

TORONTO IMAGINAL TRANSITIONS

Design For a Time Between Worlds

Tara Campbell

Cheryl Hsu



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THE SIREN CALL *to* IMAGINAL TRANSITIONS



THE SIREN CALL

to IMAGINAL TRANSITIONS

Did you know that when a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly, it forms a cocoon and then digests and melts into a *soupy organic mush*?

Right now, something is trembling and quaking in the ground of our being. And in the terrifying tumult of our systems cracking, what if we ungrip our fists and relax our jaws, and begin to breathe slowly? What if we welcome and even *desire* breaking down and transformation?

What if we told you that the dark, thick soil beneath our shiny cities, our metal cars and airplanes is *stillness* and *sanctuary*. This soil is thick with mycelium and the wisdom and traumas of our ancestors and animal kin. What if we root down so deeply that we learn to sway with the movement of the earth quaking, as though we are invited into *metamorphosis*?

In the caterpillar's cocoon of *transformation*, dormant single-celled organisms called **imaginal cells** begin to wake up, holding within them the seeds of future potential. At first, the immune system of the caterpillar views these cells as threats and tries to attack and kill them. But these imaginal cells begin to connect and communicate with each other, sharing information and multiplying until there is a *tipping point* – when they stop acting as individual, separate cells and begin to assemble new systems -- wings, legs, eyes and antennae -- and the structure of the new multicellular organism emerges...

You are invited to *Toronto Imaginal Transitions*, to dance into the emerging patterns and morphology of transformation. Instead of trying to figure out how to fix or intervene in systems, how do we come to learn what Donella Meadows describes as *dancing with systems*¹?

You are invited because we want to play with you and dream with you. We're allowed to be clumsy here, laugh, cry and make mistakes. There are no prescribed dance moves. The dance we will learn together is relational, improvisational and emergent.

We are called to participate in a transition that is deep and rooted deeply into *place* -- it is a living ecology of becoming. The personal, the local, the cosmopolitan and the planetary braid together like sweetgrass.

In order to dance with complexity, we embrace the wisdom of the philosopher Bayo Akomolafe, who says: *the times are urgent, let us slow down.*

SO WHAT IS TORONTO IMAGINAL TRANSITIONS?

We are a cocoon: we hold and nourish sanctuaries of tender stillness for grief and letting go -- for individuals that dissolve into soup and allow our imaginal cells to co-form.

We are an underground laboratory: we conduct experiments exploring the radical phenomenology of relationships and mutual transformation.

We are a dance club: we learn to move our bodies through flow, pleasure, and sensual, ecstatic feeling into distributed starling formation.

We are a martial arts dojo: we invite discipline and practice and keep showing up for each other, even when it's hard.

We are a family table: we eat delicious food and nourish our bodies together.

We are a circle around a fire: we tell stories and feel into the more-than-human elements that create the world with us.

¹ <https://donellameadows.org/archives/dancing-with-systems/>

For us, these are all ritual spaces of mutual transformation, sanctuaries that we create in the cracks for us to slow down together, and to dance and imagine and enter new worlds.

There is already a rhythm and tempo to the process of transition... But we might have to slow down, and in the quiet moments, listen to the *wisdom of the system*, and how it breathes, hums, and sings through the nested ecologies of people, cultures, cars, trees and birds that weave through it all...

And depending on the frequency that we tune into, transitions can feel like **collapse**. Deep, tragic and painful; a slow-dance into falling apart and sinking into the deep-tissue grief of letting go.

Transitions can feel like **effort**. Of sweating and rolling up our sleeves, and leaning into the heavy grind of collective work and practice.

And transitions can also feel **desirable**. We can tune into the effervescent frequencies of joy, pleasure and creativity and listen to the songs that pull our tired feet and bodies effortlessly onto the dance floor. We follow the currents of aliveness that move us in ways that we might not expect, with new dance partners we might not imagine.

And these emerging relationships might form and create new patterns, like starlings that form murmurations... that begin to shape emerging economies, cultures, and systems that we do not yet know, but deeply long for.

But where do we start? You show up. Your toes wriggle into the soil. Your body begins to melt and sway.

And just like that, together, we dance into transition.

PREFACE

Over the past year, a beautiful thing called *Toronto Imaginal Transitions* came into being. There are many stories to tell about it, some of which will be shared in the pages that follow.

I'll start by giving you a bit of its history: I work at the [David Suzuki Foundation](#) (DSF), which is an environmental charity in Canada that has been around for over 30 years. A couple of years ago, DSF established a program focused on *wellbeing economies*—economies that are purpose-built to generate wellbeing for people and planet. We are working at a national level to establish a Canadian hub of the [Wellbeing Economy Alliance](#) (WEAll), a global collaboration of organizations and individuals working to transform economic systems around the world. Recently, we have also been supporting a few experimental projects in different Canadian cities, one of which became *Toronto Imaginal Transitions*.

A few different threads from the origin story for Toronto Imaginal Transitions:

- ✱ **Relationship with the City of Toronto** Looking at the people who are a part of *Toronto Imaginal Transitions* now, you probably wouldn't imagine that it began exclusively as a project involving City staff and councillors. We started out thinking that municipal government policies were the right leverage point to aim for. We organized a series of doughnut economics² workshops with some City of Toronto staff and councillors over the course of 2021. The workshops were meant to socialize the notion of economic systems change at the City. We learned quickly that while several staff and councillors were interested in this idea, the institution of the City itself wasn't quite ready to embrace economic transitions in Toronto. It wasn't the right time, there wasn't enough support at Council, and there wasn't institutional support across City divisions and departments. A city councillor who has supported us in this work pointed us instead to

2 <https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics>

the community. He recommended that we should work on building up a community-based coalition that explores and advocates for transitions to economic systems that support wellbeing. The idea here is that the City will be more receptive when there is a more organized demand. So we reframed our project and started with community, knowing that the demand is already there. Knowing also that we can learn and create in community. Policy can be prototyped in community. We don't have to wait for government to recognize our demands (but we can organize for that too, and we can invite them to see us and join us when they are ready).

✱ **Piloting WEAll's Policy Design Guide** Around the same time we were running the Doughnut Economies workshops with the City, we were prompted by our colleagues at the global WEAll to pilot their [Policy Design Guide](#), a participatory policy development process released in 2021. Alongside three other hubs piloting the guide over the past year (Scotland, California, Aotearoa/New Zealand), we explored wellbeing economy policy development in Toronto. The guide has five phases, beginning with the development of a wellbeing vision. Rather than taking the conventional approach of running workshops with a collection of individuals to test the phases of the guide, we took a deep interest in developing the fabric of relationships that provides the basis for participation. We thought the process of building and maintaining relationships needed greater attention *and* we wanted our work to be a meaningful pilot and outlast the pilot period. We really leaned into the experimentation and learning side of the pilot project, especially our investigation into relationships and trust. We will reflect more on their role in the policy development process at the end of the zine.

✱ **Collaborative leadership** Knowing that I could not and did not want to lead this project alone, I approached someone who I trusted, and had a deep desire to work with. I approached Cheryl Hsu, a systemic designer³ by trade, but that label does not capture her. She is also a researcher, philosopher, artist, and group process host. I wanted to approach this work in a different way. I had been feeling a bit pessimistic about the usual, often technocratic approaches that result in the usual solutions that don't really go anywhere. Cheryl gets this, and has been thinking deeply over the past few years about other ways of approaching the deep and complex challenges we face in the world. So we quietly went from a team of one to two. Not long after Cheryl joined and we put together a loose plan, we invited a core group of people to experiment alongside

3 Systemic design is the discipline that both Cheryl and I have been trained in. It brings together systems thinking and design to advance systems change. <https://medium.com/the-overlap/what-is-systemic-design-flcb07d3d837>

us. We rippled from two to twelve, and we stayed together as a group of twelve for several months. And just a few weeks ago, we felt ready to open up to a larger ring of relations, moving from a tight twelve to a more fluid and nebulous start of a network. You can learn more about all these stages in the ***Process Study*** portion of the zine.

A note on terms:

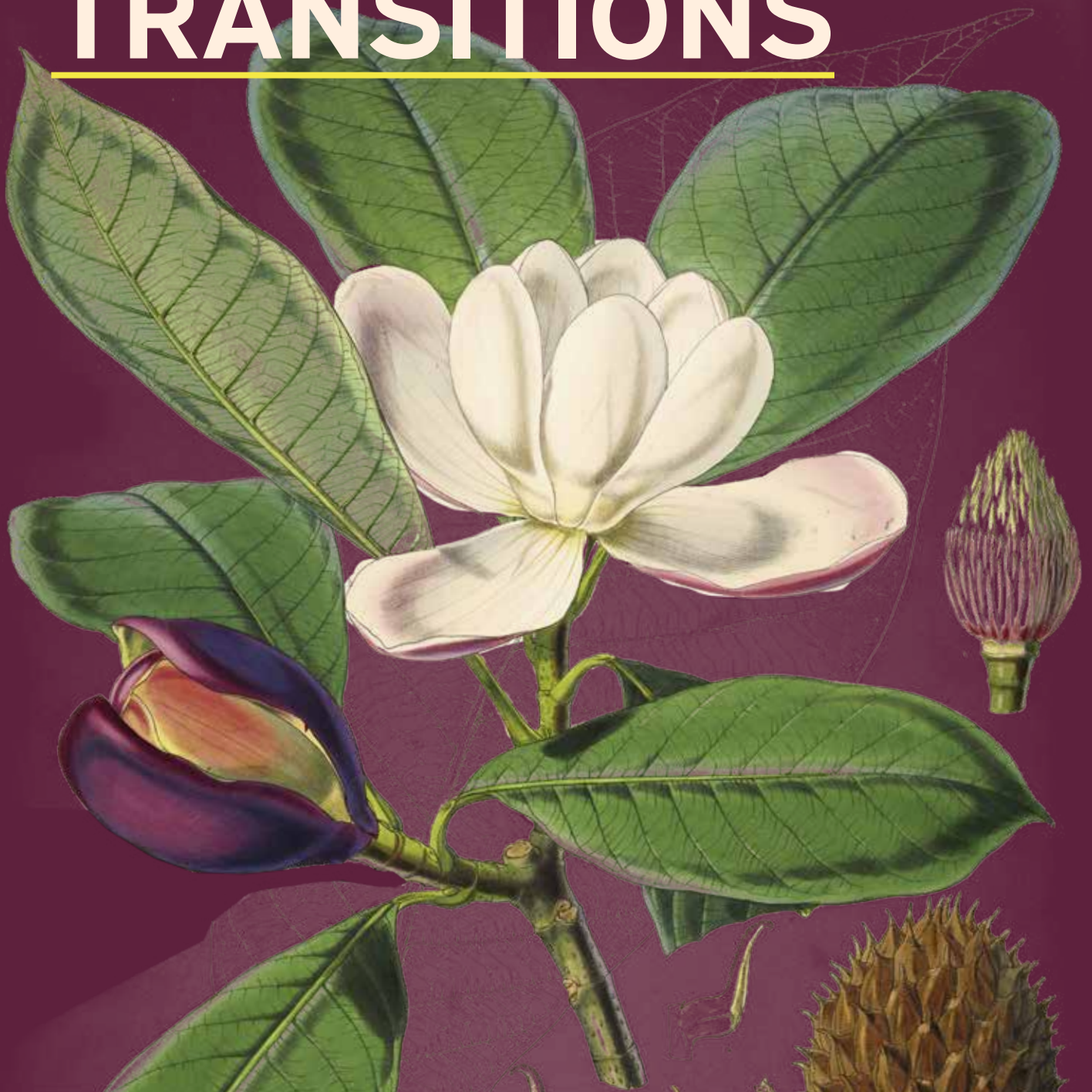
Before you jump in, I want to be clear about one more thing: while we started out this project as one focused on *wellbeing economies*, throughout the zine and in our work over the past year, we often use the language of societal and economic *transition* instead. We have done this to highlight our focus on the *processes* by which systemic changes occur. We are designers after all—we are process people! This language also puts us in relationship with other folks who think about transition, such as the fields of transition studies and transition design.

We've captured all sorts of stories here in our zine. You can hear some from my voice, and some from Cheryl's, and some from the more ambiguous "core team" voice. Have fun!

With care,

Tara

INTRODUCTION *to* TORONTO IMAGINAL TRANSITIONS



INTRODUCTION *to* TORONTO IMAGINAL TRANSITIONS

Dear reader,

Tara and I (Cheryl) talked about writing this “report” for our ***Friends of Transition***. We were imagining these *transition friends* being those who belong to an emerging community of praxis around bridging this time between worlds. We want to nurture, share and support:

- * Friends coming up with *beautiful ideas and theories for transition*;
- * Friends creating and running *experiments of transition* (e.g. existing, emerging and potential communities/economies of well-being)
- * Friends designing *systemic affordances and policies for transition*;

These might include an intersection of people who identify as: policy makers, politicians, designers, activists, community builders, entrepreneurs, philosophers, academics, and artists. What these friends all have in common is that we know something to be real and true and deep in our bodies; that is, we are moving through a time of *deep planetary transition*, what environmental activist Joanna Macy calls the “Great Turning”.

We believe that we are living in a time between worlds⁴, an evocative term to describe a historical period of major transformation that we are collectively experiencing on this planet. As humanity reckons with ways of living that are environmentally, socially, and economically unsustainable, we are drawn to

4 Stein, Z. (2019). Education in a Time Between Worlds: Essays on the Future of Schools, Technology & Society. Bright Alliance.

the call to “hospice modernity”⁵ and play a role in midwifing something new. A “time between” gestures to a liminal period of deep unknowing, that can also feel destabilizing and frighteningly uncertain. In this time between worlds, we—as designers and as people—are interested in the competencies, practices, resources, relationships, infrastructure, and wisdom needed to gracefully navigate the deep societal transitions that we find ourselves within.

We deeply know change and collapse. This has been most potently felt over the last two and a half years living through a global pandemic. We’re exhausted and isolated. We need and long for new ways of living and being together. We don’t want to spin the same wheels, write the same policy reports that tick boxes. We want our story of *transition* to be *juicy and alive*.

So we’re going to write this report differently; because our favourite scholar Donna Haraway reminds us:

“It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.”

Writing about *Toronto Imaginal Transitions* feels mystifying and impossible, because it is a messy, and unfinished, living process. But we’ve tried to collect and synthesize for you an ephemeral snapshot of the work:

- * **A process study** that tells a story about the experiment of *Imaginal Toronto Transitions* and how it’s been unfolding, including our **cycle of transformation** process.
- * Our **lessons and learnings** that reflect on how we’ve navigated the tensions of transition through dance and desire.
- * Our **seeds and theories of change** that foreground the importance of nourishing *transition through process and relationships*;
- * And our **next steps and policy provocations**.

So what is Toronto Imaginal Transitions? Tara and I wanted to create a **sanctuary** for the practice and process of **collective transformation**: to bring together people who live in *place* together in the approximate geographic region we call

⁵ de Oliveira, V. M. (2021). *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity’s Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism*. North Atlantic Books.

Toronto—friends whose bodies nudge up against and gather in *intimate proximity*—and to imagine, experiment and resource with desirable ways of living together. In other words, the wellbeing economies we desire.

The theories of change that most resonate with us (and those that we explored in this project) foreground **process and relationships**. They centre the importance of *nourishing soil* from which new ideas and patterns might sprout. And in this soil, we scatter and plant theories of change into the potential of place-based practice and policy: of *emergent flocking and pleasure activism* from adrienne maree brown, of *staying with the trouble and response-ability* from Donna Haraway, of *slowing down and creating sanctuary* from Bayo Akomolafe, and of *designing for the pluriverse* from Arturo Escobar, of micro-solidarities and many unnamed others.

Toronto Imaginal Transitions is also a **bridge-building project** to evaluate, translate and tangibly share our insights and learnings with you—so that they might ripple out to inspire systemic policies and interventions that support cultures to move through transition together.

We love the invitation of environmental scientist Donella Meadows, who calls us to *dance with systems*. So for now, we're inviting you to take a moment, to pause, to breathe, and to come along with us on our dance in Toronto.



Alex Hong,
Allenna Leonard,
Corey Snelgrove,
Daniel Rotsztain,
Gabriel Li,
Kimberly Peter,

WHO *is* TORONTO IMAGINAL TRANSITIONS?



Meghan Hellstern,
Tieni Meninato,
Xavier Snelgrove,
Ziyan Hossain,
Yannick Beaudoin,
Zaid Khan.



A PROCESS STUDY *of* TORONTO --- IMAGINAL --- TRANSITIONS



A PROCESS STUDY *of* TORONTO IMAGINAL TRANSITIONS

We (Tara and Cheryl) started *Toronto Imaginal Transitions* with a desire to have every aspect of it be **prefigurative**⁶—whether we’re having a meeting, hosting a workshop, or writing a report - we want our values to be reflected and experienced in the process. We don’t want transition to be theoretical, but deeply felt and experienced in our bodies.

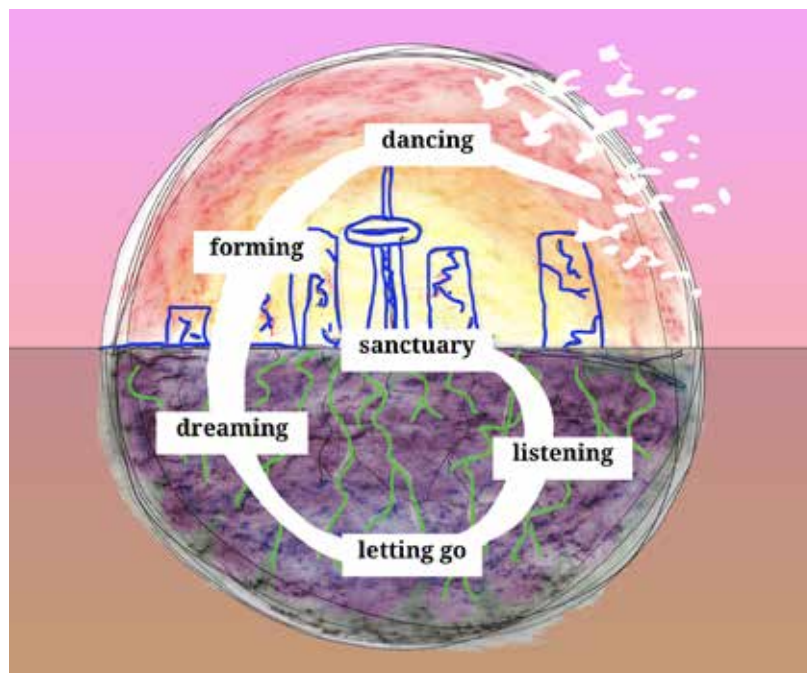
Training any capacity requires *practice*, especially around **transition and imagination**. As Mark Fisher writes in *Capitalist Realism*: “It’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.” Most of us feel stuck in reinforcing loops of productivity, of fixing and improving, and justifying every sequence of action into quantifiable actions, impact and outcomes. But our policies can also afford and prioritize the practices of *living well together*—it already happens in the liminal pockets of the time when we take naps, pick tomatoes from the garden, eat meals with family, go for a walk in the forest, listen and dance to live music with others. We don’t do these things because we’re convinced it’s going to save the world—but because it feels good, pleasurable and healthy—because you feel the nourishment of it in your body, and *it makes life worth living*.

In *Toronto Imaginal Transitions*, we invite systems change and transition practitioners, policy makers, artists and designers to gather into the **Transition dojo and dance club**. The dojo and the dance club are spaces to *practice the postures of transition*: to learn how to flow with more skill and ease through the cycles of tension and release, work and play, discipline and flow, making and unmaking. By relaxing and training with each other, we feel deep learning happen in our bodies—we recognize that different moves work for different contexts: *the right practice arises for the right time and place*.

6 Lutterman, Ariana and Campbell, Tara (2020) Practicing the Worlds We Want: Prefigurative design for revolutionary transformation. In: Proceedings of Relating Systems Thinking and Design (RSD9) 2020 Symposium., 9-17 Oct 2020, Ahmedabad, India. <http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/3635/>

Below is our ***Cycle of Imaginal Transformation***, that goes through six phases of relational practices for transition. We developed this over the course of the last year when thinking through the kinds of group processes that would take us into a fundamentally different-than-usual collaborative systems change project. This comes from our foundational assumption that our processes of approaching complex changes like transitions to wellbeing economies must be suitably designed for the tangled mess of the challenges at hand. You can read more about our theories behind this in our Theories of Change section that follows (see p. #), but we wanted to first share stories from what we actually did in Toronto Imaginal Transitions, to bring you into how it *felt*.

It begins by sinking underground into quieter, invisible spaces that focus on rest, nourishment, letting go...



Cocooning/creating sanctuary: We create open spaces for rest and safety, for our nervous systems to relax outside of our hyper-productivity focussed environments. Sanctuaries cultivate intimacy and trust through practices like:

- * Collective hosting;
- * Checking in;
- * Slowing down;
- * Being outside in nature, in the sun, beside the water, with each other.
- * Eating and laughing together.

Listening/noticing: In the calm and spaciousness of these sanctuaries, we begin to listen to what is *here* through our senseful ways of knowing. We develop an attunement to the subtle, and practice what Anna Tsing describe as the art of noticing through:

- * Collective Presencing⁷;
- * Meditation and being in silence together;
- * Listening to the birds and cars, and the spaces in-between;
- * Journaling, writing poetry and drawing what we notice to be true and unfolding.
- * Zooming in to the microscopic and zooming out to the cosmos;

Melting / Letting go: One of the most difficult aspects of transition is *release*. We have not been culturally prepared with the rituals and practices that support the death and letting go of old systems and stories that no longer serve us. Letting go is a grieving process. We practice holding ourselves and each other through:

- * Collective grieving;
- * Holding each other through holding space;
- * Venting and crying together without shame;
- * Sharing secrets;
- * Leaning into the discomfort of intimacy.

7 <https://book.collectivepresencing.org/>

Dreaming: As we create spaciousness through release, we begin to notice a subtle current of aliveness rippling in the water. We begin to trust and share our desires with each other. We start to imagine new metaphors and ideas that would have felt daring and impossible before. We practice:

- * Collective dreaming;
- * Sharing our deepest desires and longings;
- * Imagining and telling new stories;

Forming: As we dream, our hands begin to itch and our bodies want to move and play. We let go of our fears of failure and holdbacks, and allow our desires and dreams to guide the way that we form new projects, play new games. We enter a sandbox of play and begin to make and share little scrappy experiments with each other through:

- * Collective playing;
- * Making games;
- * Mushroom foraging;
- * Dancing like nobody's watching;
- * Workshoping with hurricane of sticky notes and snacks;

Dancing: Eventually, our little distributed experiments form into a murmuration of collective learning, and we realize that we've been moving in a kind of emergent flow. We trust and feel confidence in our bodies, we find the process of making and unmaking worlds *beautiful and worthwhile*.

- * Awareness, reflection and learning.
- * We realize that we've been practicing what Donella Meadows calls it *dancing with systems* all along.

How do these practices ground into process? We'll tell you a story about Toronto Imaginal Transitions as a **living process study** of **transition**. Each phase in the process study is named after one of these phases, as they loosely guided our design at each moment in time. In actuality though, these group practices were messy and entangled. They wove throughout phases, and the cycle felt fractal as well: the whole arc of the project could be framed as this cycle, and a single gathering might move through all the phases as well.

Meta-awareness and continual reflexivity around the process has felt crucial to our adaptive learning, and this process study is an attempt for us to crystallize our personal transformation learnings.

PHASE 1: SANCTUARY: TARA AND CHERYL FIND DESIRE

Processes spark into being with the meeting of right timing and right relationship. When Tara and Cheryl meet in a cafe in November 2021, *the seed of creative potential is felt.* Tara, who works at the David Suzuki Foundation, reaches out to Cheryl, who was freshly integrating back home from being away at a 3-month Buddhist monastic retreat.

We both studied in a program called *Strategic Foresight and Innovation* at OCAD University, and felt a mutual resonance around the potential of bridging profound planetary transition and the transformation of systems through intentional and ethical design. We chat, and the connection feels invigorating and nourishing.

When we reconnect in March 2022, Tara makes an **invitation** to Cheryl: ***Would you like to collaborate on a project about Transition in Toronto?*** To Cheryl, the invitation feels innocent and delightfully unconstrained. The invitation is not framed around achieving a goal or meeting a prescribed outcome -- it is an *opening to play, a commitment to process and relationship.* Cheryl's "yes" flows out of her with ease.

What is the offering?: What Tara offered to Cheryl was a **sanctuary**, a container for the mutual unfolding of creativity, play and experimentation. This sanctuary felt safe, resourced, and trustworthy enough to let something different come alive, to say "yes".

This **sanctuary** was nourished out of some **prefigurative starting conditions and transition ingredients** (*read more on page 36*) that unfold the emerging patterns of the project. Cheryl and Tara say "yes" because of:

Desire: The beginning of something new starts with **desire**. Tara and Cheryl *wanted* to work with each other, it was *easy* to say yes. Meeting each other is fun; there is curiosity, pleasure, and aliveness in the process. And when true desire (not simply obligation, the reasoning of the "shoulds") lights up, it generates the initiatory energy *required for something to be created that didn't exist before.*

Trust: Tara and Cheryl share a felt sense that the collaborative relationship, although nascent, is *trustworthy*. There is a foundation of **friendship**: they share openly not just about their professional interests, but their values, fears, dreams and passion for embracing transition through dancing, mushroom foraging and weaving.

Time: *Right timing* was very important. Tara and Cheryl met at a deeply transitional phase of their lives, where they felt a deep readiness to experiment and try something different.

Awareness: Tara and Cheryl *genuinely love learning and nerding out about meta-theory and praxis.* The two of them mutually reinforce reflexivity and deep enthusiasm around integrating philosophies and poetic theories of beloved thinkers like Donna Haraway, Bayo Akomolafe, Arturo Escobar and adrienne maree brown into systemic design and policy practice. They wonder: *"what if we created a transition project that was initiated through pleasure and desire?"*

PHASE 2: LISTENING: GATHERING THE PROCESS AND TEAM

After Cheryl joins Tara as a co-host and co-lead, we met over coffee to imagine visions for the work. As excited as two kids on a playground, we share approaches to systems change and transition processes (including a [mood board](#) of resources and memes) that resonate and feel *right* in our bodies, but feel radical in a policy context. Metaphors about dance clubs and the metamorphosis process of a caterpillar are attractive. Out of this fertile ground of liberated potential, **a project emerges with uncanny ease.**

We invite a “**core team**” of 8-10 people to go through a six-week experimental cycle of a Dance Club for Imaginal Transitions, playing with different transition capacities and practices that focus on *nourishing relationships*. When determining who would be part of this experimental core team, we wanted to challenge the orthodoxy of the impossible task of “getting the whole system in the room”. Rather than emailing “actors” or “stakeholders” who seem to work on paper through assumptions of power, place or utility in the system – we want to follow **existing relationships of trust**. We ask the question: *Who would we **desire** to be in the same room with, working on transition together?*

An abundance of sticky notes scrawled with names of *friends* began to fill the white-board – people who we know and trust, who come from a diverse mix of ages, backgrounds and passions: community building, city planning, design, food systems, activism and decolonization, art, cybernetics, foresight, etc. As we gaze at the names on the board, the criteria of **Friends of Transition** begins to emerge:

Trust: Is this someone that we deeply trust?

Desire: Is this someone who we feel attracted to and excited about?

Time: Is this someone who has the time to participate?

Awareness: Is this someone who brings reflexivity and self-awareness of the process of change?

We generate a database of people in Toronto and then narrow it down to **twelve people** who we felt attracted to inviting: [Alex Hong](#), [Allenna Leonard](#), [Corey Snelgrove](#), [Daniel Rotsztain](#), [Gabriel Li](#), [Kimberly Peter](#), [Meghan Hellstern](#), [Tieni Meninato](#), [Xavier Snelgrove](#), [Ziyan Hossain](#), [Yannick Beaudoin](#), [Zaid Khan](#).

On April 11, 2022: we send an email with the subject line: “**Come dance* new worlds into being with us [Invitation into Toronto Transitions]**”. It is a mysterious invitation to a month-long container of four gatherings, with an offering of “yummy food, good vibes, and an honorarium per session”, ending with a gif of a dancing frog. While attending all the gatherings was not obligatory, we wanted to cultivate a sense of **collective commitment to the process.**

**one member thought we were literally inviting them to a dance party, and didn't respond out of fear for two weeks.*

PHASE 3: MELTING: EXPERIMENTAL CYCLE ENACTED

Surprisingly, everyone says yes! Many of them are puzzled by, yet attracted to the mystery of the project. Most importantly, they trust Tara and Cheryl.

The experimental cycle of four gatherings explores the phases of *cocooning, listening, letting go, dreaming and forming*. While we share the concrete output of co-creating a broader plan for Toronto Imaginal Transitions in the final workshop, the first three gatherings focussed on **nourishing relationships between the team members**. We want to experiment with practices that cultivate trust, rest, play, and imagination.

A WhatsApp group is created for the core team to stay in touch between gatherings, and share responses to a-synchronous prompts (photos, drawings, poems, videos, reflections and cute/funny memes were shared) between gatherings. We make a playlist together of songs that remind people of home.

Session 1 (May 2nd, 2022) Cocooning: Friends around a fire

The series of gatherings kicks off with a gathering around a fire in Christie Pits Park to cultivate new friendships. Cheryl makes a huge batch of homemade japchae (a korean glass-noodle) and Tara picks up firewood. As each person trickles towards the fire, there was an air of tingly excitement, nervousness, and curiosity. For many of us, this is the first time meeting new people in-person since the start of the pandemic. Our agenda for the evening was spacious: our goal was

simply to start getting to know each other.

Tara and Cheryl begin with a short meditation to listen to the trees and birds, and share opening remarks about the project:

"We're in a chaotic, messy time of ecological transition and transformation. To navigate this time between worlds, we need to create sanctuary spaces, and nurture islands of hope, pockets of the future, create alternative worlds and futures."

We share a quote from adrienne maree brown about following pleasure and desire:

"Pleasure activism is us learning to make justice and liberation the most pleasurable experiences we can have on this planet."

We shyly talk about how we invited everyone by following our *desire*. We split off into smaller, more intimate 3-4 person groups for introductions, where each person shared a bit about their ancestors, and their personal journeys and experiences with "home". We come back together as a big group around the fire and chatted about the following questions:

- * "What does home and sanctuary look like for you in times of transition/transformation?"
- * "What has been your journey with home and sanctuary?"

We spend two hours just hearing and telling stories about each other, and finish by laughing and making s'mores together. A few of us begin to collaborate and engineer a contraption made out of sticks and

marshmallows to roast multiple marshmallows over the fire simultaneously (a spontaneous group activity that could have been a stereotype of a corporate team-building exercise). It's simple and fun, and we leave feeling like the early seeds of trusting friendships had been planted.

A-synchronous prompt *Listening*:

Following the first session, we were all asked to reflect on:

*How do we become intimate
with how the city is dancing with us?*

✱ **Transition Capacities:** Get the beat:
Listening/Noticing/Paying Attention

✱ **Prompts: 30 minute sanctuary time**

Step 1: Go to a place that feels like home or sanctuary for you. (It might be right here)

Step 2: Get comfortable. Breathe. Locate yourself.

Step 3. Listen intimately. What are you hearing right now? How is it changing?

Reflect/Record/Respond:

- . Record the sound with your phone.
- . Write a poem or notes.
- . Draw an image or take a picture.

Session 2 (May 16, 2022)

Zoom presencing

Our second gathering is over zoom, and the

group is asked to find a comfortable place of sanctuary before joining. It's a delicate, tender process as we want to invite the core group into **grief and letting go**.

Cheryl hosts a dialogue practice called **Collective Presencing**, which invites the group into slowing down, embracing silence, and speaking when one feels moved to speak. The group is asked to check in: "*How are you arriving into this gathering? What do you find yourself holding on to, that you would like to share into the middle?*"

After everyone shares about how they are arriving, we frame our inquiry:

"We're in a liminal time -- a space between worlds. Rooting ourselves to the liminal requires us to hospice the death of old systems to midwife the emergence of new systems. But in the process of letting go, grieving is necessary. What are we willing to let go? How do we hold each other through this process of surrender? And what happens when we do?"

Cheryl reads a quote from Bayo Akomolafe:

"I think we need room to grieve today. I wonder what might happen if we prepared the conditions for grief by accounting for the material excessiveness that escapes our control, that humbles our attempts to save our planet, that disturbs the idea that we are apart from our environments. Since grief makes tender boundaries, might grieving help facilitate perceptual shifts that allow us to notice the world differently? Might a structured hesitation to jump into solution-ing, and a desire to stay with the troubling effectuate new capacities for engaging our most haunting crises?"

We enter a dialogue together around the question: *“As we move through these times of transition, what is asking to be grieved and let go of? How are you responding?”*

The session feels unusually *intimate*. There are prolonged periods of silence that feel strange and awkward at first, but seem more okay over time. Each person shares truthfully -- sometimes in response to the question, other times about the discomfort, anger and confusion that the topic invokes. And then, someone shares something unexpectedly vulnerable about their home. She begins to weep. Others in the group have tears in their eyes. A quality that feels true and authentic shifts the felt sense of the gathering. It feels as though **trust** -- like a shy animal -- is starting to enter the group field.

A-synchronous prompt: *Melting*:

How do we hold ourselves and each other through letting go?

* **Transition Capacities:** Paying Attention / Letting go / Holding Grief / Holding each other

* **Prompts: 30 minute sanctuary time**

Step 1: Go to a place that feels like a sanctuary for you. (It might be right here)

Step 2: Get comfortable. Breathe. Locate yourself.

Step 3: Ask yourself three times, slowly, allowing space between each word and question:

. What do I need to let go of?

. What do I need to let go of?

. What do I need to let go of?

Step 4: Now ask, slowly:

. What do we need to let go of?

Step 5. Listen inwardly. Notice your body. What parts are feeling clenched, contracted, seeking release? What happens if you relax?

Reflect/Record/Respond:

. Record your voice.

. Write a poem or notes.

. Draw an image or take a picture.

Session 3 (May 30, 2022):

Waterfront imagination chaos

The third session invites the group on a field trip to the edge of the water where we gather around a fire-pit at the waterfront of Lake Ontario. We find ourselves in an absurdly chaotic environment with Slipknot, a heavy metal band, playing nearby. As we settle into eating vegetarian hot dogs around the fire, Tara and Cheryl invite the group into an **Imaginal exercise** of dreaming.

It was important first to embrace a new definition of desire. We share a powerful quote from writer Sophie Strand:

“My desire doesn’t need another person. It doesn’t even need me. It wants to be poured into the world. It wants to feel itself as a wave of matter, a crescendo of stone, poised, summitting, ecstatically and erotically strung between life and death.”

The exercise is to **stretch our imagination, and imagine an ecology of human and more-than-human archetypal figures (e.g. mother, raccoon, CN Tower)** who create a new “economy” and culture by co-navigating their desires together. People pair up, find spots around the park and co-create an **“origin story”** of a new world that arises out of the confluence of an abundance of desires.

SON ☀️ DAUGHTER Mother Father
 GRANDFATHER teacher ELDER GRANDMOTHER
 Politician TRICKSTER dreamer ACTIVIST boomer
 Sun Moon ☾ Stars SKY Earth Soil
 ROOTS Mycellum MAPLE CEDAR Womb ©
 DOOR Death Birth WATER Medicine FEATHER
 CORN Squash Beans COFFEE Avocado Condo
 Internet Blockchain BLUEJAY RACCOON COYOTE
 Squirrel ROBIN Cat Lake Ontario HUMBER RIVER
 DON VALLEY High Park Toronto ISLAND Asphalt
 CN Tower CHINATOWN Turtle Canadian Shield
 Community GOD Allah GICHI-MANIDOO
 MYSTERY Soul LIFE 🌀

The instructions:

1. Choose 3-4 archetypal human and more-than-human figures/actors of Toronto that resonate with you, that stretches your capacity to empathize.
2. **Ecological Desire:** Go for a walk. Embody them. Want their wants. Dream their dreams. Desire their desires. Feel into what gives them joy and pleasure. Ask: What do they long for? What do they dream of?

Write their name and draw them on the sticky notes. Write down how would they respond:

_____ just woke up from an incredible dream, where they realize they truly want _____.
 _____ is speaking with their best friend after a long day, and confesses that they always wanted _____.

3. **Relationships/Economy:** Now look at your three archetypal figures, and their desires. What are their relationships with each other? How do they support each other?

Draw their relationships on a piece of paper. When do they fight? When do they love? How do they support each other to get what they want? When do their desires interweave or come into conflict?

4. **Story:** What is the origin story that's beginning to emerge in these relationships? An origin story is the beginning of an emerging world, the unfolding of new possibilities, economies, systems in 50 years, 100 years, 500 years.

Afterwards, each pair shares their origin stories around the fire -- and we laugh at our struggle to speak and listen to each other over the cacophony of the metal band blasting. Each story shared is unique, provocatively imaginative and often very funny, they included stories about:

Chinatown calls up Lake to hang out together, but causes a flood in Chinatown that

forces humans to live on the second stories -- but they start taking boats to visit each other, which is nice!

Asphalt on the Don Valley Parkway deeply longs to return home underground, back into the earth from which it came... while its friend, the Don Valley River is secretly jealous of Parkway because the humans have decided to use highways instead of rivers to travel.

After sharing our origin stories, we entered a dialogue around: ***What patterns are emerging and forming around the world that we desire? How do we begin to prefigure these relationships in deep transition?***

Participants comment with surprise about what happens when they imagine new economies from the perspectives from more-than-human actors, and the ease with which they felt liberated into play and creativity.

At the end, we seed the group with an open-sandbox invitation to the group to co-shape Toronto Imaginal Transitions with us in the next workshop. The design constraints were simple:

- * **We have a tangible opportunity to experiment.**
- * **The time frame is the month of August.**
- * **The budget is \$10,000.**
- * **The guiding intention is to invite people to discover the seeds of desire that allows us to dance new worlds (economies of well-being) into Toronto?**

- * A-synchronous prompt: ***Think about the framing for what we would like to create in August in preparation for the workshop***

Session 4 (June 4, 2022) : Workshop mode activated!

Finally, we all came together at Cheryl's house, both in-person and virtually, for brunch and workshop. We prepare a tasty brunch of bagels, fruit and eggs and are joined by Fia the pup and Meowbot the cat, who don't seem to like each other very much. We started by collectively reflecting on the Imaginal Transitions gatherings and process thus far:

- * What did you feel was important about what we did over the last three sessions?

What was surprising? What felt uncomfortable? What felt right?
- * What did we need to learn about how we can resource/support ourselves and each other through transition?

People shared thoughts and feedback, especially about how the trust-building felt nourishing.

Then, we talked about wellbeing economies and transition. We discussed what wellbeing economies might feel like in Toronto, and what would be needed to support a transition towards them. This formed the seeds of our eventual theory of change, and the transition ingredients of time, desire, trust and awareness.

After this deep reflective conversation, we

were ready to shift into generative dreaming. We wanted to start thinking about how to bring others into our transition thoughts and processes. ***Let's dream big! What do we want to create together?***

Our core team suggested:

- * A film festival!
- * Walking tours!
- * A conference!
- * A playful festival!
- * A museum exhibit!
- * Live action role play!

We loved all these ideas, but they were intended as our big dreams, to get us thinking creatively and not necessarily about what we might do in August. For the meantime, one of our team members suggested that we might consider noticing existing economies of wellbeing and pockets of transition in Toronto, and connecting and going to them instead of trying to start by initiating a new network. This insight resonated with the core team. We already knew we were going to be bringing together a small team to support us with making sense of everything that had happened this far, but this prompt got us thinking about a second: s relationship-building team that connects with these pockets of the future in Toronto.

PHASE 4: DREAMING: MYCELIAL AND METABOLISM TEAMS

As we moved out of the experimental container with the core group, two streams of activity became clear to us as next steps. We proposed two teams for core group members to participate in if they felt called to do so: the *mycelial team* and the *metabolism team*. The mycelial work would revolve around relationships and learning from communities already enacting elements of a wellbeing economy in some fashion. The metabolism work would revolve around synthesis and insight generation regarding economic transitions in Toronto based on a variety of inputs. These teams formed and worked through their own projects over the course of several months.

Mycelial Team

One of the priorities that came through the final workshop with the core team was the value of *relationship building with existing communities* in Toronto. There are many micro-economies of wellbeing that exist in the city already, from grass-roots community groups to hobbyist organisations that operate through their own protocols of shared trust, common interest, and economic sustainability. We believe that these micro-economies are already holders of practical wisdom around how we can mutually sustain wellbeing with each other during times of deep transition.

To get to know some of these communities, we wanted to follow relationships, specifically, the relationships that already existed within the core team. Everyone in the core team already participates in diverse

intersections of communities and organisations that we can learn from. We offered everyone on the core team a microgrant to resource their community as they saw fit, begin relationships between their community and this work, and share learnings back with the core team.

Four members of our core team requested a grant:

- ✱ **Kim** and her neighbours wanted to formalize the mutual aid network emerging on her street as the Simpson Commons: “The core concept is about creating and protecting commons through a street community, and benefiting groups in need, beyond our street, and the environment”
- ✱ **Ziyan** proposed an event series for the music community he participates in. “The event series is meant to foster an appreciation of music, promote the therapeutic benefits of meditation and active listening and build community around music.”
- ✱ **Alex** proposed a wellness day for members of Guidance Council, a group she co-organizes: “Guidance Council is a bi-monthly, casual drop-in for BIPOC majority collectives to share stories, gossip, and solicit advice from each other.”
- ✱ **Meghan** proposed several ideas, including a retreat for community organizers in and around Toronto that “organize neighbourhood groups, mutual aid efforts, grassroots cultural movements, generative learning

and action, and so much more” and nurturing the “network of networks’ of individuals and collectives pioneering new ways of being human together and stewarding our collective systems” through a series of gatherings.

As part of our mycelial work, we also started a *mycelial strategy team* (Tara, Cheryl, Meghan, and Xavier) to articulate some of our assumptions and hypotheses around the importance of relationships, map our networks, and develop relationship-building strategies. The mycelial strategy team has met a few times now and the work is really just getting started.

Metabolism Team

We gathered rich learnings over the course of our experimental cycle and pulled together a 4-person team (Tara, Cheryl, Tieni, and Corey) to metabolize the learnings, to focus on synthesis and insight generation. In our metabolism team we grappled with a theory of change and uncovered the key transition capacities and conditions that were coming out of our experimental gatherings with the core team. We considered how these insights could impact local policy innovations and institutions. Finally, we considered how to share our metabolites, both with the core team and a broader audience in Toronto, as well as beyond.

As a team, we came together once a week, usually in person, to reflect on our theory of change. Corey wrote a first draft of the theory of change. Tieni interviewed us and organized all of our data in inputs in Miro. We all worked together to visualize our

learnings and everyone pitched in on the zine.

While we are writing this Mycelium and Metabolism section as its own phase, the work of both of these teams continues as we have found care for relationships, reflection, and synthesis to be an ongoing need.

PHASE 5: FORMING: DINNER PARTY + DANCING

Tara and Cheryl feel the desire to host a warm **dinner party** that gathers potential new friends to join the *Toronto Imaginal Transitions* movement. We invite 25 people -- through trusted relationships within the Toronto Imaginal core team -- and tell them that: **“we are inviting you to this dinner party because we feel a deep sense of trust and kinship* with you.”**

The invitation is sent sharing some light context -- but we kept the nature of the event more “underground” and mysterious to the invitees:

“We also want to share some context: A small group of us have been calling ourselves the Underground Dance Club for Toronto Imaginal Transitions. For the last 5 months, we’ve been playing, researching and experimenting around how communities in Toronto can mutually support each other to dance and move through transition.

We see transition as an alive and relational process. And we want transition to be fun and desirable as much as it can be destabilizing and challenging. So we radically foreground friendship, trust, intimacy, and play as our guiding compass to deeply connect people and communities into nourishing and resilient relationships.”

We decide to host the dinner at a community space called 1RG, run by a friend (and new team member) Max Veytsman as an affordable co-working space for Toronto-based grass-roots and mutual aid groups to connect. It’s a beautiful, massive space hidden

away in the back alleys of Toronto. During the day, we host an all-day workshop for (new and old) members of the Toronto Imaginal core team to reconnect around our emerging theory of change, and the lessons that we learned along the way.

Tara and Cheryl ask team member Gabriel Li to make a brunch and dinner for us -- giving him a reasonable budget that he completely blows us away with. Gabe is passionate about community, food sovereignty, and art. He creates an elaborate and beautiful menu of meals made from seasonal and local ingredients, sourced through farmer friends (Luminous Grounds Farm), various farmer’s markets and his balcony.

We share the menu here because it still makes us drool...

- ✱ **Falafel Lunch Plate** (green herb falafel · onsen duck egg · summer beets · mouse melon · beet hummus · turmeric aioli · red zebra tomato · mizuna mustard yellow beefsteak · tomato · radish microgreen · mint)
- ✱ **Mushroom Salad** (pickled shiitake · crispy enoki mushroom · arugula greens · mizuna mustard · feta · red wine vinaigrette · marigold concord grapes · niagara gold grapes · pears)
- ✱ **Canapés** (baby gold peach · red zebra tomato · paneer · red shiso 48 hr short rib slider · black pepper gravy · scallion roasted fennel · muhammara · pita · fennel frond · crispy shallots)
- ✱ **Cream of Corn Lake Perch** (sherfolk lake erie yellow perch · summer corn

velouté corn shoots · runner beans
· puffed wild rice · broccolini · king
oyster mushroom · rosemary

- * **Hazelnut Cake hazelnut** (rosemary
syrup · purple plum · ground cherry)

The dinner party begins around 6pm, the candles are lit, music is playing. People begin to trickle in, dressed up and looking around curiously at the strange space they have entered. They pick up delicious canapes and begin to mingle with each other. The rest of the team have been helping Gabe set up the plates.

At some point, the music is turned down and attention is called for: Tara and Cheryl introduce themselves and Gabe to the group, and share more about why everyone has gathered together. We ask the group to “try to find three other people that you don’t know, but you feel curious about”, to find a quiet place together, and then share about their desire and attraction:

- * *What brought you here? What’s making you say yes lately?*
- * *What is giving you energy? What is alive?*

For 30 minutes, each of these four-person groups gather and hold conversations on different floors of the space -- some seem hushed, reverent and quiet, others erupt into giggles and laughter. Getting people to come back to the main space for dinner is a bit of a challenge -- people have deepened so much into a sense of intimacy and curiosity about the others in their small groups.

After a while, everyone gathers and eats dinner around the table -- the space bustles with aliveness and the clinking of dishes and cutlery, laughter and exclamations about how delicious the food tastes fill the room. After dessert we ask the group to gather around the couches and sit closely with each other.

After a moment of connective, shared silence: Tara and Cheryl slowly read out loud the **“Siren Call to Toronto Imaginal Transitions”** (see page 4)

We thank everyone for coming and invite them to join an *Imaginal Transitions movement that can become whatever they desire it to be.*

“The dinner feels like the start of something big, the inauguration of a new cultural movement in the city.”

“I found it to be equal parts mysterious, magical and therapeutic. I reconnected with old friends, made new ones and even may have solved a challenge I was facing in a personal/professional pursuit.”

“I had many amazing conversations with different folks that got me thinking about various topics for the past week. I learned so much from our conversation, and I am so excited about the work you are doing.”

PHASE 6: DANCING: WHAT'S NEXT?

Toronto Imaginal Transitions created a series of containers over the past year where new relationships of trust were forged, new knowledge and awareness was created, and new resources were distributed and circulated.

We are also sharing our work beyond the small transition community we have cultivated:

- * We presented our project at an international conference of systems changemakers: The Relating Systems Thinking and Design Symposium in Brighton, UK in October 2022
- * We are sharing this zine with the global wellbeing economies movement. We are also producing an adapted Transitions Zine for our community and beyond.

We hope these containers and dispatches create ripples that go on dancing in their own ways. People in all the circles we have moved over the past year are already telling us about the ripples they have felt and seen.

Soon we will pause and find a place of sanctuary to imagine the next cycle of transformation we might unfold. You can read our **What's Next?** section (see page 50) to see some directions we have already started thinking about

TENDING
to THE SOIL:
OUR THEORIES
(SEEDS) OF
CHANGE



TENDING *to* THE SOIL: OUR THEORIES (SEEDS) OF CHANGE

At its roots, Toronto Imaginal Transitions was a deep inquiry into transformative change in Toronto: how it happens, and how to thrive within it. As designers who create collaborative processes for systems transformation, we think a lot about how, in “systems change” projects like this one, the *processes* we use structure the potential outcomes. We often unknowingly close off possibilities for deep transformation by not taking this reality seriously.

So, in a desire to take piloting the policy design process seriously, we thought deeply about our processes and how they might move us towards the worlds we desire. We put together a series of **hypotheses** about the change we seek. These are the premises and foundations of our work, for now. More than a singular “theory of change”, we want to weave together and offer what writer Ursula K Le Guin calls a **carrier bag**, or **medicine bundle** of healing seeds and stories, rituals and practices. We intend to reform this “report” into a *transition zine* that’s allowed to be scrappy, messy, and **in-process**. We cut, glue, xerox and and fold together metaphors, ideas, practices, stories and images that we feel moved by, that feel radical, resonant and moving.

In this section we want to capture some of our hypotheses and assumptions that emerged through our process, our year of learning and experimentation together. These also form the nuggets of our next steps and policy provocations that you can read about at the end of the zine.

CREATING COCOONS OF REST THROUGH TRANSITION

As we swim and move in the chaotic flows and eddies of societal and planetary transition, it can feel overwhelming and unmooring. So much is shifting and changing at the foundations of what we’re experiencing at personal, communal and cosmopolitan scales. Thinking about this and feeling this is exhausting. Our nervous systems are overwhelmed, over-stimulated and contracted. Our

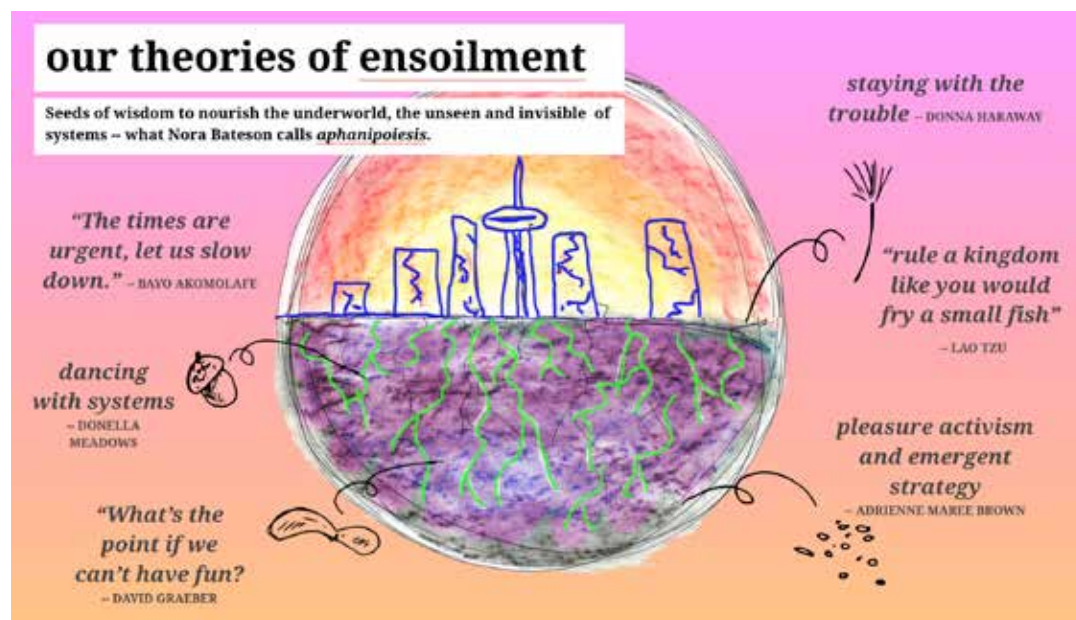
bodies need to breathe, to pause, to rest, *to root down to place and slow down*. In these dark forests of unknowing, we need to create relational containers of intimacy and trust, of what philosopher Bayo Akomolafe calls **sanctuary**.

Through *Toronto Imaginal Transitions*, we aimed to design and create these *sanctuaries* to gather and hold bodies through transformation processes. Sanctuaries allow us to rest, relate and practice together: it might be a huddle around a fire, a dinner party, a nap, an embodiment practice. They feel safe and trustworthy. Inside of them, you can rest and relax, dream and relate, heal and dream.

Policy Provocation

How do we create sanctuaries in our change processes so that we can pause together, rest and heal, and imagine in ways we couldn't before?

BEING SOIL TENDERS UNDERGROUND



One of our overarching theories of change is our metaphoric orientation to soil.

If you can imagine for a moment that the world we experience—our city, our economies, infrastructures, and systems—are like the trees, plants, and mushrooms that you can see sprouting and growing in a forest. These plants have roots. The mushrooms fruit from underground mycelium. And all of these grow within and are nourished by the soil.

In systems change projects, it is easy to get caught up in the world above the soil. We might see its flaws (some plants flourishing at the expense of others, invasive species, dead patches) and imagine and long for the beautiful healthy forest that could take its place. We might try to design this alternative forest and bring it into being by plopping down new plants and fungi. However, what we often fail to understand is that it is the soil that needs tending to in order for new growth to flourish. We also fail to acknowledge that seeds of that new growth are already there, waiting for the right conditions to germinate and grow.

The soil, the underworld, the unseen and invisible. This is where we choose to work. We remember that *all that arises eventually passes away*. Wake up and a flood might float away the structures that we're attached to. A forest fire will burn down a system. A hurricane will break down a house. This project will not continue or last forever. And everything that falls apart will decay, compost, sink and melt back into the earth. So, we choose to nourish the immaterial qualities in the soil that hold us through this time between worlds. This soil nourishment will outlast the temporary container of this project.

Policy Provocation

How do we tend to "soil"? What nourishes it? How do we enable the existing seeds of wellbeing economies to sprout and grow into a robust new forest?

THE TRANSITION INGREDIENTS THAT NOURISH ENSOILMENT

*"I'm much more interested in **ensoilment** than ensoulment. I want to have actual roots. I want my spirituality to have fur, pheromones, funk. I want it to live in a specific place. And I want it to teach me intimately how to be dynamically present and useful to my ecosystem. And I want to tell people that healing isn't about completion. And it isn't about lightness. It's about the mixing bowl where nothing is exiled, everything is included. In order to grow a garden, you need manure. You need compost. In order to heal the soil, you don't clean it, you add to it: fungi, ferment, bacteria, woodchips." ~ Sophie Strand, 'I will not be purified'*

Writer Sophie Strand invokes *ensoilment* as a way to feed and nourish the ecosystem of what is *here*, beneath our feet, in the ground and roots of entangled time and place. Through our collective learning over the past year, we have found that we can feed and nourish the soil of systems change through what we call the **core transition ingredients for wellbeing economies**:

- * time,
- * desire,
- * trust and
- * awareness.



These ingredients are also **capacities** (*skills, instincts, abilities and resources*) and **conditions** (*or situation or states of being*) for transition. Our hypothesis is that these transition ingredients can nourish processes of transformation towards wellbeing economies. We believe that when you bring together the transition ingredients of time, desire, awareness and trust into an alchemical vessel—a project, an organization, a community—something transformative happens, a process of transmutation that results in the generation of an abundance of fruits: new ideas, projects, policies, interventions, worldings—and *more time, more desire, more awareness and more trust*.

Policy Provocation

What might be the scaffolds that afford people and communities to cultivate an abundance of time, trust, desire and awareness?

Time:

In modern society, *time always seems to be running out*. We organize our projects according to quantities of time—we show up to our 9-5 jobs and count down our lives in terms of 24 hours, 7 days, 12 months, 365 days. For those working in the context of systems change in the increasing pressures of the **climate, economic, political and meaning crises**, the time scarcity feels even more pressing and *urgent*.

When this urgency is painfully felt in our bodies, we remind ourselves of the words of philosopher Bayo Akomolafe: *“The times are urgent, let us slow down.”* The hyper-optimization of linear, quantified time is only one way we have organized ourselves within our systems, yet we feel trapped in it. *Slowing down might be the most radical move, to remember and liberate ourselves into pluralities of times.*

Have you ever gazed at a little green inch worm crawling its way across a leaf, and felt *time become very delicate and alive*? Or looked up at the stars at night, and felt *time as vast, deep and infinite*? Have you ever dropped into the flow of a deep conversation with a friend, in painting or reading a book, and *gotten lost in time with effortless pleasure and enriching ease*?

We need to make sanctuary space to be present, where we can slow down and root down so that we can free time. Free time to connect with our seven generations in the past and the future. Free time to build relationships and nourish soil. Free time so that we can experiment and imagine and try new things. Free time so that we can feed and nourish our wellbeing.

Policy Provocation

How can we free and enrich time?

Trust:

Moving at the speed of trust is something that we learned first from adrienne maree brown. We trust this principle: *change happens at the speed of relationships, and relationships move at the speed of trust.*

Perhaps it is worth exploring *trust* as a mutable, living organism, a tangible resource that flows through relationships that need to be fed and nourished. How quickly or slowly does trust move? When does it feel stuck, or tired, or diminished? When does it feel healthy, abundant and happy?

Trust connects us to a larger organism in which we are mutually and intimately entangled, and it teaches us about setting boundaries and becoming more porous in relationships. Trust can be broken or hurt. Whether we trust our institutions enough to keep showing up to vote, paying our taxes, putting our money in our banks depends on many relational factors—how long can our systems alienate, hurt or betray us before we say: “No more”.

We need to cultivate trust in our soils. When you trust the people who you care for, who you love—you commit to showing up even when it’s hard. You act out of deep response-ability and reciprocity. You can create collective projects. One of the statements in *Micro-Solidarity*⁸— a movement of cultivating communities of belonging and purpose—is “*emotional intimacy before economic intimacy*”. What if our economic systems foregrounded emotional intimacy and trust: local relationships of friendship rather than transaction?

Policy Provocation

How can we build and nourish relationships of trust?

Awareness:

Developing the capacity for reflexivity and meta-awareness is the most critical in systems change, to sense and understand that we live and design in fractal ecologies of many overlapping systems. Cultivating **pluri-perspectival seeing** is to know and feel (deeply in our minds and bodies) that we live in a **pluriverse** of many worlds, stories and ideologies -- all of which have distinct values and autonomous desires that co-habit in generative tension with one another.

This means that we also develop a *senseful attunement* to each-other and the more-than-human actors with which we are entangled in our complex ecosystems. Senseful attunement is **embodied**: we “make sense” with more than just our heads, and we sense *through and with each other* (perhaps, as an emerging form of collective, distributed cognition). We practice what anthropologist Anna Tsing calls the “*arts of noticing*” -- to be a care-full anthropologist embedded in the field, committed to a discerning auto-ethnography of one’s own life and on-going practice, of being and becoming.

In Donella Meadows’ ground-breaking paper “*Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System*”, she describes the highest impact leverage point as “**the power to transcend paradigms**”, defined as “the mindset or paradigm out of

8 <https://www.microsolidarity.cc/>

which the system — its goals, power structure, rules, its culture — arises.” These paradigms can be as invisible as the air that we breathe, yet impact the ways in which we live and act in the world. The “logic” of the systems that we experience arise from the powerful myths and metaphors that are embedded deep into the soil of our ecologies. The soil of our modern systems are malnourished and monocropped: we feed and reinforce goals about increasing growth, productivity and convenience, metaphysical assumptions about linear causality and quantified time, and even more deeply, our myths are seeded with a deep suspicion of human desires. They impact our ethics and our culture -- what we believe to be right or wrong, desirable or worthy of sustenance or change.

To be a pluriversal-aware designer is to also follow the principle of **ontological design**, knowing that *what we design designs us back*. When we recognize our positionality as entangled designers, we have to be deeply aware of how and what we are making and unmaking. Our understanding of feedback loops means that we take radical responsibility for all our potential ripple effects -- we actively seek and ask for feedback, learn from our mistakes, and commit to continual adaptation and learning.

So what does cultivating this kind of pluri-perspectival awareness mean for *acting in the world*? We follow the principle inspired by Otto Scharmer: *The quality of the intervention depends on the **awareness** of the intervener*. We believe in the cascading impacts of nourishing the responsible, aware and reflexive practitioner in the world -- through relationships and friendship! We are all tired and need nourishment and rest -- we need to cultivate the wisdom that arises when we pause, notice, care for ourselves and each other.

Policy Provocation

How do we cultivate pluri-perspectival awareness?

Desire:

The anthropologist David Graeber writes: “*The ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something we make and could just as easily make differently.*”⁹

Easily. It’s a delicious, almost scandalous thought.

To remake the world differently, though, requires *desire* for a different world.

9 Graeber, D. (2015). *The utopia of rules: On technology, stupidity, and the secret joys of bureaucracy*. Melville House.

However, desiring and wanting otherwise is something that we often don't feel permission to explore. We are told to be satisfied with what we have. To not disrupt. To think about living our best lives *within* the dominant idea of success. Our deep desires are often suppressed, hidden, buried under artificial desires imposed upon us by the world we inhabit.

Imagining and making new worlds can also feel impossibly difficult. We can focus a lot on what *doesn't* work in our systems, to see problems and deficits. *We want things to be different, we want the world to change.* In change practices there can be so much wanting and desire that it can feel overwhelming. It can make us feel shy and scared because desire also asks us to embody the tension that *we want something that we don't currently have.* Wanting other worlds is a fire that can burn within us. It can hurt, but it drives us. We want to tend to these fires as they pull us towards what Charles Eisenstein calls the "more beautiful world that my heart knows possible."

In *Toronto Imaginal Transitions*, we don't shame desire—in fact, we see **desire** as a vital transition capacity. What if we're allowed to want? What if our deepest *wants guide us more than we think.* What if our desires were wise? What if we trusted these desires to guide us to *the worlds that we want?*

Policy Provocation

How can we support people to explore, tune into, and trust their deep desires?

Collective desire

We do not come into new economies and worlds alone, but in an entangled meshwork of more-than-human relationships. Rooted deeply into this place of deep mutuality and responsibility, perhaps we can imagine and create new worlds together?

We see action coalescing and emerging from *generative tensions* of many different desires and needs held within individuals and collectives. As individuals, we are always trying to navigate the tensions of our personal needs. Manfred Max-Neef's taxonomy of human needs foregrounds the interdependence of these different desires that are complementary, all of which are necessary to achieve satisfaction. Similarly, within a broader collective, we are always navigating the territory of many different desires and the new worlds that can erupt through them.

Policy Provocation

How can we navigate and negotiate between our different deep desires?

Acquiring the taste to be in transition

Transition work is long and it can be hard -- we want to cultivate an **acquired taste** for the pleasure and joy that can be found in staying with the trouble. We might not ever see the wellbeing economies we want. We want the process of working for them to be nourishing and meaningful. We draw from adrienne maree brown and her notion of *pleasure activism*: "learning to make justice and liberation the most pleasurable experiences we can have on this planet."

Policy Provocation

How can our processes of change and transition be nourishing and pleasurable so that we long to be in them?

REFLECTIONS *on* POLICY DESIGN

As shared in the preface, Toronto Imaginal Transitions was part of a larger collection of projects around the world piloting WEAll's *Policy Design Guide*. While what we have created is more expansive than this pilot project with additional ambitions and a longer time horizon, we have lots to reflect on regarding the guide.

The guide outlines five phases in the policy design process:

- * **Develop a wellbeing vision**, framework and measurements.
- * **Design a strategy** to foster the areas of economic life most important for our wellbeing.
- * **Assess and co-create wellbeing economy policies** to build a coherent and innovative policy mix.
- * **Successfully implement wellbeing economy policies** by empowering local stakeholders and communities.
- * **Evaluate policy impacts on wellbeing** for learning, adaptation and success.

The stories we have shared from Toronto may seem quite different from those that you might picture while reading the policy design guide, but the guide did serve as an ongoing site of inspiration and reflection. We learned that:

- * ***Relationships are the foundation of the entire policy design process and they take time to develop.***

The policy design guide is about *participatory policy making*, which means other people are involved. The guide implicitly assumes that you have government actors, organizations, and individuals on hand to call up to be a part of the policy design process. A lot of our work in Toronto

was centered around building up these relationships. This was our deepest goal of the pilot phase. We took a lot of care in determining who to approach and how to create relationships with them and amongst them.

While building relationships can feel preparatory for the “real thing,” most of our engagements centered relationships *while* piloting some element of the guide. For example, the core group created wellbeing economy visions together while having fun around a fire telling stories and creating friendships. Relationship-building is not just “a phase” or “the first phase” of the policy design process, but an ongoing practice of care and maintenance of the social fabric required to design, influence, and implement policy. Relationships take time to build, trust takes time to build, but it doesn’t have to happen separately from design processes.

✱ ***Policy design doesn’t have to start in government.***

✱ ***Inviting government policy-makers can make it uninviting for certain people to participate.***

The policy design guide implies *government policy*, but policy applies to organizations, coalitions, relationships, etc. We did invite a trusted municipal government actor to be in touch with our work and to advise us, but we did not centre them, nor did we centre government policy (for now). This is partly because our earlier engagements with the City demonstrated that it wasn’t the right time to invest too deeply in City policies as there wasn’t enough support across government for transition. This choice was also made because some of the people we wanted to invite into the process would have participated in a different way (or not at all) if this project was centred around government actors and government policy.

It can also be easier and faster to prototype wellbeing economies policies in non-governmental settings, while still having a significant impact on the transition to well-being economies. We developed policy provocations aimed at government policy-makers, but we also developed them for ourselves (i.e., the core team) and all the organizations and communities that we are a part of. We have more agency to enact and experiment with policies in the spaces we inhabit.

✱ ***The policy design process is a space to prefigure and prototype wellbeing economies.***

We saw the policy design process and all our work in Toronto as a space to experiment with and prefigure the wellbeing economies we are working towards at a larger scale. We thought about how resources flowed (i.e., our project budget) and what it meant to give money to someone or something, the “jobs” our core team members took on and their labour, our procurement practices, how we governed ourselves, etc. As much as possible we modelled our own process along our compass of desire and how we envisioned a wellbeing economy to look and feel like. This allowed us to experiment with our vision, to see what we liked and where we could improve, to better understand what would enable our own micro economy to be centred around wellbeing, etc.

✱ ***Skillful navigation of the policy design process means always sensing into right timing for this work.***

It became clear from the outset when we met resistance at the government level that we needed to be strategic with our *timing*. We could have spent all year running workshops with government folks talking about a wellbeing vision and potential policies but it wouldn't have gone much farther than that at this specific moment. If we weren't open to shifting our vision and reorienting around opportunities, we would have spent a long time trying to force something to move in a way that it doesn't yet want to. An important part of the policy design process seems to be *evaluating the readiness* of the actors you want to include and their willingness to engage in the process and take it seriously. If the readiness is not there, what can you do to increase it? Or, if increasing would take too much effort, who else might you collaborate, or in what other contexts might you design policy?

POLICY PROVOCATIONS

We've shared a lot in this zine. It is a bit messy, it is in process. Perhaps some of our offerings landed for you, perhaps some will land later, perhaps some were for other people, perhaps some were just for us. Our intention was to invite you to *feel*, to bring you into our mess. We would like to end though with a simple, but deep offering.

One of our ambitions with this work is to translate our insights into *the design of policies for transitions to wellbeing economies*. We still feel that we are only at the beginning of exploring our theory of change, of testing our hypotheses

and assumptions, so it has felt premature to try to develop them into policies, although we did start turning them into policy provocations that we would like to explore more in the next phase of our work. They are meant to provoke and inspire policy experimentation at the deep level of our systems, by nourishing the soil for change:

- ✱ *How do we create sanctuaries in our change processes so that we can pause together, rest and heal, and imagine in ways we couldn't before?*
- ✱ *How do we tend to "soil"? What nourishes it? How do we enable the existing seeds of wellbeing economies to sprout and grow into a robust new forest?*
- ✱ *What might be the scaffolds that afford people and communities to cultivate an abundance of time, trust, desire and awareness?*
- ✱ *How can we free and enrich time?*
- ✱ *How can we build and nourish relationships of trust?*
- ✱ *How do we cultivate pluri-perspectival awareness?*
- ✱ *How can we support people to explore, tune into, and trust their deep desires?*
- ✱ *How can we navigate and negotiate between our different deep desires?*
- ✱ *How can our processes of change and transition be nourishing and pleasurable so that we long to be in them?*

META-POLICY PROVOCATIONS

What we would like to offer here are some meta provocations on policies and policy makers. **Policies** are the methods, principles and tools embedded into systems to "guide and make choices."¹⁰ Policy makers can be considered choice-architects -- they *make* the affordances that guide action for people across complex systems.

There's a line in the *Tao Te Ching* that we want to apply in our approach:

"Rule a kingdom as though you were cooking a small fish – don't overdo it."

This concept is probably very alien to most of us working in complex systems. The very notion of complexity and meta-crises of our systems undeniably

¹⁰ Exploring Policy Innovation: Tools, Techniques + Approaches (2018) <https://brookfieldinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/BrookfieldInstitute-PIP-Landscape-1.pdf>

generates **urgency**. In response, we want to map and understand the whole system and all of its potential intervention points. Our policies are dizzying. Our systems maps have 872938293 feedback loops. Policy makers are feeling the stress and trauma, the burn-out of trying to find solutions and fixes in the context of an overwhelming crisis.

However, the principle of *ontological design* is that “we design our world, while our world acts back on us and designs us”¹¹. As long as the choice-architects in our systems create policy from situated positions of stress, contraction, distrust and disembodiment, our policies will design those very qualities into people’s lives. We are in a time where we need to radically innovate the policy in these systems that design us back.

At the heart of this work is a desire to work toward policies that guide **skillful and wise choice-making** in conditions of never-ending evolution and learning *because the very fabric of transition is flux*. These policy design principles might feel radical, but to be *radical* is to go and transform the very roots of how we design through transition together. In the context of transition, how might policy afford **sensing and choice-making that**:

1. **Create space and slow down**: we need to pause and rest to see and interact with our economy in a radically different way.
2. **Learn from bodies**: we need to feel and trust our bodies.
3. **Don’t overdo it**: we need to allow ease and simplicity to stay with complexity.
4. **Trust desire**: we need to move away from fixing things to following an aliveness that is true.

But we’re also holding this lightly as an experiment in *serious play*. **We don’t know**, but we also know we’ll fail, make mistakes, and learn. So together, we nourish our bodies and soil cycles of **finding sanctuary, listening, letting go, dreaming and forming and dancing**.

We find sanctuary, breath, pause, let our bodies relax.

We listen, check in with ourselves and each other: *How are we feeling, and doing?*

11 Willis, A. M. (2006). Ontological designing. *Design philosophy papers*, 4(2), 69-92.

We let go: *Is this something that we actually want? Do we need this? What do we need to let go of?*

We dream: *How do we want to live with each other, feed each other, care for each other, die with each other?*

We form: *What are the relationships and worlds that we truly long for, that we desire? How do we support each other to embody and live into these potential futures, pre-figuratively, here and now?*

And like a murmuration, **we dance.**

WHAT'S NEXT?



WHAT'S NEXT?

We see *Toronto Imaginal Transitions* as a *bridge-building* project using place-based experiments to find ourselves through this *time between worlds* on our way to economies of wellbeing. We feel attracted to discovering and creating the following **transition pathways** as we move forward into our next phase:

We want to make sanctuary for the nourishing and deepening of the soil of relationships.

We want to host Toronto-based events and gatherings that center around friendship and deepening trust and intimacy among those who are attracted to the collective, transdisciplinary work of transition. We have already begin to weave relationships with:

policy-makers, city councilors, artists, activists, community organizers, researchers, designers, technologists, foresight practitioners, entrepreneurs (but also, mothers, fathers) in domains including food systems, urban planning, health care, decolonization, etc.

We want to publish and share place-based stories of transition and ecologies of practices that support people and communities to navigate through this time between worlds.

We want to create and distribute a “zine” of Toronto-based transition stories and events. We hope to collect and distribute stories, poems, images and other ephemera of the on-going work of transition as dispatches of learnings to the wider world of people interested in transition in Toronto and beyond.

We want to resource existing micro-economies of well-being that we consider to be “pockets of the future in the present”¹².

12 Sharpe, B., Hodgson, A., Leicester, G., Lyon, A., & Fazey, I. (2016). Three horizons: a pathways practice for transformation. *Ecology and Society*, 21(2).

We want to create a *mycelial resourcing movement* that resources micro-economies of well-being (communities, projects) through light-weight grants of money and support. Rather than allocating grants based on visible project outcomes; the intention is to support communities to invest in *process and relationality*, through the transition ingredients of: trust, time, awareness and desire. Our budding mycelial team is working on this pathway.

We want to learn, reflect and adapt through continual meta-reflection, while generating knowledge around emerging capacities and wisdoms.

We have started to cultivate a **metabolism research team** that prioritizes the continual reflection around our learning, experimentation and evaluation process. We want to build reflexive awareness about our process, and intentionally invite feedback into a living and evolving system. We want to share our learnings through our publication arm, the presentation of papers in conferences, participating in podcasts and events, etc. The hope is that any insights from our place-based process of learning and failure might outlast our current systems and lives to seed into future generations as “*dispatches*”.

We want to increase the “readiness” level of institutions like government to take transition and wellbeing economies seriously.

Part of this will be a task for our research team to deepen into our Theory of Change and understand the roles institutions might play in transition. Part of this will involve our mycelial team to cultivate new relations at institutions. And part of this might involve a new role entirely of cultivating champions within institutions who can work from the inside to increase readiness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This was a project that was unabashedly about love and friendship. Cheryl and Tara co-hosted this container and co-authored this report, but it was made up of so many people who put in their time, energy, and care:

Our core team: Alex, Allenna, Corey, Daniel, Gabe, Kim, Meghan, Tieni, Xavier, Xiyan, Yannick, Zaid.

Our metabolism team: Cheryl, Corey, Tara, Tieni.

Our mycelial strategy team: Cheryl, Meghan, Tara, Xavier.

Tieni, our graphic designer.

Corey, our copy editor.

Mike Layton, for advising us and giving us insight on happenings at the City.

Everyone who came out to our **Imaginal Transitions dinner** for creating magic.

The Wellbeing Economy Alliance for providing funding and creating a collaborative container for checking with other projects globally (California, Scotland, Aotearoa/New Zealand). It was a monthly sanctuary.

The **David Suzuki Foundation** for supporting Tara and for providing funding.

Everyone at the Relating Systems Thinking and Design Symposium who came to Cheryl and Tara's talk and provided us with feedback, validation, and encouragement.

