SEEING

BEING

DOING

A Compass for Social Imagination

SEEING

Attending to how we see the world: challenging the frames and mental models that keep us stuck in old solutions that aren't working

BEING

Attending to our ways of being in the world: our creative capacity and confidence, our reflective practice and our ability to work collaboratively and generously

DOING

Attending to our 'ways of doing' in the world: bringing the better futures we imagine into reality through leadership, self-organising, and processes for making change happen

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Why Social Imagination?

"I am enough of an artist to draw freely on my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the whole world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution."
— Albert Einstein

If we can't imagine it, we can't make it happen. We believe that without new and shared imaginations our society will stay stuck in its current destructive and unequal patterns. We know that all of us are deeply imaginative, but society is not set up to support us to imagine together. As a result, the future is always being built based on imaginations that are incomplete, one-sided and disconnected. This is what we seek to change. We seek to create the conditions for new shared imagining, new stories and new action for a better world.

About Canopy

Canopy is a not for profit organisation set up to bring more imagination into public life. At the heart of our work we use this compass for social imagination to guide conversations and projects in the way of social imagination. We hope it can be useful for you too.

Our work includes:

- **Public projects** that grow our ability to imagine together in new ways. E.g. The Dark is Bright exploring loss, grief and creativity through science fiction filmmaking. www.thedarkisbright.com

- **System-facing work** in partnership with public services, charities and whole local systems to develop new shared stories and ways of working. E.g. Working with Goodstart to reimagine early learning and childcare for the 21st Century. www.canopy.si/project/goodfuture/

- **Incubating social imagination practice** as part of a community of practitioners, we support each other to develop the skills and conditions for growing social imagination.

- **Social Imagination Quests**, which are long running investigations starting with provocative questions that cut across established ways of seeing the world to open up new space for imagination. E.g. What if grief was an engine for social change? www.canopy.si/pcategory/loss/

We are part of a much broader community of people and organisations working with imagination for social and environmental change.

Find out more about Canopy: www.canopy.si

Making space for social imagination

"Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope."
— *Rebecca Solnit*

The word *imagination* has a bad name. It makes us think only of make-believe, playing or day dreaming about a better life. That's because imagination as a way of making things happen has been pushed into the realm of leisure (where it is separate from the hard facts of reality) and the home (where it is a private endeavour). The big decisions about the structures which shape our lives are not made through imagination. Instead they are more often made through *reason* and *analysis of* what has gone before by experts and leaders who are personally quite far away from the sharp end of life.

In contrast, the practice of social imagination holds that reason is not enough and that our imagination is a legitimate experience of what's possible, a rich source of ideas for shaping better futures.

Following this belief requires us to work in ways we have perhaps fallen out of practice with. When imagining we engage far more than our intellects, we engage our sensing bodies, our values and beliefs about how the world works and what matters, and we engage in relating to those we are imagining with. This imagining is also a practice of making, not just dreaming. As ideas come into life, hope grows more solid too, and imaginations deepen again. That's what the way of social imagination feels like, that's the bigger conversation it allows.

"If the world is to be healed through human efforts, I am convinced it will be by ordinary people, people whose love for this life is even greater than their fear."
— Joanna R. Macy

Where has the compass come from?

The Social Imagination compass is the distillation of decades of work by the members of Canopy in complex social and environmental programmes. After both successes and failures we asked ourselves, *what is it that keeps well intentioned attempts to create change stuck? How is it really possible to unlock new possibilities that are more joyful, just and sustainable?*

The content of the compass isn't ours. We draw on the work of many brilliant thinkers and practitioners. We quote from many brilliant people, not because we think our work is on a level with theirs, or feel any sense of ownership over their ideas or experiences (which are different to our own) but because they inspire us to be the best we can be in our life and work. We have seen how their insights and practices unlock situations that had previously been stuck.

Our contribution is to bring all this thinking and practice together in a way we hope will spark new conversations and provide support planning for practical action to grow social imagination. We hope that you will find it useful.

Using the compass

We want the compass to be a resource to everyone who is working to bring imagination into public life. We wrote it with a range of purposes in mind, and undoubtedly, you will find your own even better uses.

1. Making the case

    This document is designed to support all of us in making the case for social imagination. When the rhetoric of our public institutions is about hard facts (even if they remove the vital context of the data and privilege single perspectives) it can be uphill work to create the space to work with imagination. We hope some of the arguments here will help you to demonstrate why we *need* imagination; that if we don't learn to see things differently, find different ways of being, and different ways of taking action, we have no hope of getting unstuck.

2. Diagnosis

    The compass can be a basis to diagnose where a situation is stuck and where are the possibilities for releasing new possibilities. It can help to show us where we have been going in circles and offer some simple ways to break out of those cycles.

3. Making a practical start

    In this document we offer a sketch of a wide range of practices we use to grow social imagination. You may read through these and find that there is one that feels like a good place to start. When we're working with complexity, action is as important as analysis for learning, so taking some simple practical initial steps will help to reveal more of what is going on and how it can be changed.

4. Activity / programme planning

For social imagination to come to fruition time and care is needed. As we work, we are also creating the conditions for change as we go, in an upward spiral. The compass can be used as a reflection tool and a menu to create longer term programmes of work, in communities, in organisations and in whole systems.

Seeing

A good teacher teaches how to see, not what to see.
— Richard Rohr

How do we see the world?

Challenging the frames and mental models that keep us stuck in old solutions that aren't working

1.1 Why are our 'ways of seeing' important?

Our action is limited by what we can imagine. Our imagination is limited by how we see the world.

Have you ever felt trapped by the 'dictatorship of no alternatives'?
— Roberto Unger

The parts of our society where power and money lie, in private, public and charitable institutions, are often dominated by a limited number of 'ways of seeing'. These are the ideas, conscious and unconscious, about how the world does and should work, and what matters when making decisions.

My dear,
Is it true that your mind is sometimes
like a battering ram
Running all through the city,
Shouting so madly inside and out
About the ten thousand things
That do not matter?"
— Shams-al-Din Mohammad Hafez

If we believe that easily measured cost efficiency is the most important factor in how we value a social innovation, work which may bring long term positive outcomes, but is more costly and difficult to measure, will not be supported. Even when in the long term it is much more effective.

If we believe that a meritocracy which rewards individuals who work the hardest is 'fair', then we cut off those who are excluded from the conditions which enable us to work hard, such as extra educational support, a good space to work in, finance to invest in growing our ideas or capabilities, good nutrition and decent sleep.

If we believe that the wild world is a resource to use as we wish, with fewer rights to space and life than us, we will continue to degrade the natural systems that sustain this planet, including us.

If we believe that the professional skills which have traditionally been gendered 'male' such as engineering or being a doctor, are more valuable than skills traditionally gendered female, such as garment manufacture or nursing, we continue to see the world as imagined by, and privileging, men in the global north. And so it continues to be so.

These beliefs are *ways of seeing*, just a few examples of how mindsets can limit what we imagine.

> **"If these out-of date beliefs are to be called myths, then myths can be produced by the same sorts of methods and held for the same sorts of reasons that now lead to scientific knowledge"**
> *— Thomas Kuhn*

Data and technology bake in those ways of seeing, making us even more blind to them. They have become so deeply embedded into the fabric of society and our public institutions, that we often need to examine them fully to notice the limits they create. If we don't examine the ways of seeing which shape the area of change we are working on, we can often try to imagine something new but instead end up imagining the same thing, based on the same assumptions. Or a technologically more efficient way of embedding those same beliefs even deeper.

"If we do something over and over, it becomes normal. If we see the same thing over and over, it becomes normal."
— *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

1.2 Opportunities for seeing differently

> **"Listening is such a simple act. It requires us to be present, and that takes practice, but we don't have to do anything else. We don't have to advise, or coach, or sound wise. We just have to be willing to sit there and listen."**
> *— Margaret J. Wheatley*

The power of listening

Listening is at the heart of seeing differently. Listening allows us to connect with others and see the world from multiple perspectives. 'Listening with' is a practice of being alongside rather than opposite the other.

> **"Each of the stories we tell and hear is like a small flicker of light – when we have enough of them, we will set the world on fire. But I don't think we can do it without story. It doesn't matter what community is in question or what the conflict appears to be on the surface, resolution and change will require people to own, share, and rumble with stories."**

— Brené Brown, Rising Strong

A wider and deeper perspective

'Common sense' only makes sense from within a system of assumptions about the context. When we find that the 'common sense' of the culture we are part of is not creating the world we want to see, it's time to take a wider perspective. This means exploring new perspectives on time, like the Iroquois 'seven generation stewardship'. This means looking at the larger wholes of which we are part. And this means questioning our ideas of what is at the 'centre' of our picture of the world.

"Systems thinking is "contextual," which is the opposite of analytical thinking. Analysis means taking something apart in order to understand it; systems thinking means putting it into the context of a larger whole."
— Fritjof Capra

"Copernicus took us out of the centre of the solar system; we now need to take ourselves out of the centre of the biosphere."
— John Thackara

"I think it is healing behavior, to look at something so broken and see the possibility and wholeness in it."
— Adrienne Maree Brown

Awareness of power and privilege

The ways of seeing that are associated with power and privilege have a deeply embedded and distorting effect on the way we all see the world. Our societies are steeped in patriarchy, white privilege and ableism. Those who benefit from these ways of seeing the world are the least able to notice their effects. Those who do not benefit from these ways of seeing have the hard earned experience and insight of butting up against them again and again. We are all richer when these perspectives are centered. We are all more able to make a positive contribution when we bring awareness to how our own experiences and identities shape the way we see the world.

"Every empire, however, tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate."
— Edward W. Said

"Anyone who has done historical research knows that the undocumented often have more to say about how the world is put together than do the well pedigreed."

— Donna Haraway

Surfacing and challenging underlying assumptions

When we make the everyday look strange, our hidden assumptions become more clear to see. Then we can decide if they are still useful assumptions for us. There are many traditions that can help us in this process of seeing the 'ordinary' from the outside.

"Teach her to question language. Language is the repository of our prejudices, our beliefs, our assumptions."
— Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

In Native American ceremonies, the Heyoka's role would be to disrupt things in order to enable people to see things differently. This manifests by their doing things backwards or unconventionally—riding a horse backwards, wearing clothes inside-out, or speaking in a backwards language.

Kōan is a story, dialogue, question, or statement which is used in Zen practice to provoke the "great doubt".

1.3 Practices for growing new ways of seeing

Centering marginalised voices

Working in alliance with groups or individuals who have lived-experience of marginalisation, allowing them to define the space in which they feel free to speak, demonstrating to them that their insights and knowledge are valuable and re-aligning resources and opportunity to support their ownership and creation of their futures.

Experiential learning

Embodying different ways of seeing through practices such as forum theatre, role play and creative writing can reveal our existing ways of seeing, and the great holes in our ways of seeing that need others to help us fill.

Frameworks that expand perspectives

Some frameworks can give us ways in to uncovering how our 'ways of seeing' limit our ability to imagine the new. We use a range of frameworks we find helpful for this, including 3 horizons, Cynefin, and the ecocycle planning framework, which helps us to identify what we need to allow to die, so that the new can come.

Working with narratives and framing

Social framing is another term for 'way of seeing' which emphasises how we filter our perceived reality through a vast and mostly unconscious collection of 'framing elements', including beliefs, anecdotes and stereotypes. There are often a large collection of these elements associated with a particular social issue which shape how the issue is communicated and understood in society. By changing the anecdotes, and metaphors we use to frame a social issue, we can change what futures can be imagined about it or how it is received. Narrative, similar to frame, is the story which surrounds an issue, and the way in which it is discussed amongst those who have power to influence it. We like Marshall Ganz' public narrative framework which offers a method for identifying narratives of change driven by the marginalised which can get beyond the dictatorship of no alternatives.

Deeply embedded qualitative research

Co-authored embedded research can help us to learn deep contextual insights about people, place and culture while empowering those who take part as co-researchers. This process is often used as a way of surfacing the 'unknown unknowns' of culture - the things we wouldn't even know to ask about. Participants in these processes become guides to their world are often deeply appreciate the opportunity to be seen and recognised. Training staff in these practices is often deeply transformative for organisations.

Poetic & mythic exploration

Poetry and myth offer 'big river' stories which carry the themes and patterns of our own lives and contexts. When we enter these imaginary worlds we find within them moments which speak powerfully to the lives and situations we are living, but often, because they don't contain the same humdrum constraints, we can see possibilities within those worlds that we are blind to in our own. We can then carry the freedom and insight from the myth world back into the one we are living. We choose myths, stories and

poetry to work with that speaks to the themes in a given piece of work and can expand, play with and stretch our ways of thinking about it.

Inspiration from worldviews other than our own

Until very recently in evolutionary terms, people lived in a symbiotic relationship with the land and all the wild ones who occupy it. Our human nervous system, sensory skills and imaginations are expertly designed for living in that way. That's true for all of us. But the worldview of the industrialised world has largely rejected that relational way of knowing in favour of reason and rationality, separating the spiritual and physical worlds. But ways of living which have retained that connection are far more inclusive of paradox and mystery, and more practiced at trusting intuition. At times we draw on these different ways of understanding the world with curiosity and reverence. Within the literary tradition similar ways of thinking that collapse the inner and outer worlds include science fiction and utopian and dystopian descriptions. These also we draw upon to jolt our ways of seeing out of their comfortable grooves.
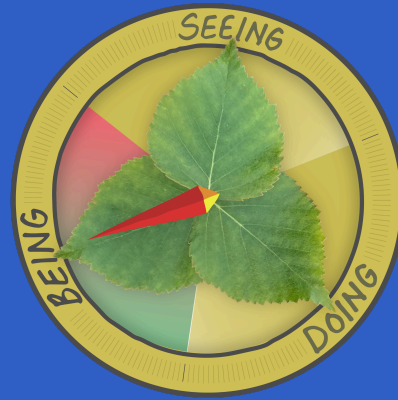
Being

"**You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop**"
– *Rumi*

Attending to our ways of being in the world

Growing our creative capacity and confidence, our reflective practice and our ability to work collaboratively and generously

2.1 The problem of how dominant ways of being limit our imagination

Our imagination and our ability to realise our dreams is limited by our 'ways of being' in the world. Our ways of being - for example, at work, in community, online - often fail to connect us to each other and to our purpose in meaningful and nourishing ways. You might experience some of this day to day in the depletion you feel from your work or the disconnection of the community you live in, for example.

This isn't an isolated story, it's part of a bigger picture. A society premised on competition, specialisation and domination is inevitably going to suppress emotional processing, creativity and playfulness. Yet researchers like Antonia Damasio have shown that in many ways emotions themselves are the basis for 'rationality'. When we ignore them we undermine our natural abilities needed to generate new possibilities with others. The result is that we fall out of right relationship with each other and with wider living systems.

 "We could have been anything we wanted, yet our free-floating individualism has taken us far from community, contribution or connection, the very things that truly give life meaning and purpose."
— *Margaret J. Wheatley*

I have seen how denying our full, complex selves—denying our aliveness and our needs as living, sensual beings—increases the chance that we will be at odds with ourselves, our loved ones, our coworkers, and our neighbors on this planet."
— Adrienne Maree Brown

Despite the marginalisation of our emotional selves, particularly from public and work contexts, the personal wellbeing industry is booming. Mindfulness, yoga retreats, therapy and self help books for example, but this positions the responsibility for our emotional wellbeing entirely on our own shoulders, and expects us to process all the emotional impact of our work and community life in the private sphere, separate from those who are traveling with us in our communities, ecologies and work places. These tools for personal wellbeing aren't bad, they are trying to compensate for the lack of emotional engagement within public and work contexts and they do support us individually. But they do not create the space and safety to make sense of things together, to feel things together, and to include our emotional experiences in our collective processes, including our democratic processes.

"Industrial growth society would have us interpret our sorrow and anger over the suffering in the world in terms of some personal pathology"
— Joanna Macy

"Sometimes we use our minds not to discover facts, but to hide them. . . . One of the things the screen hides most effectively is the body, our own body, by which I mean the ins of it, its interiors. Like a veil thrown over the skin to secure its modesty, the screen partially removes from the mind the inner states of the body, those that constitute the flow of life as it wanders in the journey of each day."
— Antonio Damasio

One of the effects of a competitive system that rewards individual success is that we are taught that we aren't enough, that our value is about our productivity not our creativity. Creativity, like emotional wellbeing is shunted to our private lives; hobbies, recreation, playing with the children in our lives. So many people tell us they 'aren't creative' when we can see that they are.

"I'm not very creative" doesn't work. There's no such thing as creative people and non-creative people. There are only people who use their creativity and people who don't. Unused creativity doesn't just disappear. It lives within us until it's expressed, neglected to death, or suffocated by resentment and fear.

— Brené Brown

The possibility of creativity cannot be separated from the emotional safety needed for it to emerge. When we have our first try at being creative what comes out is often messy, unfinished and unrefined. But if we are afraid to show it we won't make it, if we are focused on it's productive value, rather than it's creative expression, we won't follow it.

"Worrying about scarcity is our culture's version of post-traumatic stress. It happens when you've been through too much, and rather than coming together to heal (which requires vulnerability), we're angry and scared and at each other's throats."
— Brené Brown

2.2 Opportunities for new ways of being that can unlock change

"We do not think ourselves into new ways of living, we live ourselves into new ways of thinking"
– Richard Rohr

Creating space for all of ourselves to show up

As rich, complex, sensing beings we are able to process much more information than our cognitive processes alone. When we are working with complex social processes, we need all of these wonderful abilities to be valid and included.

"I have seen, over and over, the connection between tuning in to what brings aliveness into our systems and being able to access personal, relational and communal power."
— Adrienne Maree Brown

"I am angry. We should all be angry. Anger has a long history of bringing about positive change."
— Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

"Emotion is not opposed to reason; our emotions assign value to experiences and thus are the foundation of reason."
— Bessel A. van der Kolk

Doing our own inner work

Some of the work is on our own. Developing our awareness and compassion. Understanding ourselves more deeply so that we can see how our ways of being shape the world around us for better and worse.

"We can't change this world, but we can change ourselves so that we can be of service to this world."
— Margaret J. Wheatley

"Every story I create, creates me. I write to create myself."
— Octavia E. Butler

"We can hardly bear to look. The shadow may carry the best of the life we have not lived. Go into the basement, the attic, the refuse bin. Find gold there. Find an animal who has not been fed or watered. It is you!!

This neglected, exiled animal, hungry for attention, is a part of yourself."
— Bessel A. van der Kolk

Re-finding right-relationship

Right-relationship is how we describe the re-connection of people, society and ecologies into ways which allow aliveness to flow again. It feels more like joining in with life than fixing or designing solutions which maintain or deepen the inequalities we have accumulated.

"Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world."
— bell hooks

"Are you actively practicing generosity and vulnerability in order to make the connections between you and others clear, open, available, durable? Generosity here means giving of what you have without strings or expectations attached. Vulnerability means showing your needs."

— Adrienne Maree Brown

Embracing embodied participation

Embodied participation describes the many embodied practices through which our consciousness intuitively senses the connectedness of all things. It was the dominant way of knowing our human place in the world story until the modes of rationalism and specialisation took over with the rise of the industrialised society. Through myth, poetry, dance, dream, imagination, play, music, fertility, and speaking to the wild ones, people participated their way into knowing. When we participate in this way there is no separation between ourselves and all the others, we are not observers, describers, analysers, fixers or designers, we are participants. Entering into this mode of knowing and *thinking* released insight we cannot access though our analytical thinking processes and new possibilities reveal themselves.

"Joy doesn't betray but sustains activism. And when you face a politics that aspires to make you fearful, alienated, and isolated, joy is a fine initial act of insurrection."
— Rebecca Solnit

"No matter how much insight and understanding we develop, the rational brain is basically impotent to talk the emotional brain out of its own reality."
— Bessel A. van der Kolk

Growing community

The complexity of the challenges we want to face means that no one person could know best about them. We have to learn new ways of relating and leading that allow us to work together and create the conditions for more collective intelligence.

 "No one is special, and everyone is needed."
— *Adrienne Maree Brown*

"Leadership is a collective act; its growth involves experiencing life together."
— *Mryon Rogers*

We have the creativity we need

We know from our experiences, that despite our education, we are all deeply creative and intuitive beings. We all seek and find creative solutions to the complex issues we face in our own daily lives. However, we are not all equally safe or well resourced to explore our imaginative potential. Our work in social imagination is about creating space and conditions for each of us to feel fully alive in our own creative potential.

 "When our self-worth isn't on the line, we are far more willing to be courageous and risk sharing our raw talents and gifts."
— *Brené Brown*

"Everytime a person crosses from one country to another seeking refuge, their necessary and creative act imagines a world without borders. Everytime a parent tells their children to share their toys, they are imagining a fairer world."
— *Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan*

"Everything in modern society is the result of a collection of decisions made by someone. Why shouldn't that someone be you?"
— *Tom Kelley*

Nurturing courage

There is much uncertainty ahead. We must learn to nurture courage to face and to act in the face of this uncertainty and disappointment.

"What lies ahead seems unlikely; when it becomes the past, it seems inevitable."
— *Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark*

"Courage is the measure of our heartfelt participation with life, with

another, with a community, a work; a future,"
— David Whyte

2.3 Practices for growing new ways of being

Holding safe spaces for creative exploration

Creativity isn't about perfection, it's about allowing something, anything, to come out of the core of you. We offer in our practice, opportunities to take baby steps with our creativity, and grow our confidence from there. Such baby steps might be as simple as selecting a picture from a stack of postcards which speaks to something you recognise, or choosing an object as metaphor for an idea or emotion you are feeling. We are very protective of people's creativity because we know the courage it takes to express it. We don't allow criticism or judgment to steal tentative explorations.

Working with myth, real life story, filmmaking, forum theatre and poetry

There are many modes of embodied participation. We tend to use these story-based ones. All of these ask us to be present in the sensory and imaginal world with others to discover things about ourselves and the work we are doing that we don't usually allow to be present in a work context. When we imagine, we use a different part of our brain to when we are analysing or rationalising. It isn't the part which judges, it's the part which empathises, and it is far better connected to the nervous system beyond our brains all the way out into our limbs. In this way our work reveals things we cannot know through analysis but it also builds our ability to understand others and allow paradox.

Ritual

When we change and grow on the inside, it needs to be witnessed on the outside for it to come into its full potential. This is what happens when you

are recognised at work with a new promotion, your efforts and potential is affirmed by those around you. We create rituals to recognise and celebrate the thresholds that those we work with cross. Sometimes we include a ritual which offers a moment of reflection for an individual or group to recognise the distance traveled from where they started and to agree that they are not the same as they were. This serves to strengthen our courage but also to move forward into the next stage of the journey.

Reflection

When we are exploring new territory and new imaginings, it can be difficult and uncomfortable. As Dorothy put it 'Toto I have a feeling we are not in Kansas any more'. Sometimes we need a reflective practice of questions and activities which we return to regularly, or reflective moments at key points in a project. These enable us to explore how we are feeling in the imagining process, what meaning we are making and re-making from it as we go. Reflection is just another word for being actively in the process of learning and noticing what we are learning, individually and together.

Play

The first place we learn to create and recreate ourselves is through play, which for Canopy has big overlaps with creativity in all its forms. Playfulness is one of the attitudes we bring to creativity. Play isn't something that's just for children, or something trivial, it's a way of being with things, imagined and real which invites them into the creative possibility of this moment with you and with us. Play is emergent and co-creative. We often use modeling with lego, playdough, figures and toys and anything else we can lay our hands on to playfully and intuitively express ideas in three dimensions together. These models can reveal the principles we want to work with and what matters in designing work in the real world.

Leadership with ways of being

The space in which what we call 'being' is most welcome in the world of work is often called leadership. A practice which recognises that there are internal competencies and relationship skills which enable good leadership both of others and also of ourselves. We believe that the practice of social imagination should value the insights of all those with a stake, including the other than human, and not only those with official leadership roles. We work with leaders who want to learn how to include these others, how to radically democratise the imaginative landscape they work with. That's true leadership, and it takes work to learn how to be it, on the inside and the outside.

Connection with the more than human

Embodied participation arises out of an understanding that human and non-humans are all members of living systems, and are all part of the conversation. Again, indiginous communities lead the way as they have not forgotten how to do this. In 2015 after 140 years of protest, the local Māori tribe of Whanganui in the North Island of New Zealand has fought for the recognition of their river as an ancestor which now carries the same legal rights as a person. And since then the Indian court has done the same for the Ganges and Yamuna rivers making the state government their legal guardian. We understand that ways of being which support social imagination need to de-centre human advancement at the cost of all else. We bring nature connection practices into our work to allow our neurology, which co-evolved for millions of years in relation to the natural world, to speak in relationship to it and not dominance over it.

Coalition

Because of the inequity and injustice present in our social systems, centering marginalised voices is essential to re-imagining our society. But Canopy is two white middle class British people of a similar age living in London. We have not been squeezed to the margins and we are not best placed to design the spaces in which the imaginations of those who have can be nurtured. There are others who can do that far better than we can, but we do want to help, we do want to bring our skills in service of their hopes and dreams. This is why working in coalition and in service of those voices is so precious to us, especially when it disrupts our own white, male, sis, adult, ableist, neurotypical -imaginations.

Doing

"Hope is more the consequence of action than its cause. As the experience of the spectator favors fatalism, so the experience of the agent produces hope."
— *Roberto Unger*

How do we act in the world?

Bringing the better futures we imagine into reality through leadership, self-organising, and processes for making change happen

3.1 Why are our 'ways of doing' important?

Limited 'ways of doing' = limited possibilities

Our imagination is limited by how we know how to act in the world. Too often we will call a situation hopeless simply because we don't know what to do about it.

Sometimes problems feel too troublesome, so we avoid doing anything about them because we don't have 'ways of doing' that can contain the uncertainty and possible conflict that may arise.

"Many of us would like the world to change, but we don't want to endure the trouble of helping make it happen."
— Arnold Mindell

Many conversations in the field of social change are focussed 'what' we want to change, and not enough attention is given to 'how' we can make change. When we limit ourselves to methods and processes we already know, we can expect to get outcomes similar to what we already have.

"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results."
— Albert Einstein

Repeating domination, blindness & excluding resource

Within established organisations, limitations are often based on 'how things are done around here'. But who is trusted to do what? Who makes decisions? Who has experience of the problems? How are tricky questions addressed or avoided? Most organisations have underdeveloped answers to these hard questions. Yet even with good intentions, using our known and comfortable methods will inevitably repeat the patterns of blindness to difference, dominance, exclusion that they created before.

> ## "The process you use to get to the future is the future you get"
> ## *— Myron Rogers*

Perception of risk

Change is scary for organisations as it is for individuals. Unfortunately, most organisations do not have 'ways of doing' that allow them to manage the risk of the new, and so become very resistant to anything that might create change, even if they say they want that. Commonly feared risks include, disrupting existing services and systems, people becoming lost, frustrated and their time and energy being wasted, however all these things can be managed with the right 'ways of doing'. Organisational fears also tend to disproportionately emphasise the risk of the new over the risk of what we already have, i.e. the limitations and injustice of the situation we are in now.

> ## "Perfection is a stick with which to beat the possible."
> ## *— Rebecca Solnit*

> ## "Waiting until everything looks feasible is too long to wait."
> ## *— Rebecca Solnit*

Separation of the embodied and the big picture

The 'ways of doing' are often separated into two different types: The first type are ways of doing that are seen to be appropriate for the embodied and the local - community and wellbeing activities. The second type are ways of doing that are seen as appropriate for the 'big picture' - national organisations and politics. While these 'ways of doing' remain separated there is an absolute limit to the kind of change that is possible. Unless our ways of doing are local and embodied they lack real connection and meaning. Unless our ways of doing attempt to address the big picture they are simply making a bad situation more livable.

"...to accept the present political and economic arrangements as the unsurpassable horizon within which the social innovation movement must act, is to reduce the movement to the job of putting a human face on an unreconstructed world."
— Roberto Unger

3.2 Opportunities for new ways of doing that can unlock change

Social imagination is as much about 'how we imagine' as it is about 'what we imagine'. And how we bring those imaginations to life matters.

Working across the ecocycle (not just new ideas)

All the things we know are parts of living systems. People, ideas, organisations, communities are all deeply interconnected, relational systems that go through processes of birth, growth, maturity and death. We need to use 'ways of doing' that are appropriate for complex living systems, rather than becoming dependent on ideas of machine-like control, certainty and constant increase.

> **"The living world is a constant conversion of one thing into another, leading to inexorable new growth."**
> — *Andreas Weber*

> **"Inside the word "emergency" is "emerge"; from an emergency new things come forth. The old certainties are crumbling fast, but danger and possibility are sisters."**
> — *Rebecca Solnit*

Developing new stories

Stories shape how we understand the world, how we relate to each other and how we act. Participating in developing and living out new stories is a key part of making change.

"The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is—it's to imagine what is possible."
— bell hooks

"Science fiction is simply a way to practice the future together. I suspect that is what many of you are up to, practicing futures together, practicing justice together, living into new stories. It is our right and responsibility to create a new world."
— Adrienne Maree Brown

"Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it."
— Augusto Boal

Creating the conditions for self organising

Self organising, autonomy and interdependence are central features of living systems, but rarely seen in modern organisations. Yet organisations that do nurture these ways of working tend to flourish. We explore opportunities to distribute power and resources differently, for example, we see that when those

who experience a problem own the process of arriving at a solution many things fall into place.

"Self-organization is not a startling new feature of the world. It is the way the world has created itself for billions of years."
— Frederic Laloux

"Could we invent a more powerful, more soulful, more meaningful way to work together, if only we change our belief system?"
— Frederic Laloux

Learning through doing

If we stay only in words and ideas, we can only go so far. The cognitive mind, even of a 'genius' can only process so much information and hold so many interrelated possibilities. We have a simple complement to this mode, which is to learn through action.

"If a picture is worth a thousand words, a prototype is worth a thousand meetings"
— IDEO.org

"I've come to believe that creativity is the mechanism that allows learning to

seep into our being and become practice. The Asaro tribe of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea has a beautiful saying: 'Knowledge is only a rumor until it lives in the muscle.'"
— Brené Brown

Staying with the trouble and making together

'Staying with the trouble' is a term from Donna Harraway expressing a commitment to making with, rather than making alone, despite the difficulties that brings. Making alone (as individuals or individual organisations) can feel faster and more efficient, but that's because it removes the essential trouble of relationships and wider context. Working together to bring our imaginings into the world will not be perfect but it will be alive. This is the kind of thinking, the kind of staying-with, we need if we are to build more equitable futures.

"We are born makers. We move what we're learning from our heads to our hearts through our hands."
— Brené Brown

"Learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying together on a damaged earth will prove more conducive to the kind of thinking that would provide us the means of building more livable futures."
— Donna Harraway

3.3 Practices for growing new ways of doing

Creating holding spaces

While leadership is traditionally understood as being the boss and making decisions, when we work with complexity and emergence, 'leading as holding' becomes more relevant. There is no way any leader could have all the insights and experience to know what to do. Instead we follow Ronald Heiftz in his ideas about supporting leaders to hold space where marginalised voices are protected and promoted, focus is maintained on the 'real' problems and the distress of working with the unfamiliar is regulated.

Planning emergent processes

Plans are an important part of any holding space, though when we're working with complexity and emergence, we don't want to define every step or action. Instead we create structured plans that guide the energies needed for change rather than limiting them. The traditional design 'double diamond' is a good example of how we can use 'divergent' - exploring and generating - phases in sequence with 'convergent' - refining and deciding - phases to allow creativity and critical thought to work hand in hand.

Prototyping

Prototyping is about learning through doing. Prototyping is a type of trial and error developed in design practice but applicable to many types of situations. When we prototype we manage the risk of the new by iteratively creating models, simulations or drafts of an idea we might want to try, gradually improving them as we go. Early prototypes tend to be cheap,

quick and low risk, like quick drawings or role plays. As we learn more and become more confident we add detail and 'realness' until we have something close to what we actually want to launch. Prototyping is a key process in the gap between what we do now that we are confident in, and what we want to do, but don't yet have the confidence to try. Prototypes can be very inclusive and generate many new and better ideas along the way.

Community development

The UN defines community development as "a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems." We enable processes of community development by offering the training, planning support and creative confidence people need to make changes within their communities.

Creative public experiences

By working with the public we connect with a wide range of perspectives and experiences and we have opportunities to gather energy around new ways of seeing, being and doing. We run a wide range of experiences, including storytelling performance, mythopoetic experimenting, beekeeping, podcasting, group singing and collaborative filmmaking. These different modes help us to explore big themes in an embodied way and can be connected to wider programmes of exploration and change.

Abundant generation of possibility

There isn't one right way to imagine or to act. Instead we need to get in touch with the abundance of possibility. This goes hand in hand with building creative confidence, since if we are always looking for 'the right answer', we will always be too afraid to explore any possibility. We use

processes that encourage the abundant generation of possibility, vastly expanding our social imagination and creating many more possibilities for change.

Developing new stories and imagining the future

Knowing the story we are living isn't only an important part of seeing, it's also an important part of doing as the foundation of a story is an action-based plot in which stuff happens. If we can't imagine it we can't do it. There are many different practices we use for this; story building between the mythological and our own lives, creating metaphors which guide us into the new story, being inspired by stories of how others have imagined new worlds to help us imagine ours, the Future Backwards method which describes the way we have come back to front and the way we are going front to back. These are just a handful of examples.

Where next for the Social Imagination Compass?

This is our first version of the Social Imagination Compass (July 2021). In time, we hope to develop it with others who use it too. We encourage you to create your own versions and make it useful for your contexts. If you do, we would love to hear about it and share what we learn together.

Please do get in touch if you'd like to talk about the Compass, about how it could support your work or where it could go next, we'd love to hear from you.

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