shouldn't swallow it whilst it might burn us. As Gergen, in the shadow of James and Dewey, pointed out above, we can benefit from asking 'in what ways are our lives enriched or impoverished?' We are then, more likely to seek more detailed information about effects and to bring the abstract into our situational, living and responsive political ecologies (Shotter, 2006).

We should worry about what we have created and what we are generating. None of our knowing is neutral, value free but rather the political grammar of social organising and we should take responsibility for it. We should be concerned that we are creating and sustaining deep divisions in our societies from eugenics, hate crimes, 'othering' and even the idea of meritocracy. Merit is not an exclusive attribute of individuals – it owes more to our entanglement in cultural ecologies.

"You are only a good person because your life has let you live that way."

(You don't know me. Episode 2, BBC 1 drama, 06.12.2021)

"82% of offers from Oxford and 81% from Cambridge went to students from the top two socio-economic groups in 2015."

(The Guardian, 19th October, 2017)

We should be disturbed too that our systems of justice owe more to the views inherited from the 'entitled', privileged elite than they do to understanding how situational, [micro] political relationships function.

"The rich get richer and the poor get prison"

(Reiman, J. and Leighton, P. 2016, book title)

Even in our organisations we individualise poor performance (see 3 Ways To Manage, Blantern, this issue). Though there's a humanistic influence and a more empathetic consideration of employee's circumstances, very little account is given to the local, micro ecology. The individual is regarded as being 'in deficit' and requires, however sympathetic, remedial correction either through training and development or discipline. Quite often they are synonymous. Organisations are hierarchy's production line.

That the task is to 'fix' what has been characterised as errant behaviour – as distinct from forging new and potentially better ways together has elicited critique from the field of psychotherapy. Former president of the British Psychological Society, Dr. Peter Kinderman, and postdoctoral researcher, Dr. Kate Allsopp, in 2018, wrote to the Lancet...

"It is well known that poverty and social inequity are major determinants of our mental health and the United Nations Special Rapporteur characterizes mental health care not as a crisis of individual conditions, but as a crisis of social obstacles, which hinders individual rights. It is important, therefore, that the circumstances that have given rise to distress should be formally recorded alongside the distress itself."

and...

"Imagine if it were as serious to fail to document extreme poverty as it would be for a clinician to fail to identify severe depression."

The same goes for managers and supervisors in organisations. Imagine if the failure to give attention to the situational ecology, events and their politics, was seen as important and demanding of management as the requirement to preside over traditional characterisations of individual competence.

Similarly training and development in organisations might be better to include ways of characterising the configurations, effects and possibilities of local political ecologies when it comes to intervening in the effectiveness of agency. Such considerations might go some way to explaining the challenge of 'learning transfer' – why people do not reproduce in context what they have 'acquired' on a training course. From the eco-conscious point of view the goal of self development is not individual autonomy – but rather the propitious reconfiguring of the affecting ecology. This may seem novel given our traditional understandings of what 'development' might mean though, as the new materialists (Fox & Aldred, 2021) point out, this is not a new way of going on for many indigenous people.

Teju Raviolochan has suggested that Abraham Maslow, who spent 6 weeks living with the Blackfoot First Nations people at Siksika, formulated his model of the human hierarchy of needs after this experience.

However, according to Ravilochan, Maslow interpreted it in a lean Eurocentric way. First Maslow proposed a hierarchy whereas the people of Siksika thought more about life as sustainable, renewable circles. The Blackfoot people regarded the propagation and maintenance of supportive and inclusive community as the pre-eminent 'grammar' and wealth was thought of as the strength of the social network. Basic needs were a community rather than individual responsibility. In their world self actualisation was taken as the inherent participation of an inclusive community rather than the quest of the individual. Perhaps the very idea of self actualisation is symptomatic of societies that have forgotten how to enact 'cultural perpetuity'?

"For instance, if Maslow had more fully integrated Blood First Nations perspectives, the model would be centered on multi-generational community actualization versus individual actualization and transcendence.

(Blackstock, C. 2011, p 4)

Finally then, as if to emphasise the barren convenience of historical, Euro-anthropocentrism, here are the words of Thich Nhat Hanh a Vietnamese Buddhist Zen master, poet, scholar, and peace activist...

"Everything relies on everything else in the cosmos in order to manifest—whether a star, a cloud, a flower, a tree, or you and me.

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## About Chris

Chris is an independent researcher and practitioner specialising in 'organisational change and learning'. He has a particular interest in participative approaches to organising and has developed many practical methods for effective and swift, inclusive and sustainable decision-making (*'people support what they create'*). These methods are informed by foregrounding local inquiry and an increased sensitivity to the effects of joint and several action – for example participatory action research and dialogic practices.

After 30+ years' experience of working in a variety of public sector and commercial organisations Chris has noticed that many, maybe most, organisations tend to promote discipline and control at the expense of curiosity and inquiry – quite often to their detriment. Informed by this experience Chris has, latterly, become interested in the politics of organising, the effects on employees and the role of organisations in propagating cultural norms in society at large.

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<sup>xxxi</sup> 'Man' – made. This is not an insensitivity to gendered issues. On the contrary women and girls are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/our-work/emergencies-disasters-humanitarian-response/climate-change-and-gender>

<sup>xxxii</sup> The use of the generalised 'humankind' obscures a political argument – that saying 'we' - all humans - are responsible for the climate emergency does not distinguish between the powerful and the powerless, the wealthy and the poor, the industrial nations and the 2/3 developing world. *In just 2.3 days the average American or Australian emits as much as the average Malian or Nigerian in a year.* " <https://ourworldindata.org/per-capita-co2>

According to the Climate Accountability Institute 20 multinational and state owned companies are responsible for 35% of all energy related methane and carbon dioxide totalling 480 billion tons of 'carbon dioxide equivalent' since 1965. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/09/revealed-20-firms-third-carbon-emissions>

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Karen Barad used the term 'intra-action to emphasise the inter-objective realisation of 'discursive' practices.

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*“The notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual ‘interaction’, which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the ‘components’ of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful.”* (Barad, 2007, p.139)

xxxiv This archaic use of “*participate*” as a transitive verb is taken from Owen Barfield’s concept of “original participation” (Treinen, 2020)

xxxv ‘Natural kind’ - a term used by philosophers to distinguish between entities that are deemed to exist in character prior to the human descriptions of them.

xxxvi <https://dominicummings.com/tag/iq/>

xxxvii *“There are excellent reasons to think the very real racial differences in intelligence are significantly – even mostly – genetic in origin, though the degree is of course a very serious subject of scholarly debate.”* <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/feb/17/andrew-sabisky-boris-johnsons-ex-adviser-in-his-own-words>

xxxviii *Compared to households on incomes above £50,000, those on incomes below £10,000 are:*

- *Considerably more likely to be attacked by someone they know and far more likely to be attacked by a stranger;*
- *Twice as likely to suffer violence with injury;*
- *Twice as likely to be burgled;*
- *Three times as likely to be robbed and mugged;*
- *Three times as likely to suffer rape or attempted rape;*
- *Six times as likely to be a victim of domestic violence.* (Cuthbertson, 2018)

xxxix *Galileo exclaimed in 1616...“I mean the universe - which stands continually open to our gaze, but it cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and interpret the characters in which it is written. It is written in the language of mathematics.....”*

xl Just as we have an ongoing sense of the conventions of language – of grammar, we have an ongoing, consolidated sense of the norms of cultural encounters – of what seems socially ‘fitting’ in any given situation and what seems universal – a sense of social grammar. “I call social norms the grammar of society because, like a collection of linguistic rules that are implicit in a language and define it, social norms are implicit in the operations of society and make it what it is.” (Bicchieri, C., 2005, p Preface ix)

xli French sociologist and philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu characterised these dominating forms of ‘social grammar’ as ‘symbolic violence’. “Symbolic violence is the imposition of systems and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such ways that they are experienced as legitimate. This legitimacy obscures the power relations which permit that imposition to be successful.” (*Jenkins, 2007, p. 104*)

xlii See Barad. K. and also Shotter. J. on ‘*agential realism*’.

xliii My parentheses.

xliv Perhaps the very notion of ‘unit’ is inappropriate. Even Bateson uses the unbounded metaphor of the ‘*root branching out through the tissues of life*’.

xlv Latour illustrates what is afforded when we think of human and non-human social actors not so much as pre-existing, separate entities, but rather as partners in the dance of agential realism by deploying this example of a ‘citizen with a gun’.

*“Which of them, then, the gun or the citizen, is the actor in this situation? Someone else (a citizen-gun, a gun-citizen). ... You are different with a gun in your hand; the gun is different with you holding it. ... ...If I define you by what you have (the gun) and by a series of associations that you enter into when you use what you have (when you fire the gun) then you are modified by the gun – more or less so, depending on the weight of the other associations that you carry.”* (Latour, 1999, p179)

xlvi Branch of meteorology that deals with the measurement of rainfall

xlvii A practice discernable in the UK Government’s ‘negotiations’ with the EU over the application of the Northern Ireland Protocol and again with the French Government about the policing of migrants attempts to cross the English Channel from the shores of Northern France.

xlviii Thus History is written.

xlix ‘Dim’ here means ‘not well illuminated’ rather than unintelligent.

# Eco-Leadership Explorations

Simon Western



When coaching leaders, I use an exercise called 'locating ourselves', based on the notion that all leadership is biographical. Many of the senior and successful leaders I coach, come into my sessions and find themselves talking as if in a 'coaching confessional' (Western 2012). What leaders confess, is not being a sinner against God as in a traditional church confessional, but being a sinner against the corporate-social expectations of what it is to be a good leader. To be a leader is to be confident, charismatic, upbeat, positive, courageous, visionary, authentic with a sense of self (a strong ego). What these leaders confess to me, is that they are feeling unconfident, a bit lost, unsure what to do. I often play back to them that they seem a little 'dislocated' and many agree that it's a good description of their predicament: they don't feel hopeless or unable to cope, but they do feel disconnected from others and somewhat adrift and dislocated from the world.

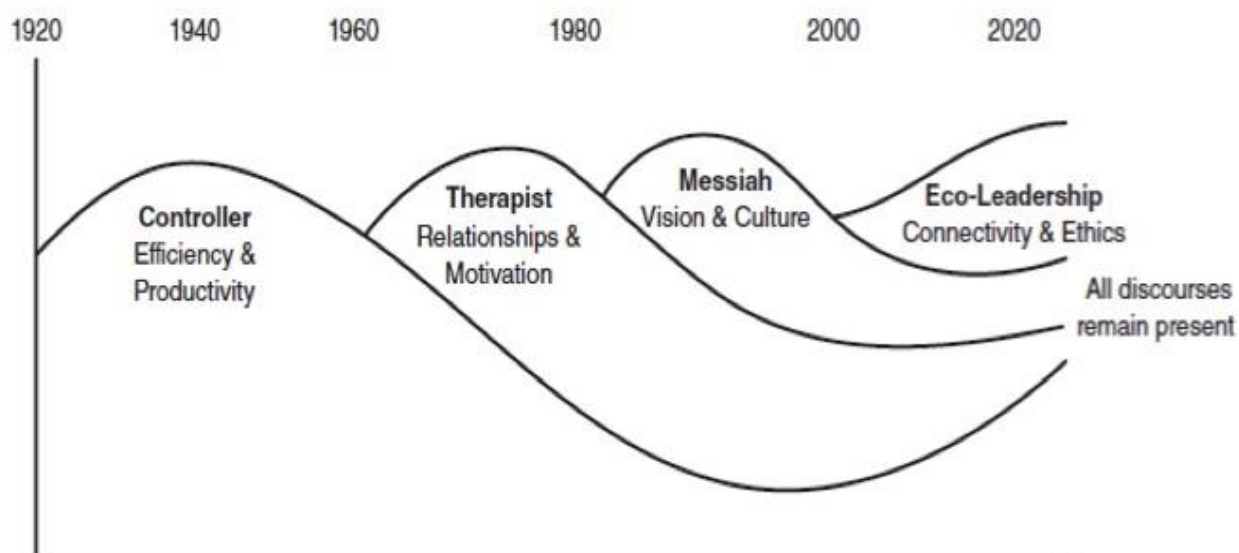
My work as a coach is to help them locate themselves. For unless a leader can locate themselves, they remain 'all at sea' and unable to navigate clearly. To locate oneself is to understand how social, cultural, family, place and personal influences shape us. To understand how the social speaks through us, and to understand that as Freud says, 'We are not masters in our own house'. Coaching leaders to locate themselves is to help them find their place in the world, to find anchor points that hold and contain them when the weather gets stormy. Doing this work, helps the leader move between ego and eco.

We are not trying to help them move from Ego to Eco, as this is a mistaken idea. To move between Ego and Eco is less about a Buddhist type renunciation of the Ego, as is often portrayed by the pseudo-spiritual workplace literature. To embrace Eco is to work as an organisational ecologist alongside the more familiar organisational psychology and Therapist Leadership approaches (Western 2019). To engage with Eco is to engage with the concept that 'Organisations are ecosystems within ecosystems' (Western 2019:317).

An organisation operates less like a machine, or closed system as in the imaginary of the 20th century (Morgan 1986) and more like ecosystems, albeit organisational ecosystems are hybrid, consisting of technology, social and the environment (built and 'natural'). This organisational ecosystem is connected and interdependent with wider ecosystems e.g. financial ecosystems, service ecosystems, social ecosystems, technological ecosystems, environmental ecosystem. If the leader is to embrace eco and take up an Eco-Leadership position, they must develop the eco-mindset of an Eco-Leader.

When a leader is dislocated and is unclear of their identity or place, they revert to patterns that are known. They locate themselves in the familiar even if they realise that this is limiting to them and the organisation. A dislocated leader is unable to be expansive, generative, and creative as they seek solace in anything they can hold onto.

### Illustration 1.



What I notice when I work with leaders attempting to move into the Eco-Leadership space, is that whilst cognitively they understand this is where they should work, their unconscious takes them quickly back to where they feel safer i.e. in the more familiar leadership roles from the past century. Back to Messiah and leading with charisma and engineering culture control to influence change, or taking up Therapist leadership and finding comfort in being the caring authentic leader, and of course most commonly reverting to Controller leadership and utilising targets, audits and surveillance techniques to feel in control. In my long experience of working with leaders aiming to move into the Eco-Leadership space, they first must locate themselves, and to support their teams and the organisation to become less dislocated from place and purpose. The four qualities of Eco-Leadership directly address this issue of locating ourselves.

### The four qualities of Eco-Leadership

1. Connectivity and interdependence
2. Organisational Belonging
3. Systemic-Ethics
4. Leadership Spirit

To be located, is to internalise the notion that we are connected and interdependent on the ecosystems we engage with. Many organisations lost contact with locality, with place, and acted as if they were closed systems operating outside of society and nature. Recovering the sense of belonging not only enables organisations to feel part of communities (local and global) but also to give and receive from these communities, which transforms how employees engage. Systemic-Ethics means to locate ourselves as

global citizens, accounting for the impact of our organisations on wider systems i.e. the environment, supply chains, downstream workers. To embrace Leadership Spirit means to embrace the human spirit which in turns means to embrace our multi-species companions on planet earth, to do this is to locate ourselves within our ecosystems.

If the ego/self/organisation cannot find its place in the world, it is nearly impossible to engage in a wider ecosystem of work, and therefore we reduce ourselves to Controller leadership approaches. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the ego is not a bad thing to be eliminated, but a strong enough ego is necessary for health and wellbeing. To locate ourselves is to become comfortable with our ego desires and our super-ego demands. To relate to ecosystems, means being less preoccupied and more at home with the self. The task therefore is not to move from Ego to Eco, but to move comfortably between ego and eco, and discover the interdependencies and connections between ego and eco. We are part of nature, not separate from it, (Latour, Haraway).

When we as individuals, teams and organisations (and nations) are more located, when we feel more embodied and more at home in ourselves, then we can then become relational beings. We feel less need to build walls to protect us, and less anxious to Control others and the environment around us. We can then focus less on our anxieties and insecurities, become less ego-centric, anthropomorphic and narcissistic, and engage with 'the other' in new ways. Locating ourselves is to find our place in the ecosystems in which we live. Gary Snyder, poet and environmentalist, writes:

When an ecosystem is fully functioning, all the members are present at the assembly. To speak of wilderness is to speak of wholeness. Human beings came out of that wholeness and to consider the possibility of reactivating membership in the Assembly of All Beings is in no way regressive. (1990: 121)

This reactivation of membership in the Assembly of All Beings, means to move easily between ego and eco, to find our place in the ecosystem, to become part of the whole.

## Locating Myself

I write as a practitioner–scholar drawing on an unusual breadth of workplace experience. I left school at 16 and worked in a factory, at 18 trained as a general nurse, then trained and worked as a psychiatric nurse. Later I worked as a family psychotherapist with emotionally troubled young people and their families in urban deprived areas. I moved into clinical management and struggled with the NHS bureaucracy and poor leadership. I became interested in leadership and the unconscious dynamics of organisations. Undertaking a masters at the Tavistock Clinic, I studied psychoanalytic perspectives in organisations. I then undertook a PhD at Lancaster management school and worked in executive education, becoming faculty, founding and directing their postgraduate executive coaching programme. I moved to the Tavistock Clinic to run their masters in Organisational Consultancy before starting my own coach training company, and consultancy. For the past decade I have worked with senior leaders across the globe, sharing my theory and practice of Eco-Leadership and co-developing ideas with these leaders and organisations. My recent work as an executive coach and organizational consultant using psychosocial methods, has also given me unusual and privileged



access to the psychological, social, and emotional experiences of leaders. My working life has engaged me with the body- (factory manual work and nursing) the mind (psychiatric nursing and coaching) the small group (family therapy) the organisation (as an organisational consultant) and wider society (as an academic and psycho-social blogger and podcaster) and the 'natural' environment as a human being and environmental activist. The relationship between the body, mind, group, organisation, society and environment is where Eco-Leadership emerged and is practiced.

My experiences of leadership and followership, in this wide variety of settings, have formed my ideas around Eco-Leadership. Ideas that have emerged from the messiness of real work, rather than from the tidiness of academic ideals. Eco-Leadership is about working with organisational ecologies and wider ecosystems made up from technologies, people, and the environment. To work in this space however, always must begin with locating ourselves.

Having briefly located myself, I invite you to watch the video and engage with a critical conversation between Professor Jonathan Gosling and myself, exploring the possibilities and limitations of Eco-Leadership.

## **FOLLOW UP**

Below you can find a 20minute video on Eco-Leadership ideas as discussed in conversation between Professor Jonathan Gosling and Dr Simon Western:

### **Interview with Jonathan Gosling,**

Nov 4, 2021

Meeting Recording:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/9lbrK4aeDbpXW-THRWK60GDBNQGRIHU7PQ-5hRoKkdtHqAU6tbLjrlF7SlvUuYq.fDxj9QGczMUJdUWO>

Access Passcode: ^=NY7h\$H

For more information about the Eco-Leadership Institute: [www.eco-leadership.institute](http://www.eco-leadership.institute)

Contact: [Simon@analyticnetwork.com](mailto:Simon@analyticnetwork.com)

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## **About Simon**

When coaching leaders, Simon often found that they felt a little dislocated, out of place in this fast-moving world. The first task of coaching work, focused on locating them, helping them re-discover their place, to feel more grounded and located in their networks. After which they were better positioned to take up leadership more authentically, and with more insight and dynamism.

# Some forthcoming events

You are most welcome to join us

Please click on the links if you'd like to find out more.

Date	Event	<a href="#">More info</a>
8 March, 4.00-5.30 pm, via Zoom	<p><b>Leading through Storms</b>, with James Barlow and colleagues</p> <p>Discussion and inquiry based on this e-O&amp;P article <a href="#">'This is an emergency. We must slow down'</a></p> <p>To participate, please register <a href="#">here</a>.</p>	
22 April, 1.30-3.30 pm, via Zoom	<p><b>AMED Writers' Group</b>, Writing and responding to book reviews, with Ruth Slater.</p> <p>Details tbc</p>	
26 May, 1.00-2.00 pm, via Zoom	<p><b>AMED Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM)</b>,</p> <p>Details tbc</p>	
17 June, 1.30-4.30 pm, via Zoom or possibly in-person, Roots and Shoots, London	<p><b>AMED Writers' Group – sustaining the next 20 years as a community of writing practice?</b> with Bob MacKenzie and critical friends</p> <p><b>Details tbc</b></p> <p>Contact <a href="mailto:bob@amed.org.uk">bob@amed.org.uk</a> for updates</p>	

# Your invitation to become more involved with e-O&P

## About e-O&P

[e-O&P](#) is AMED's quarterly online journal, available in pdf format, for academics, professionals, managers and consultants at all stages of their careers. It addresses innovative approaches to personal, professional and organisational development in a reflective and accessible way. It has a practical bias with a balance of well-written thought pieces, case studies, interviews, articles, reviews and editorials. Our articles are succinct, engaging, authentic and easy to read. We maintain our high standards of writing through the careful selection of relevant themes, through applying the principles of critical friendship, and through our support of outstanding guest editors.

## About our guest editors

Once selected, our editors have a pretty free hand within a broad set of guidelines. Guest editors deliver to the e-O&P editorial board a set of articles of suitable quality, ready for publication, according to a pre-arranged schedule. This involves editors in inviting proposals for contributions, identifying authors, commissioning stimulating articles, reviewing, and where appropriate, critiquing drafts and proof-reading final copy and liaising with the e-O&P Editorial Board.

## About our Critical Friends

For their particular edition, guest editors often find it useful to create a small, temporary editorial team to support them, including Critical Friends. The e-O&P editorial board is happy to help them find such collaborators, and is on hand to explore any issues or concerns that arise, bearing in mind our limited time to engage in extensive, detailed reading or conversations.

We are always looking to expand e-O&P's critical friendship network, which would be available to guest editors or individual authors on request. Depending on their preferences and any specific need, Critical Friends can help by reading drafts, offering constructive feedback, clarifying ideas, commenting on style, providing encouragement, or by proof-reading or copy-editing pre-publication texts. In return, this offers Critical Friends the opportunity to develop greater insight into, and awareness of possibilities for, their own writing and professional practice. They might even consider subsequently becoming a guest editor or author for e-O&P.

## Are you interested in joining our exciting project?

If so, please contact one of us on the e-O&P editorial board as soon as possible. We'd love to hear from you.

[Bob MacKenzie](#)

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[David McAra](#)

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## A note about AMED

*Sadly, so far, nobody has expressed a willingness to take over from the outgoing AMED Council. So in the circumstances, the EGM on 26 May is likely to confirm that AMED will finally cease to operate as an educational charity by the end of 2022 at the latest.*



AMED stands for the Association for Management Education and Development, [www.amed.org.uk](http://www.amed.org.uk). We are a long-established membership organisation and educational charity devoted to developing people and organisations.

Our purpose is to serve as a forum for people who want to share, learn and experiment, and find support, encouragement, and innovative ways of communicating. Our conversations are open, constructive, and facilitated.

Through AMED, we strive to benefit our members and the wider society. Exclusive Member benefits include excellent professional indemnity cover at a significant discount, free copies of the quarterly journal *e-O&P*, and discounted fees for participation in a range of face-to-face events, special interest groups, and our interactive website. We aim to build on our three cornerstones of **knowledge**, **innovation** and **networking** in the digital age. Wherever we can, AMED Members, Networkers and Guests seek to work with likeminded individuals and organisations to generate synergy and critical mass for change. [www.amed.org.uk](http://www.amed.org.uk), or contact **Linda Williams**, our Membership Administrator, E: [amedoffice@amed.org.uk](mailto:amedoffice@amed.org.uk), T: 0300 365 1247