Beyond Exploitation – Reimagining Life & Health:
4 building blocks for a different way forward
Land Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge the land that the University of Toronto is located on. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the New Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, including the Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee, Metis and Inuit peoples, and is also host to Indigenous peoples from other countries.

We are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land. It is important for us to recognize colonization as the primary reason for the many social and economic challenges facing Indigenous people in Canada. Beginning with the Doctrine of Discovery and Terra Nullus – racist ideologies that were used to justify colonization by European settlers of the land we currently call Canada - our government’s policies and practices have deliberately marginalized Indigenous peoples to the benefit of non-Indigenous settlers.

Indigenous Treaties & Languages in the GTA
Map Source: native-land.ca

Also giving thanks for that has enabled this moment, made possible by the abundant generosity of Mother Earth.
Emerging Threats to Planetary Health & Health Equity

Climate change
Ecological degradation
Resource depletion
Energy insecurity
Widening socio-economic disparities

Image courtesy of Toronto cartoonist Tony Biddle, reproduced with permission
The trajectory of the green line represents a fold bifurcation with the clear potential for a planetary-scale state shift, and are not expected to decline any time soon. Therefore, considerable uncertainty remains about whether it is inevitable and, if so, how far in the future it may be. The magnitudes of both local-scale direct forcing and emergent global forcings are much greater than those that characterized the last global-scale state shift. On the timescale most relevant to biological forecasts, critical transitions over regions larger than the directly affected area, as whether they result from sledgehammer or threshold effects—triggering the development of ways to anticipate a global critical transition, ideally in time to do something about it. Expecting the unexpected can be gleaned from the natural experiments provided by past global-scale state shifts. At a minimum, these kinds of effects would be expected from a global-scale forcing that probably has dynamics within the limits characteristic of the past 11,000 yr. Given that it takes hundreds of thousands to millions of years for evolution to compensate for extinctions, the 20,000 yr ago as a result of the last planetary state shift because global and regional diversity today is generally lower than it was long enough for evolution to compensate for extinctions.

Figure 2

Percentage of Earth’s terrestrial ecosystems that show state shifts and percentage of lightly affected ecosystems. Percentage of Earth’s terrestrial ecosystems that are unarguably transformed land for each person. That value was used to estimate the amount of ecosystem services required to sustain the human population. An estimate of 0.68 transformed acres (0.28 ha) per capita in 2011 come from refs 1, 34, 35, and when divided by 7,000,000,000 (the present global human population) yield a value of approximately 2.27 acres (0.92 ha) of transformed land for each person. That value was used to estimate the amount of ecosystem services required to sustain the human population. Although the ultimate effects of changes such as growing food—balances the loss extent to which human-caused increases in the population size of many loci, owing to human-transported species homogenizing the world’s biota richness in many locales, new patterns of gene flow triggered by human transport have been shown both empirically and theoretically. It is possible to imagine qualitative aspects of a planetary state shift given present conditions. In view of potential impacts on humanity, a key need in biological forecasting is the development of ways to anticipate a global critical transition, ideally in time to do something about it.

Is Risk Management Up to the Challenge?

- Risk management is the default modality for public health, but it is proving increasingly ineffective and even counter-productive.
- It’s also mostly about maintaining the status quo (e.g. resilience as bouncing back from adversity).
- Control is elusive: living in increasingly interconnected and complex world.
- Path dependency, sunk costs, and diminishing marginal returns: more and more effort required to prop up status quo.
- Deeper paradigm shift required.

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

Albert Einstein

David C. Korten
The Great Turning
From Empire to Earth Community

ecozoic
CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION
Re-Imagining Planetary Health?

4 promising directions from an emerging (and also established, but often ignored) landscape of possibility:

- **Change from the margins**: social movements & niche innovations in sustainability transition

- **Decolonization** from dominant world view that keeps us stuck in stress, reactivity, despair, & ineffectual action

- **Animism & relational worldview**: honouring the sacredness and interconnectedness of all life

- **Watering the seeds of what we want**
Social Movements Respond

Convergence of Movements for Change

relocalization, urban homesteading,
BLM, #MeToo, Fridays for a Future, Idle No More, Tiny House Warriors, ecovillages,
voluntary simplicity, resilient cities, permaculture,
active transportation, urban agriculture, social enterprise, sharing economy...
The Transition Town Movement: A Social Technology for Building Resilience

Resilience as capacity to bounce back from adversity & bounce forward into new ways of thinking & doing

Citizen-led

Reducing dependence on fossil fuels

Re-localizing production of basic needs

Building Community Resilience

Emphasize connectedness

Reskilling

Harnessing diversity, emphasizing equity & inclusion.

Responding proactively to emerging threats

“If it isn’t fun, it isn’t sustainable”

“We want to be known by what we stand FOR, not what we stand AGAINST”

“An experiment in engaged optimism”

“If it isn’t fun, it isn’t sustainable”

“We want to be known by what we stand FOR, not what we stand AGAINST”

“An experiment in engaged optimism”
Poland, B. et al. (2019). The emergence of the Transition movement in Canada: Success and impact through the eyes of initiative leaders. *Local Environment*. 24(3): 180-200
Embrace change and bounce forward into new ways of thinking & doing.

Capacity to bounce back from adversity.

Parabola Model of Community Lifecycle

2. Decolonize!

- **We are socialized into a world view** that we take for granted & that supports the status quo
  - Naturalizes inequality, competition, domination, scarcity mentality

- Encoded as a series of **stories** we tell ourselves about who we are and where we are headed that impact what is seen as possible & what we invest in
  - greening business-as-usual, ‘sustainable development’, salvation via technological ‘solutions’
  - societal collapse
  - conscious evolution

- **Whose stories count**, who gets to tell, who’s listening, and how they are heard?

- Note that **separation & disconnection are problems of privilege**: only people who can afford to meet all their needs in the marketplace can afford to have no relationships. For everyone else, and indeed throughout history, community and relationships based on reciprocity are what enables survival.
Drawing inspiration from non-dominant knowledge traditions

- **Critical & progressive traditions at the margins in the Global North** – degrowth, political ecology, critical race theory, ecofeminism

- **‘Earth’ traditions at the margins in the Global North** – deep ecology, neo-paganism, druidry, animism

- **Indigenous ways of knowing** – connection to the land, ancestors, “all my relations”, sacredness of all life

- **Global South epistemologies** – Buen Vivir, Freirian critical pedagogy, liberation theology, ‘collective health’

But note the dangers of cultural **appropriation**, and the need for real **reconciliation** and **repatriation**, Indigenous people’s **sovereignty**, resolution of unresolved land claims, honouring of Treaties, and the meaning of genuine **allyship**
What if the sustainability crisis is not a technical problem but a relationship problem? Have we fallen out of (right) relationship with ourselves, each other, and the more-than-human world?
## Rethinking Social Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usual Way of Thinking About Change</th>
<th>Emerging &amp; Non-Dominant Perspectives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Act to reduce harm</strong> (humanity is a blight on the planet)</td>
<td>From reducing harm to <strong>mutual benefit</strong>, regenerative sustainability, reciprocity</td>
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<td>Being green = what <strong>should</strong> give up, do without</td>
<td>Crisis as an <strong>opportunity</strong> to create the kind of society we always wanted</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social change is hard work</strong> (burn out trying to make change happen)</td>
<td><strong>Doing what you love</strong> and <strong>inviting others</strong> to join (&quot;if it’s not fun, it’s not sustainable&quot;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>So few people know what’s going on – the amount of work to be done to educate everyone is <strong>overwhelming</strong></td>
<td>A few key <strong>trigger events can spark a rapid change</strong> in awareness and willingness to act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change is linear and predictable</strong> – you can compare energy expended with expected returns/impact, and decide whether it’s worth it</td>
<td>Social change is almost always <strong>non-linear &amp; unpredictable</strong>, building critical mass can take time but <strong>social ‘tipping points’ come surprisingly quickly</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unlikely to act</strong> if it seems like it won’t make a difference.</td>
<td>What we do and how we are in the world is an <strong>expression of alignment</strong> with what we value</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hope is a prerequisite for action</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hope is generated through action</strong></td>
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3. Embrace Animism & A Relational World View

- World views and ways of being, common amongst Indigenous peoples as well as European neo-paganism, shamanism, and Shinto traditions in Japan, that see all life as animate, sentient, and possessing agency and spirit.

- A world that is fully alive, that speaks to us, and that works together to co-create reality is quite a different world from the one that modern Western culture sees as a world of ‘things’, ‘resources at our disposal’, with humans at the pinnacle of evolution.
What if we not only learned about nature, or in nature, but also from nature?

What kind of deep listening (to self, to each other, to the land) engenders transformative change?

What is the quality of being from which we source our knowing & doing?
The Many Lenses Project invites residents of Toronto to participate in a dialogue circle about new ways of seeing the challenges and opportunities of our time:

- **Monday, April 1st**, 1:00pm-3:00pm: 155 College, WBIIH Board Room
- **Tuesday, April 2nd**, 3:30pm-5:30pm: 155 College Street, RM 208
- **Tuesday, April 16th**, 9:00am-11:00am: 155 College Street, RM 696
- **Wednesday, April 17th**, 1:00pm-3:00pm: Gerstein Library, RM 1230
- **Wednesday, April 17th**, 6:00pm-8:00pm: 155 College Street, RM 696

Refreshments will be provided to those who are able to attend as well as a $30.00 honorarium for those who are students, unwaged, or otherwise requiring compensation.

**ABOUT THE PROJECT:** Our health is affected by the environments in which we live, work and play. But every day we hear that our environment, and the health of the planet, is in trouble. We know we need to transition to a more sustainable state of affairs. But how to do this? And what kind of future do we want to build together? Often citizens are asked to say what they would like to see, but rarely are they invited to see things ‘outside the box’ of conventional thinking. What would happen if we could plant the seeds for seeing things in new ways that invite new possibilities, drawing on indigenous, global south, critical, animistic and other perspectives? Come find out and explore this with us, in circle, in an Indigenous way.

**WHO WE ARE:** Indigenous and non-Indigenous social and health researchers/activists working on issues of planetary health, social justice and citizen engagement. For more information about the project please visit our website:

[https://manylensesproject.home.blog](https://manylensesproject.home.blog)

RSVP on Eventbrite at: [https://www.eventbrite.com/e/manylenses-project-dialogue-circles-tickets-59378376322](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/manylenses-project-dialogue-circles-tickets-59378376322)
4. Watering the Seeds of What We Want

- conjoin clear-eyed realism about current state of affairs with vision of “the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible”
- energy flows where attention goes
- positive deviance / appreciative inquiry / asset-based community development / post-traumatic growth / community resilience / morphic resonance / quantum social theory / pleasure activism / engaging emergence
- what brings you joy? “If it’s not fun, it’s not sustainable”

https://cvdl.ben.edu/blog/what-is-appreciative-inquiry/
Thank-you!

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https://manylensesproject.home.blog/

http://www.cansee.ca/2017/06/23/pedagogy-for-the-anthropocene/

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