



Faculty of Design

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Design for a Time Between Worlds

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Design for a time between worlds

Stories and seeds from
Toronto Imaginal Transitions

Presented by **Cheryl Hsu** and **Tara Campbell** for the
Relating Systems and Design Symposium (RSD11) on
October 16, 2022, Brighton, UK

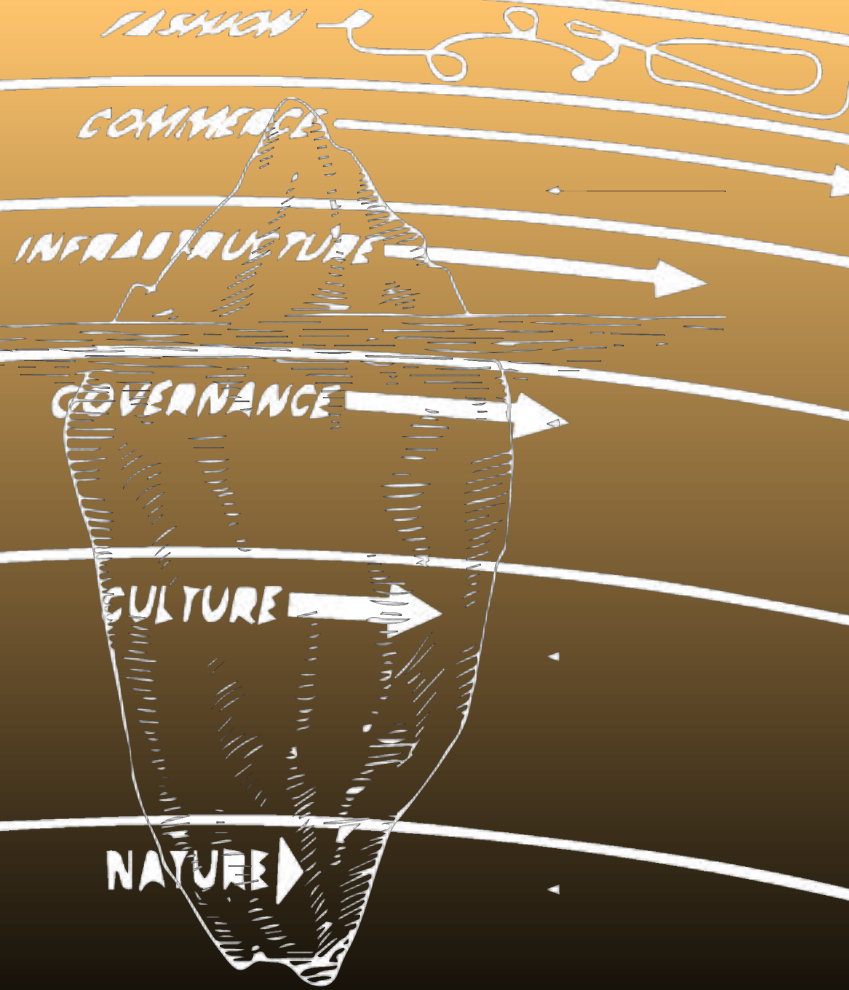




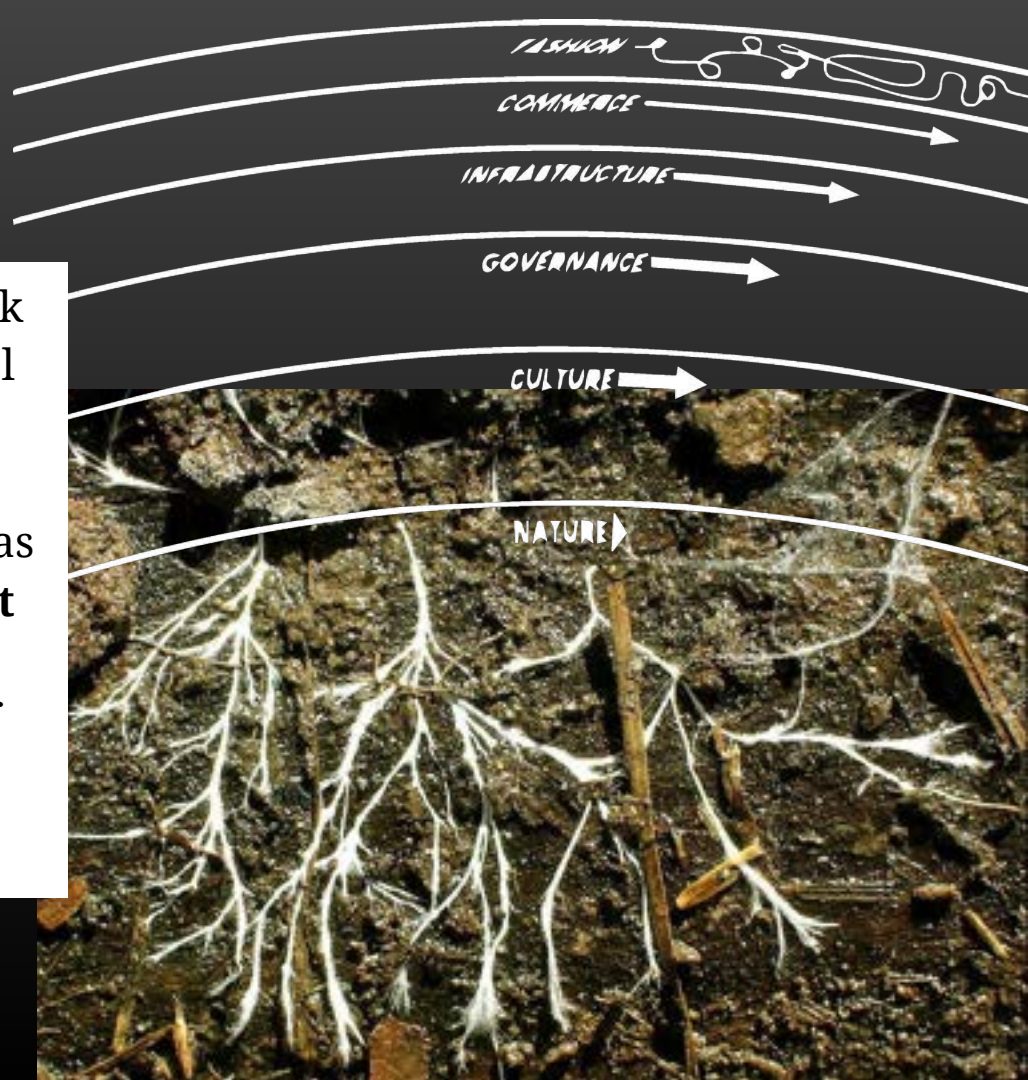
Did you know that when a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly, it forms a cocoon and then digests and melts into a soupy organic mush?

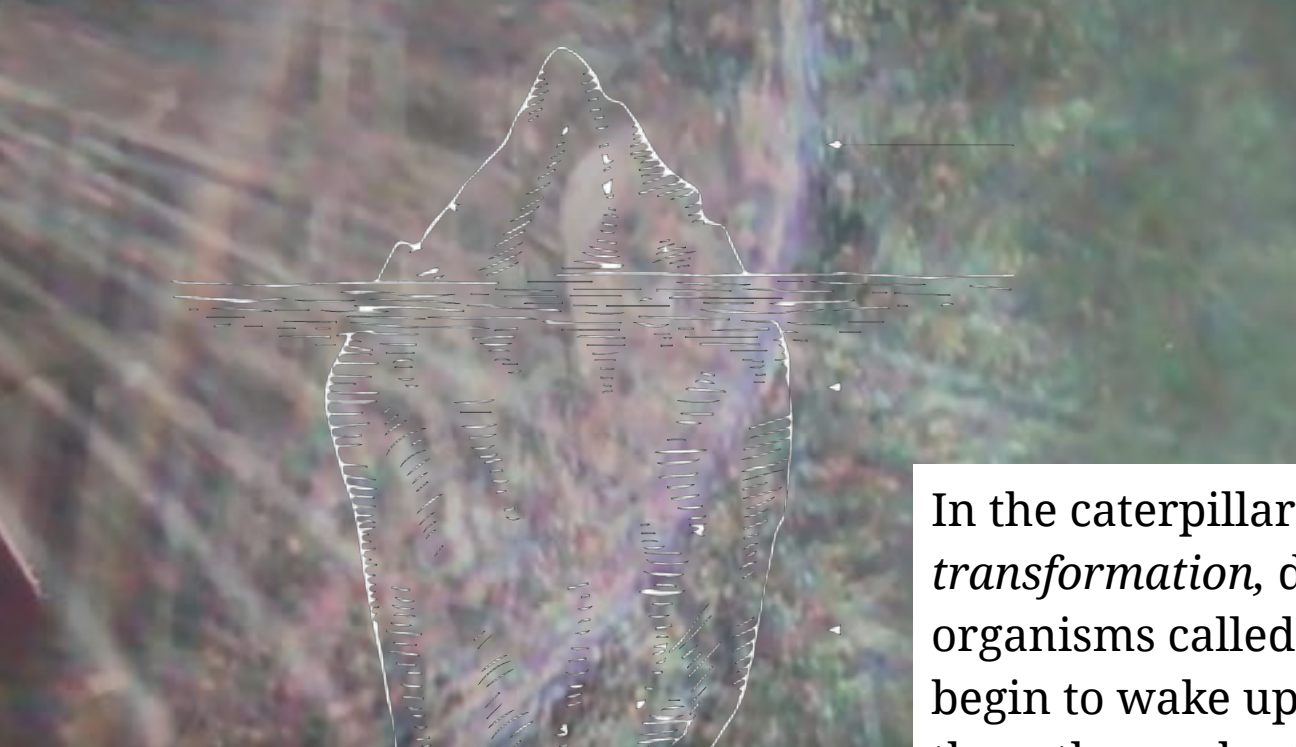
Right now, something is trembling and quaking in the ground of our being. And in the terrifying tumult of our systems cracking, what if we ungrip our fists and relax our jaws, and begin to breathe slowly?

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...

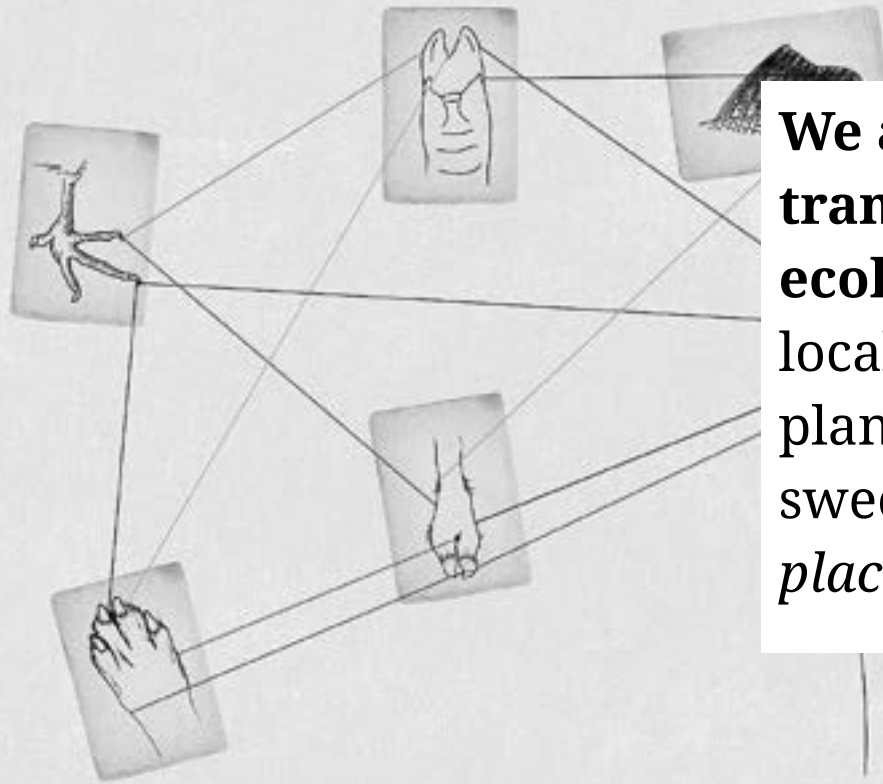
You are invited to ***Toronto Imaginal Transitions***, to dance into the emerging patterns and morphology of transformation. Instead of trying to figure out how to fix or intervene in systems, how do we come to learn what Donella Meadows describes as *dancing with systems*?






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 — it is a living ecology of becoming. The personal, the local, the cosmopolitan and the planetary braid together like sweetgrass—and are rooted deeply into *place*.

An aerial photograph of a large, intricate spiral maze carved into a field. The maze consists of many concentric, slightly irregular rings that spiral outwards from a central point. The ground is a mix of light and dark patches, suggesting different soil types or vegetation. The overall shape is roughly circular but with a complex, winding path.

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:
where we eat delicious food and
nourish our bodies together.



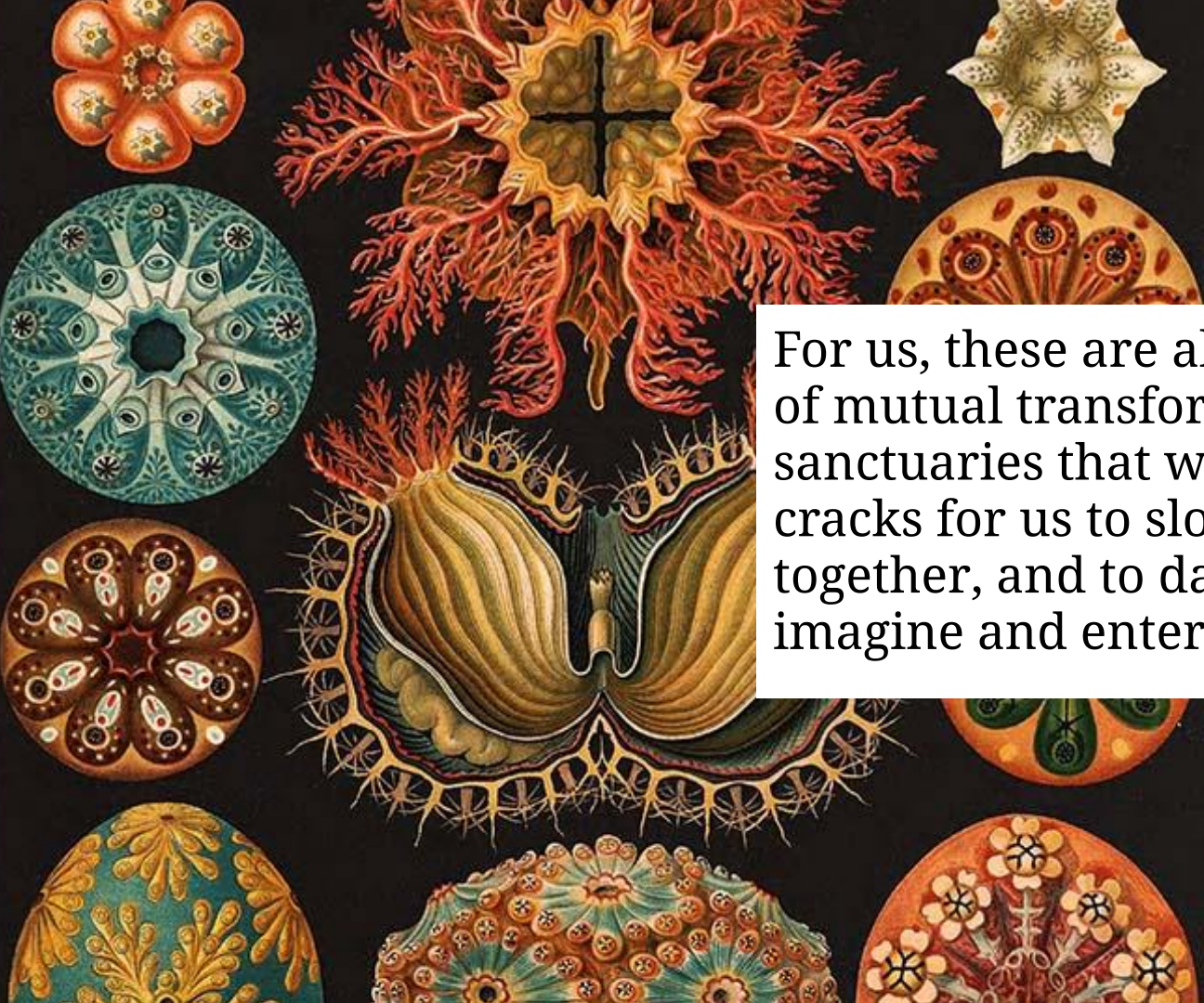
We are a circle around a fire:

We tell stories and feel into the more-than-human elements that create the world with us.



Community



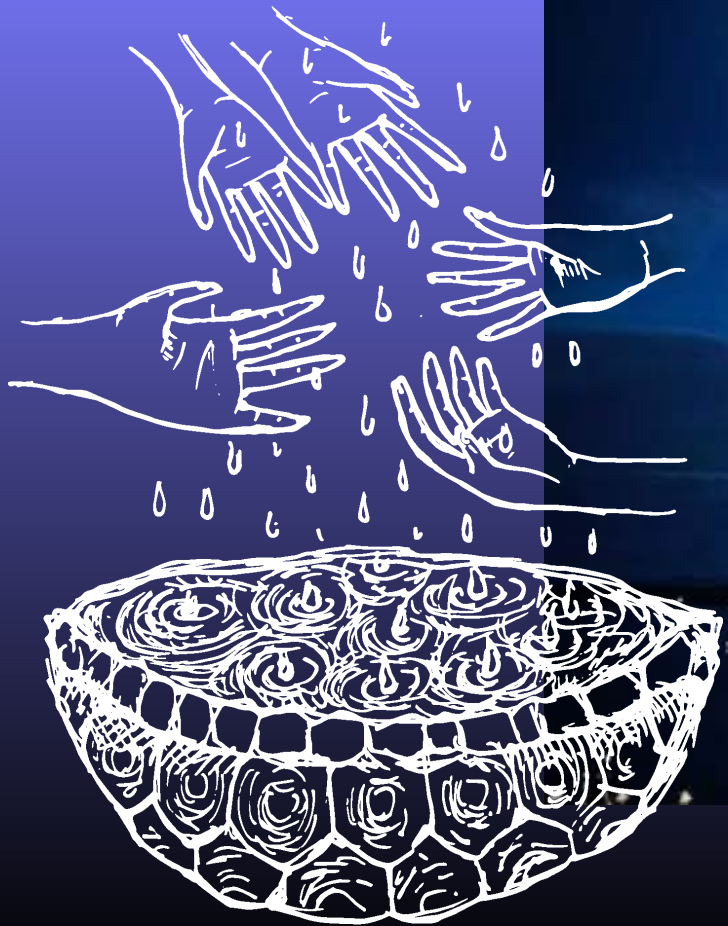


For us, these are all ritual spaces of mutual transformation, sanctuaries that we create in the cracks for us to slow down together, and to dance and imagine and enter new worlds.

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***... how it breathes, hums, and sings through the nested ecologies of people, cultures, cars, trees and birds that weave through it all.





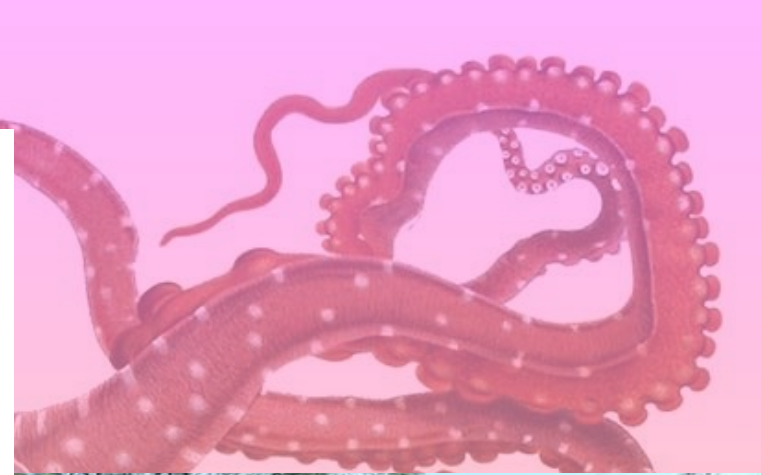
And depending on the frequency that we tune into, transitions can feel like ***collapse***. Deep, tragic and painful; a slow-dance into falling apart and sinking into the deep-tissue grief of letting go.



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.



time between worlds



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FRIENDS OF TORONTO IMAGINAL TRANSITIONS

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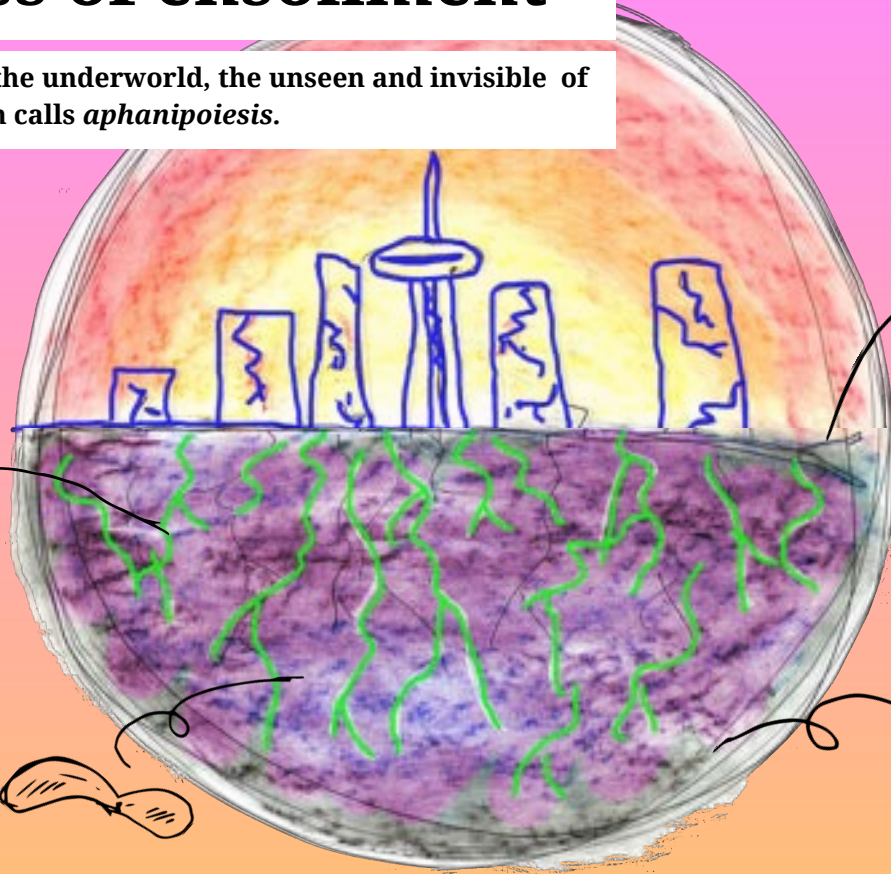

our theories of ensoilment

Seeds of wisdom to nourish the underworld, the unseen and invisible of systems -- what Nora Bateson calls *aphanipoiesis*.

“The times are urgent, let us slow down.” -- BAYO AKOMOLAFE

dancing with systems --
DONELLA MEADOWS

“What’s the point if we can’t have fun?”
-- DAVID GRAEBER



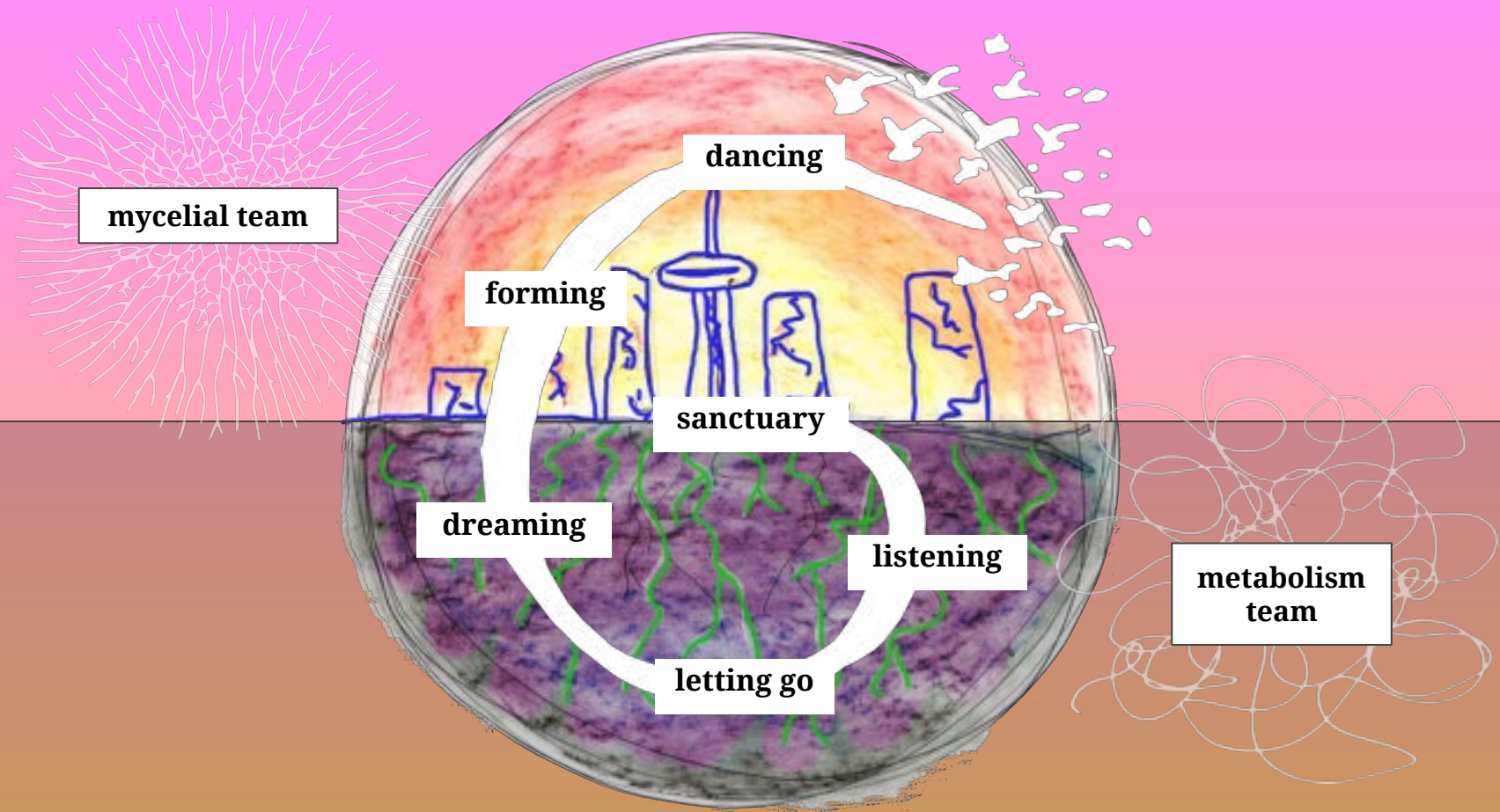
staying with the trouble -- DONNA HARAWAY

“rule a kingdom like you would fry a small fish”

-- LAO TZU

pleasure activism and emergent strategy

-- ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN



mycelial team

dancing

forming

sanctuary

dreaming

listening

letting go

metabolism team



dancing

forming

sanctuary

listening

letting go

dreaming

hidden ingredients of systems

these ingredients are also immaterial capacities and capabilities of collective transition

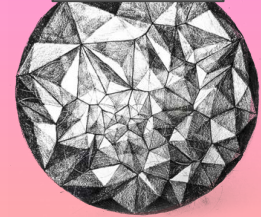
time



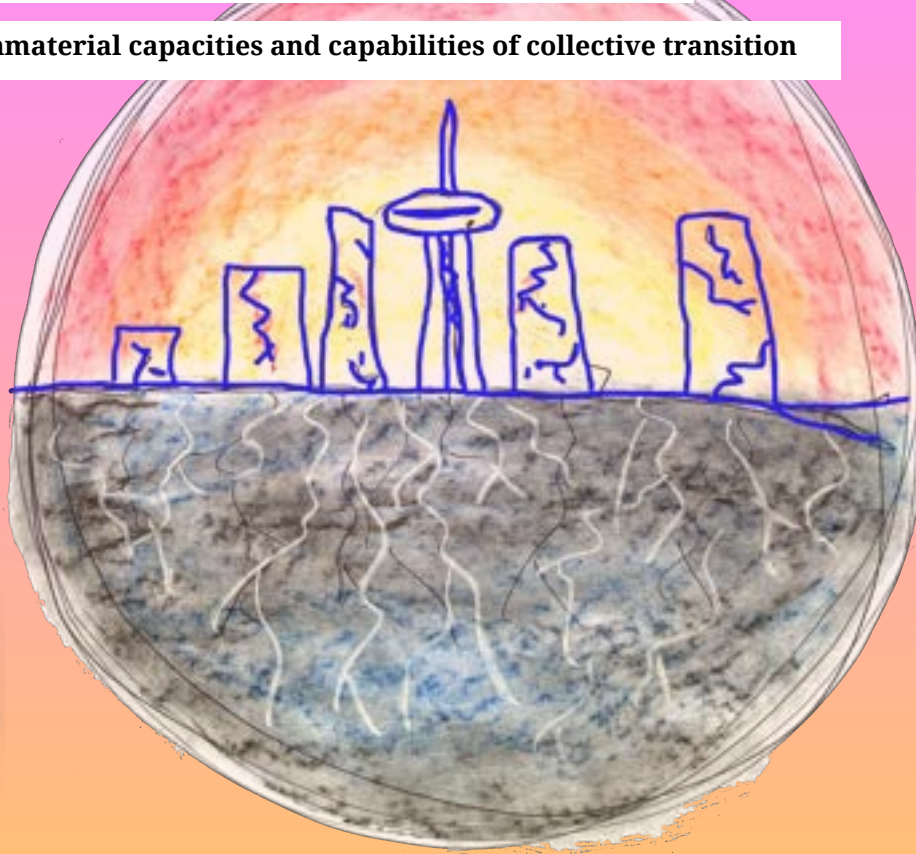
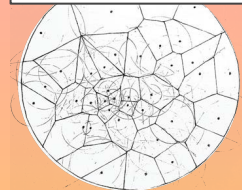
desire



trust

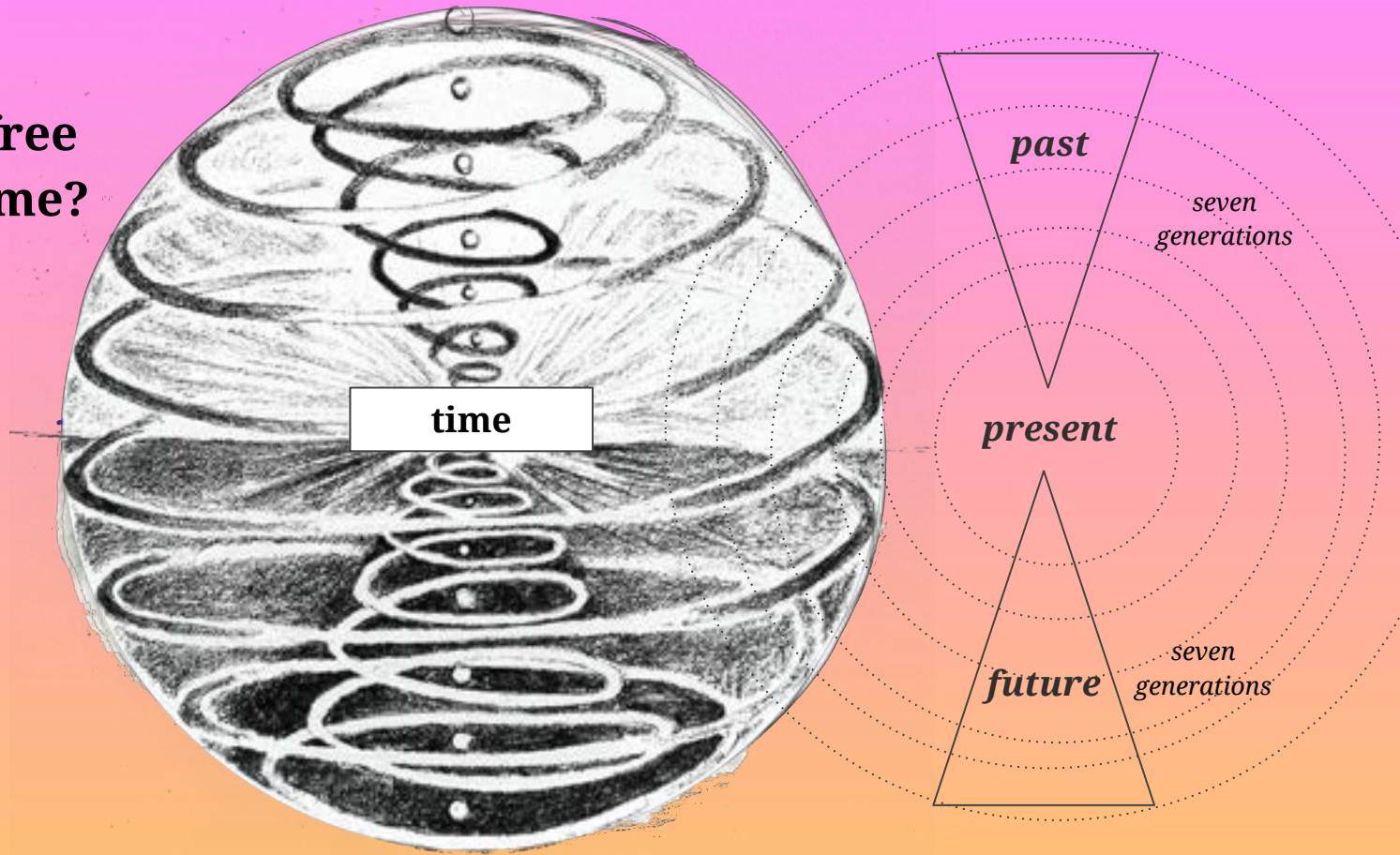


awareness



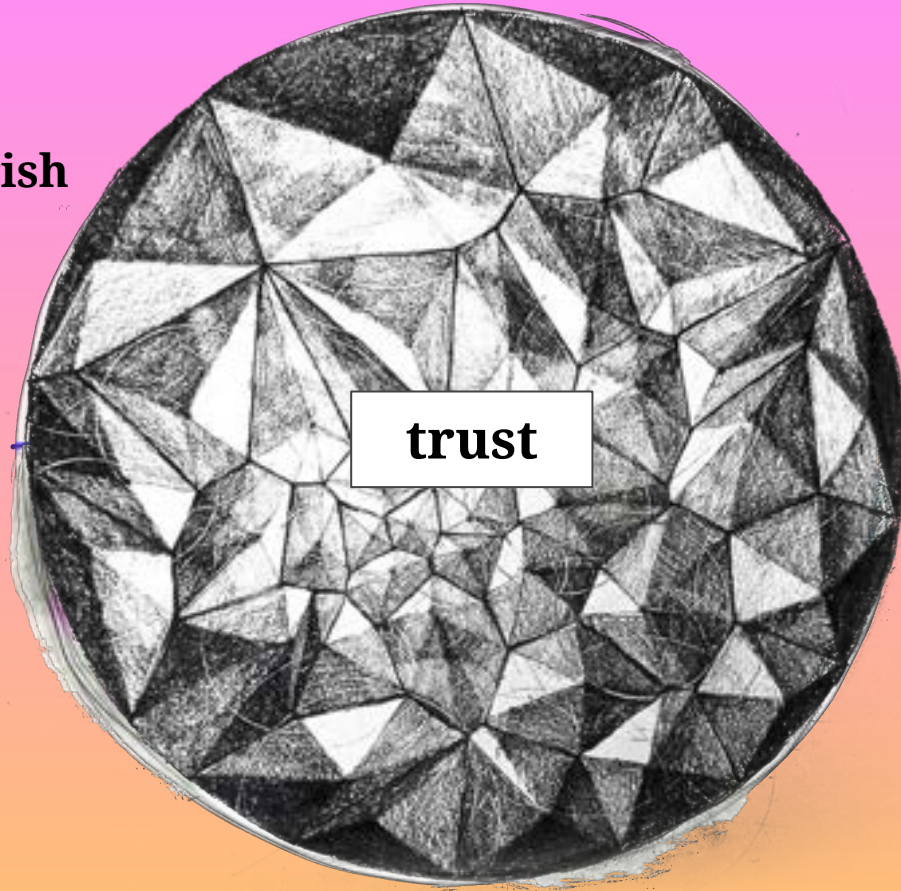
POLICY PROVOCATIONS

How can we free and enrich time?



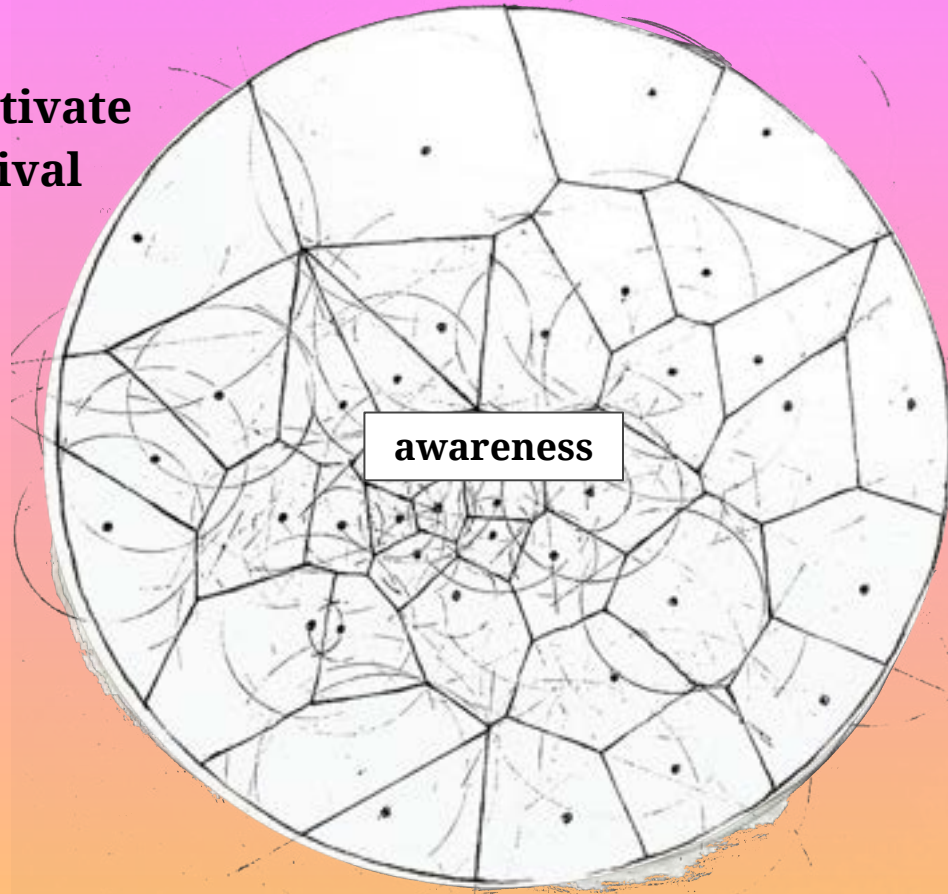
POLICY PROVOCATIONS

**How can we
build and nourish
relationships
of trust?**



POLICY PROVOCATIONS

**How do we cultivate
pluri-perspectival
awareness?**



POLICY PROVOCATIONS

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



How can we navigate and negotiate between our different desires?

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



Tara Campbell

Cheryl Hsu

