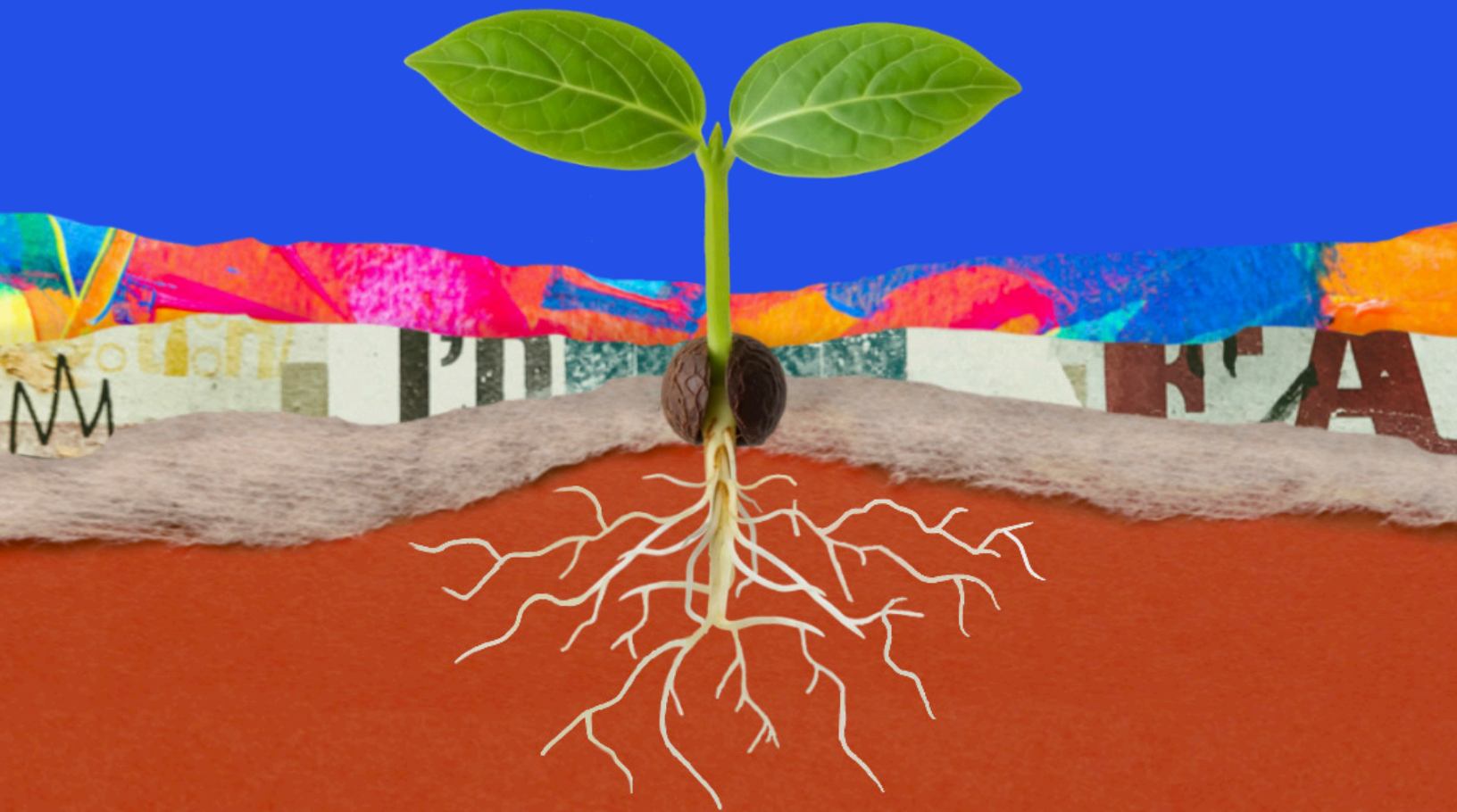


SEEDING TRANSFORMATION

Growing Imagination, Hope, and Agency Through
Embodied, Arts-Based Futures Practice



Sara Blanke & Malu Cascelli

Submitted to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Design in Strategic Foresight & Innovation

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Abstract

This research starts from the question: What conditions allow people to imagine the futures they desire to live in and feel they can act towards? Beginning from the understanding that futures-making capacities are not absent, but suppressed — by Modernity's structural forces, colonized imaginaries, fragmentation of mind from body, and a futures field that has too often reproduced these same conditions — this study explores what it takes to restore them.

Through literature review, eleven expert interviews, and two series of participatory workshops with fourteen participants, this research developed and prototyped the Germination Model, a nine-stage framework for collective futures-making grounded in embodied, arts-based, and relational approaches. This model moves from within outward, from individual reconnection to the body and mind, through the surfacing of anticipatory assumptions and the naming of desires, toward collective imagination and shared practice. The ecological metaphor grounds the approach, understanding imagination not as a cognitive skill to be taught but as a living capacity to be tended.

Workshop findings suggest that when people are supported to arrive in their bodies, feel their emotional relationship to the future, name what they desire, and imagine collectively through creative and multisensory practice, something shifts. Changes arise in what they can picture, in their relationship to hope, and in their sense of agency. Hope emerged not as an outcome, but as a renewable energy that is contagious, relational, and cultivated through collective practice.

This research listens to and lifts the voices already shaping this field, weaving them with our own to contribute a futures practice that centers the whole person, expands who gets to imagine, and understands futures-making as an act of collective care.

Keywords: *futures-making, collective imagination, embodied futures, desire-based futures, critical hope, arts-based research, futures literacy, decolonial futures, Germination Model, transformative foresight, futures workshop.*

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And to the futures that have not yet arrived but are already germinating — in communities, in bodies, in conversations happening right now in rooms across the globe — this work is offered in your direction.

Thank you. Obrigada. Merci

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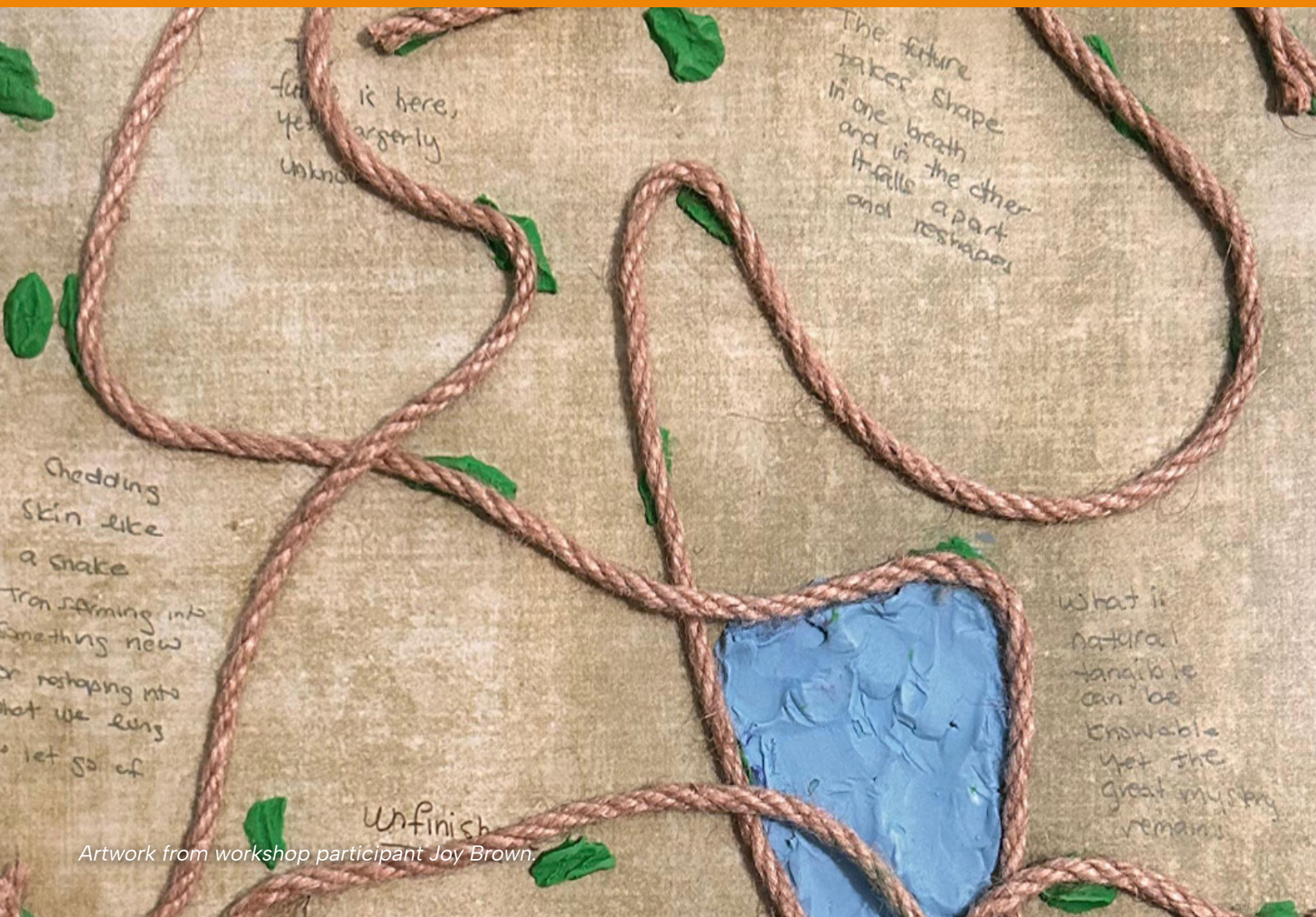
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Introduction



Artwork from workshop participant Joy Brown.

The world is undergoing unsettling transformations. An escalating climate crisis, unregulated advancements in artificial intelligence, deepening geopolitical conflicts, the erosion of minorities' rights, and the enduring legacies of colonialism and exploitation are converging into what has been named a polycrisis: the intersection of crises that collectively generate tensions and a sense of instability (World Economic Forum, 2023). In such times, envisioning the future for many communities can feel daunting, even hopeless.

There's a particular grief that comes from seeing a gap between the world that is and the world you sense it could be, the world that you see and the one communities long for. This research originates from noticing this gap. It began with a question that felt urgent and intimate: where does hope come from in such times? What allows people to imagine the futures they most desire —the futures that live in the body as longing, in community as a shared dream, in the quiet stubborn refusal to accept the present as the limit of the possible?

We live in a moment that makes these questions difficult and necessary. People are not failing to imagine different futures because they lack capacity, they are failing because the conditions for imagining have been systematically dismantled — through overwork and exhaustion, the colonization of collective imaginaries by a single story of progress, and the isolation that modernity installs as a default condition of modern life. When dreaming feels impossible, it is not because people have given up, it's because the systems are succeeding by design.

And yet people keep hoping. They keep dreaming in the margins, in the community gardens and the mutual aid networks, in the late-night conversations and the collective grief and the stubborn joy. They keep reaching toward something that does not yet fully exist but that they can feel, sometimes, in their bodies. A pull toward a world that fits more of them, that holds more of what they love, that asks less of them to disappear. It is from within this tension — between constriction and longing — that this research takes shape.

Against this backdrop of uncertainty and rapid change, futures studies and foresight have gained traction as tools for navigating uncertainty, drawing growing interest from companies, organizations, governments, and institutions. However, mainstream foresight approaches often reinforce dominant worldviews and prioritize risk management, while overlooking emotion, plurality, and relational knowledge. As Audre Lorde's (2002) powerful assertion reminds us "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*" Fundamental systems, structures and ways of thinking that uphold oppression cannot be dismantled using the same tools, ideologies, and methods (Lorde,

2002). When foresight relies on these tools, it risks producing narrow parameters of change confined within the very frameworks it claims to challenge.

Dominant foresight approaches are rooted in histories steeped in colonial, patriarchal, and single, linear perceptions of development and progress (Krishnan, 2022). The field is deeply influenced by factors such as positionality, cultural values, economic systems, and our collective capacity for imagination, factors that are often unexamined. Any future aiming for social good has to allow all people to see themselves in it, particularly those not used to seeing themselves reflected in decision-making (Krishnan, 2019). Questions of who gets to future, whose imaginations shape the visions that become plans, whose desires inform scenarios that become policy, has been growingly, but insufficiently, asked.

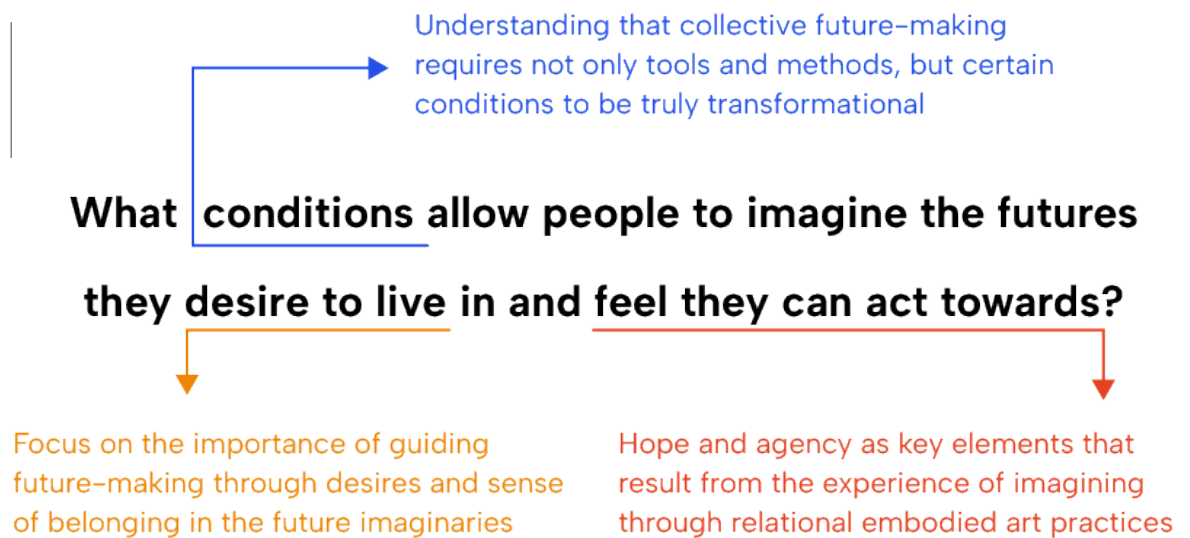
An ongoing shift is beginning to address this gap. Shermon Cruz (2025) highlights an ontological and epistemological movement that is reevaluating colonial legacies, and reclaiming local perspectives and knowledge systems. This movement, according to Cruz, referred to in decolonial and futures conversations as 'emancipatory futures', aims to dismantle deeply entrenched colonial ways of knowing that position Western concepts and visions of the future as universal standards. He elaborates that voices previously silenced, marginalized and oppressed are rapidly gaining momentum in their demand for epistemic justice. Escobar's (2018) pluriversal design paradigm reinforces this, emphasizing the need to center a pluriverse of futures rooted in cultural specificity and relationship, and underscoring that there are countless valid ways of knowing and being, now and across multiple timelines.

This research engages with this movement by interrogating the intersections of strategic foresight and futures, decolonial practice, and arts-based methodologies to reconceptualize how futures are envisioned and by whom.

Research question

The research question had its own journey through multiple iterations, starting out as “How might we use art-based approaches to imagine desire-based collective futures?.” After literature review, conversations with experts, and our empirical prototype through the workshops, it slowly moved towards: **“What conditions allow people to imagine futures they desire to live in and feel they can act towards?”**

Figure 1:
Research
question.



What motivates this research

This research emerged during a particular moment of collective grief experienced by those close to us. It was undertaken as we witnessed genocides unfolding across the globe—in Palestine, Congo, and Sudan, to name a few—the resurgence of authoritarian politics, the persecution of trans and immigrant individuals in the United States, and the ongoing interference of United States’ imperialism in Latin American and Middle Eastern lives, lands, and politics in the name of resource extraction. To conduct research on hope in such a time was part of our own search for hope amidst despair, both within ourselves and among those around us, as we confronted the immobility and numbness that many experienced as coping and survival mechanisms.

This project emerged from this urgent and personal search for other possibilities; a need to find and share pathways toward different futures with our communities. Throughout this research process, we moved through grief,

anger, sadness, and frustration with the world, and at times hopelessness about our collective capacity to regenerate our relationships with one another and more-than-human lives. We found ourselves asking: what are the stories we tell ourselves to keep moving? What do we numb ourselves with, and what would it mean to stay awake instead?

We hold a deep conviction that the current systems we inhabit are in a state of collapse and transition. The world being built in their place will be built on imagination — and we are exhausted by living inside the imagination of the few. This research is grounded in the belief that the next world must be built on the imagination of many.

Through this journey to understand how to ignite this imagination, we propose that futures-making is not primarily a cognitive practice, but an embodied, relational, and affective one. It involves the whole person: the feeling self, the sensing body, the part that grieves what has been lost and longs for what has not yet arrived. And it requires conditions: not just the right methods or the right frameworks, but the quality of the container — the safety, the trust, the permission to be present in full.

To understand this in practice, two series of participatory futures workshops were conducted. They brought together small groups of participants to explore assumptions, desires, and visions for the future through embodied practice, art-making, meditation, dialogue, and collaborative worldbuilding. These workshops gave the empirical foundation of the Germination Model for Collective Futuring, a model for how accessible, participatory, embodied arts practices activate futures-making capacities by reconnecting people to imagination, hope, emotion, and collective agency

Evidently, this research is a personal one. It emerged from the experience of caring about the world during a difficult time. From the fatigue of watching crises compound and feeling the imagination narrow in response. From the conviction that how we imagine the future matters, that the quality of our collective dreaming shapes what becomes possible, and that there is something essential and undervalued in the practices that help people dream more freely, more honestly, and together.

This research is an offering in that direction. It does not resolve the question of what futures we will build. It offers, instead, some understanding of what it takes to imagine them and some evidence that, under the right conditions, imagining can inspire something generative and sustaining: a renewed sense of agency, a quality of collective hope, and the felt knowledge that you are not alone in reaching toward something better.

To answer this, we must understand not only what constrains imagination, but also what enables it. Before we can explore either, we must understand orientations at the heart of this research: hope and its relationship with imagination and agency.

Setting the stage: hope, agency, and imagining otherwise

Hope is not a simple concept, and it is important to name at the outset how it is understood throughout this work. For Freire (2021), it is an ontological need, a fundamental precondition for social transformation, even though it's not enough alone. Hope demands anchoring in practice, in a commitment to a cycle of reflection and action oriented towards transforming oppressive conditions. This is what Freire refers to as critical hope, a hope that is not wished for, but worked toward.

What makes this movement possible is imagination. Hope, at its core, is the capacity to conceive of things being otherwise. For Bloch (1986), hope manifests in what he calls anticipatory consciousness — a distinctly human orientation toward what is not yet but could be. Where memory retreats into the past, anticipatory consciousness reaches forward, holding open the space of possibility. Bloch's concept of the "not-yet" captures this precisely: the world is genuinely unfinished, and the present contains within it the seeds of futures that have not yet come into being. Hope, in this sense, is the act of sensing and moving toward those seeds.

Although his articulation is from a positive psychology and individual perspective, Snyder's hope theory adds structural clarity arguing that hope requires both pathways (imagining how to get to a desired future) and agency thinking (believing you can take that path) (Snyder, 2002). Without this, imagining that things could be different collapses into optimism or a breakdown of the core of hope in mobilizing action. The animating force of hope depends on both the vision and the sense that one can move toward it. Bauer (2024) also highlights the role of agency within hope, distinguishing between a passive hope, anchored by external forces or wishful thinking, and active hope which refers to one's own agency or the agency of others. Crucially, hoping with agency does not mean believing you have complete control; it means acting in the face of acknowledged uncertainty, be it because of your own specific limitations, general human limitations, or concrete experiences of powerlessness in relation to the power of others (Bauer, 2024). It is hope that moves us, even when the outcome is not guaranteed.

Crucially, this framing also implies that hope is not a feeling but a cognitive and volitional orientation, something practiced and chosen rather than passively experienced. Abolitionist organizer Mariame Kaba (2018) tells us that hope is a discipline, cultivated daily through action even in the face of grief, fear, or uncertainty. Hope does not require the absence of other challenging feelings; it can coexist with them and often must.

This understanding of hope as choice rather than emotional state is what makes it available even in the most difficult conditions, and what connects it back to Freire's insistence that transformation requires active, practiced commitment rather than wishful waiting.

Together, these perspectives converge on the understanding of hope that guided this research: hope as an ontological need, inseparable from the capacity to imagine different futures and from the felt agency to work toward them. This is not a passive or wishful hope, but one that requires continual practice, what Freire describes as utopia's necessary movement of denunciation and annunciation. This movement reinforces the idea that the future is not a destination. As we move towards it, new desires, needs, and problems emerge. Futuring is an ever-shifting activity, especially as we and the world shift with it.

This framing positions imagination as conditions for action. Understanding how these capacities might emerge, and what constrains or activates them, is essential to our research.

Researchers' positionality

In conducting research that supports and aligns with decolonization, it is essential for researchers to acknowledge their positionality and privilege. Positionality refers to the various intersecting social identities — gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, dis/ability, geographical location, and others — that shape how we understand and engage with the world, including what we know, our attitudes and perspectives, and our work practices (Homan, 2025). Articulating one's positionality is an act of reflexivity — it involves considering power dynamics, biases, and personal experiences, and re-dressing inequitable power relations, particularly for those from colonizer/settler backgrounds in relation to historically marginalized researchers (Homan, 2023).

As individuals, researchers occupy multiple identities, fluid and dialogical in nature, context-situated, and that inform the positions from which they engage with and make meaning of the world (Acevedo et al., 2015). Here, we'll identify the intersection of identities that are the most relevant to the work we present in this research.

**Malu
Caselli**
(she/her)

I am a light-skinned Latina woman of settler European descent — Italian and Portuguese — from the land of Pindorama, colonially known as Brazil. Since 2022, I have been residing on Turtle Island, more specifically in Tkaronto (Toronto). My birth name is Maria Luísa de Carvalho Caselli de Azevedo and I identify as a queer cisgender woman, middle-class, and able-bodied.

I hold a Bachelor's degree in Product and Graphic Design from the University of Brasília, Brazil, and have been working as a Service Designer since 2018. Coming from a design background, I am conscious of how the field has historically drawn on ethnographic and anthropological methods for commercial purposes, often without the critical analysis that ethical participant engagement demands. As such, I am on an ongoing journey of unlearning and relearning how to conduct ethical research and facilitate co-creation spaces.

I recognize that my presence here, as a non-Indigenous person from a Latin American settler-colonial ancestry, carries historical responsibilities that shape how I engage with the world, the land I live in, the power I hold, and therefore the research I conduct. With Portuguese as my native language and navigating my master's and research in English, I am also aware that language is not a neutral vessel: some knowledges, feelings, and ways of being are more or less accessible depending on the language through which

they are expressed , and that something is always lost and something always gained in translation. My origin also motivates me to bring in more references from the Global South, particularly South American voices, which offer rich perspectives for the North American academic context.

As this research centers art and embodiment, it feels important to also name my relationship with both. Art has been present in my life for as long as I can remember. Growing up with two musician parents and being encouraged to explore visual arts, music, and dance from an early age, creative practices have always been very present and a way of expressing myself. Yet as a woman raised in a Catholic context, I was also taught to be estranged from my own body — to see it as a temple, but also as something treacherous, a carnal temptation, its desires and emotions flattened into moralized categories of good and bad. My relationship with embodiment has therefore been one of slow and ongoing reclamation, most significantly through dance, movement, and spiritual practices, as well as through somatic therapy and Internal Family Systems work. Dancing has become such a big aspect of that journey that I cannot imagine life without movement and music. Parallel to that, I am in the ongoing process of demoralizing my relationship with my emotions — learning to receive anger, sadness, jealousy, and grief not as failures, but as directives: as information my body is offering me about myself, my relationships, the world and my place within it.

It is from this location — as a designer, an immigrant, a dancer, a queer woman, a Brazilian, a Latina, someone learning to trust her body again — that I approach this research on hope, imagination, embodiment, and art.

Sara Blanke
(she/her) *I am a cisgendered able-bodied woman of white settler ancestry, fluent in French and English. I grew up middle class, in a home with my parents and my sister, and surrounded by extended family. I am infinitely grateful to have spent so much time with my grandparents. I spent these formative years in Ottawa, Ontario, on lands I understood only through the lens of colonial design. It wasn't until later that I learned this place is the unceded, unsurrendered territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg people. Learning this was the beginning of a longer journey. I am still learning how to build relationship with this territory, as well as with the land of the Dish with One Spoon Treaty on which I currently reside, to understand the histories I was not taught, and to center Indigenous stories and teachings as a part of how I relate to the natural world. It is a commitment I carry forward, knowing it will this learning will never end and will require time, deep listening, and humility.*

I hold a Bachelor of Social Sciences from the University of Ottawa, and much of my education has been grounded in Western knowledge systems. I am learning to recognize the limits of that training and actively seek out other ways of knowing and being. For the past ten years, I have worked in the non-profit sector, work that has taught me about care, community, and the realities of systems that both support and constrain people.

While I consider myself able-bodied, changes in my health and the shifting sensations in my body have pushed me into a kind of personal research practice over the last few years. I found myself gathering stories, tracking patterns, piecing together experiences in order to communicate them to healthcare professionals, trying to translate what I was feeling into something understandable to others.

This journey has involved numbers, measurements, and data, but it has also required something quieter, more subtle: noticing. Listening to and respecting the whispers. Trusting that the patterns I sensed were real, meaningful, and worth following. Through this process, I've gained a different kind of awareness that is deeper than I could've expected. I'm often surprised by how far paying attention can take me. How something small, almost insignificant, can open into an insight that shifts everything I thought I knew about my own body.

I feel proud when I catch these moments. Proud of the part of me that is learning (and unlearning) how to listen. Proud of the body that keeps sharing information, even when I don't yet know how to interpret it. This journey of noticing – of body wisdom, intuition, and deeper knowing – has changed me. This personal transformation feels deeply connected to the heart of this research: the belief that futures work must make space for the quiet signals, the truths between the cracks, and the forms of knowing that Modernity teaches us to ignore. I am grateful to have explore that connection, both personally and through this project.

Methodology: How We Approached Our Work



Artwork from workshop participant Mariam S. Ukaria.



**We cannot
remove ourselves
from our world in
order to examine it.**

Shawn Wilson (2008)

Finding our footing: ontological and epistemological foundations

Research is never neutral. Every approach carries assumptions about what exists, what can be known, and who gets to know it. Before describing what we did, we believe it's important to name what shaped how we did it. We wish to share the commitments, beliefs, and perspectives that guided decisions all along the way.

Transformative paradigm

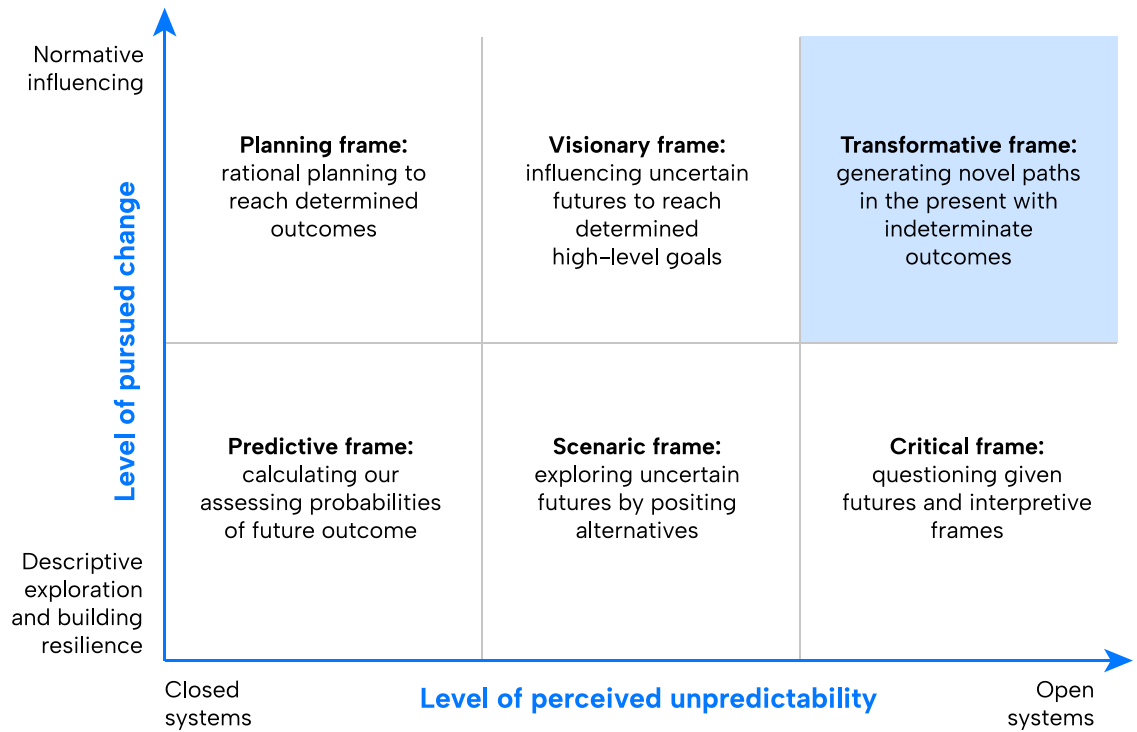
Research paradigms are a set of underlying beliefs and assumptions upon which research is based. They guide researchers' actions, how knowledge is produced, what counts as evidence, and the purpose of the inquiry (Wilson, 2008). This research is situated within a transformative paradigm, understood as an engaged, politically and socially responsible enterprise, with the power to transform and emancipate (Leavy, 2023). This paradigm positions the research itself as a site of change, where the process of research is inseparable from its political and social implications. From the start, the intent was to explore what might have a transformative impact on people's capacity to hope, imagine, and influence futures.

This paradigm also aligns directly with what Minkkinen, Auffermann, and Ahokas (2019) describe as the transformative frame within foresight, one of six foresight frames distinguished by two dimensions: the level of perceived unpredictability and the level of pursued change. As shown in Figure 1, the transformative frame sits at the intersection of high unpredictability and high pursuit of change. Unlike predictive or planning frames that seek to forecast or rationally steer toward defined outcomes, the transformative frame focuses on *"expanding the scope of possibilities and generating novel paths in the present without defining future outcomes"* (Minkkinen et al., 2019).

This frame *"challenges traditional notions of foresight"*, and it is even likely that some practitioners do not consider it as foresight (Minkkinen et al., 2019). It blurs the boundaries between foresight and societal change-making (Minkkinen et al., 2019), and this blurred boundary is exactly where this research lives. From its transformative standpoint, this work is oriented towards the present as much as the future: toward transforming how people understand their own capacity to act and influence desired futures.

Therefore, the transformative research paradigm and the transformative foresight frame are not only compatible, but mutually reinforcing and highlight the space in which this research operated: the synergy between futures studies and social transformation. The decision to position this research in the transformative paradigm, both in research and foresight, is a political and ethical commitment to research that takes seriously the structural conditions that constrain imagination and agency, that centers the knowledge of non-experts, and that understands the act of imagining otherwise as itself a form of transformation. This framing aligns directly with the current social and political context, as Minkkinen et al. (2019) affirm: highly turbulent times may demand critical and transformative outlooks.

Figure 2: Six foresight frames (Minkkinen, Auffermann, and Ahokas, 2019)



Principles and beliefs

The following principles and beliefs were active commitments we made in this research, serving as a lens or benchmark at each step of the way. They shaped every practical decision that followed, how the workshops were structured and facilitated, what methods were used and how participants were invited to engage with them, and how findings were gathered and interpreted.

The future is not fixed.

At the heart of this research is a belief that the future is genuinely open. It is not inevitable, nor predetermined; rather, it is unfinished. Bloch (1986) calls this the *“not yet”*, the idea that the present contains within it real possibilities that haven’t yet come into being. The future is open but not empty. It grows from where we are, from the conditions, relationships, actions, and desires that exist in the now. That belief is what makes the question at the centre of this research worth asking.

There is no singular future, no single way of knowing.

We are oriented toward what the Zapatista movement calls *un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos* — *“a world where many worlds fit”* a vision that underpins pluriversal thinking. Not the vision of a better future handed down from above, but many futures, each rooted in the knowledge, desires, and experiences of different communities. Smith (1999) shows how research itself has been part of destroying and marginalizing ways of knowing, treating Western perspectives as universal while invalidating others.

Different communities don’t just have different opinions about the future. They inhabit genuinely different worlds, shaped by different histories, different relationships to land and power, and different ways of making sense of time. Any research about futures has to take that seriously rather than assume one community’s experience is the same for all.

This is both an ontological and epistemological position involving whose knowledge counts and how it is gathered. We come to this work as a non-Indigenous team, and we are conscious that Smith’s (1999) arguments were written in response to the specific harms Western research has done to Indigenous peoples and knowledge systems. We draw on her critique, taking with us the lessons around what it means to do research that genuinely serves rather than extracts.

Everyone can imagine differently, but not everyone has the same access to that capacity.

We started from the conviction that the capacity to dream beyond the present is not a specialist skill or privilege for few. The conditions that suppress imagination are structural, not personal. They are produced by dominant institutions and narratives with an interest in making the present, and its projected future, feel permanent and inevitable. This suppression is also collective. When communities are cut off from shared imaginative space, the sense that change is possible together erodes.

Arts and the body as ways of knowing.

We believe there are multiple ways of knowing that can only be activated through art or deep connection with the body. Body wisdom, emotional wisdom, and intuition each carry their own intelligence, holding desires, information, and truths that the mind cannot always reach alone. Art and deep connection with the body are the conditions through which these ways of knowing become available.

Knowledge comes from relationships, not just methods.

We hold that knowledge doesn't exist independently, waiting to be extracted through the correct technique. We believe knowledge emerges in relationships, whether between researchers and participants, between participants themselves, even between the spaces, practices, and beings — human and more-than-human. Wilson (2008) argues that research conducted outside of genuine relationships produces a thinner kind of knowledge. Robinson and Oldham (n.d.) extend this into futures work specifically by articulating that imagination infrastructures need to encompass the embodied, and even the spiritual, to open up the kinds of knowledge that futures work requires.

This is an epistemological commitment, shaping what we count as evidence and how it was gathered. Wilson (2008) describes research as ceremony, an act that carries responsibility into the relationships from which it emerges and to which it must return. We draw from this framing with care, as a reminder that research is relational and that those relationships are part of what determines the legitimacy of the research.

Hope is practiced.

Freire (2021) describes hope as an ontological need, a fundamental orientation toward the world as changeable. It functions as epistemology too, as without hope, inquiry stays within the limited scope of what already exists.

With hope, you can reach toward what isn't yet. We understand that hope is not something that happens to you but something that you practice (Snyder, 2002; Kaba, 2021; Bauer, 2024).

The tools of research should be open to everyone.

Methodological gatekeeping is its own form of power. If the tools of inquiry are accessible only to the trained insider, then the knowledge they produce will only reflect the insiders' questions and perspectives. Illich (1973) called for convivial tools, where ways of working that people can understand, adapt, and carry with them are essential, moving away from a dependency on external experts. It reflects a deeper consistency across our position, that if we truly believe that futures belong to communities and not specialists, then the tools through which we explore them must be held openly too. In practice, our intention with this work is to be open with the methods, pathways, decisions, and tools we used and created throughout this journey. This aligns with broader efforts in futures studies to open up foresight practices beyond experts, supporting the development of futures literacy: the capacity to imagine and engage with alternative futures (Miller, 2018).

Reflexivity is an integral and continuous practice in research.

This research is situated. It speaks from particular bodies, in a particular city, at a particular moment, and is shaped by our own worldviews, cultural backgrounds, experiences of power and its absence, areas of clarity, and blind spots. Acknowledging that research is always filtered through the researcher's lens, we treated reflexivity as an ongoing practice— impacting how we approached every interview, workshop, and interpretive choice.

In practice, being conscious of the power we hold as researchers meant checking our assumptions, staying attentive to the dynamics of who was in the room, what we were asking of people, and how our presence shaped what participants felt able to share. It meant making decisions with care about how to engage, interpret, and represent what participants and interviewees offered. We held their contributions as gifts, and that orientation required us to keep returning to the question of whose interests the research was serving and whether the design honoured the people who made it possible. We shared this report with participants and interviewees before finalizing it, in the hope that they could identify places where their voices might have been misinterpreted or where the narrative differed from their intentions. Working as a group was also crucial to our practice of reflexivity: we constantly stayed in conversation about what we might be assuming, missing, or interpreting.

Tools and methods

This research benefited from a range of different tools and methods, and most importantly, adapted as we learned through the process, always guided by curiosity, care, and a belief that the research would show us the path forward. Our approach drew on a rich overlap of qualitative and art-based research (ABR) methods to understand the question at hand. To guide the overall sequence of the work, we used the Double Diamond as a process framework: a way of moving through cycles of expansion and convergence into a pathway forward. As methods of information finding we used literature review, qualitative interviews with experts, and art-based workshops to prototype our proposed model. Other tools were used for sense-making, such as systems maps and Causal Layered Analysis (CLA).

Double diamond: cycles of divergent and convergent thinking

First developed by the British Design Council in 2003, the Double Diamond describes the design process as a sequence of divergent and convergent thinking, represented as two diamonds. The model is a simplified representation of the key phases of exploring possibilities and defining a pathway forward. The framework maps four phases to get from your original question to an answer/ solution: discovery, definition, development, and delivery.

We worked with a revised version of the model proposed by Nessler (2016), which articulates in more detail the details of each stage. This felt truer to our experience: the process was not a linear path forward, but a continuous journey of expanding understanding and deciding what to carry with us. This revision specially called our attention for representing the internal diamonds that exist within the two traditional diamonds, and for the loop in the Delivery phase, which visually acknowledges the iterative nature of this part of the process. These elements capture the non-linearity of the process of this research and its cycles of iteration.

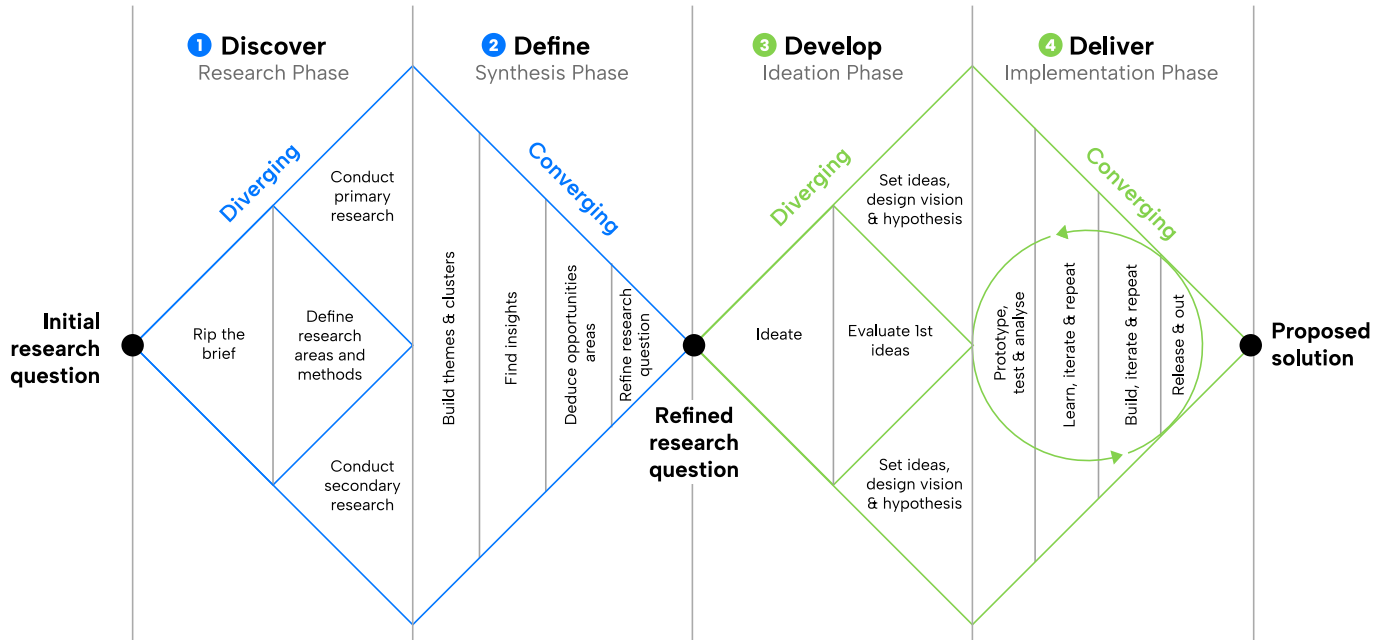


Figure 3: Revamped Double Diamond (Nessler, 2016)

Phase	Questions	Methods	
		Primary	Secondary
1 Discover Research Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What’s the current state of the futures studies landscapes? How might we use art-based approaches to imagine desire-based collective futures? What are the practices and conditions that enable communities to co-create liberatory futures? How do different cultural conceptions of time influence practices of imagining and building futures? How do communities foster hope amid despair? 	Expert interviews	Literature review
2 Define Synthesis Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the specific gap in how futures work currently engages collective imagination? Who is underserved by existing foresight practices — and why? What would a desire-based, embodied, participatory approach to futures need to do or be? What values and conditions must ground this work? 	Expert interviews	Systems mapping Affinity mapping Literature review
3 Develop Ideation Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How might accessible, participatory, embodied arts practices activate futures-making capacities in people? What conditions must be in place to allow people to uncover their ability to imagine, hope and feel agency about the future? 		Literature review
4 Deliver Implementation Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What changes when people practice imagining together through bodies and art? Do people seem more hopeful? Are they able to imagine more or different? Were they surprised by what they imagined? How has their relationship to the future changed? How do different methods unlock different layers of creativity or imagination? 	Prototyping Workshops	Literature review

Table 1: Summary of phases, methods and guiding questions.

Literature review and desk research

Literature review and desk research informed the theoretical understanding of this research, but they were never a static starting point. We returned to them repeatedly, letting new questions and insights pull us to a new reading that would inform our understanding and open new pathways of exploration.

The terrain we explored was deliberately wide, encompassing topics such as foresight, futures studies, decolonial futures, desire-based design, participatory methods, arts-based foresight approaches, speculative and critical design, philosophy and psychology of hope, and futures imagining movements, such as Afrofuturism, Hopepunk, Solarpunk, and Indigenous futurism.

The constant challenge of such a project is that there's always more to learn and study. Many works informed the one we write about, and there are many more that could have been influences to deepen our exploration. It was a constant reminder that we had to understand our time and scope limitations. We recognize that there are many theories, disciplines, methods that have synergy with our work but that haven't crossed our paths within this time-frame. This work is situated, but it is far from complete.

Expert interviews

To deepen our understanding of the current futures studies landscape, the role of arts-based methods in collective imagination, and the diverse worldviews informing these practices, we conducted 11 expert interviews. These semi-structured exploratory conversations helped us ground the research within the broader theoretical and practical contexts.

Here, it's important to ground ourselves in how we define 'expertise'. Expertise is often defined by formal credentials and institutional authority and that definition has systemically excluded ranges of expertise outside the Western academic domain. The people we spoke with are experts in the sense that they have given significant sustained attention to particular domains, through practice, lived experience, artistic inquiry, research, or scholarship. Through this process, they have developed a nuanced, hard-won understanding. We hold the word "expert" lightly, as a shorthand for deeply knowledgeable, thoughtful, and willing to share, not as a gatekeeping term that elevates some voices and diminishes others.

We had rich conversations with academics, artists, facilitators, foresight practitioners, and a psychotherapist. We attempted to curate a spectrum of

expertise that reflects different positionalities, geographies, and knowledge systems, both dominant and historically excluded. Participants were based primarily in North America, with one artist joining us from Brazil. Their identities spanned different ethnicities, genders, and nationalities. We included their bios in the next section, so you can get to know more about them and their work in their own words.

After these conversations, we coded their interviews, synthesized the findings through systems maps and affinity mapping exercises to surface key recurring themes. The insights — particularly around embodied, somatic, spiritual, participatory, and art-based approaches to futures work — became the primary influences shaping our workshop design.

These conversations were extremely rich, and we are not able to cover the depth of all the knowledge and wisdom shared so generously with us within this report. Even though not everything shared will be explicitly present within these pages, these conversations deeply impacted our approach, pathways and ourselves throughout this process.

The experts who shaped this research¹:

**Nikolas
Badminton**

is a futurist speaker, foresight thought leader, and Chief Futurist at futurist.com. Over his career, he has partnered with global organizations — from leading think tanks and consultancies to high-growth tech teams — to drive transformation through strategic foresight, speculative futures, and creative innovation. Nikolas released in 2023 his first book ‘Facing our futures’ where he provides executives and organizations with the foundations for future design and the tools to imagine new futures, create bolder visions, anticipate unforeseen risks, and strengthen strategic planning. He’s currently working on his second book ‘The Hope Engineer’s Playbook’, to be released in September 2026.

**Julienne
DeVita**
(*she/her*)

is a design futures practitioner and founder of Liminal, blending strategic foresight, systems thinking, and design methodologies to help organizations think into the future. She has partnered with institutions including the OECD, EY, the City of Houston, and Autodesk, and teaches at Parsons School of Design, where her research explores the intersection of creativity, technology, and long-term thinking. In 2024–25, she was awarded a research grant to create an AI Design Ethics Toolkit. She is co-founder of the Embodied Futures Collective, a community of practitioners exploring change through movement, togetherness, and presence.

¹The experts listed here are only the ones that wanted to be attributed for their contribution.

- Rodney Frederickson** is a Somatic Futurist, Design Provocateur and Creative Facilitator. The thread beneath all of it, as he describes it, is alchemy — a love for the liminal spaces between disparate things. His noteworthy creation, Somatic Futures, was born from his explorations and experiments in the alchemy of Art, Design and Futures. Somatic Futures is a reflexive practice exploring how the body shapes—and is shaped by—the futures we breathe, make, and imagine.
- Nicci Obert** (*she/her*) explores the theory and practice of prosocial futures, integrating strategic foresight with transition design to support community resilience and social innovation. She has extensive professional experience in both higher education and the nonprofit sector in grant writing, project development, and high-level program management. Nicci holds an MS in Foresight from the University of Houston, where she currently serves as Research Director for the Foresight program.
- Emily Empel** is a spiritual futurist and the founder of Advance Notice, a Toronto-based vision studio and dreaming collective devoted to guiding organizations toward the futures they hope to inhabit, in ways that feel alive, unexpected, and easy to live into being. Her practice sits at the edges of the field: centering the everyday and the mundane over the bleeding edge or exceptional, holding the tension between the current moment and emerging desire rather than parsing them apart, and translating a desired reality into a lived practice rather than a distant wish. Emily's practice has been forged inside institutions, not despite them. She began her career on a long-term preparedness project for the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), before joining The Walt Disney Company as their Resident Workforce Futurist and later leading the foresight practice at Idea Couture, an innovation consulting firm. Through Advance Notice, Emily and her collaborators continue to self-fund original research into the futures they feel are most under-explored—including collective wellbeing and death, grief, and discomfort.
- Zan Chandler** (*she/her*) has been working in futures for over 20 years, and across public, private, and nonprofit sectors on projects spanning transportation, municipal planning, arts and cultural industries, and education. Since 2017, she has taught in OCAD University's Strategic Foresight and Innovation program. Her current work at Policy Horizons focuses on building foresight capacity within public service. Zan's practice sits at the intersection of foresight, systems thinking, and design — animated by a deep commitment to centering marginalized communities and fostering decolonial, trauma-responsive, and regenerative futures.

- Skawennati** (*she/her*) is an internationally exhibiting multimedia artist best known for her online works and machinima depicting possible peaceful futures in which all beings thrive. She is co-director of Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC), a research-creation studio-lab based at Concordia University's Milieux Institute, dedicated to ensuring Indigenous presence in the digital worlds we are building. A forerunner of Indigenous Futurism, Skawennati has received several honours, including a Meritorious Service Medal in 2025 for founding Montreal's first Indigenous artist-run centre, daphne; a 2022 Hewlett 50 Arts Commission; an Honorary Doctorate from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design; and a 2011 Eiteljorg Contemporary Art Fellowship. Her work has been exhibited and collected internationally. She is Kanien'kehá:ka from Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Territory.
- Jason Edward Lewis** is a digital media theorist, poet, and software designer of Hawaiian and Samoan descent. He holds the University Research Chair in Computational Media and the Indigenous Future Imaginary at Concordia University, where he is also Professor of Computation Arts. Lewis co-directs Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC), which includes Abundant Intelligences and the Skins Workshops on Aboriginal Storytelling and Video Game Design; as well as the Indigenous Futures Research Centre. His work explores computation as both a creative and a cultural material. Lewis is deeply committed to developing intriguing new forms of expression by working on conceptual, critical, and technical levels simultaneously.
- Karlie Chalmers** (*they/them*) is an Occupational Therapist and Psychotherapist trained across rehabilitative and psychotherapeutic modalities working at SickKids Center for Community Mental Health and Cambrian Counselling and Wellness in Toronto, Canada. An ally specialized in supporting the disability, neurodivergent, queer, polyamorous, kink, and mad pride communities, they encourage self-discovery, community care, and a radical refusal of any standard that asks us to disappear or die trying. By using a therapeutic process that is playful, non-pathologizing, and accessible, Karlie supports people in building interpersonal and intrapersonal relational security in the service of moving towards a robust capacity to be with whatever unfolds.
- Juma Pariri** (*they/she*) is an Indigenous activist nomad based in Abya Yala (colonially known as Latin America). Gender-defying and "inhuman", they listen to forest secrets, and collectively conjure performagical actions for liberation of land and beings. She also is part of the Organization of Kariri People of Serra do Catolé (Ceará/BRAZIL), an associate researcher at the Hemispheric Encounters Network (YorkU/CANADA) and is developing the postdoctoral project "Organicizing Technology: Reclaiming Indigenous Intelligences through Artistic Research", within the project Connected Minds: Neural and Machine Systems for a Healthy, Just Society (York University/CAN).

Workshops: prototyping our model

The workshops were where the research became embodied. They were a prototype of the learnings that took place through literature review and expert interviews, bridging the gap from theoretical learning towards practical.

We conducted two series of workshops, two sessions in each series, with a total of 14 participants across both groups. The first group had 6 participants; the second had 8, although 3 participants weren't able to attend both sessions of their respective series. Participants represented a range of demographic backgrounds in terms of gender identity (including women, men, and gender non-conforming and non-binary people), ethnicity (including Black, African, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and European descent), and age (predominantly 25–54). While not explicitly discussed, we observed that the majority held similar political orientations, which we noted as a potential influence on group dynamics and imaginative range.

The intent of the workshops was to explore whether participatory creative practices help “everyday people” (non-practitioners) build comfort with uncertainty, activate embodied ways of knowing, and restore belief that their actions can shape livable futures. We were interested in what changes when people practice imagining together through their bodies and art? Our guiding question across workshops was: how might accessible, participatory, embodied arts practices activate futures-making capacities?

Guided by this inquiry, the workshops were where we applied Art-based research (ABR)² as a method of investigation, understanding art as a powerful means of expression and exploration. ABR has the potential to offer unexpected insights, tap into knowledge that would otherwise remain inaccessible, forge connections between individual experiences and larger systems, and to hold open multiplicity in meaning (Leavy, 2025). Due to our somatic exploration of people's relationship to the future and imagination, art was an important element in creating space to explore multiple ways of knowing. Additionally, Lehtikoinen and Tuittila (2023) found that art-based approaches in futures workshops facilitate nonverbal expression of ideas and emotions, contributing to more holistic and imaginative explorations. And that the multimodality of artistic methods creates more inclusive futures spaces, honouring multiple intelligences, learning styles, and commu-

² Art-based research (ABR) is a transdisciplinary approach that combines artistic methods and practices across all phases of inquiry, treating art-making itself as a mode of knowing (Leavy, 2025). Its forms are many and not limited to: literary, performative, visual, audiovisual, multimedia, multimethod (Leavy, 2025). What they share is their ability to surface different ways of knowing and expressing that language alone cannot.

nication modes (Lehikoinen and Tuittila, 2023, Gardner, 2000). Seppälä et al (2021) expand this argument by sharing the potential of artistic methods in challenging extractive research norms and cultivating the imagination of more just futures. Understanding art’s potential, we positioned it as a critical element within the research, allowing participants to tap into different ways of knowing, processing and meaning-making about the future and their role in shaping it.

The workshop structure also drew on UNESCO’s Futures Literacy Laboratories (FLL) framework and the Futures Literacy Toolbox developed by Plurality University (U+), Youthwatch, and BrusselAvenir. Both emerged from years of experimentation with futures literacy across diverse audiences. We adapted and extended these frameworks through an explicitly arts-based lens — using movement, making, and creative practice to activate multiple ways of knowing and holding space for grief and hope, difficulty and possibility, together.

Every structural choice in the workshops was made with care:

- **Small cohort size to allow for deep engagement and relationship-building.** Keeping groups small helped create space for individuals to participate at their pace and comfort, to share vulnerably, and to foster the kind of slow trust-building that this work depends on. On the other side, a smaller setting also allows us, as facilitators, more capacity to support participants and maintain a collaborative environment.
- **Two sessions per group, separated by a week.** The full arc of the work couldn’t be compressed into a single gathering without losing something essential or being overwhelming for participants and facilitators. Two sessions let participants sit with what had emerged, notice what shifted in the intervening week, and arrive the second time carrying that new awareness.
- **Space for iteration between groups.** Running two separate cohorts was itself a research decision. The first group allowed us to test, observe, and gather feedback; the second allowed us to refine and deepen. This iteration enabled more experimentation with each cohort, given that we could learn from its reception and adapt for the next workshop.

Embodying the research: allowing it to change you

We also tried, as researchers, to live the research we were making. Rodney Frederickson wisely advised us to also practice what we expected participants to feel in the workshop. He invited us to notice how even the simplest of actions, done with awareness, can shift something within you. Frederickson put it plainly in our interview: *“Notice — not only what’s emerging as you’re creating, but also how you are changing along the way.”*

Embodying the research took different forms for each of us — clown classes, dance classes, festivals, communal events like Brightside (an interactive world-building experiment inviting reflection, connection, movement, and play), Maracatu, capoeira, conversations with friends and family, yoga, meditation, journaling, and reflective walks across the city. They were all ways we were activating our different ways of knowing to connect with our emotional and body wisdom.

Throughout the 8 months of this research, our noticing shifted, changing what we saw and how we moved through the world. As Wilson (2008) writes: *“If your research hasn’t changed you as a person, you haven’t done it right.”*

Limitations

Every research project carries the marks of its conditions: the time available, the resources in hand, the choices made about who is in the room, and who is conducting the research.

Time and resources

The total research unfolded in eight months with limited time and funding. More time and resources would have enabled deeper analysis, greater iteration of the proposed model, and a more thorough engagement with the breadth of literature that touches this work.

Sample size and participants mix

Our workshop cohorts were small by design, but this also meant limited reach. The majority of participants fell within the 25–44 age range and held broadly similar political orientations, which likely shaped the imaginative terrain of the sessions in ways we can only partially account for. While we had

meaningful diversity in gender identity, ethnicity, and background, European-descended participants were still the majority. Workshops were held in person in Toronto, which created barriers for participation based on location, mobility, and physical access. Future iterations would benefit from broader geographic reach, greater age and diversity of identities. We also wonder how the model would work with intergenerational cohorts, including children and elders imagining together.

Expert positionality and selection bias

Experts were mostly selected through our networks and cold-reached out to others with significant influence in the space. This reach was limited, which also excluded other frameworks of practice and was limited to the researchers' languages: French, English and Portuguese.

Measurement and evaluation.

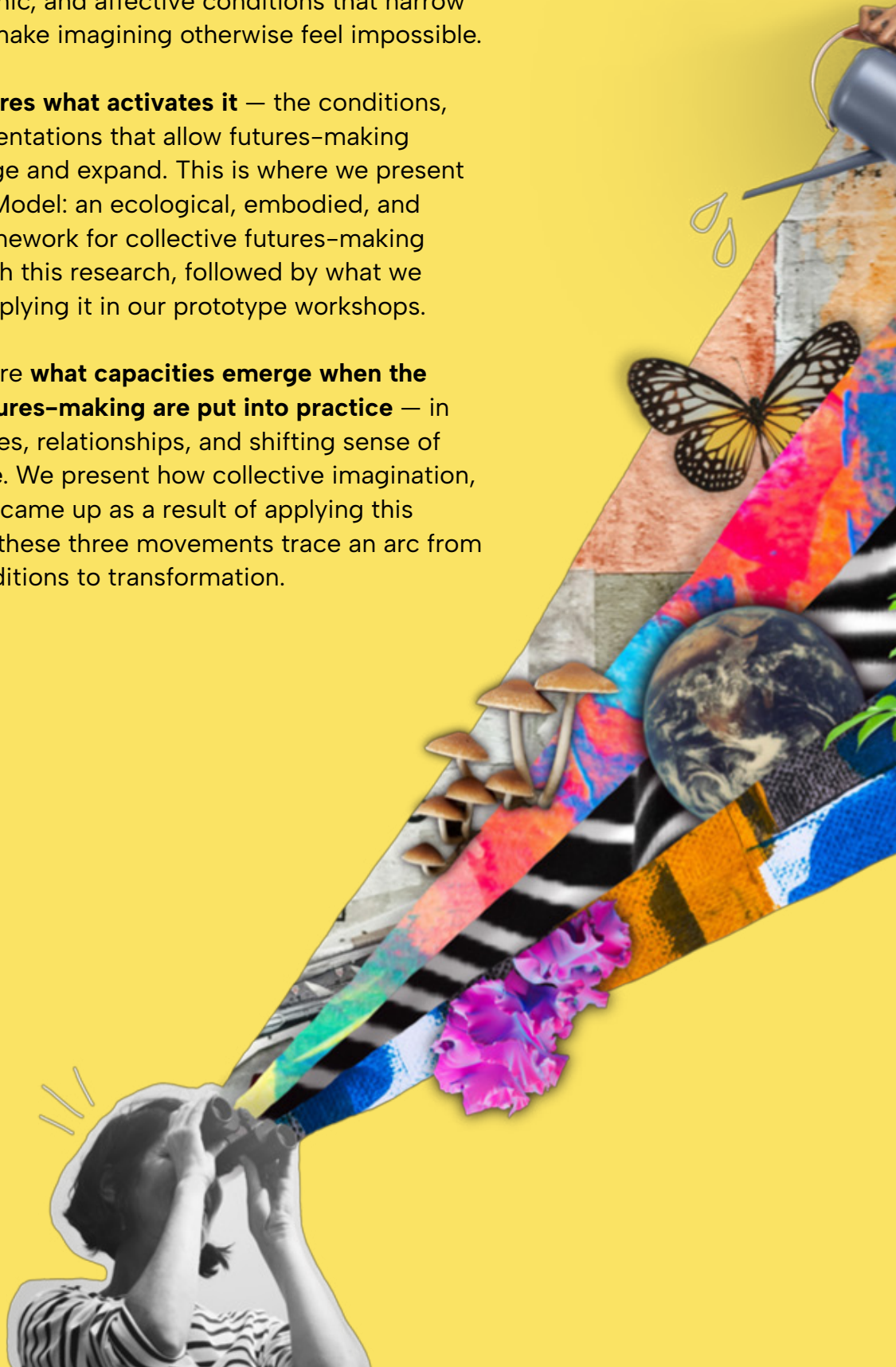
Our approach to understanding what changed for participants relied primarily on observation, conversation, and reflection: qualitative tools well-suited to this kind of exploratory work, but limited in their ability to track longer-term shifts in futures imagination, hope, or agency. A more longitudinal follow-up would offer richer insight into what, if anything, endures beyond the workshop room and how the transformations experienced are sustained through the test of time and challenges of the "real world".

Language and translation.

The workshops, interviews, and literature review were conducted almost entirely in English, with one interview and a few literature reviews in Brazilian Portuguese. This is itself a limitation that shapes which knowledge systems were accessible to us, which experts we could speak with directly, and whose voices are present in this text and whose are not.

The findings of this research unfold in three movements:

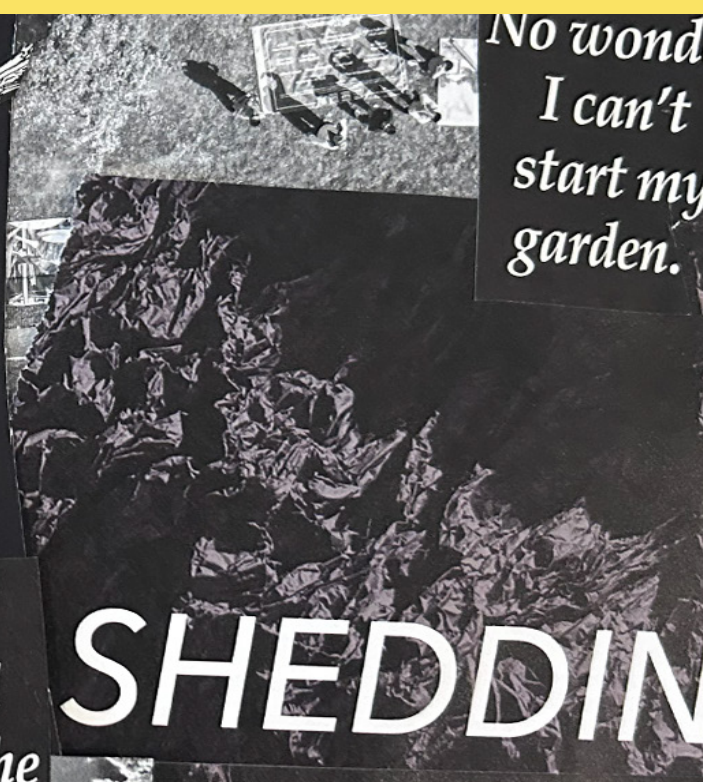
- 01** The **first examines what constrains futures-making** — the structural, epistemic, and affective conditions that narrow imagination and make imagining otherwise feel impossible.
- 02** The **second explores what activates it** — the conditions, practices, and orientations that allow futures-making capacity to emerge and expand. This is where we present the Germination Model: an ecological, embodied, and desire-based framework for collective futures-making developed through this research, followed by what we observed from applying it in our prototype workshops.
- 03** Finally, we'll explore **what capacities emerge when the conditions for futures-making are put into practice** — in participants' bodies, relationships, and shifting sense of what was possible. We present how collective imagination, hope and agency came up as a result of applying this model. Together, these three movements trace an arc from constraint to conditions to transformation.



FO

What Constrains Futures-Making Capacities?

*this," she
whispered,
"And don't
ever lose
it.*



*No wonder
I can't
start my
garden.*



*I leaned
forward
and felt the*

Artwork from workshop participant Theo Odrach.

SHEDDING



**What we cannot
imagine cannot
come into being.**

bell hooks (2000)

1.1. Constricted consciousness & colonized imaginaries

The capacity to imagine the futures we desire does not emerge in a vacuum. It is shaped, and often constrained, by the political, social, and economic systems that organize contemporary life. Throughout this research, Modernity is used as the umbrella term to encompass the current, interlocking systems: capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism, heteropatriarchy, nationalism, white supremacy, and ableism. These systems shape the emotional, psychological, and relational landscapes in which imagination takes place. To understand what constraints or activates futures-making, we must first understand how these systems demarcate what feels possible to envision, desire, or act toward.

Vanessa Machado de Oliveira Andreotti's concept of the house of Modernity³ (2021) offers the foundational architecture for this analysis — a way of naming the structural, epistemic, and relational conditions that organize life under dominant systems and that shape, often invisibly, what feels possible to desire, to envision, and to reach toward. Even as the house shows signs of collapse — ecological, social, and economic crises that signal profound unsustainability — its logics continue to shape how people think, feel, act, and hope (de Oliveira, 2021). The result of these crumbling systems constitutes what is increasingly named as polycrisis: the convergence of multiple, overlapping, and interconnected crises that create complex, systemic problems which exacerbate one another, and then, cannot be addressed in isolation. (World Economic Forum, 2023). These crises are not failures of the house's architecture but expressions of it. Efforts to fix or reform the house without addressing its foundational issues will only sustain existing harms.

What makes this especially difficult to navigate, De Oliveira (2021) says, is that whether we are critical of Modernity or not, its conditions still shape how we think, feel, act, desire, relate, hope and imagine. She describes the house as full of promises for those who inhabit it, promises that feed loops

³ The author talks about how the house of Modernity is built on the foundation of separability: a concrete structure that separates humans and land, associated with human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism. This foundation creates hierarchical value between beings and cultures, a hierarchy that overflows into all other relationships and is premised on species, race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, neurotypicality, nationality, employment, and citizen status. The house is supported by walls of universalist knowledge and nation-state governance, all capped by the roof of global capitalism, which shapes modern material realities but also generates profound structural instabilities and violences. (De Oliveira, 2021). For more on the house of modernity see De Oliveira, 2021.

of fears and desires. However, she continues, the affordances and enjoyments of modernity are maintained by historical, systemic, and ongoing processes that are inherently violent and unsustainable. The benefits Modernity promises cannot exist without expropriation, extraction, exploitation, militarization, dispossession, destitution, genocides, and ecocides (Machado de Oliveira, 2021).

De Oliveira (2021) argues that the stories of progress and desire we are living off are expired. They seemed appealing for their apparent stability and solidity, but they no longer serve us anymore. And crucially, they never served everyone equally. A new system, she suggests, is only possible if we learn from the lessons modernity has to offer in its decline. Modernity's narratives inherently exclude many identities, bodies and locations from their successes, as adrienne maree brown suggests (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2025) *"we are living inside of someone else's imagination for how the world would work and we need to exercise our own imaginations in order to come to a different way of structuring the world, a different way of understanding our role in it"*.

These broken systems and stories provide important information and direction towards what to build anew. Understanding whose imagination built this house — and who was always excluded from its promises — is the starting point for understanding the conditions that allow people to imagine the futures they desire to live in and feel capable of acting toward.

Constricted consciousness: the psychological and emotional weight of Modernity

The current limitations of our imagination have been named in different ways, such as *"crisis of imagination"* and *"poverty of imagination"* (Haiven, 2014; Mulgan, 2020; Kumar et al, 2025). In his interview for this research, foresight practitioner Nikolas Badminton named it directly *"our greatest failure is not a lack of technology, but a collective poverty of imagination."* This research understands these symptoms as expressions of constricted consciousness, the psychological and emotional narrowing produced by the accumulated weight of Modernity's interlocking systems.

Constricted consciousness is one of the least visible but most consequential effects of Modernity. This is not only about limited resources and opportunities, but the internalization of a world that was not built for your whole flourishing. Over time, these structures begin to feel like natural facts rather than

political arrangements, shaping what feels possible, allowable, and desirable. When the energy of daily life is consumed by navigating systems that were not designed to include you and don't allow mental and emotional space for imagining otherwise, the inaccessibility of dreaming is a reasonable response to structural conditions. As Lewis (2024) writes, *"Imagining our possibilities fully and freely can be difficult. Historical contingencies harden into what seem like facts that will never, ever change. The struggle to thrive in the present leaves little time for dreaming"*. Arjun Appadurai (2004) puts forward that aspiration is a cultural capacity, unevenly distributed by structure of power and actively diminished for those at the margins of society. What modernity produces then, is not only a scarcity of material life but also of imaginative life, creating a world in which it becomes more challenging for people to picture alternatives for themselves or their communities.

What makes constriction particularly hard to name and challenge is that it does not announce itself as a constraint, but often comes across as realism, the idea that dreaming is a luxury you can't afford within the struggles of everyday. Bayo Akomolafe (n.d.) points toward this when he argues that while we hurry up, we rush into the same patterns that plague us. Participants in this research named this constriction directly: *"We don't have time to think about these kinds of things in our daily lives — you just want to rest at the end of the day and don't end up having these conversations with others."* The urgency that Modernity ingrains is a cage, a pace which limits our ability to engage with new, invisible, or not-yet-known ways to address today's crises. Elif Shafak (2024) names a related symptom when she discusses numbness as the true danger in our "Age of Apathy" where the future looks grim. Numbness, apathy, fear, stress, anxiety, sadness, despair, worry all contribute to a constricted consciousness, too engulfed within present reality to be able to perceive other sides of the self and others.

Karlie Chalmers, in their interview for this research, described observing this directly in their psychotherapy practice: when consciousness is constricted in ways that obscure the future, it becomes very challenging to tell stories about who we are and how we want to be known in the world. What opens that space for reflection and empowerment, Chalmers explained, is the capacity to sit with emotions and regulate them. Achieving this state, gives them rich information about what they want for themselves and therefore what they want for their futures. Through that process of deconstriction, people have an access to telling different stories about their futures — *"stories about what they want to do, what they want to create in the world, what they want to fix, what they want to heal and move towards."*

Another element that contributes to imaginative constriction is isolation. Isolation has a significant imaginative cost. Fowler et al. (2024) found that imagination is social and relational, meaning that when people imagine futures together, something shifts in both the ability to picture it and in the sense that change is possible. This is important because modernity works by isolating people from one another through competition, individualism, and privatization of inner life. The imagination shrinks not only because the future feels blocked but because the conditions for imagining together have been dismantled. When dreaming feels impossible, it is not because people have given up — the systems are succeeding by design.

Colonized imaginary: whose futures populate the horizon

If constricted consciousness limits the space individuals have for imagining, colonized imaginaries limit what they can imagine. Modernity does not only shape inner life; it also shapes shared cultural landscapes through which people come to understand what futures are plausible, desirable, or even thinkable. As de Oliveria (2021) argues, *“Modernity colonizes both physical and imaginative landscapes.”* Within Modernity’s house, she continues, we’re socialized to believe imagination is individual and boundless, however *“our ways of imagining are bound by collective referents that restrict what is possible for us to imagine.”*

One of the most powerful of these referents is Modernity’s single story of “forward” — of progress, growth, happiness, and development that crowds the horizon with only a narrow set of futures. Political philosopher Roberto Mangabeira Unger (as discussed in Mulgan, 2020) calls these *“invisible enemies”* of social imagination: the rationalizations embedded in dominant institutions that persistently argue that current systems are the natural or proven victors of evolutionary competition. The famous quote attributed to both philosophers Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek expresses this constriction of our imagination and also the pervasion of modern systems as the only pathways: “it’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism”. This statement exemplifies how thoroughly Modernity colonized the horizon of possibility.

This colonization of the collective imaginary is represented across culture, explicitly appearing within science fiction, the cultural genre most dedicated to envisioning futures. The stories we consume and tell shape our horizons of possibility (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2025). Jason E. Lewis (2024) recognizes that science fiction’s roots in the imperial project invites

the replication of colonial perspectives, often mirroring the foundations of the house of Modernity we inhabit. As Lewis articulated clearly in our interview, *“when discovering whole new worlds, whole new planets, whole new peoples, we chose in these stories to manage those encounters in a particular rapacious, extractive and Christianity-infused manner.”* Most often, the narratives of the future that permeate our imaginary are Western supremacists, inscribing assumptions and prejudices in ways that make them seem natural rather than socially constructed, and in consequence, naturalizing the exclusion of identities, cultures and ways of being.

This cultural symptom has political roots. As Sasha Costanza-Chock (2025) observes, *“there’s a relatively undemocratic distribution of who gets invited to imagine the future.”* She continues saying those positions are largely dominated by men, white people, and people from the global minority or Global North (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2025). Who is resourced and paid to spend time imagining is itself a question of power. The futures that rise to the surface tend to align with Modernity’s dominant logics, not because they nurture collective flourishing, but because they are the ones that the system knows how to reproduce.

David Bickham (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2025) points out an important distinction, *“we don’t need to reimagine the world. We need to imagine the world.”* Reimagination, he argues, keeps us within inherited images of the future and imagination allows us to refuse these images altogether. He continues that for BIPOC communities, this distinction is particularly important, where reimagining the world may fall into trying to fix something that was never intended for their flourishing in the first place. This distinction is not merely semantic, but the difference between working within the inherited frame and refusing the frame altogether. Benjamin (2024) names this as abolitionist imagination: not the reform of existing systems but the envisioning of genuinely new ones, rooted in the traditions of communities who have long practiced imagining freedom under conditions designed to make it unimaginable.

Lewis’ own work is rooted in who is left out of these stories, particularly from an Indigenous perspective. As he described in his interview, when conducting workshops with Indigenous youth and asking about the future: *“they’re not talking about Mohawk futures or Anishinaabe futures or Hawaiian futures. They’re really talking about Western futures.”* The colonization of the imaginary is so thorough that even those most harmed by Modernity’s house have inherited its blueprints for what comes next. That’s the important work that Lewis and Skawennati, and many others are doing to change: using art and education to place Indigenous life firmly within imagined futures, disrupting the colonial temporalities that frame Indigenous cultures

as belonging only to the past, and expanding what futures can look like for communities who deserve to belong in them wholly.

This work creates new future imaginaries, a term coined by Lewis to describe a vision of the future that is shared by a group of people and used to motivate change in the present. *“Future imaginaries provide groups with shared vocabularies for envisioning the future and strategies for getting to the future they desire”* (Lewis, 2024). They define the future a community desires and articulate the path toward it — generating what Lewis (2024) calls future facts: possibilities awaiting somewhere down the timeline, *“waiting for us to catch up.”* This concept is especially significant in the context of Indigenous communities, where the future imaginary is inseparable from questions of sovereignty, land, language, and the recovery of ways of being that Modernity has sought to erase.

Many cultural and artistic movements have challenged the colonized imaginaries, including but not limited to, Afrofuturism, African Futurism, Latinx Futurism, and Indigenous Futurism. Afrofuturism is one of the most sustained and generative traditions of resistance to this colonization of the imaginary — a practice of imagining Black futures outside and beyond the colonial frame, using speculative fiction, art, and music to reach toward worlds that center Black life and joy. As Eshun (2003) argues, Afrofuturism reclaims the right to imagine for communities whose futures have historically been foreclosed. This cultural and political movement was present in our workshop data — participant Mariam named Afrofuturism and the synergy of solar energy and nature as sources or inspiration for other possible futures, showing evidence of an already-existing imagination of otherwise.

The case for pluriversal futures

If Modernity constrains imagination through structural, psychological, and cultural mechanisms, then futures-making requires conditions to undo these constraints. This research returns to pluriversal futures as a way of naming the imaginative, relational, and political possibilities that emerge when many worlds, and ways of knowing, of being, and desiring, are allowed to co-exist without being assimilated into a single narrative of progress.

Being othered by Modernity’s systems produces a longing — a felt sense that something is missing, that the structures of the world don’t fit you, and that you shouldn’t have to change to fit them, but that they should change to fit you. José Esteban Muñoz (2009) names this precisely in *Cruising Utopia*: queerness, he argues, is *“the rejection of a here and now”* and an insistence

on a not-yet that is already felt. This longing, the refusal of the present as sufficient, resonates beyond queer theory. It echoes Bloch's notion of anticipatory consciousness, the reaching toward what has never existed but is sensed as possible, and Freire's understanding of the utopian impulse that refuses to accept the present as the limit of the possible.

Taken together, the architecture of Modernity, the constriction of consciousness, and the colonization of collective imaginaries, tell a specific story: the difficulty of imagining other futures is not a personal failing. It is structural, political, and by design. When people struggle to envision worlds beyond the present one, when futures feel foreclosed or belong to someone else, when the imagination feels exhausted before it begins, these are outputs of systems that intentionally limit what feels possible.

If the obstacles towards futures-making are structural, then the responses must be too. It is not enough to invite people to dream more boldly without also addressing the conditions that narrow the dream. It is not enough to add diverse voices to existing futures-making processes if those processes still run on the expired stories of progress and growth. Dator (2005) argues that we are living in a crumbling society that requires new social inventions, and the challenge is not to tear down walls, as many are already failing or down. The challenge is the invention, and he claims that humans are not very inventive. Yet humans, he notes, tend to idealize the past when faced with the need to design new systems. Instead, he urges us to assume that nothing is natural, normal, or given, and that ultimately, there is no obvious place to start. This perspective is an invitation to dream and envision different futures, to break from the walls of Modernity's narrative of what is good and natural, towards the not-yet.

As Kelley (2022) makes plain in his account of the Black radical imagination, the most transformative social movements have been sustained not by pragmatic demands alone but by what he calls freedom dreams — visions of worlds that had never existed, reaching toward a future that felt impossible and was therefore worth fighting for. *"Without new visions we don't know what to build, only what to knock down"*. The work of building requires first understanding what has been done to our capacity to imagine, and by whom, and in whose interest. Only then can we begin to understand what it would mean to imagine freely.

We need to imagine new worlds that fit the plurality of our human existence. *"Un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos"* — a world where many worlds fit — as the Zapatista movement calls for. This is not a single utopia imposed from above but a proliferation of imaginaries, each rooted in its own

community, its own land, its own ways of knowing and being. Nêgo Bispo, a prominent quilombola⁴ and political activist, named these encounters “*confluência*” (confluence). In his words, “*a river does not cease to be a river because it flows together with another river — on the contrary, it becomes itself and other rivers, it grows stronger. When we confluence, we do not cease to be ourselves; we become ourselves and other people — we multiply*” (Bispo dos Santos, 2023, author’s translation). This is not the universalism of Modernity, which assimilates difference into sameness. It is a meeting of distinct streams that remain distinct while becoming something larger.

Ailton Krenak (2022), philosopher, activist and writer from the Krenak people expands this analysis by arguing that colonialism’s deepest harm lies in assertion of universal sameness, an approach that flattens difference and suppresses plurality. He’s not rejecting equality as a value, he’s arguing against the colonial perspective that erases distinct worlds under the guise of sameness. For Krenak, resisting this flattening requires reviving the “*affective cartographies*” that coloniality has tried to overwrite. As he puts it, we need to reforest our imaginary against the monoculture of coloniality.

This reforestation is not only metaphorical. It is the work this research understands as futures-making: the deliberate cultivation of conditions in which imagination can grow back — plural, embodied, relational, and rooted in communities’ own desires rather than in someone else’s vision of progress. The sections that follow explore what those conditions look like, and what becomes possible when they are created.

⁴ Quilombola is an Afro-Brazilian resident of quilombo settlements, a communities created by enslaved people fleeing forced labour or by black communities after the abolition of slavery. They are vital symbols of resistance, memory, black heritage, and cultural identity. Antônio Bispo dos Santos, known as Nego Bispo, was a quilombola leader, activist, writer, and philosopher from the Saco-Curtume community in Piauí. He was a leading voice in the defense of quilombola rights in Brazil, developing the concepts of “counter-colonialism” and “confluence”.

1.2. A fragmented self: how Modernity disconnects us from ourselves

At the heart of Modernity lies multiple fractures, one of them is especially relevant to this research: the separation of mind and body. This Cartesian binary positions the mind as the rational, cognitive entity at the core of humanity's and marker of evolution and differentiation from non-human beings, all while constraining the body as irrational and to be conquered. Maturity in Modernity is associated with the *"rule of mind and reason over emotions and the body"* (de Oliveria, 2021, pg. 67). This hierarchy and separation are the organizing logic of a civilizational project that devalues non-cognitive ways of knowing and renders them less legitimate and less respected. Attending to this fracture is necessary because it severs people from the very sources of knowing that allow new futures to take root. Modernity's desire to index the totality of reality in unambiguous, objective language – to sort, categorize, and measure everything into well-organized boxes, produced a systematic dismissal of all that didn't fit into this structure. The resulting knowledge was focused on certainties, objective descriptions, and moralizing prescriptions (De Oliveira, 2021, pg. 21). What fell outside these tidy boxes was the *"dark world of passions, intuitions, feelings, emotions, affections, beliefs, faiths, values, myths and the world of the unsayable"* (Santos, 2013, pg. 20). Their complexity could not be communicated through the words and understandings of Modernity, and therefore they were rendered illegitimate, dangerous, or simply nonexistent.

The result, as De Oliveira (2021) describes it, is the override of other sensibilities *"to the point where we can only register what we consider meaning-full, and we may become numb to sense-fullness"*, in other words, we become numb to the full richness of sensory, emotional, and somatic⁵. This disembodiment of the human experience made it impossible for knowledge productions to account for the complexity and contingency of the relationships between the different parts of sensing and experiencing. (Santos, 2013, pg. 20). The body becomes *"felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual's own being"* (Laing, 1965: 69 as cited in Sheets-Johnstone, 2018).

⁵ *Somatic* derives from the Greek *sōmatikós* meaning pertaining to the body (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). It refers to something of or relating to the body as a site of knowledge and experience. In this research, somatic practices are those that engage bodily sensation, movement, and felt experience as primary ways of knowing, rather than treating the body as secondary to cognitive or rational processes. The term is used in contrast to purely cognitive or verbal approaches, and draws on traditions in somatic psychology, embodied cognition, and movement-based therapies.

This exclusion of embodied and emotional knowledge is not accidental, it is what Santos calls *epistemicide*: the deliberate delegitimization and elimination of ways of knowing that deviate from the dominant norm (Santos, 2014). The disembodiment of knowledge is therefore inseparable from the colonial project: what counts as knowledge, who gets to produce it, and through which faculties.

Many Indigenous knowledge systems resist the mind/body split imposed by colonialism and Modernity. In an interview conducted for this research, Indigenous artist and researcher Juma Pariri described how, in Indigenous practice, memory is embodied: *“We need to embody it. Indigenous memory, in indigenous practice, is a bodily act. The hard drive is internal and collective, not external, or it needs to be filtered through the body.”*

It’s also important to note how this suppression of body and emotional knowledge is not the same for all bodies; the shape and expectations imposed vary based on ethnicity, gender, and ability. Elizabeth Grosz (1994 as cited in Leavy, 2023) distinguishes between the “inscriptive” and the “lived body”. The inscribed body serves as a site where social meanings are created and resisted. Bodies are not neutral: gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class are socio-political aspects shape our mental, emotional and physical selves and inform our ethical values (1994 as cited in Leavy, 2023). On the other hand, the social body is people’s experiential knowledge; it is through the body⁶ that we access the world. What is at stake in this fracture is not only personal wellbeing, but also the range of futures we are capable of imagining.

Alienation from our emotions as a political project

If Modernity fractures the self by separating mind from body, it also fractures our emotional⁷ lives, which has direct consequences for futures-making. Imagination is not only a cognitive act, but also an emotional and embodied one. The capacity to imagine otherwise depends on the ability to feel otherwise: to sense longing, discomfort, desire, grief, anger, hope. When people are disconnected from their emotional experience, they are disconnected from the very signals that orient them toward what matters, what is

⁶ When we refer to “the body” in this research, we are referring to all knowledge and wisdom originated from sensory and affective origins: kinesthetic, affective, feelings, emotions, intuitions, sensory and making, all of the ways our bodies process and make sense of the world.

⁷ There are multiple definitions and distinctions between feelings, emotions and affect. For the purposes of this research, such terms are used as keywords, points of departure rather than strict categories (Cvetkovich, 2012). Following Cvetkovich, we believe there’s beauty in using the word ‘feeling’ and it’s intentional imprecisiveness and an ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences. This vernacular quality reflects an integrated conception of mind and body – the very integration Modernity severed and that this research seeks to restore.

intolerable, and what could be different. Emotional alienation is therefore not simply a personal or psychological issue, rather a political project that constrains the conditions under which people can imagine the futures they desire and feel capable of acting toward.

In their interview, psychotherapist Karlie Chalmers named the political dimension of this severance directly: when we are in touch with our emotional experience, it offers rich information from an essence place within us — a body wisdom, an embodied knowing — that gives us access to a deeper understanding of ourselves and others. *“People can’t have any sense of autonomy if they don’t have a sense of identity of self”*, says Chalmers. Emotional disconnection is not just a personal loss. It is, as Chalmers named it, one of the biggest reinforcers of power in our society. To keep people alienated from their feelings is to keep them alienated from a fundamental source of self-knowledge, collective understanding, and the capacity to imagine otherwise.

The suppression of the body operates not only at the level of knowledge systems, but at the level of feeling itself. *“The hierarchy between emotion and thought/reason gets displaced, of course, into a hierarchy between emotions: some emotions are ‘elevated’ as signs of cultivation, whilst others remain ‘lower’ as signs of weakness”* (Ahmed, 2014). The triumph of reason is being able to control emotions and only show socially acceptable ones.

Being so, Ahmed (2014) argues that emotions are not simply internal psychological experiences, they are also social and political, circulating between bodies and identities in ways that reproduce or resist power. Ahmed (2010) names those whose emotional responses don’t align with the norms of the dominant culture as *‘affect aliens’*: people who feel grief, anger, or despair when they are expected to feel gratitude, optimism, or compliance. To be an affect alien is to experience being in appropriate emotional contact with an unjust world. And it is not coincidental that affect aliens are bodies already othered: Black, Indigenous, queer, disabled, poor. The mandate to overcome the body and regulate emotion towards positivity is not equally distributed, it falls heaviest on whose feelings are most threatening to the stability of existing structures. Chalmers reinforces how systems we live within are “constantly trying to suppress parts of you that are dangerous, like parts that feel deeply, parts that have a deep knowing and witnessing of both joy and pain”.

Depression, grief, and trauma, Cvetkovich (2012) argues, are not deviations from a healthy norm; instead, they are legible political responses to conditions that are genuinely depressing, genuinely grief-inducing, genuinely traumatic. To treat them only as symptoms to be managed is to misread their nature and to foreclose the knowledge they carry. The alienation from

feelings that Chalmers describes is therefore not incidental to systems of power, it is, as Cvetkovich's (2012) work highlights, one of the mechanisms through which those systems sustain themselves.

Cvetkovich (2012) argues on the need to *“depathologize negative feelings so they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis.”* These feelings and sensibilities perceived as negative are still going to feel challenging and associated with inertia, despair, apathy and indifference, but they can bring people together and create community (Cvetkovich, 2012). The recognition of shared difficult feeling is itself a form of connection, a ground from which collective understanding and action can grow. Spaces that cultivate the potential of these emotions for connection, action and hope are precisely why our workshops had an emphasis on bridging and validating the emotional experiences of participants.

A diminished imagination: the cost of leaving the body out of futures work

A disconnect from body and emotional wisdom does not only diminish our present experience, it impacts our futuring capacity. If we cannot understand the complexity of our embodied experience in the present, our visions of the future will continue to reproduce the suppressions we have not yet acknowledged. Futures work that bypasses the emotional and somatic is not neutral, it is, intentionally or unintentionally, replicating the conditions that create the disconnect.

In an interview for this research, Somatic Futurist Rodney Frederickson, brought the important critical reflection during the futuring process, *“how do we see what we're perpetuating? How may our reactions and imagining of futures be mirroring our own relationship to embodiment? Where in these futures are we conforming, resisting and negotiating?”* For liberation and unlearning of affective suppression and disconnect, we need to acknowledge how it takes shape in the present in order to imagine futures with systems and relationships that support wholeness without judgment or hierarchies of ways of knowing.

Beyond this methodological risk, there is also generative creative potential lost when emotional and body wisdom are excluded from futures work. First, emotions are directional: they point towards what matters, what is broken and what's worth fighting for. When feelings such as grief, fear, and anxiety surface in futures work, and are not named and held, they create barriers to generativity. Workshop participants named this directly: anxiety and fear

were constant emotional responses related to the concept of the future, and it was through the acknowledgement and discussion of those feelings that we were able to open space to imagining otherwise. In naming them without moralization of good or bad, or right or wrong, we opened space for reflection on the reasons they surface in our bodies. This reflection makes the structures and systems that produce them visible, and what becomes visible can be questioned, and what can be questioned can be reimaged.

Second, engaging somatic knowledge produces knowledge that cognitive approaches cannot reach alone, unlocking ways of imagining that remain inaccessible when the invitation is only to think.

Third, and perhaps most fundamentally, feeling safe and whole in the body is a prerequisite for creative and generative work. The conditions that allowed imagination to emerge are not primarily methodological; they were relational and somatic. People need to feel held before they can imagine freely. The conditions that allow for this to emerge will be further explored in the section called *What Activates Futures-Making Capacities?*

For futures work to be genuinely liberatory, it must engage the whole person: not just the thinking mind but the feeling, sensing, moving, grieving, longing body. In a world shaped by Modernity's long project of fracture and suppression, choosing to work with the whole body is itself an act of resistance and refusal of the separability of ourselves.

1.3. Professionalizing foresight: who gets to imagine the future?

Foresight emerged in the mid-twentieth century as governments, militaries and corporations sought systemic ways to anticipate long-term change and navigate uncertainty. Initial work in the field was closely connected to technological forecasting, systems analysis, and strategic planning. Over subsequent decades, the field developed a professional identity through academic programs, certification bodies, and formalized methods (Kuosa, 2011). Work on corporate foresight highlights how foresight has become institutionalized within organizations as a strategic capability designed to identify emerging trends and inform long-term decision-making (Rohrbeck et al., 2015).

The professionalization of foresight has contributed significantly to the discipline, creating shared language, training pathways, and building legitimacy for the idea that thinking seriously about the future is a worthwhile investment. Structured methods like horizon scanning, scenario development, and trend analysis allow organizations to systematically explore uncertainty and consider alternative pathways forward. These tools have helped establish foresight as a recognized discipline with shared frameworks, competencies, and professional communities.

However, the rise of this discipline is not without tensions. The field has periodically had to contend with its own tendencies: toward the preferences of business clients over communities, toward the analytical abstraction of lived experience, and toward futures that look like a continuation of the present rather than genuinely imagining otherwise (Son, 2015; Kristóf 2024). As foresight has become professionalized, it has also developed implicit boundaries around what counts as legitimate futures work. Within many institutional contexts, futures thinking is defined primarily through analytical tools and expert-driven methodologies. This creates a narrowing that carries significant consequences for whose imagination, whose knowledge, and whose futures count – and therefore the conditions under which people can imagine the futures they desire and feel capable of acting toward.

Colonized imaginaries in the futures field

The suppressions discussed in the previous section – colonized imaginaries, body and emotional disconnection – do not disappear when futures practitioners enter the room. They travel with them. A growing body of literature argues that mainstream foresight practices often reproduce broader social and epistemic structures, including Western-centric assumptions about progress, development, and what constitutes legitimate knowledge (Escobar, 2018; de Sousa Santos, 2014). Krishnan’s (2022) critique of the coloniality of foresight brings this to the surface: the field’s dominant frameworks carry embedded assumptions about what progress looks like, whose knowledge counts, and which futures are worth imagining.

These are not neutral methodological choices. They carry weight. They reflect a particular vision of the future rooted in Western modernity, linear notions of development, and institutional priorities that have historically served the already-powerful. Sohail Inayatullah has long emphasized the importance of examining the cultural assumptions embedded in futures thinking (Inayatullah, 1990). His method of the Causal Layer Analysis (Inayatullah, 1998) encourages practitioners to move beyond surface-level trends and explore the deeper worldviews and myths that shape collective expectations about the future. The prompting of these reflections offers a counter to the risks of foresight reproducing dominant narratives rather than opening space for transformative alternatives.

Jim Dator’s work makes a similar case from a different angle, arguing that meaningful futures thinking requires actively dismantling deeply held assumptions about what progress could or should look like (Dator, 2005). He has famously said that *“any useful statement about the future should appear ridiculous”* (Dator, 2009, p.2), emphasizing the importance of disrupting dominant imaginaries in order to make space for genuinely different futures.

These critiques converge on a shared concern: when the futures field fails to interrogate its own colonial foundations, it risks reproducing the very structure of exclusion that constricts imagination and freedom of marginalized communities (Jae, 2022). Krishnan’s work pushes this further, naming how a Western-centric image of progress becomes the implicit benchmark against which all futures are measured, including futures imagined by people for whom this future has never been welcoming (Krishnan, 2022). Ziauddin Sardar’s concept of *“postnormal times”* (2010) extends this further, arguing that the futures field is operating in an era of complexity, chaos, and deep uncertainty that its own methodological tools were not designed to hold. The field’s neat frameworks, built for a world that felt knowable and steerable,

strain under the weight of the present moment, especially for communities whose present is already shaped by centuries of dislocation and loss.

Taken together, these critiques reveal a central tension: the question of whose knowledge shapes the future imaginary is inseparable from the question of whose future is being imagined. This has direct implications for the research: if the field focused on imagining futures reproduces colonial, exclusionary imaginaries, these imaginaries permeate the resulting strategies. The intent of this research is to re-instill in people the belief that the future is a discipline for all and the importance of bringing the affected voices into the imagining space, so strategies for change reflect their desires and other ways of being.

The cost to practitioners

These structural critiques are not only about what the field does to communities. They are also about what the field does to the practitioners within it and what they are asked to leave behind in order to do this work. Importantly, practitioners are not positioned outside the dynamics described above; they move through the same institutional environments, carry their own histories, and absorb the same emotional weight from Modernity's suppression and fragmentations.

Several interviewees described the personal and professional toll of doing futures work in a context where emotional honesty and embodied presence are either treated as secondary to the "real" work or quietly sidelined as insufficient in rigour. In many institutional contexts, the role of the practitioner is implicitly defined as one of facilitation and interpretation, rather than relational presence. This can require practitioners to shelve some of their own experiences to maintain a posture of neutrality often expected in these professional settings. Nicci Obert, during her interview for this research, described this dynamic as *"turning myself off to go to work"*, a form of self-suppression that mirrors the broader disconnections described earlier in this research.

Practitioners also carry the emotional weight of engaging with stories of loss, systemic violence, and fragmentation through interviews, workshops, or research processes. Yet the field itself often offers few structures for processing the emotional impact of this work. Several interviewees explicitly named that futures practice has not developed adequate capacity to hold emotions. Grief, anxiety, and hopes tend to be acknowledged briefly before returning back to the analytical tools and frameworks. Over time, this can produce a form of quiet burnout, particularly for practitioners who entered the field through social justice or community-oriented backgrounds.

Practitioners help create the imaginative conditions others enter in a participatory context. When practitioners are emotionally suppressed or disconnected from their own sense of possibility, the imaginative space curated for participants narrows. The cost to practitioners is therefore also a cost to futures-making.

A second tension concerns the ongoing challenge of legitimizing futures work within institutions that remain anchored in short-term planning horizons and quantitative metrics. Several practitioners interviewed described the difficulty of articulating the value of foresight to organizations or clients who equate rigour with data and view speculative exploration with skepticism. In such environments, conversations about preferred futures or transformative possibilities can be dismissed as unrealistic or overly idealistic. As one expert observed, the assumption that preferred futures are “unicorns and bunnies” reflects a deeper discomfort with the uncertainty and vulnerability woven into futures thinking.

Yet, interviewees also noted that when organizations allow themselves to engage seriously with futures thinking, something shifts. The resistance practitioners encounter is not always intellectual but emotional. Many people express interest in talking about disruption and transformation in the abstract, but are less willing to confront the internal or organizational changes such disruption may require. Nikolas Badminton observed, people often like the idea of disruption but rarely want to be disrupted themselves. For practitioners who believe wholeheartedly in the power of futures work, navigating this resistance while sustaining their own commitment becomes a form of emotional labour.

The reflections suggest that the gap in foresight is not purely methodological. It is also relational and affective. Futures practice has developed sophisticated tools for analysis, but has been slower to cultivate the emotional and relational capacities required to hold uncertainty, grief, hope, and ambiguity within collective explorations of the future. As Rodney Frederickson explained during his interview, effective futures facilitation requires more than technical expertise. It also requires the ability to “hold your own space and tolerate a range of tensions and ambiguities”. In this sense, the work of the future facilitator involves not only guiding conversations about the future but also holding the emotional conditions in which those conversations can meaningfully unfold.

Re-expanding futures practice: emerging approaches

In response to these constraints, a growing number of scholars, artists, and practitioners are experimenting with ways of practicing futures work that expand beyond the analytical foundations of professionalized foresight. These approaches do not always present themselves as foresight and often exist at the edges of the field, in spaces that traditional futures discourse may not consider rigorous. Yet, many of these practices expand futures work beyond purely analytical models by weaving in creativity, embodiment, and participatory engagement.

What unites these approaches is a refusal to leave emotion, body, spirit, at the door. If anticipation is understood as a human capacity that emerges through the whole person (Miller, 2018), then separating futures thinking from bodily awareness is not a neutral methodological choice. Instead, it limits the field's ability to access the full range of imaginative and intuitive knowledge through which people relate to the future.

Rather than treating futures thinking as a primarily cognitive or analytical activity, these approaches invite imagination, emotion, embodiment, creativity, memory, and more into the process of exploring possible futures. In doing so, they challenge the implicit boundaries that have developed within professional foresight around what counts as legitimate futures practice.

Arts-based futuring practices center envisioning and experiencing futures sensorially and emotionally rather than described conceptually. Practitioners increasingly engage with the concept of the future through storytelling, world-building, and visual or performative explorations of possible futures within institutional foresight contexts. One interviewee, for example, described working with theatre practitioners to transform scenario development into embodied performance. Rather than evaluating scenarios from a distance, participants step into roles within possible futures and explore how those worlds might feel, unfold, and evolve. These experiential approaches shift futures thinking from abstract to tangible (Candy & Dunagan, 2017). Others, such as Lehtikoinen and Tuittila (2023) or Myllyoja (2024), have also published research on integrating art and drama methods into the foresight space.

Embodied and somatic approaches to futures work begin from the premise that imagination is not solely a cognitive activity. Instead, these approaches recognize that bodily experience – whether sensorial, movement-based, emotional, or the physical act of making – carries its own anticipatory intelligence. Interviewee Julianne DeVita shared about her research and work with the Embodied Foresight Collective, and Rodney Frederickson about his

work with Somatic Futures. Although these practices engage the body in the futures space through different perspectives, they both are examples of designing futures processes that intentionally engage the body as part of the inquiry. Movement-based exercises, sensory exploration, or creative making activities invite participants to physically experience aspects of possible futures rather than only discussing them. In these contexts, participants might notice how different futures register in the body, which possibilities evoke tensions, excitement, curiosity, or resistance.

For some practitioners, the body functions as a medium through which futures can be explored and understood. Others go further, suggesting that the body itself is a primary site of anticipation. From this perspective, futures are not only imagined intellectually but also sensed through posture, breath, and nervous system response. Before a future is consciously articulated, it may already be sensed somatically as a feeling of expansion, contraction, or unease. Movement and bodily awareness therefore become integral to the inquiry rather than warm up activities.

Pro-social futures, a praxis being developed by Nicci Obert centers agency, hope, and authenticity and explores what better, more equitable, and joyful futures might look like. This practice involves shifting the posture away from the doom and gloom narratives to see the possibilities for the futures we want to live in. Embedded in this approach is genuine care for others and wanting to see all of humanity thrive. This thread of relational futures emerged across interviews, highlighting the growing position that futures work is inseparable from relational practice. Facilitating futures conversations involves cultivating trust, curiosity, and care among participants, while remaining attentive to whose voices are shaping the imagined future at hand. Practitioners described an increasing practice of reflexivity in the field, intentionally asking whose voices are missing from the room and what futures are yet to be articulated.

Finally, we heard from Emily Empel about spiritual foresight. This approach is among the most marginal in the dominant discourse — marginalized, in part, by the very process of professionalization — yet it reflects longstanding traditions of sensing and exploring the future through reflection, contemplation, and attunement. In this conversation, we heard about futures exploration as a deep form of listening: looking not only at conceptual signals, trends, and data, but also tuning into the subtle, often overlooked clues found in the everyday and the mundane — the kinds of signals that strategic foresight sometimes discounts or misses entirely. Empel reflected that when the conditions are present for a deeper foresight practice, the value of this work extends beyond the production of insights or scenarios. Participants

may begin to relate differently to their own lives, others, and the world around them, aligning decisions more closely with a deeper, more attuned sense of inner knowing. In this sense, futures practices can shift how people live in the present moment—in their everyday—much like they would relate to a wisdom tradition.

Despite their difference, these emerging approaches share a common orientation: they treat futures thinking as a process involving the whole human being, expanding what counts as legitimate knowledge and experience within the field itself. Imagination, emotion, body wisdom, culture, memory, relationships all shape how people anticipate and engage with the future. As Inayatullah (1998) argues, futures work that remains at the level of trends and events never reaches the myths and metaphors that actually shape collective expectations about what futures are possible.

A gap in futures practice

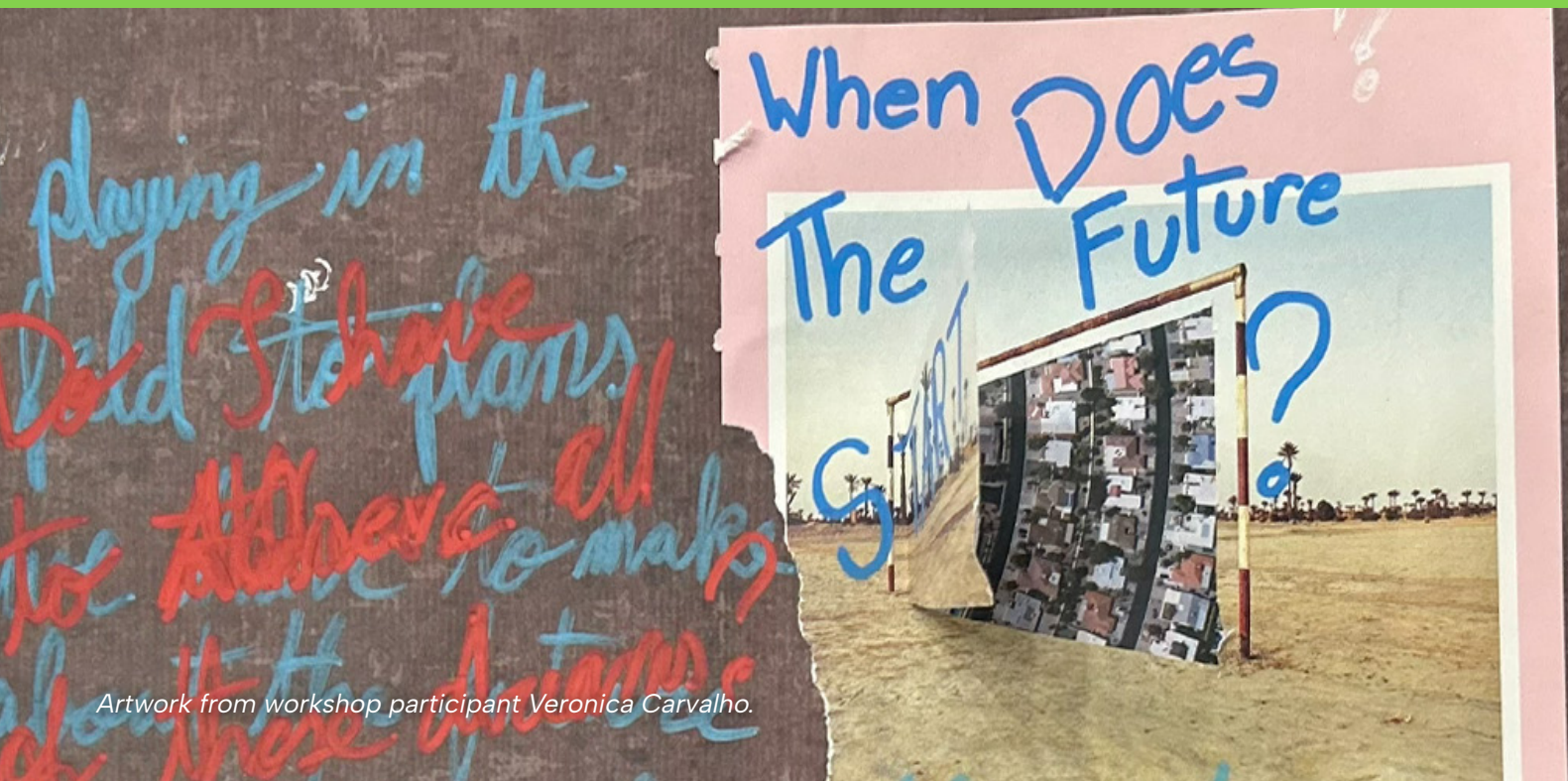
Taken together, three lines of work stood out from our research:

1. a **professionalized foresight** rooted in analytical tools and institutional strategy;
2. a **critical strand** that interrogates the colonial and epistemic foundations of the field—questioning both who conducts futures work and whose ways of knowing are treated as legitimate; and
3. a growing landscape of **experimental practices** that reintroduce embodiment, creativity and relational ways of knowing into futures work.

This research sits at the intersection of the latter two. It is motivated by the critical question of whose futures and whose knowledge, and explores what embodied, art-based, and participatory practices might make possible that cognitive approaches cannot.

Relatively little research exists around how these practices might influence one's capacity to imagine and engage with futures. The following section dives into what we learned as we explored what it takes across design, facilitation, and relationality, to hold space for people to explore desired futures.

What Activates Futures-Making Capacities?



Artwork from workshop participant Veronica Carvalho.



**Remember to
imagine and
craft the worlds
you cannot live
without, just as
you dismantle the
ones you cannot
live within.**

Ruha Benjamin (2024)

The question guiding this research – *what are the conditions that allow people to imagine the futures they want to live in and feel like they can act toward them?* – requires us to look not only at what restricts imagination, but also what activates it. The previous section explored the forces that narrow imaginative possibility: structural oppression, *epistemicide*, and narratives of inevitability. These forces matter deeply but only tell one part of the story. To meaningfully support futures-making capacities, we must also understand what enables them.

This section turns toward the generative. It synthesizes insights from our literature review, expert interviews and workshops to articulate the conditions that activate futures-making capacities and introduces a practice-based model that emerged from this research.

2.1. Futures literacy as a starting point

While many critiques focus on transforming how foresight is practiced, another question emerges: who should have access to futures thinking? Here is where the concept of futures literacy comes in and begins to diverge from the logic of professionalization.

Futures literacy offers an important foundation for understanding how people imagine and act toward the future. UNESCO defines futures literacy as the capacity to “*use the future*” to make sense of the present (Miller, 2018). This framing positions anticipation not as prediction, but as a fundamental human process where people constantly use images of the future (consciously or not) to make sense of the present. Becoming “*futures literate*” through this perspective, means surfacing the anticipatory assumptions that shape perception, emotion, action, and experimenting with alternative ways of imagining.

UNESCO’s Futures Literacy Laboratories (FLL) demonstrated how structured experiences can help people recognize and disrupt their inherited expectation of the future (Miller & Sandford, 2018). Building on this work, the Futures Literacy Toolbox (2024), developed by Plurality University (U+), Youthwatch, and BrusselAvenir, expands futures literacy into a set of accessible and participatory practices designed for diverse communities. The toolbox points to opportunities to embed creativity, play, and collective meaning-making into this work, a spirit that is deeply aligned with our own commitments to embodied and arts-based approaches.

Scholars have raised important critiques that deepen our understanding of what this concept of futures literacy can and cannot do. Facer and Srip-rakash (2021) caution that efforts to codify futures literacy risk turning it

into a universal or technical toolkit that obscures the political, cultural, and relational dimensions of how people imagine the future. They bring forward a sharper critique which lies in the term itself, positioning futures literacy as a learned capability risks reinforcing the expert and gatekeeping dynamics, rendering everyday anticipatory practices as forms of “futures illiteracy”. If anticipatory thinking already exists within everyday human experience, then the challenge may not be to download the capacity but to cultivate contexts in which diverse ways of engaging the future can surface and expand. Karl- sen (2021), argues that futures literacy initiatives risk becoming routine pro- cedures rather than a transformative practice, arguing that without reflexiv- ity, futures literacy risks reinforcing institutional logics rather than opening up genuinely new ways of imagining.

Several interview participants in this study emphasized the importance of expanding futures literacy across institutions, communities, and individuals. Some spoke of wanting futures work to feel genuinely accessible to people who have never encountered scenario planning and who may distrust insti- tutions that claim to know what the future holds. Several identified the gap between who currently participates in formal futures processes and who most urgently needs the conditions to imagine otherwise.

This perspective is fundamentally different from professionalizing the field further. It is about giving the power back, redistributing who is recognized as capable of meaningful futures thinking. As critiques of coloniality in fore- sight illuminate, the question of who gets to imagine the future is insepar- able from the question of whose future is being imagined. As the emerging practices described above suggest, when imagining happens in community, with attention to body, emotions, and the whole human, what becomes pos- sible expands.

These critiques do not diminish the value of what futures literacy brings. Rather, they highlight the need for approaches that are situated, relational, and embodied. They point toward futures literacy as something that must be practiced in ways that honour people’s realities, emotional landscapes, and cultural ways of knowing. Our research builds on this expanded view: we treat futures literacy not as a set of techniques to be delivered but as a cap- acity that grows through embodied, relational, and creative practice. Futures literacy, in our understanding, must be felt, sensed, and lived.

This orientation shaped the development of our framework and informed every aspect of our workshop design. Futures literacy provided the concep- tual foundation with our embodied, participatory, and arts-based approach serving as the practice that brought it to life.

2.2. What we believe activates futures-making capacities

The structural analysis of the previous section was not only diagnostic. Each constraint it named pointed toward its own solution, an antidote. Across our literature review, expert interviews, and workshops, seven conditions consistently emerged as essential for activating futures-making capacities. These are not steps in a process, but qualities of the environment, and when presented together, imagination blooms. These conditions, which were woven through our proposed model and will be further explained in the next section, directly support the capacity to imagine desired futures and sense agency toward them:

- **Embodied Presence:** People imagine more expansively when they feel grounded, regulated, and connected to their bodies.
- **Emotional Access:** Imagination opens when people can feel, not bypass, the emotions that accompany grief, uncertainty, hope, and desire.
- **Making Anticipatory Assumptions Visible:** making these assumptions explicit disrupts the all-encompassing feeling of inevitability, externalizing them and therefore, opening space for alternative possibilities within.
- **Desire as Direction:** Desire reveals what feels meaningful and worth moving toward. It acts as a compass.
- **Relational Imagination:** imagination expands through encounter. Collective imagination generates possibilities that individuals cannot access alone.
- **Weaving Practices:** creative, multi-sensory approaches including art, movement, and making that bypass cognitive constraints reveal insights stemming from deeper layers of knowing.
- **Conditions of Safety, Care, and Relational Holding:** imagination requires vulnerability, therefore, safety must be viewed as a catalyst for transforming relationships to the future.

2.3. Introducing our practice: The Germination Model

As our research unfolded, it became clear that we were not simply gathering insights about imagination. Instead, we were learning about how imagination moves. We were learning about what it needs, how it opens up, how it contracts, and how it becomes possible again. We were learning that imagination is not a static capacity, but a relational, embodied, and emerging process.

As we began this project, we weren't exactly clear on what our contribution might be: Tools? Exercises? Techniques? But as we moved deeper into the work, the process revealed to us that the tools themselves were not the point. Rather, it was the sequence of inner movements participants made, the conditions that supported those movements, and the logic of it all that held the experience together.

The workshops were not a linear progression of activities. They were a choreography of conditions: emotional, relational, embodied, and imaginative. The Germination Model is our articulation of these conditions that enable people to imagine the futures they desire and feel capable of moving toward. They constitute a practice of moving from within to the between and then beyond: from self to collective, from sensing to imagining, to acting. They were a lived exploration into what activates futures-making capacities.

The logic of the model: from within, outward

The logic of the framework is grounded in a simple but profound insight: the capacity to imagine otherwise is shaped by the conditions people carry within them. As the previous section argued, the capacity to imagine otherwise is suppressed through emotional disconnection, constricted consciousness, and colonized imaginaries. If a methodology moves too quickly into collective visioning without addressing these conditions first, it risks reproducing them. Participants and facilitators bring their constriction into the room, if not acknowledged and given space, it shapes what they are able to imagine.

For this reason, the framework begins with the inner world. Before people can imagine different futures together, they must reconnect with the parts of themselves that Modernity has severed – embodiment, emotion, intuition, desire.

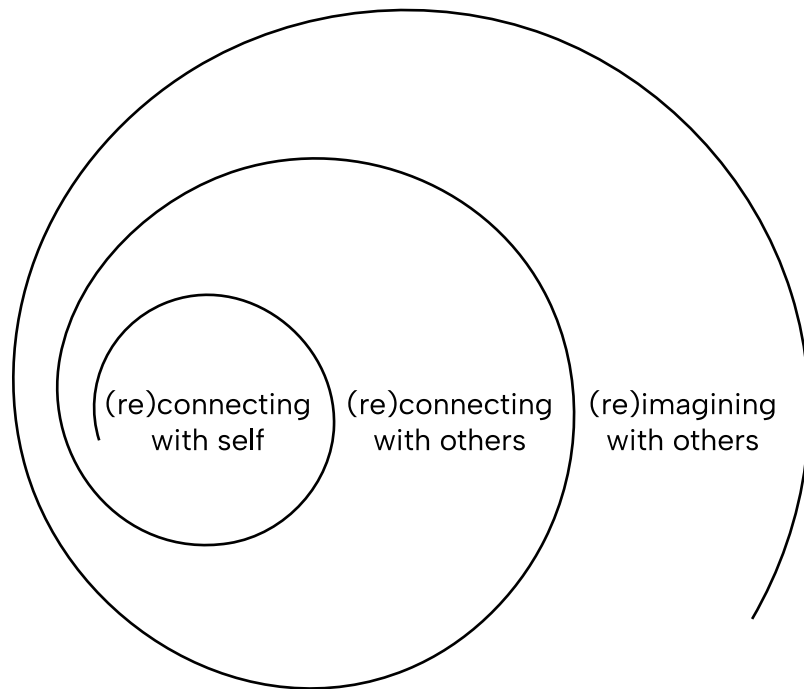
This is the philosophical standpoint for the framework we propose: futures-making moves from within, outward, and these different layers of

relationality — self, others, collective — continue to influence one another throughout the process. Each ring of the framework allows you to move to the next, but this is not a linear progression. The rings don't close behind you as you move outward, they influence one another. As you relate with others and imagine, you reconnect even more with your inner truths and feelings and that impacts the ecosystem. As participants connect with others, they reconnect more deeply with themselves. As they imagine collectively, their individual desires may shift — complicated, deepened, or transformed by the encounter.

The dynamic was visible throughout the workshops. When one participant named a held fear, another participant's inner landscape shifted as they understood themselves in a new light because someone else made something visible within them. When the group began to imagine together, the desires surfaced individually took on new meanings. Sometimes they were reinforced, other times challenged, and sometimes dissolved entirely to make room for something neither participant could have arrived at alone.

The self that arrived at the end of the workshops was not the same that began. Participants had been changed by their encounters with others, and others had been changed by encountering them. The model is structured by that same logic of *confluência* (Bispo dos Santos, 2023) that Nego Bispo talks about. Participants do not merge into a collective at the expense of their individuality. Rather, the encounter with others reveals dimensions of the self that could not be accessed alone, and the collective imaginary that emerges is richer precisely because each thread remained distinct.

Figure 4: Philosophical framing of the model: moving through layers of (re)connection with self to (re)imagining with others.



This movement – from within, to between, to beyond – is the logic of the Germination Model. It’s why the work begins with grounding and rooting, why it moves through to opening up and desire, before arriving at collective imagination, and why it returns to tending. It reflects the belief that imagination is relational, cyclical, and emergent, and that futures are made through the interplay of inner transformation and collective encounter.

2.4. The practice: Germination Model for collective futures-making

The Germination Model is a nine-stage practice-based model that articulates the inner movements, the relational conditions, and the embodied processes that support people in imagining and acting toward futures they wish to live into. We hope you receive this approach as a logic of unfolding, a way of structuring experiences that nurture imagination as something relational, emergent, and alive.

Each stage of this model reflects a distinct movement in the process of futures-making. Working together, they form a cycle: the tending that closes one round of the practice becomes the soil from which the next begins.

Why an Ecological Metaphor?

The ecological metaphor at the heart of this practice emerged gradually, through the literature we engaged with, and which informed the imagery that underpinned workshop activities. We call this the germination model because it frames imagination, hope, and transformation, as something that emerges slowly, from conditions of care, which require time, nourishing relationships, and often unseen work beneath the surface before anything becomes visible. These metaphors offered a way to understand imagination not as a linear process but as something cyclical, alive, and interdependent.

Ecological thinking also helped us see imagination as an ecosystem: shaped by conditions, nourished by relationships, and unfolding through cycles of emergence, decomposition, and renewal. It grows in rhythms, needing darkness and rest just as much as light and nutrients. It is influenced by the emotional climate and relational soil in which it is held. Crucially, it is never the product of one actor alone, but always in an ecosystem of relationships.

THE GERMINATION MODEL

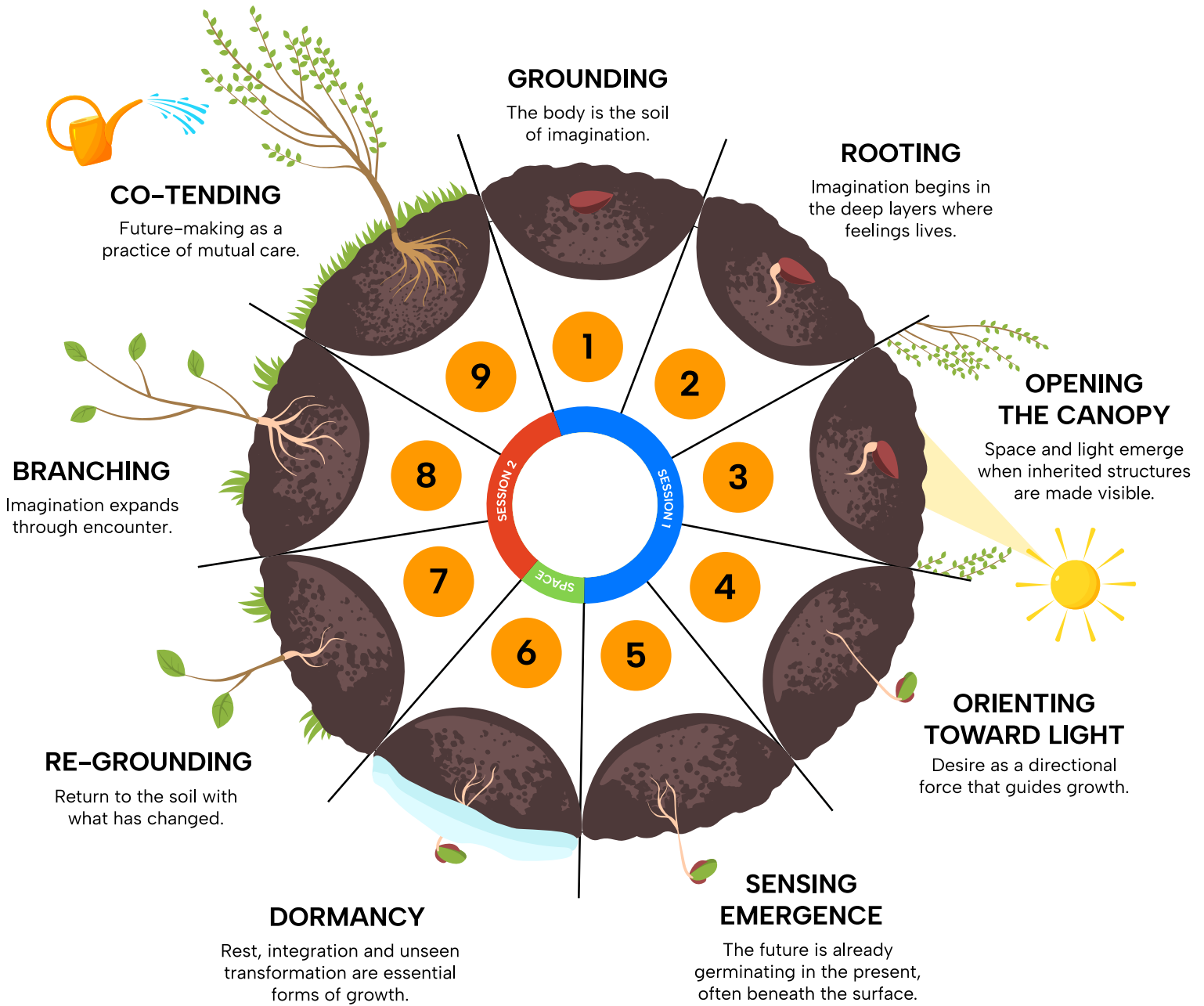


Figure 5: The Germination Model

Stages	Principle	Purpose
1 GROUNDING	<i>The body is the soil of imagination.</i>	Viewing participants as whole people, the goal is to help them arrive fully – physically, emotionally, relationally – so that the work that follows has somewhere to take root. Without this, engagement is surface-level.
2 ROOTING	<i>Imagination begins in the deep layers where feelings lives.</i>	To reconnect participants with the emotional and body wisdom that Modernity has taught us to bypass. Rooting establishes deep internal anchors that nourish imagination, acknowledging the complexity of feelings and parts that shape one’s relationship to the future.
3 OPENING THE CANOPY	<i>Space and light emerge when inherited structures are made visible.</i>	To surface anticipated assumptions (the inherited, internalized, and often invisible) that shape what futures feel possible. Opening the canopy creates ecological gaps where new growth can occur without erasing what already exists.
4 ORIENTING TOWARD LIGHT	<i>Desire as a directional force that guides growth.</i>	To reorient participants from fear and inevitability toward desires, hopes, dreams. Naming desires is an act of identifying what is worth moving into.
5 SENSING EMERGENCE	<i>The future is already germinating in the present, often beneath the surface.</i>	To shift participants’ relationship to the present by finding evidence that desired futures already exist in various forms.
6 DORMANCY	<i>Rest, integration and unseen transformation are essential forms of growth.</i>	To create space between workshops for reflection, metabolization, and internal reconfiguration. Dormancy honours that imagination develops in cycles and that not all growth is visible.
7 RE-GROUNDING	<i>Return to the soil with what has changed.</i>	To acknowledge that participants re-enter the space transformed by their reflections. Re-grounding prepares the “new self” for collective work, reconnecting inner shifts with the shared environment.
8 BRANCHING	<i>Imagination expands through encounter.</i>	To create the conditions for collective futures-making, where the ideas extend outward, intertwine, and transform through interaction. Branching reflects how relational networks generate possibilities no individual could access alone.
9 CO-TENDING	<i>Futures-making as a practice of mutual care.</i>	To support participants in carrying insights back into their lives, identifying what they wish to nurture, release, or continue practicing. Co-tending emphasizes that sustaining imagination requires ongoing care.

Table 2: Germination Model outline.

These stages, while forming a sequence, are not rigid. The methods, activities, and techniques we used in each stage (described in *The Germination Model in practice* section and listed in Appendix A) can be reimagined based on the context, community, and culture. What matters is the movement each stage invites. The model is intended to be a scaffold, not a script.

This practice, as it is defined for you through this text, did not precede the workshops. The essence of each movement, the moment, or invitations to shift that we hoped to curate, guided the development of the workshops. However, this refined and articulated model emerged from the workshops themselves, shaped by:

- The emotional journeys we observed and heard from participants
- The moments where imagination opened or closed
- The relational dynamics that supported vulnerability
- The embodied practices that shifted perceptions
- The creative activities that unlocked new possibilities
- The pauses, silences, and in-between moments that allowed for personal integration

Both Rodney Frederickson and Emily Empel urged us to practice noticing. We carried this into the workshops, paying attention not only to what participants imagined, but how they moved, related, softened or tensed, and how they left. The approach is a reflection of that noticing.

What follows is an account of how each stage unfolded in practice, alongside the literature and conversations that shaped our thinking.

The container: what must be in place before anything can grow

Across expert interviews and workshop observations, one theme repeatedly appeared: futures-making does not emerge solely from the application of methods or tools. Rather, it depends on the conditions in which people are invited to imagine. Put simply, expanded futures imagination emerged within a carefully held environment.

We use the concept of a container to describe the environment, including the material, relational, and experiential conditions, that made imagination and transformation possible. In therapeutic and facilitation traditions, the container is understood not as a backdrop but as an active force, shaping

what unfolds within it (Winnicott, 1971). Here, we extend that idea into futures work. The container is not the stage in the process, but rather what makes that stage possible.

The **material layer** of the container is the physical and sensory environment of the workshops. Rather than treating the space as neutral, the workshops intentionally cultivated an atmosphere that signaled care, comfort, and openness. Experts shared their perspectives with us, offering personal stories and advice on hospitality which stayed with us and shaped how we set up the space:

- A chill corner with blankets, pillows, and mood lighting
- A sensory station with fidget toys, essential oils, and tactile supports
- Shared food informed by participants' dietary and cultural contexts
- Music that moved participants through different moments and intentions of activities
- Spatial design that allowed participants to move, lay down, sit, as their bodies needed.
- A variety of art materials, from visual arts to sculpting and building materials, supporting their creative exploration

Reciprocity, acknowledgement, and gratitude for the participants remained consistently at the forefront of these decisions.

These details communicated that participants' presence and comfort mattered, helping them arrive in the space not only intellectually but physically and emotionally. Sarah Pink (2010) argues that knowledge and experience are produced through the full sensorial spectrum, ranging from touch, smell, texture and sound, not exclusively through language or analysis. Pallasmaa (2005) argues that human perception and understanding are fundamentally multisensory and that the body perceives atmosphere and spatial cues before conscious thoughts emerge. Ultimately, when spaces engage the senses, they shape how people feel and interact within them.

The **relational layer** of the container involves the relationships and social dynamics which shaped the space. Participants' willingness to share their feelings about the future, often including uncertainty, fear, grief, and hope, depended on the presence of trust and mutual respect within the group.

Workshops began with a discussion around group norms. We proposed an initial list of expectations: mutual respect, celebrating diversity, sharing space, and affirming that participants are the experts of their own experience and have explicit permission to show up in the space in a way that

reflects their authentic selves. Psychological safety, the sense that one can speak, feel, and not-know without fear of judgement, is understood as a precondition for creativity and genuine dialogue (Edmondson, 1999). Karlie Chalmers, offered an important reframe in their interview: safety is ultimately an internal and embodied experience rather than something externally produced. As facilitators could not guarantee that participants would feel safe. Instead, we could create the conditions that increase the likelihood that participants may move toward a sense of safety within themselves. This shifted our role from managing the room to being genuinely present with it, holding a regulated and attentive presence, modeling the openness we hoped participants would bring, and trusting that participants had their own ways of navigating their emotional experiences.

The **experiential layer** of the container was the set of practices through which participants engaged with futures. Rather than relying solely on discussion or analytical exercises, the workshops incorporated embodied, artistic, and playful activities designed to access different ways of knowing. Lehtikoinen and Tuittila (2024) contend that futures research too often overlooks the potential of the arts, even as the arts inherently embrace creativity and often explore imagined futures. Importantly, they argue that this should extend beyond art-making itself to include communication, exploration of ideas, and emotions. Through movement, theater games, meditation, and art-making, participants were able to explore possibilities that felt inaccessible through conversation alone. Victor Turner's (1977) concept of liminality comes into play, describing how rituals and creative practices can mark time differently, identifying a threshold crossed and loosening the structures that usually determine what we think is possible. The workshops created this kind of threshold, creating a temporary "somewhere else" in which the imagination could move more freely.

Together, these material, relational, and experiential elements formed a container within which the Germination Model unfolded. What we kept returning to, across both sessions and in subsequent reflection, was how much the container itself was the intervention. When those conditions were present, participants moved beyond discussing the future toward something more embodied and relational: a way of imagining that felt shared, alive, and real.

The Germination Model in Practice

Session One

Session one moved through five stages: Grounding, Rooting, Opening the Canopy, Orienting Toward Light, and Sensing Emergence. The workshop focused on internal arc, moving through the body to feeling, to assumptions, to desires, and to the initial noticing of desired futures alive in the present. Participants left the first session carrying something new: a deeper understanding of their own personal relationships to the future, to imagination, and left with an invitation to take in the world in a different way.

1 Grounding

The body is the soil of imagination.

Just as soil holds memory, nutrients, and the remnants of what came before, the body carries the emotional and sensory conditions that shape what can grow. Grounding prepares this inner ecosystem by settling, softening, and attuning, so that imagination has somewhere alive and receptive to take root.

If participants arrive carrying the weight of the day, those dynamics shape what they are able to imagine. Modernity's fragmentation does not disappear when people enter a room to do futures work, they carry it with them. An approach that jumps right into cognitive or analytical engagement reproduces this fragmentation rather than disrupting it. Therefore, without addressing the fragmentation, engagement with the activities, burdened by tension, distraction, and the pace of the outside world remain surface-level. Truly seeing participants as whole people, this stage is meant to help them arrive fully, caring for their physical, emotional, and relational selves. This is not a warm-up before the real work begins, but a first step in the work itself.

We began each session with grounding. The opening sequence of each session was designed in four distinct but connected moments: arrival into the body itself, care through movement, collective somatic experience, and connection through play. Through somatic shaking, gentle movement, breathwork,

and “Ha” breathing⁸ participants were invited to release the day and tune into themselves. Disrupting participants patterns of movement through these exercises, begins to open the space for disrupting their patterns of thought, as Feldenkrais (1972) argued, habitual movement patterns are inseparable from habitual patterns of thought. Peter Levine’s (1997) work on somatic experiencing also helps explain why movement matters beyond comfort: the body stores tension and unprocessed stress in ways that directly constrain cognitive and creative openness. Shaking in particular has a neurological function, as it is one of the body’s natural mechanisms for discharging accumulated tension and returning the nervous system to a more regulated state.

According to psychotherapist Karlie Chalmers, movement releases stress from our systems in stressful situations, highlighting that often people feel they have to be still in these settings, trapping that energy, when it could be helpful to let it out. They proceed to exemplify that jumping, spinning, and other movements can help release this energy for most people, being aware that for some that might be overstimulating. The grounding activities are meant to open space for that regulation and present to participants that moving the way you body needs is allowed in that space. Chalmers also noted that when trying to access body and emotional wisdom, the more sensorial and playful the approach, the better. Engaging the body in this way releases the analytical mind that otherwise constrains access to the deeper knowing that lives beneath it.

Laughter followed the breathwork grounding in the workshop as we moved into silly games inspired from improv and clowning, including a texture walk and playful introductions through moments of shared absurdity. Porges’ (2017) Polyvagal Theory presents that collective rhythmic activity and synchronized movement activates the ventral vagal state: the physiological condition of feeling safe and socially connected, which is the prerequisite for the kind of open, curious, collaborative engagement that futures work requires. Dunbar’s (2021) research on social bonding documents that laughter and synchronized play trigger endorphin release and are among the most powerful and rapid mechanisms humans have for building trust and felt connection. Additionally, Winnicott’s (1971) concept of the transitional space — the imaginative, bounded space between the self and the world where

⁸ HA breathing is a somatic breathwork technique involving a forceful, voiced exhalation through the mouth. The technique appears in multiple traditions, from yoga and pranayama, to Hawaiian and Indigenous traditions, to trauma-informed practices. In the workshop, we combined the release breathing with movement: bringing arms up while inhaling and bringing them down with the torso while exhaling. The extended exhalation activates the parasympathetic nervous system through vagal stimulation, supporting the shift from fight-or-flight activation toward a regulated state (Balban et al., 2023; Zaccaro et al., 2018).

play happens — illuminates why this matters for futures work specifically: it is in play that people can try on different identities, suspend the ordinary rules of the possible, and encounter the not-yet without the anxiety that futures thinking can otherwise produce.

One participant who had been initially skeptical of the movement reflected afterward: *“Even though I think I could’ve skipped the movement part, I do see how that impacted how relaxed and relieved of stress, stigma, and shyness I felt after”*. Another noted: *“Time flew by with the playfulness.”*

The body, in this approach, is not something to manage before the real work begins. Rather, it is where the real work begins.

2 Rooting

Imagination begins in the deep layers where feelings live.

Rooting extends into darkness before anything is visible. Roots seek nourishment, stability, and connection with the unseen networks beneath the surface. Rooting invites participants into this internal and downward movement, into emotion, intuition, and the plural interior that anchors all future growth.

Grounding prepares the soil. Rooting asks participants to send something down into it — to make contact with the inner emotional landscape that will shape everything that follows. Without exploring and processing this emotional landscape, the futures they imagine will be shaped by unacknowledged feelings, like fear and grief operating as constricting factors, continuing to suppress desires. Rooting reconnects participants with the emotional and body wisdom that Modernity has taught up to bypass, acknowledging the complexity of feelings and parts that shape one’s relationship to the future.

In practice, this took shape by giving space for participants to spend time with the concept of the future and how they understand and experience it in their bodies through a guided meditation. Through a series of sensory prompts, they were invited to explore how they sensed and experienced this concept— not cognitively, but somatically. What feelings and emotions arose? Where did they live in the body?

Drawing from the Internal Family Systems (IFS) framework, we invited participants to explore the multiple, sometimes contradictory feelings associated with the future.

This framework offers a useful model for this stage, understanding the self as plural, containing multiple parts, each carrying its own feelings, fears, and desires (Anderson, Frank, et al, 2017). This framing challenges Modernity's desire for a unified, coherent self (Machado, 2021) or the mono-mind belief system (Schwartz, 2021). This coherent unified perspective of the self limits our capacity to face plurality, uncertainty, ambiguity, and unknowability — both within ourselves and the world around us (de Oliveira, 2021).

De Oliveira's (2021) concept of "*the bus within us*" speaks to the same territory: learning to hold space for internal complexity is what allows us to hold space for the complexities of all layers of existence and experience. Suppressing the complex feelings and emotions that arise around the future doesn't dissolve them. As Schwartz (2021) argues, the parts of us that carry fear, anxiety, and sadness — like people — fight back against being shamed or exiled, and become stronger for it.

Emily Empel, spiritual foresight practitioner, named in her interview why this emotional entry point is irreplaceable: "We can intellectualize and rationalize the future — 'oh, that makes sense' — and stop there. But that's different from connecting with the longing and desire that live in the body. Or the opposite: the disgust, the fear, the sadness, the despair... Being able to connect with all of these feelings and let them be a guiding force in this work is so incredibly important. And you just can't get that through intellectualizing."

Participants were then invited to express what had surfaced during the meditation through art, choosing from multiple materials. Beautiful and honest work emerged, with the majority reaching for collage. Starting with existing images seemed to be a more approachable activity for participants than starting with a blank page. This connects with Leavy (2023, p. 224) who argues that, since collages often bring disparate elements together, they can be a powerful way of jarring people into thinking and seeing differently, producing connections that would otherwise remain out of reach, inferring new associations, or refining or enhancing meanings.

Greene (1995) offers further grounding. She argues that the arts are the primary site where people develop the capacity to imagine things as different from how they are — not as an added benefit from the method, but as its central function. Imagination is activated and expanded through shared creative experience, making arts practice a genuine way of knowing, not just a form of expression. Participatory and arts-based approaches support this

by engaging embodied, sensory, and affective ways of knowing, allowing people to sense, express, and explore possible futures beyond purely cognitive or abstract forms (McNiff, 1998; Pink, 2010; Lehtikoinen & Tuittila, 2024).

The meditation surfaced different things for different people — different emotions, images, and reflections — and for some it was not easy. As the participant Theo shared: *“It did make me feel really anxious and then a bit stuck in that feeling; I couldn’t move past it until I started the art exercise”*. This pointed to the importance of art-making and group sharing following meditation as spaces to voice, process, and externalize the experience.

When participants shared their creations and reflected on their experiences, a consistent pattern emerged: the relationship with the future lives between tensions— between different feelings, and between what participants feel and what they wish they felt. The future was connected with anxiety and fear for many, both personally and societally, with AI, technology, and the current political context named as drivers.

Yet something unexpected also surfaced: in the communal holding of this anxiety and fear, hope began to emerge. Externalizing these feelings together, a ritual of communal grieving for a desired future that felt out of reach, became an important step in building community and beginning the process of resurfacing hope. This was not a practice many participants had access to in their daily lives. Although they thought about the future regularly and intensively, doing so collectively, with intention, exploring the roots of these feeling, and with space to hold the emotional weight of it, was rare.

3 Opening the Canopy

Space and light emerge when inherited structures are made visible.

In forests, new growth often begins when a canopy gap opens, not through destruction but through a shift that allows light to reach the forest floor. Opening the canopy surfaces the internalized narratives and anticipatory assumptions that have blocked light, making space for new possibilities to germinate.

Rooting facilitates participants' access to the inner emotional and somatic landscape of their relationship to the future. However, feelings alone don't reveal the structures beneath them. This stage exists to make visible the anticipatory assumptions that shape what futures feel possible. This is not because participants are unaware that they have assumptions, but instead, it is because those assumptions are rarely examined and consequently, rarely questioned. Bringing them into the light does not erase them. It creates space, identifying where new growth can take root without destroying what already exists.

Anticipatory assumptions are not neutral. We established earlier that humans constantly use, consciously or not, images of the future to guide decisions and behaviour in the present. Once we surface these assumptions and began to question them, what becomes possible in this stage is the opportunity to reach beneath them. As Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis (1998) reminds us, the worldviews and myths that shape collective expectations live far below the trends and events we can easily observe and name. Opening the Canopy is the attempt to reach those deeper layers and to let light in. Crucially, this stage must hold space not only for shaking off these limiting assumptions, but also for acknowledging the structural realities that produced them. For many participants, pessimism about the future is an accurate reading of political contexts.

We used the Polak Game to allow participants to characterize their position towards the future, and understand how others characterize it (Hayward & Candy, 2017; Kaplan et al., 2024). The game invites participants to position themselves physically in a matrix by responding to two questions: do you believe the future will be better or worse than the present? And do you believe you can influence what happens in the future? Participants position themselves in relation to these two concepts of optimism and agency. Since they can see each other, the group ends up with a living, visual map of where each person stands in their relationship to the future.

4 Orienting Toward the Light

Desire as a directional force that guides growth.

Plants do not choose the direction of their growth arbitrarily. They move toward the light, water, nutrients, responding to the cues in their environment. Desire functions similarly, revealing what feels meaningful, compelling, or life-giving. Orienting toward light invites participants to continue the journey inward, searching for what draws them forward rather than what constrains them.

Having surfaced the assumptions that constrain imagination, this stage asks a different question: what do you desire deeply? This reorientation is deliberate, intentional, and we believe, necessary. Fear and dominant narratives heavily shaped anticipatory assumptions. Without actively turning toward desires, the imagination remains confined to what already exists. This stage exists to reorient participants from inevitability toward desire, an act of identifying what is worth moving toward.

This stage moves towards what Miller (2018) calls the aspirational round — *“the moment liberated from the conventional imperative of thinking about the future probabilistically.”*

Beginning with desire is a deliberate act of recalibration. For Nelson and Stolterman (2012), desire is the force that provides intrinsic guidance and energy, the destabilizing trigger for transformational change, acting as force that provides guidance and energy toward something genuinely different. They position that *“people desire to flourish and not just survive. They may not need music or art to survive, but they certainly desire them both”* (Nelson and Stolterman, 2012, p.111). Leitão (2022) reinforces this, describing desire as *“a bodily, corporeal force related to motivation and enjoyment of action”*, through which we recognize what is worth living for, what is valuable to us.

Within Modernity, the desirable is defined externally. The modern narrative of a single model of progress spreads its own vision of what is desirable, making other models of life not only less visible but barely describable (Leitão, 2022). Inviting participants to explore their deep desires opened space beyond those colonized definitions of the good life, reclaiming imagination as something from within. Their desires then become a compass.

A guided meditation invited participants to visit a future where their deepest hopes and desires for themselves, their loved ones, other beings, and beyond

The desires that emerged across both groups were rich and revealing, showcasing the convergence of themes. Participants' leaves moved fluidly between embodied, sensory desires (warm sun, birdsong, moss, salty comfort) and structural ones (legal personhood of waters, politicians paid minimum wage, collective company ownership, no mass inequality). This fluidity between the felt and the structural suggests the meditation successfully bridged embodied experience and systemic thinking. Participants also reflected on the cohesion and harmony of desires, with one participant noticing: *"People who don't know each other still have similar goals"*. They came to realize that others were holding the same story or perspectives of the future, on their own lenses.

When the desires took shape together in the tree, something unexpected emerged in the first group: a feeling sadness from a couple of them in looking at how the shared desires weren't audacious dreams, they were rooted in basic human rights that should long since have been guaranteed, and that remain, still, the subject of struggles for equity and justice. *"Sad to see we are asking for basic things"*. *"We're not asking for much here"*. This sadness is worth naming, not softening. It is the grief of people who recognize that what they most desire — safety, connection, equity, housing, care — should not be radical. That recognition, held together in a room of strangers, became its own form of solidarity. As Barton (2024) positions *"untended grief can linger, smothering our creative capacity and ability to vision, until we give it space to be acknowledged."*

Emergent desires from the workshop participants

Some of the emergent desires across both groups expressed longings for different values, relationships and behaviours. They reflected a refusal of prevailing narratives and dreamed of a world that makes their hearts pound.

- **Reconnection was a dominant thread.** Across nature, community, and culture, participants desired reconnection: to each other, to the earth, to rhythm, to slowness, to story. This theme hints to a discomfort with the sense of disconnection of the present.
- **The desired future feels like a memory.** Some desires also framed the future as something remembered rather than invented: a return to our essence, to childhood joy, to the care of a village, to nature. Participants were reaching forward toward something that felt ancient, past and future meeting. As participant Joy Brown shared: *“The village returns. A system of hope, and deep healing.” “We are connected once again through the beat of our mother’s drum. Mother nature welcomes us back home.”*
- **Nature reclaiming its place in the forefront, not as backdrop.** Participants shared a desire for nature to reclaim its rightful place and thrive, with humans repositioning themselves within it rather than above it — not protected by humans, but sovereign in itself. It was framed as a return to nature, a relationship of care and harmony. *“I saw a world where nature reclaimed, signalling that no matter how powerful man thinks they are, nature is so much stronger.”*
- **Joy as an aspiration.** Appearing repeatedly, joy manifested itself through children laughing, music, dance, play, warmth, lightness, not as relief from the serious work of the future, but as evidence of what a good world feels like to inhabit.
- **Desires for equality and justice were concrete and specific.** Housing, food, water, healthcare for everyone, everywhere; an empathic world and no discrimination; choice and autonomy for all. *“No one left behind”. “No more need to leave your home country for a better life. Life is good everywhere”.*
- **Technology as a tool to enable other desires.** Technology appeared as a tool to enable other desires: equality, inclusion, nature’s regeneration, and connection.
- **Redefining societal values.** Rethinking values and principles that guide relationships with self, others and systems: curiosity over rejection, ready for randomness, work for creation rather than profit, less innovation and more wisdom.

5 Sensing Emergence

The future is germinating in the present, often beneath the surface.

In ecosystems, early growth is not always visible. Much of what signals renewal or activity happens out of sight. Sensing emergence invites participants to attune to these subtle indicators — fragments, practices, and relationships in the present that carry the seeds of desired futures.

Having named what they desire, participants now need to sense that those desires are not only possible in some distant or abstract future. They are already present, in a range of forms, in the world around them. Without this, the gap between desired future and the present can feel paralyzing. This stage shifts participants' relationship to the present, noticing the world around them in a new way. The future does not have to be imagined from scratch. The momentum from today can carry us forward.

We established earlier that constricted consciousness and dominant narratives actively narrow what feels possible for the future. What this stage asks is a deliberate counter: learning to see differently, not only imagine differently. Juma Pariri, Indigenous artist and researcher, interviewed for this research, described the relationship between past, present, and future in terms that highlight the symbolism of the seed: *"past and future are in the now, if the memory of the past is in the present, it is here now. A seed sometimes lies there for various reasons unsprouted, dormant. But if you water it, it sprouts. So it's all in the present — a present connecting forward and back."* The seed is the manifestation of the past and the promise of a future, held together in a single living thing. It refuses the linearity that Modernity imposes on time, and in doing so, makes space for a different relationship to what is possible.

The reframing from trend-scanning to sensing emergence is also a departure from dominant foresight practices. Rather than identifying signals of probable futures extrapolated from the present, participants are invited to find evidence of desired futures already present in their lives, positioning them not as observers of an incoming future, but as people already living with one foot inside futures they wish to inhabit.

As a closing for session one, participants were invited to continue practicing noticing where, in ordinary life, the futures they had imagined were already beginning to take root. These seeds might be small: a neighbour checking

on you, a community garden, a friend group providing mutual aid, a moment of unexpected joy or connection. They're not the full future yet. But they are pockets of the possible showing up in the present, and learning to notice them is itself a practice of reframing — a shift from anticipatory assumptions shaped by fear and scarcity toward ones shaped by desire and emergence.

This noticing is not passive, it is an intentional practice. Current media and news are designed for engagement, often triggering dysregulation in our nervous systems — we are trained by daily exposure to see what is wrong, what is threatening, what is failing. On top of that, our brains are wired for negativity⁹ and noticing the emergent seeds of desire requires an active countereffort. As Nicci Obbert, pro-social foresight practitioner, shared in her interview: *"I don't have a problem finding the pitfalls of things. And so, getting really optimistic views on things is helpful because of my natural bent the other way. It's part of my practice"*. Noticing the seeds is a practice, something cultivated deliberately, over time, against the grain of dominant patterns of attention.

Emily Empel described how this noticing of what she calls clues looks different for everyone: some find the whispers of the future in the natural world, others in symbols/aesthetics, movement, or conversation. This represents an expanded definition of weak signal scanning, one that is rooted in a lived practice that draws meaning from the ordinary world, the everyday and the mundane, rather than reserving futures sensing for exceptional, imagined, or curated spaces. This exercise trained participants to see the present differently, not just imagine an alternative. One participant described how the practice changed not only what they noticed but how they acted, moving from observing seeds to actively planting them. This was an active reframing of anticipatory assumptions: shifting attention from signals of doom to signals of desire, and practicing the art of seeing what is worth cultivating.

⁹ Negativity bias is defined as the tendency for humans to attend to, learn from, and be more influenced by negative information than by positive information in their environment. This bias leads individuals to consistently pay greater attention to negative events or stimuli rather than positive ones, and to weigh negative aspects more heavily when processing information and making decisions (Vaish et al., 2008).

Emergent seeds of change from the workshop participants

The seeds were placed at the beginning of session two in the same image of the tree of desires, and what participants shared across both groups confirmed this shift. When participants shared what they had noticed, four themes emerged consistently:

- **The future is already arriving in small acts.** Participants are finding the future they desire in the cracks of the present: mutual aid in Minnesota, community organizing against ICE in the United States, collectives and co-ops, and a stranger’s hello in an elevator.
- **Community as the primary site of transformation.** Unlike dominant narratives of change that center policy, technology, or institutions, participants located transformation in relational moments: connection, healing, storytelling, dancing, showing up. The political and the intimate are not separated, a qigong class and a socialist meetup appeared in the same activity without contradiction.
- **Safety as a precondition for everything else.** Many seeds pointed towards safety for authenticity, for vulnerability, for masc-presenting people to open up, for strangers not to be scary. The desired future isn’t just joyful, it’s psychologically safe enough to be present in, the future feels like a place where people can finally exhale and connect profoundly with themselves and others. “Pushing past fear and in return being open to connection, play, curiosity, love”. “Make it safe for masc presenting folks to open up and share with each other”.
- **Deliberate retreat from the digital.** Participants highlighted seeds around AI refusal, the slow death of the internet, and the choice of real life over screens. These were not only preferences for the offline, they were an act of political reclamation: a refusal of a particular vision of the future being imposed by tech culture, and an insistence on agency over how attention is spent and how life is lived.

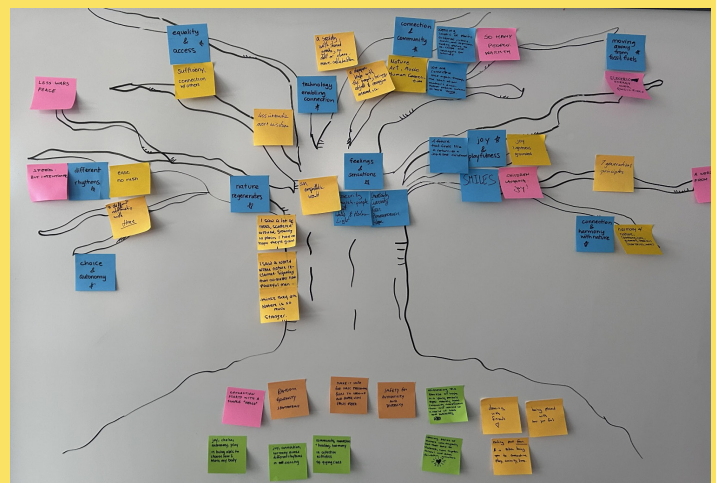


Figure 8: Tree of desires with the seeds of change.

Between Sessions

The space between sessions is where the stage of Dormancy took place. This stage did the real work of processing, sense-making, and noticing — important reflexive practices to prepare participants for the following stages.

6 Dormancy

Rest, integration, and unseen transformation are essential forms of growth.

A dormant seed is not dead, not passive, not waiting to be rescued. Beneath the stillness, organisms strengthen and prepare for the next cycle. This stage honours the necessity to pause, allowing insights to settle, emotions to integrate, and imagination to deepen in organic ways.

The week between sessions was not designed as a gap, but as a stage. This reflects a commitment to pacing that runs through this research, understanding that integration cannot be rushed or replicated in a workshop space. Dormancy honours that imagination develops in cycles, and that not all growth is visible. What participants carried with them into their daily lives after session one needed time to settle, deepen, and prepare them to imagine more expansively together in session two.

The two-session format let participants sit with what had emerged, notice what shifted in between, and arrive the second time carrying new awareness. The invitation to continue sensing emergence during this period was a deliberate extension of the workshop into ordinary life.

The work of dormancy became apparent in retrospect. Participants returned to session two not as the people who left, but as the people who had been quietly changed by the week in between. They confirmed that the week had been rather generative. Knowing the workshop's structure and that they would return to a familiar space with familiar faces allowed them to enter the space differently than the first time. When they gathered again, there was a sense of returning to the community they had created, of greeting people they had already been through something with.

Session Two

Session two moved through three stages: Re-grounding, Branching, and Co-Tending. Where session one focused on the personal, internal, session two moved outward from the changed individual into collective imagination and then prepared to return out to the world. The community built in session one became the instrument of the futures work in session two.

7

Re-grounding

Return to the soil with what has changed.

When a plant is transplanted, moved from one environment to the other, there is a period of re-establishment. The roots, disturbed by the move, must reconnect with new soil. This is not starting over. The root system is more developed than it was at first planting. It reaches more deeply and holds more securely. Participants return changed. The self who arrives in the second session carries what the first season planted and what the dormancy deepened, ready for a new cycle of growth.

Participants do not return to session two as the same people who left session one. They have been shaped by the week in between, by what they noticed, what stayed with them, and what shifted in the backdrop of ordinary life. This stage acknowledges the changed self and prepares for what comes next. Re-grounding closes the dormancy and opens up the branching. It holds distinct and intertwined functions. The first is to acknowledge the new person who has arrived, shaped by the space in between, the moments since we last saw each other. The second is preparation for what's to come by re-entering the body, re-tuning to self and others, and creating the conditions that collective imagination requires. To move into branching without this re-establishment would be to ask roots that have just been transplanted to immediately extend outward. Those roots must first meet the soil.

The relational aspect is particularly important here. Participants carry a shared history formed through the vulnerability and community of session one. Participants were already familiar with one another, and it was from within that relational container that the work of collective futures-making could begin. The shift from individuals to a relationally-held group was foundational, and the subsequent collective imagination depended on it.

Session two opened with the same somatic and relational practices that opened session one, but with different invitations. The selection was never arbitrary, each activity was chosen because its somatic logic mirrored the conceptual work it was preparing participants to do. The mirror game (drawn from Boal's Theater of the Oppressed), was used here as a warm-up to collective attunement: tuning into the other, listening through mindful movement, and practicing mutual recognition and non-hierarchical relation (Boal, 2003). Moving through different phases of shifting the designated leader and follower into a stage with no designated roles, participants attuned to each other in a way that verbal re-introduction rarely produces. It was a rehearsal, in the body, of the quality of attention and collaboration the rest of the workshop would require.

DeVita's (2025) research on embodied futures highlights the importance of shared movement. Although the movements explored in her research differ from the ones chosen for these workshops, their outcomes share a similar impact: "attuning to presence, especially through shared movement, can unlock a form of collective imagination that is largely underutilized in traditional futures practices" (DeVita, 2025). Re-grounding practices activate this shared history before any words are exchanged. The nervous system that returns for session two had already experienced this space as safe, arriving more quickly at the conditions that allow imagination to open up.

After this stage, participants placed the seeds that emerged during Dormancy on the shared tree, building a collectively generated evidence-base that the futures they longed for were already flickering into existence. Now the ground was ready to branch into imagining the futures where these seeds flourish.

8 Branching

Imagination expands through encounter.

A tree branches in response to its environment, reaching toward light, intertwining with others, forming canopy networks and shared habitats. Here, imagination becomes relational. It extends beyond the individual, shaped by the encounter. Branching reflects how collective imagining generates possibilities no one could do alone.

Individual imagination, even if well developed, has its limits. This stage exists because collective futures-making generates possibilities that are genuinely inaccessible to individuals working alone. This is not because groups are smarter but because the encounter changes what can be imagined. When individual desires, fears, and seeds meet those of others, the futures that emerge are different. They are shaped by a plurality of perspectives, which acts as a generative force for the stage itself. We have already established the relational and embodied conditions that make this possible, and Branching asks us to put it into practice.

Innovation North (n.d.) names what becomes available: when different people come together to imagine desirable futures, they often uncover shared longings or similarities that neither could have surfaced alone, and this convergence becomes a source of energy and collective optimism. This is something that cannot be produced by one person imagining on behalf of many.

Noohi and Uose (2025) argue that reigniting imagination does not hinge on a simple permission to dream but rather requires a deliberate infrastructure that is cultivated and resourced because imagination, like any capacity that has been systematically diminished, does not just re-emerge organically. Amahra Spence, cited in the Collective Imagination Practices Toolkit (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, n.d.), frames collective imagination as “*continuous rehearsal of the worlds we’re growing*”. This framing shaped how we understood the purpose of this stage, which is not to produce a polished version of the future, but to practice inhabiting one together, through making, movement, and encounter. The Imagination Infrastructuring framework (Robinson & Oldham, n.d.), argues that imagination infrastructures must “*encompass the embodied, even the spiritual*” if they are to ignite truly plural and liberatory imaginations that do not simply reproduce what is already familiar.

After the Re-grounding stage, participants planted their seeds on the shared tree, building a collectively generated evidence-base that the futures they

longed for were already flickering into existence. The futures-making activities started with defining the parameters orienting this imagining. Through dot-voting, each individual placed five votes across the leaves on the tree of desires, selecting the desires that resonated the most deeply with them. This was a simple but deliberate act of shared prioritization that established north stars for the next stage. Then, in small groups, they defined the remaining parameters of their future, defining geography, year, and how speculative they wanted the imagined future to be. These, combined with the vote on desires, acted as loose but generative constraints that gave the imagination space to grow by creating a shared frame within which ideas could interact and build on one another.

To support the envisioning and development of these futures, a deck of cards (Appendix C) offered multisensory entry-points across four categories:

- **Doing & making the future:** art-based invitations for exploration through tangible artifacts or enacting something in the future
- **Feeling the future:** prompts to visit the future through your senses,
- **Living together:** critical questions through relationality and care in the future, and
- **Holding and shaping the future:** critical questions through systemic and institutional lenses.

They were built to engage different senses and prompt imagining without embedding assumptions of current systems. Expert Jason E. Lewis noted the importance of having practical avenues that bridge into more conceptual dimensions of thinking, lowering the barrier to entry without reducing the depth of exploration. Here, structure functioned as an access point rather than a constraint, enabling participants to move between tangible and abstract, and from there, into new imaginative territory. One card simply asked: how does water move in this future? For some participants, this was a question they had genuinely never considered. It stopped them and opened up a new pathway for imagination.

With the cards as invitations, groups could choose their preferred art method to make the future tangible: one group chose a flyer for an event and a map of a place of gathering, another chose to re-enact a moment of care, and another did a collage of the different elements of their future. Overall, the methods were points of departure; even if participants selected a flyer for an event as their artifact, they imagined the whole social context that motivated that gathering, which indicated elements of mobility, social relations, labour, celebration, and values of this future. The cards served as tangible artifacts that helped participants engage in futures thinking that

would otherwise feel too large or abstract. They were described as directive, effective, and familiar — a vehicle that connected to current reality and made the future feel approachable. Additionally, allowing groups to decide their method and parameters was shared as something important to their engagement and imagining.

One participant described how acting out a desired future made it feel more possible and closer than they had previously felt. The performative element became a rehearsal of the future, showing the body how that reality could feel like. A participant from this group shared the impact of enacting futures where their needs were met: *“At the core of our roleplay was community and care that expanded beyond the nuclear family, and a government system that cares about well-being and healthcare for all. By having our basic needs met, it allowed us to have more space to be more present and engaged with ourselves and each other.”*

Something else emerged organically. The group who performed their future did so with movement and dialogue, re-enacting a communal meal around a dinner table. Through the dialogue in the performance, they began to back-cast, tracing a path from the present, naming what had shifted, what would have to be composted to arrive in that future, and what was emerging. This was not a planned component or prompt woven into the activity. It arrived through the act of inhabiting and presenting the world they had imagined through dialogue and performance. This suggests that foresight techniques such as back-casting can emerge organically when participants are immersed in embodied futures contexts, rather than needing to be explicitly introduced as analytical tools.

When groups shared the futures they had built, participants were not asked to critique or evaluate one another, instead, invited to notice what was happening within themselves. What did this future produce in the body? What emotions surfaced? But something different happened when groups co-created their worlds: imagination expands through witnessing. Encountering a future that someone else had built with their hands, voices, bodies, and creativity changes what you can imagine. Witnessing someone else’s world externalizes possibilities that may have remained unspoken or not-yet internally known. It gives shapes to intuitions you may have felt but not known yet how to articulate. In this way, witnessing can act as an imagination catalyst, expanding the range of what feels thinkable.

The significance of what shifted through this process of collective imagination and encountering is taken up more fully in the next section called Unlocking capacities: what people feel able to do and feel.

9 Co-Tending

Futures-making is a practice of mutual care.

Ecosystems thrive through relationships. Responsiveness, reciprocity, and adaptation. Co-tending invites participants to carry what has been cultivated back into their lives, identifying what needs to be nourished, pruned, or protected. It frames futures-making as a sustained, relational practice rather than a single moment in time.

At this stage, Illich's (1973) call for convivial tools becomes especially relevant. Co-tending is about supporting people to leave with practices they can understand, adapt, and use on their own – tools that do not create dependency on the workshops or facilitator, but expand their capacity to act in the world.

The risk of any workshop-based intervention is the implicit assumption that transformation happens in the room and stays there. Co-tending exists to address this directly. It is intended to support participants as they carry what was cultivated back into their lives by identifying what they wish to nurture, release, or continue practicing. The prefix co is intentional, meant to instill that sustaining imagination is not a solitary act. It is a practice of mutual care, tending both to the self and to the shared conditions that make futures-making possible for others.

What our prototype revealed is that becoming does not happen through instruction. It happens through experience, by feeling, building, witnessing, and then being invited to consider: what does this ask of me? The path from seeds of the future to a new tree is about practice. And the workshops gave people a felt sense of what practice could take root in their lives. The Future is Now Toolkit (Plurality University Network, 2024) describes this phase as becoming the change, where you learn to see yourself as an actor in the story that leads to desired futures. As the Collective Imagination Practices Toolkit (n.d.) describes, the work is tending to the seeds already there and cultivating the soil in which new patterns can flourish.

The closing sequence of the session moved inward. A meditation invited participants to hold the futures they had built and witnessed, and to feel into their own relationships with these worlds or other imaginings that emerged through the process. They were invited not only to name what they want to grow but also what they want – or need – to compost and release, eliminating what is no longer in service to the futures they desire. In ecological terms, composting is the transformation, where the conversion of what has ended turns into the nutrients for new life.

Journaling followed, giving the reflections a material form and allowing other insights to emerge through the writing process. One participant described how the meditation surfaced things they were not aware they were carrying. Another shared how meditation and journaling allowed them to externalize some personal commitments, guiding points for the future they wanted to live in. These moments confirmed that the transition from imagining to acting is mediated through internal, often non-verbal processes that are difficult to access through discussion alone.

For some, the shift had already begun in the week between sessions as the invitation to notice seeds had moved from observation to action, from seeing the future they desired to practicing it in small daily gestures. The workshops were designed to invite a second round of the Polak Game to make those internal shifts visible. While time constraints only allowed us to repeat it with one cohort, the game's prompting was discussed with both groups. Across cohorts, participants reported placing themselves differently than they had at the beginning, describing themselves as more optimistic and feeling they had more agency. One said: *"I'm a bigger part of the puzzle than I thought."* These shifts are significant and represent a changed relationship with one's own capacity to imagine and act—a movement from seeing the future as fixed or out of reach to understanding it as something people can shape, together and through their own actions.

When asked to describe the workshop in a single sentence, one participant said: *"I imagined the future with a group of people and discovered there's more to be optimistic about than I previously thought."* Another participant, Fábio, said: *"I came in a person and left a village."* This stage closes the arc while opening a new cycle of growth.

At the closing, participants received seeds, a small symbolic gesture of both reciprocity and a reminder that the futures imagined together were possibilities lying in wait in the present. The seeds were an invitation and reminder to keep going, to bring the practice of noticing, imagining, and tending back into the texture of everyday life and to trust that what was cultivated here would keep growing in the dark.

Taken together, the Germination Model and its container articulate the conditions under which imagination reopens, agency strengthens, and futures-making becomes possible.

2.5. Our learnings: a reflection on the limits of the prototype

The Germination Model is grounded in the understanding that learning emerges from honest engagement with what works and what doesn't, and that the capacity to hold complexity, uncertainty, and imperfection is itself a futures-making skill. This section applies that same orientation inward to the research itself. What follows is an account of the learnings that emerged from the edges of this prototype — the places where the design strained, where the experience felt uneven, and where the work is still becoming.

Designing for difference requires a flexible, multimodal, and accessible approach.

A consistent challenge across both sessions and cohorts was timing. This work requires certain steps and space that can't be rushed. Therefore, to protect the work these steps were doing, we constantly adapted so that the necessary movements were achieved and space was given where needed. For example, the Branching step, (where the futures-making card activity was) needed more time than initially allocated: groups needed at least sixty minutes to settle in, negotiate parameters, choose cards, understand their working dynamic, and then begin the imaginative work. In one cohort, to accommodate the extra time needed we skipped the second round of the Polak Game. This suggests the design is currently ambitious and could benefit from more time, smaller groups, or a different sequencing of activities.

This learning also raises a question about the scalability of the current model. There is still a need for further assessment of how much time would be required with more participants to progress through the model's different movements. In total, we had 6 hours to work through the model across two 3-hour sessions. To maintain the level of sharing and relationship-building we achieved with a larger group, more time, or a different activity structure would be needed.

However, simply adding more hours is not enough. There are elements of participation that can't be anticipated beforehand, as they depend on the unique dynamics of each group's encounter. This highlights the need for a living agenda, as brown (2017) calls it, a spacious, adaptable structure that facilitators can breathe with in real time, prioritizing and adjusting based on what the group needs rather than what the plan prescribed. This requires facilitators to hold the intent of each movement clearly enough to know what

can be condensed, what cannot, and what the group is telling them through their energy and engagement.

Designing for differences means recognizing that participants process and engage in profoundly varied ways. For some, the meditation was the most essential and generative part of the experience. For others, it was the movement, or the art-making, or the conversations. One participant reflected honestly about their sense-making process: *“I process things by talking a lot, so I could have discussed the way I envision the future for a long time. I realize, however, that’s not everyone’s preferred way of processing.”* This work asks people to engage with potentially unfamiliar or uncomfortable modalities. We observed that when participants trusted the process and remained open to the proposals being made, they were able to move through activities that didn’t immediately suit them, and often found something unexpected on the other side.

This reflects the value of the multimodal design: the workshops were deliberately designed to span different ways of knowing precisely because no single modality reaches everyone. But it also surfaces a genuine tension of designing for a group whose preferences and sensory processing styles are unknown to the facilitator. Incorporating different ways of knowing and agency to engage with the activities in a way that feels most comfortable becomes even more important, though not enough. It calls for ongoing attentiveness: noticing what your group needs, naming the permission to engage differently, and adapting through facilitation rather than trying to anticipate everything in the design phase.

This attentiveness extends into accessibility and neurodiversity. We designed activities with variations to accommodate different accessibility needs, and intentionally adapted when specific needs became known. For example, one participant disclosed having aphantasia, so we attempted to adapt the meditations to emphasize sensory and somatic prompts rather than solely visual imagery. This is one area that requires further development and testing to ensure that activities are accessible across neurodiverse experiences. We also recognize that many of the movement-based activities would require further adaptation for participants with different physical needs, and that some activities might need to be adapted to foster dialogue and participation among multigenerational audiences, particularly when involving kids. Overall, it’s important to acknowledge that accessibility is an ongoing design commitment, something to be built into and improved with each iteration of the workshops’ design.

Assuming competence supports participant agency and emotional self-determination.

As facilitators, we often noticed ourselves worrying about whether planned activities would land, and how best to care for participants when they encounter challenging emotions. We noticed varied signs of engagement throughout both cohorts: some participants moved through activities with ease, others showed signs of resistance or discomfort. One participant clearly articulated the anxiety the initial meditation evoked, and another how the movement games were not their comfort zone. As previously discussed, these variations often reflect different processing styles, preferences, and emotional states that participants carried at the time. Trusting the process and the intentional use of multiple modalities was essential.

Chalmers provided an important piece of advice in their interview that stuck with us: to assume competence. While they spoke about it from an anti-ableist affective perspective — presuming that participants have the competence to regulate their own emotions, or to feel them, as they prefer — the principle extends to facilitation more broadly. Creating the conditions for participants to build their own safety in the space means announcing clearly that they have the autonomy and agency to follow their own needs, to step back from an activity, or to engage differently. As Chalmers put it: *“Presuming competence that they can either handle that experience or they’ll ask for help — and letting them know that there’s no moral impetus to either regulate or feel. All of those are okay options.”*

This also requires resisting the common facilitation impulse to “save” participants from discomfort. As Cvetkovich (2012) argues, negative feelings are not pathologies to be resolved but forms of knowing that surface what dominant cultures suppress. Discomfort can be a sign that the work is brushing up against something real, and it does not always need to be softened or solved. Allowing participants to stay with difficult feelings, while trusting their competence to navigate them, can itself expand the imaginative capacities the workshops aim to cultivate.

The model asks for vulnerability and deep engagement from participants, and it’s important to name it as a potentially big ask. Each participant will be on a different journey in their awareness of Modernity’s suppressions and constrictions, as well as in a specific emotional state and readiness on that day. It’s part of the nature of the work, however it’s crucial to allow participants to engage in the way that feels safe and aligned with their readiness on that day.

When we, as facilitators, both felt anxious about how a participant might be feeling, we trusted they would ask for help or care for themselves as they

needed, and that we had provided the conditions and space to do so. Holding this trust made it possible for the work to unfold with integrity and for participants to meet the process on their own terms.

Multi-session design supports transformation but introduces challenges in continuity.

As mentioned previously, the two sessions were an important design decision, but it resulted in three participants only being able to attend one session. It is demanding of participants to return and commit to both sessions, which we fully understand, but we still believe it is an important element of the model. Nevertheless, it is important to name its potential implications and vulnerabilities.

Workshop activities benefit from continued testing, refinement, and adjustment.

The futures-making card activity was one of the most valued elements of the workshops and also one which its mechanisms of engagement could still be refined. We tested two different approaches: in the first cohort, participants browsed the full methods deck (see Appendix C, Doing and Making the Future) and selected cards they were drawn to, with other decks available as optional additions; in the second cohort, each participant drew one card from each deck, and groups then selected their preferred cards together. The cards were extremely helpful as concrete, tangible anchors for imaginative work, but the mechanics of drawing cards that best support both agency and creative prompting could still be further tested and refined.

One participant also suggested repeating the opening meditation and art-making exercise from session one at the close of session two — a return-to-beginning structure that could be worth exploring as a way of making visible how participants' relationship to the future has shifted across the arc of the workshops. This is worth exploring in future iterations and could be an excellent alternative to the repetition of the Polak game as a comparison tool.

Caring for ourselves enables us to care for participants with integrity.

As mentioned previously in *The cost to practitioners* section, facilitators also carry the suppressions that participants experience, as well as the complex emotional experience and relationship to the future. We felt that and noticed how it also impacted our experience during the workshops. Chalmers and Frederickson both acknowledged in their interviews the importance that we, as facilitators, also care for ourselves. Chalmers shared how they prepare for

sessions through mindfulness practices that allow them space to process their emotions prior to attending their patients. This was an important lesson for us: while organizing the room for the workshops and preparing the nourishments, we practiced mindfulness, creating the space for processing, breathing, and reflecting on our emotional experiences. According to Gumbs (2021) *“the responsibility of a facilitator is to keep people breathing in the face of their greatest fears — including rejection, not knowing, being wrong, losing something, and the future.”* She continues that as a facilitator, you need to breathe first, as our breathing and how we are present through change and possibility, can serve as a guide or evidence for participants to know that they too can breathe through this process.

Post-workshop continuity remains an open area for further development.

The workshops functioned as bounded experiences: the relationship between that shift and sustained transformation in daily life remains open.

After leaving the container, the conditions that suppress imagination re-surface. The exhaustion, the isolation, the dominant narratives that insist other futures are impossible do not disappear because someone spent six hours imagining otherwise. The workshops created a seed, and seeds need ongoing nutrients, resources, and tending to grow.

Participants named this themselves: when asked what support would help them practice futures-making beyond the workshops, the most requested resources were an ongoing community or group to practice with, and more examples of people and movements already practicing these futures. Connections to existing communities doing this work, shorter practices that could be done alone, follow-up sessions, and online resources or toolkits were also mentioned. Taken together, participants were describing an infrastructure for continuity, a recognition that a transformative experience and a sustained practice are different things, and that bridging that gap is one of the important unfinished works of the prototypes.

Creating the conditions for a transformative experience within a bounded container is a different challenge from creating the conditions for ongoing futures-making as a daily and communal practice. This is both a limitation of this research and its most important invitation to future work.

Unlocking Capacities: What People Become Able To Do and Feel

3
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Artwork from workshop participant Andre Carvalho.



Everything we attempt, everything we do, is either growing up as its roots go deeper, or it's decomposing, leaving its lessons in the soil for the next attempt.

adrienne maree brown (2017)

When the conditions are right, something shifts — people’s relationship to the future itself changes, not just their knowledge of it. In the following sections, we’ll discuss the emergence of collective imagination, agency and hope through this process.

3.1. Collective imagination emerges as a different kind of knowing

Imagining the future together produces a kind of knowing that imagining alone cannot. Not simply more ideas, or more creative ideas, but a shared, relational knowing that arises in the in the space between people. This way, collective imagination becomes a condition for imagining otherwise, expanding what feels possible by allowing people to think, sense, and dream beyond their individual imaginaries. Participants consistently described the collective nature of the process as its most transformative element. As one participant said: *“you’re really limited in what you can imagine by yourself without externalizing your thoughts. It serves no one to imagine the future in isolation, and it’s a much more productive, enriching and hopeful experience to come at the future with honesty and with others. It’s an essential practice we need in this moment of our history.”*

Anna Tsing’s (2015) concept of contamination brings this dynamic to light. Encounters with others’ stories, histories, and perspectives altered participants’ own imaginaries. Through this mutual influence, new directions and possibilities emerged, not authored by a single person but co-produced through the encounter. Tsing’s (2015) uses the concept of a polyphonic assemblage to argue how worlds are not built by single organizing forces or unified visions. They emerge from the coming together of diverse, autonomous melodies that intertwine and produce world-making projects, human or not (Tsing, 2015, pp. 23–24). The collective imaginary produced in the workshops was an assemblage of this kind. Without a single participant, method, or facilitator as its author, it emerged from the encounter between all of them, shaped by the particular people who happened to be in those rooms on those days. A different group would have produced something different — and that contingency is not a weakness but the source of its particular aliveness.

This unique assemblage of plural perspectives is worth framing through Santos’ (2014) concept of the ecology of knowledges — the idea that richer and more just futures emerge from multiple ways of knowing held in genuine

dialogue. Participants brought different cultural frameworks, different relationships to time, different experiences of power and marginality, and different ways of sensing and expressing their relationship to the future. The result of this contamination was not consensus but a shared imaginative landscape that was more honest, more complex, and more human for containing multitudes.

This insight connects to the roots of collective intelligence research, which shows that under the right conditions, groups consistently produce wiser judgments and more creative solutions than individuals working alone — not despite their diversity but because of it. The key enabling conditions were present in the workshop design: diversity of perspectives, independence, decentralization, aggregation, and trust (Surowiecki, 2004). Yet, what unfolded in the workshops extended beyond cognitive problem solving.

Workshop participants were practicing what Freire (2000) understood as *conscientização* — the process by which people develop critical awareness of their social reality through dialogue and shared reflection, and begin to see themselves as capable of transforming it. As Freire (2000) understood, humans are always in a process of becoming, never complete, and the container created space for further steps in the critical engagement with reality that makes the imagining of not-yet futures possible. Participants left not only with a richer vision of possible futures but with a transformed understanding of their own capacity to act toward them.

Witnessing and listening to others, having one's inner experience reflected back through a different voice, creates a sense of community, and a particular type of courage that comes from knowing you're accompanied. Participants consistently named this as one of the most valuable parts of the experience, with the word "validating" surfacing repeatedly. This wasn't just a nice social feature of the workshop; it was described as necessary to the experience. *"Good to know I'm not crazy." "I'm in a harsh mental space, but more resourceful, knowing other people invested in the shift". "We are closer than we think to each other. Same goal of a better future and making a change."*

Having the space to name their anxieties and fears about the future, and to hear them named back by strangers, created something politically significant: a collective claim that these feelings are real, shared, and worthy of attention. *"The obscurity of the connections between our own despair and the collective despair that is present in the places where we live adds to our confusion and (political) depression"* (Cvetkovich, 2012). Making those connections visible and naming the private as shared was an act of communal holding of difficult feelings that creates a renewed sense of community.

This shared recognition is one of the conditions that makes desired futures imaginable. It loosens the isolation that constricts imagination and brings in a sense of collective possibility. Through dialogue, they move beyond their constrained narratives of the future. Their imagination opens up, and they can envision diverse and genuinely desired futures rather than recycling the futures that dominant narratives have already pre-populated for them. Collaboration of this quality requires time, care, trust, and mutual respect. It requires honouring of the richness that comes from bringing genuinely different people together. As foresight practitioner Zan Chandler noted in her interview, it requires meeting people where they are. The time spent in play, movement, sharing, and making together created the relational architecture that made genuine collaboration possible — not just co-presence, but the felt sense of being in something together.

This research confirms that it is not only the shared content of the imagining that matters, but the experience of having done it together. As one participant reflected: *“The final group task consolidated the belief that I can imagine better futures and that other people are willing to imagine and build those together.”* As Tsing (2015) learns from mushrooms, in the ruins of what we thought was stable, survival itself is collaborative, we cannot flourish alone, and the quality of the relations we build in the present shapes what futures become possible. The community formed in the act of collective imagining becomes a living demonstration of the future being imagined: a small, temporary, but real instance of the connection, plurality, and mutual care that participants named as what they most desired.

Ultimately, what collective imagining produced was an expanded field of possibility. Participants encountered futures they would not have generated alone, and their own visions were altered through the encounter. This suggests that imagination is not solely an individual capacity, but a relational one strengthened through plurality, shaped through exchange, and animated by the worlds we build together.

3.2. Agency emerges from embodied reflection and conversation

Agency has a close and necessary relationship with imagination. As Snyder's (2002) positions in his theory, it's not about seeing pathways to be achieved, but feeling capable of walking them that generates hope. Without this sense of capacity, imagining worlds collapses into wishful thinking or may even lead to hopelessness, where the desired futures are visible but utterly out of reach. The relationship between imagination and agency is therefore not sequential, but mutually generative: imagination opens pathways, and agency is what makes those pathways feel achievable.

Modernity creates a narrative of agency connected to meritocracy that tells a story that individuals can achieve anything through effort and talent, however, this is a fallacy within systems that were never designed for everyone's flourishing. Agency to change their reality is systematically unavailable for most people, while the illusion of individual agency keeps them from seeing the structural conditions that constrain them. Within this context, agency is a hard sensation to cultivate; even when you understand the systems that constrict your flourishing, their change feels out of reach. Participants acknowledged those structural barriers and also shared a deep mistrust of current systems to lead meaningful change.

What the workshops produced was not a resolution of this impasse, but a different relationship to it. Agency showed up in an unexpected and instructive form. Unlike dominant narratives of change that center policy, technology, or institutions, participants located transformation in relational moments — connection, healing, storytelling, dancing, and showing up. This doesn't mean they left giving up on systemic change, they named the wall clearly — the concentration of power, the speed of ecological and political deterioration, and the depth of inequality. That didn't disappear, but what shifted was the relationship to it. Rather than paralyzed by it all, participants began to locate themselves in relation to it differently: as people who could not single-handedly dismantle it overnight, but who could act meaningfully from where they stood, in relationship with others who were doing the same.

Agency is felt before it is known

Through opening new imagination pathways and, most importantly, embodying these futures, they feel reachable. Agency arrived through this felt sense, in the body, in shared space, in the experience of inhabiting a desired future and noticing elements of it sprouting in the day-to-day.

When participants were invited not only to think about different futures but to feel them — in their bodies, in shared space, in collective movement and imagining — those futures began to feel reachable. Embodying a desired future makes it familiar. It creates a felt sense that this future is not only possible in the abstract but liveable in the now, and so we can move towards it. These embodied futures, become the attractors Lewis mentions, pulling present action toward them. Therefore agency is built through futures that have been felt, not only reasoned.

Agency is local, cellular, and relational

In sharing the affective and imaginative space with others who also saw the challenges with the current reality and were seeking change, agency emerged. Participants described a shift not just in how they felt about the future, but in how they understood their own capacity to act. However, agency took an interesting shape, it was relocated to the local, the cellular, the relational — community organizing, closer circles, collective action, making change where you are. It's an acknowledgement of structural power while refusing to be paralyzed by it, a recognition that change begins somewhere, and that somewhere is always here. This reframing of agency as everyday practice, is a condition that makes acting toward desired futures feel possible rather than overwhelming or not worth trying.

One participant described taking away specific ideas, such as engaging with strangers in public by starting with a simple greeting. Another said they now know their actions will have an impact and that others will join. Participant Mariam said it beautifully: *“Every change starts at a cellular level.”* *“There’s beauty in starting small.”* These are expressions of a hard-won and politically critical hope, the kind that Kelley (2022) names, where visions and dreams sustained movements across generations not because victory was certain but because action was chosen.

Participants moved toward something closer to what adrienne maree brown (2017) describes in emergent strategy: the understanding that large-scale transformation emerges from small, interconnected actions, that the quality of the relationships we build now shapes the futures that become possible, and that starting locally is not a consolation prize but the actual work. *“Bigger changes have been made with less”*, one participant noted. *“Slavery was a thing until it wasn’t”*. These are statements of recognition that structural change has always begun somewhere particular, with someone refusing to accept the wall as permanent.

Agency is accompanied

The sense of agency that emerged from this research is one that Modernity's individualism suppresses: the understanding that agency is not a solo capacity. It emerges in relationship, and it is sustained by it.

Throughout the workshops, participants described shifts in their sense of agency that were inseparable from the experience of being in community — of discovering that others shared their feelings and their commitment to change. The experience of not being alone in seeking a different world was itself a source of capacity. It changed not only how participants felt but what they believed they could do. The participant Fábio highlighted: *“now I certainly know that I am not alone and not everyone is alienated. I can start doing things, and they will have an impact, and other people will join. We are in this together, and we all want to feel part of a community.”*

The shift in agency also translated into concrete behavioural intention, as participants believe that they have a higher capacity to influence change on a local level. The participant Theo articulated: *“It made me want to be a better person, as in act in ways that are more aligned with the kind of future I dream of and want to build. It made me feel like I have more agency in creating a better world with those around me.”* The community built in the workshop became, briefly, a model of the community participants wanted to live in. And that experience, however temporary, was generative: it showed them that the future they desired was not only imaginable but already partially present.

This is what the model produced: not a plan, but a posture. Not certainty about outcomes, but a felt sense of capacity and companionship. Agency, in this research, did not arrive as the knowledge of what to do. It arrived as the experience of feeling you are not alone in seeking change, and your scope of action can have an impact in living the desired futures in the present.

This expresses how collective futuring can begin to shift the present: by making desired futures feel inhabitable in the now, and by revealing where they already live in small, relational moments. This is a cyclical perception of time and the essence of transformative foresight: envisioning futures that inspire action in today, not only in working toward those futures, but in the shift of noticing where they already live — and choosing, together, to cultivate them.

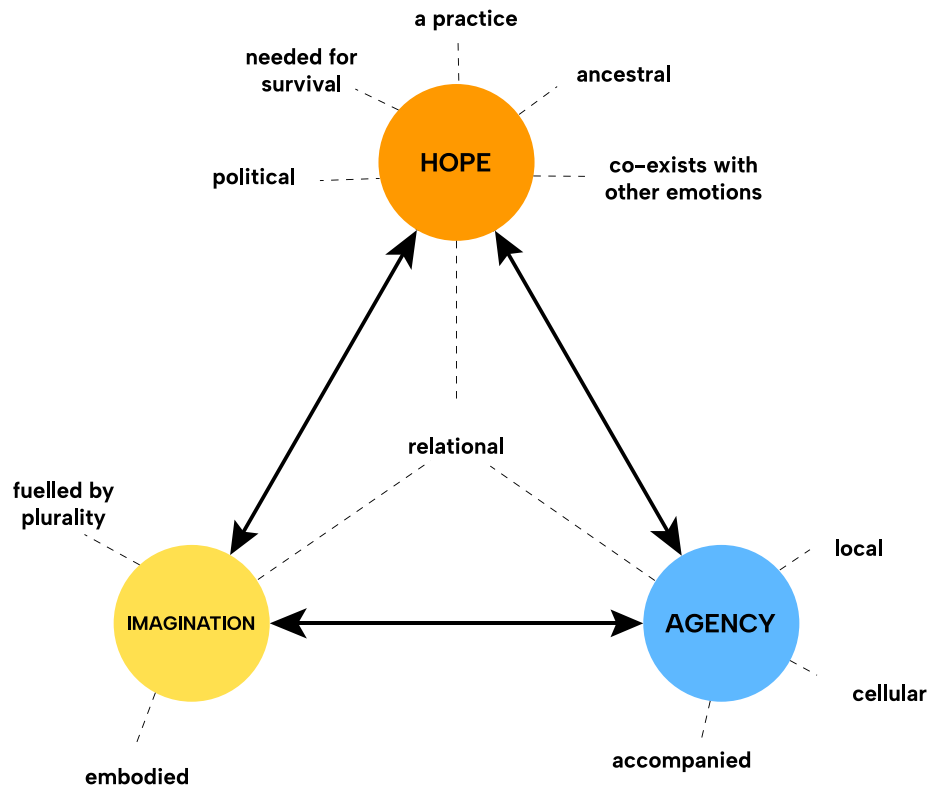
3.3. Hope emerges as a renewable energy that fuels change

Hope was a thread that both inspired and directed our inquiry. We wanted to understand where hope emerges from, in what conditions, and how it can be cultivated. Throughout history, entire communities facing marginalization and oppression found ways to keep hoping, to keep dreaming — not because the present seemed promising, but despite it. Hope, then, is not equivalent to seeing a good present. It emerges in the harshest conditions. Through this research, Freire’s framing of hope as an ontological need was not only affirmed theoretically but experienced in practice: as participants connected with their desires and with each other, hope emerged — and with it, a renewed sense of agency and movement toward different futures.

What this research found, taken together, is that hope functions neither as a precondition nor as an outcome of collective futures work. It is both a generator and a product simultaneously. The imagining of desired futures sparks hope — and hope, in turn, fuels the sense of agency needed to move toward those futures. But this relationship is not linear. It is circular and self-renewing: agency generates further imagining, further imagining generates further hope, and hope sustains the practice through the inevitable encounters with difficulty. Nikolas Badminton offered the idea of hope as renewable energy for change that can be created individually or in groups (Badminton, 2025). This idea deeply resonated with our learnings: hope is not a finite resource that depletes, but one that regenerates through use, particularly through collective and embodied use.

It was a beautiful movement to witness in practice. Participants arrived carrying real grief, distrust, and fractured temporalities; the assumptions named showed that. By the end, the same group was naming signals of hope, feeling the future in their bodies, and identifying cellular-level change as meaningful agency.

Figure 9: The foundational structure of change.



Such a complex energy encompasses many elements. Through this research, we learned that hope is active, it's a movement toward the desired future, it is contagious and relational. Environments can support its emergence, and it can be held together with grief, pain, and fear.

Hope is a practice

Hope is cultivated, exercised, and renewed. As Kaba (2021) reminds us, it's a discipline, cultivated daily, even in the face of grief, fear, or uncertainty. This understanding of hope as a choice rather than an emotional state is what makes it available even in the most difficult conditions, and what connects it to Freire's insistence that transformation requires active, practiced commitment rather than wishful waiting.

This practice requires tending. Juma Pariri, in our interview, described hope, imagination, and dreaming as muscles that needs to be exercised, and similarly to other muscles, if you stop using them, they atrophy. Juma also named the difficulty of this daily tending: *"It's a daily struggle. So every day it starts with the invitation to myself, and then continuing to invite others and also receiving, taking medicine, searching together"*. Nicci Obert described the importance of cultivating a hopeful posture even when fear is present, and her practice of actively exercising the noticing of hope as part of her research on pro-social futures.

Hope is political, ancestral and needed for survival.

Participants positioned hope not as a feeling of positivity but as something owed, necessary, and chosen against the odds. As Freire (1997) puts it, *“it is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite”*. As some expressed, cynicism and apathy are a luxury, privileges available only to those who can afford to step away. The ones who expressed the strongest sense of hope did not do so because the future seemed to be heading in a good direction, but because the alternative to hope is abandonment: of themselves and of each other. *“We owe it to other people to be hopeful”*. *“Hope as a need for survival”*. *“Cynicism is a luxury”*. *“Apathy is a luxury”*.

Hoping for other futures is political, and this stance emerged in the workshop most strongly from those who have been marginalized in Modernity: those who recognize that the futures being imagined by others don't include them, and who also carry the knowledge of how far their ancestors and communities have already travelled. In the workshops, this was voiced by Black and queer participants, for whom hoping for something different is not a philosophical position but a condition of flourishing against the oppressive systems of Modernity. This is true for many communities, where hope emerges not as a choice, but as a necessity, an act of refusal and resistance. Participants affirmed that bigger changes in history have been made with less. The ancestral dimension of hope — the sense of being carried by those who came before and carrying something forward for those who come after — ran through these expressions as a sustaining thread.

Hope is relational in its emergence and re-fuelling.

A key learning from this research is the communal aspect of hope: how it showed up in relationship, in conversation, in collective reflection, in communal grieving, in realizing that others carry the same fears and longings. It both emerges in relationship, but also is sustained by it.

Jason E. Lewis described in his interview the aspect of hope as contagious, reinforced and amplified by the presence of others that express it, highlighting the facilitator role in this process as well: *“if you're facilitating, you have to be optimistic as people will feed off that energy”*. The renewable quality of hope means it can ignite in others what they maybe couldn't access on their own. Karlie Chalmers, in their interview, named hope as contagious: *“even though we can't give people hope, when we can be in a hopeful state*

and genuinely and authentically accessing hope in us, that's contagious. We can, through our own journey and process, make it easier for someone else to access their process of hope."

The Polak Game surfaced this dynamic with particular clarity. Hearing where others placed themselves on the matrix influenced participants' own positioning — and several reflected on this afterward, noting that you don't always realize you might be leaving a seed that inspires someone else simply by naming where you stand. Hope surfaced not as a private emotional state but as a practice sustained in relation: something we hold for each other when we cannot hold it alone. This relational quality of hope is important because it strengthens people's sense of what is possible, especially in moments where their own hope can feel thin.

Hope co-exists with other emotions

Hope is not the absence of harder feelings. As mentioned before, it can coexist with grief, fear, anger, and sadness — and in this research, it consistently did. Participants did not report experiencing hope instead of anxiety or despair. They reported experiencing hope alongside them, often emerging from the very act of naming and sharing those emotions together. Hope arrived not despite the grief but because of the space made for it. This coexistence makes room for imagining otherwise without requiring people to resolve or dismiss what they're carrying.

Chalmers described this double holding as essential: "It's hard to make a new story when all we focus on is tragedy and pain. And I don't think we should hide or obscure tragedy and pain in any way, but I think it's really important to center and hold two truths at once." This is not contradiction, it is complexity.

The Internal Family Systems (IFS) framework illuminates why this matters: the part of us that carries hope does not disappear under conditions of fear or pain. It is obscured by other parts that may call more attention or are louder at times. The work of the workshops was, to an extent, to create conditions in which that hopeful part could become audible again, even for a little bit. As Chalmers reflected how we all have hopeful parts in us: "I think we all have that somewhere in us. And I think other parts tend to block those parts when we're in those constricted, pain-oriented spaces. I don't think we can give people hope. I think we can give people our presence in a way that opens up consciousness and allows them to access hopeful parts in them."

This is perhaps the most important finding about hope in this research: it cannot be given, only accessed. The role of the research is not to show how to produce hope, but to create the conditions in which it can surface. It is the distinction between hope as a gift and hope as a capacity: something already present, waiting to be reached.

This is the loop that closes the three sections on hope, agency, and collective imagination. They are not separate capacities. They are dimensions of a single, mutually generative process: collective imagining sparks hope, hope fuels agency, agency generates further imagining, and the whole cycle is sustained by the quality of the relationships in which it takes place. This is what it means to say that futures-making is a transformative social practice — not because it produces a particular vision of the future, but because of what it does to the people who practice it together.



Conclusion: The Future is Already Present



Artwork from workshop participant V

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**Another world is
not only possible,
she's on her way.**

Arundhati Roy (2014)

This research started by noticing a gap between futures being narrated as pathways, and futures people desired. It started with a question about hope and imagination: where does it come from, what conditions allow it to emerge, and what does it take for people to imagine futures they actually want to live in rather than the ones imagined for them? We sought answers on the conditions that allow not only to imagine those futures, but also feel like they can act towards them.

We arrive at this point without a simple answer, but with an understanding of the ecology of conditions that allow imagination to take root. What this research found is that futures-making, when treated as an embodied, relational, and affective practice, changes people's relationship to the future itself — not because it produced better scenarios, but because it temporarily suspended the conditions that make imagining otherwise feel impossible. That suspension, even briefly, was transformational. Participants arrived carrying grief, distrust, cynicism, and anxiety about the future. They left naming signals of the future they desire in the present, feeling agency by being with others who were also challenging modernity's narrative, and identifying connections as the ground on which change grows.

The methodology didn't produce that alone; the conditions did. This is perhaps the central contribution of this work: the container — the material, relation, and experiential ecology — mattered as much as the methods. Designing futures practice means designing for the whole person, not only for the thinking mind.

The inside-out logic of the model reflects this. Futures-making begins in the self — in the body, the feeling, the desire. And when the self encounters the collective with honesty, it reaches back and changes what each person brought. The self that leaves is not the self that arrived. This spiral movement — inward, outward, transformed, returned — is itself a form of transformative futures-making.

Three questions remain genuinely open and point toward the work ahead. How are the shifts activated in these workshops sustained beyond the bounded moment of the session? How does this model travel across different cultural contexts and conditions of acute crisis? And what would it look like to embed this kind of practice, not as an event, but as ongoing communal infrastructure? These are invitations to continue this work.

Under the right conditions, futures-making is a practice that can generate something worth continuing: a renewed imagination, a quality of collective hope, and the felt knowledge that you are not alone in reaching toward something better.

A love letter

We close this work with a love letter — to other worlds, to the other futures waiting to be nourished into being. And to you, the reader, who has witnessed this journey up to this point and who carries this forward.

As we come to the end of this report, we are left with deep gratitude and a renewed sense of hope. As we dove into this research, we didn't know how our work would be able to transform those who participated and ourselves. We dove into the unknown, trusting the process and the learnings gifted to us along the way. In all interviews and in the workshop, we asked participants about their desires, so we wanted to end by sharing our desires for the future as the ones weaving these stories together.

We have many desires for the future — for regenerative and relational ways of living, for futures that hold more of what we love, and ask less of us to disappear. But our deepest desire, the one we carry out of this research, is simpler: that you notice. That you look around at the world you move through and begin to see what is already germinating there. Not despite the difficulty, but in the middle of it.

Because this research showed us, again and again: the futures we desire are not only imagined, they are already being practiced. When everything looked hopeless — during slavery, during genocide, during dictatorship, during pandemics — people did not only endure, they practiced the futures they desired, in the middle of the worlds that were. They created pockets of the world they wanted, right where they stood. As Juma Pariri shared in our interview, drawing on the teachings of their deeply respected mentor Casé Angatú, the futures we desire are already living here in seeds, reminding us that if we think about building the future, it already exists and is already happening, we need to look at the peoples who are already trying to exist differently. “If you want to think about the future, look at the communities that already are the other possible world. If we're talking about an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist future — because they too are making the future all the time, in their present.” Juma points to the radical ways indigenous peoples are already living different possible futures in the present, citing the Zapatistas as an example, and expanding on how that is true in multiple communities across the world.

We wanted to share and honour a few of the examples we noticed and were shared with us. We are building our relationship to these movements and stories, they inspire us and we hope they do the same for you. You may hold other stories in your heart, examples that you've noticed and heard different

communities or across history. These movements practiced the futures they wanted to live in through their bodies, their relationships, and in their daily lives.

- **The Zapatistas in Mexico:** building autonomous communities with their own schools and healthcare and governance.
- **The MST in Brazil:** landless workers who've occupied unused land and now grow organic food for millions while practicing direct democracy.
- **Ballroom culture:** Black and latinx queer and trans people in the 1960s who, rejected by their families and excluded from white gay spaces, created Houses as chosen families and spaces of joy and power in the middle of the AIDS crisis.
- **The Warehouse in Chicago:** the birthplace of house music — where Black queer community created dancefloor freedom when the world was hostile to their identities.
- **Indigenous resistance movements:** from the Pueblo Revolt in 1680 to Standing Rock in 2016 — defending land and water and sovereignty across centuries.
- **Mutual aid networks during COVID:** people creating care systems when institutions failed.

One of the narratives of Modernity is to invisibilize and delegitimize these other ways of living. This means that it might require intentional attunement, a purposeful shift toward noticing. Hope isn't passive. Hope isn't just believing things will get better. Hope is what you practice. It's creating the future you want in the present, even in small ways, even in constrained circumstances. We invite you to practice a different kind of noticing — not filtering for what is failing, but the kind of noticing that is oriented toward what is already germinating.

As you go, our wish is that you carry this forward. That you dare to imagine your wildest dream for a future where you feel you can belong in and thrive in. That you have more conversations. That you keep noticing. And that you trust the seeds you are already planting, whether or not you know it yet. And for practitioners, we call you to engage other ways of knowing, that you bring the body into play and that you open space for your emotions, grief, and desires to surface.

To help you move into that space, we end with an invitation for a mediation, inspired in the ones we conducted in the workshops.

A closing invitation:

Find a comfortable position. You can sit or lie down. If you'd like, close your eyes. Or soften your gaze. Whatever will help you drop into a more internal, reflective space.

As we guide you through this meditation, don't worry about seeing pictures in your mind. Simply notice what you sense and feel: the thoughts, memories, or sensations that arise. If images come, welcome them. If they don't, follow whatever shows up in the body

Start by taking a few breaths. You don't need to change anything, just notice how your breathing is moving through your body. Is it fast or slow? Where do you feel it — in your chest, your belly, your throat? Feel the air coming in through your nose and out.

Now bring your attention to what you've been carrying lately about the future. What does the word stir in your body? Where do you feel it? Is there a tightening somewhere? A heaviness? Is there any softening? An opening or closing?

If "the future" lived somewhere in the space around you, where would it be — in front of you, behind, to your side, above or below? Maybe it doesn't have a location at all. Does it have a quality — a color, a temperature, a texture? Is it heavy or light? Still or moving? If it's moving, which way does it move? Does it come toward you, or do you move toward it? Does it circle? Does it scatter?

Just let whatever comes, come. No judgement. Just notice.

Is there more than one future around you? Do different futures pull in different directions? Notice if different parts of you reach toward the future, pull away, or even feel nothing at all. No judgement. Notice what these parts are saying.

We carry many parts within us — sometimes one is louder than others, other times you can sense multiple in conversation. Are your parts feeling different things about the future? Are they conflicting? Is there a part that refuses to look at all? A part that feels scared? Maybe a part that feels hopeful? A part that feels sad or tired or angry or excited? Just notice if different parts show up, and what they each feel. What does each part want you to know?

Now, gently, we invite you to shift your noticing.

Think of the past week — the past month — the world you moved through. The small things. A stranger who held a door. A community gathering around

something that mattered. A child laughing without self-consciousness. A garden growing in an unlikely place. A conversation that surprised you with its honesty. A moment when someone chose care over convenience, connection over efficiency, slowness over urgency.

These are seeds. They are not the full future yet. But they are pockets of it, already here, already growing in the cracks of the present. They exist because people chose them — small choices, cellular choices.

What seed have you seen recently?

Let it come. Let it be small. It doesn't have to be extraordinary. The most ordinary seeds are sometimes the most alive.

Now stay with that seed for a moment. Notice what it gently asks of you. Maybe it asks you to plant one like it. Maybe it asks you to tend to something you've been neglecting. Maybe it simply asks you to keep noticing — to keep being oriented toward what is emerging rather than only what is failing.

The act of noticing is not passive. It is a practice of hope. And hope is renewable — it regenerates through use, through relationship, through the shared act of imagining otherwise together.

As you hold these seeds, reflect: what would need to shift for the seeds to grow? What systems, values, relationships, structures would need to be different? What have you been taught is immutable — unchangeable, fixed — that might be transformable?

What from our current world needs to end or be composted for these futures to grow? Like a snake shedding its skin to make space for a new form, what must be released?

When a snake sheds, it doesn't passively watch the transformation — it actively facilitates the birth of its new version with the assistance of trees and rocks. What can you practice now that aligns with these futures? What small actions, relationships, or choices would move you toward these worlds? What do you want to continue doing? What do you want to learn?

Take your time, and when you are ready gently open your eyes and slowly come back to the present moment.

As you sit with what came to you through these prompts, take some time to journal or create an art-piece with these reflections, you can use any materials that call to you.

Thank you for reading. Thank you for imagining. Thank you for the seeds you are already planting, whether or not you know it yet.

Go gently. Go hopefully. Go together.



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Appendices

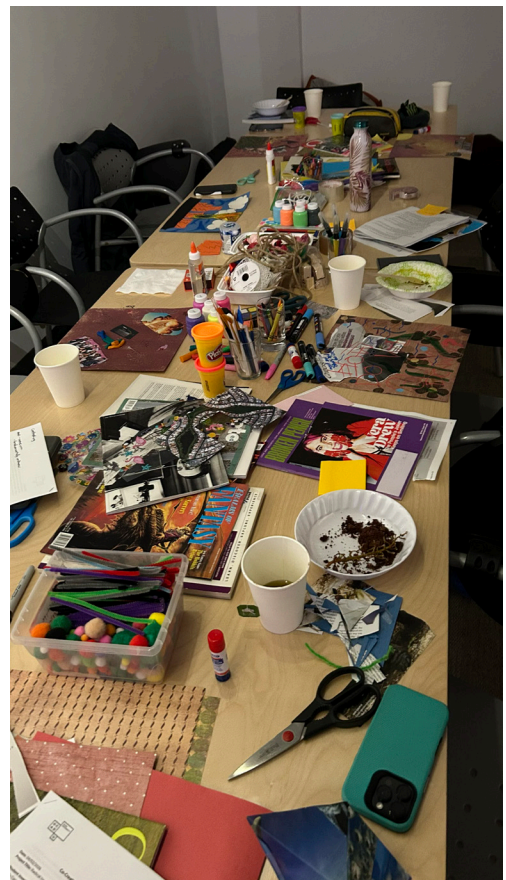
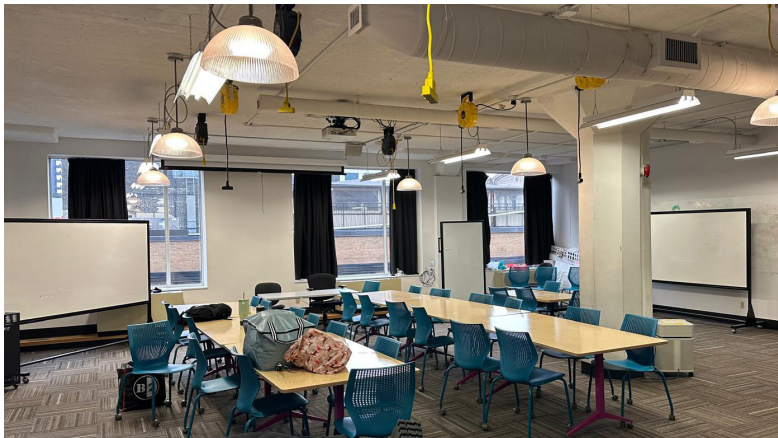
Appendix A: Workshop details

Stages	Purpose	Activities	Timebox
1. Grounding	Help participants arrive fully – physically, emotionally, relationally – so that the work that follows has somewhere to take root. Without this, engagement is surface-level.	Intros	10 min
		Collective agreements	7 min
		Grounding	3 min
		Silly introductions	5 min
		Energy release <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaking • HA Breathing • Stretching 	9 min
		Movement games <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupy the space • Texture walk 	6 min
2. Rooting	Establish deep internal anchors that nourish imagination, acknowledging the complexity of feelings and parts that shape one’s relationship to the future.	Meditation	7 min
		Art-making from meditation	20 min
		Shareback	20 min
3. Opening the Canopy	Surface anticipated assumptions (the inherited, internalized, and often invisible) that shape what futures feel possible.	Polak Game	10 min
		Shareback on positioning	10 min
		Discuss assumptions surfaced	15 min
4. Orienting Toward Light	Reorient participants from fear and inevitability toward desires, hopes, dreams. Naming desires is an act of identifying what is worth moving into.	Meditation + movement visiting desired future	10 min
		Place desires surfaced in the tree of desires	5 min
		Group tree reflection	20 min
5. Sensing Emergence	Shift participants’ relationship to the present by finding evidence that desired futures already exist in various forms.	Invitation to notice seeds of emergence	10 min
		Place seeds in the the tree	5 min
		Discussion	10 min

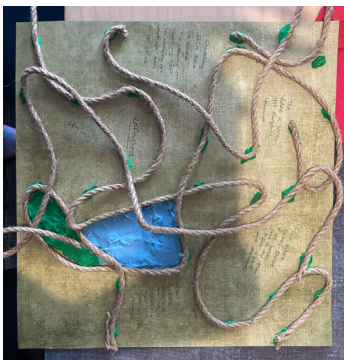
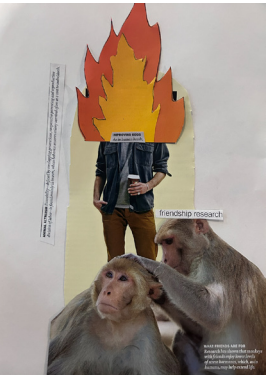
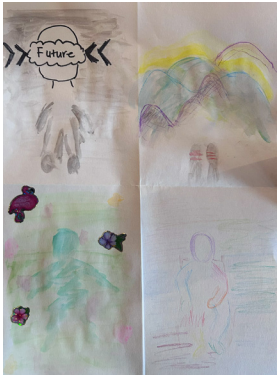
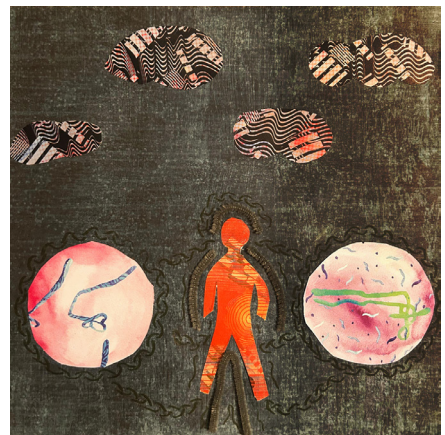
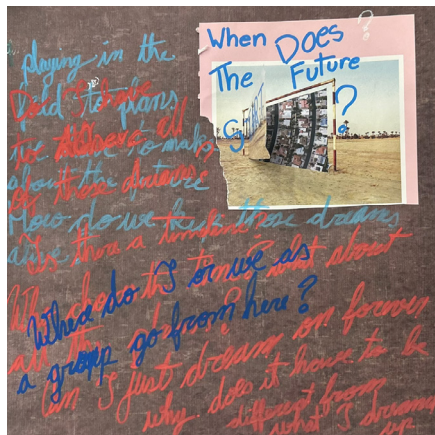
<p>6. Dormancy</p>	<p>To create space between workshops for reflection, metabolization, and internal reconfiguration. Dormancy honours that imagination develops in cycles and that not all growth is visible.</p>	<p>Space between workshops</p>	<p>1 week</p>
<p>7. Re-grounding</p>	<p>To acknowledge that participants re-enter the space transformed by their reflections. Re-grounding prepares the “new self” for collective work, reconnecting inner shifts with the shared environment.</p>	<p>Consent and agreements reminders</p>	<p>3 min</p>
		<p>Grounding</p>	<p>3 min</p>
		<p>Energy release</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaking • HA Breathing • Stretching 	<p>3 min</p>
		<p>Mirror Game</p>	<p>5 min</p>
<p>8. Branching</p>	<p>To create the conditions for collective futures-making, where the ideas extend outward, intertwine, and transform through interaction. Branching reflects how relational networks generate possibilities no individual could access alone.</p>	<p>Voting on desires + Divide Groups</p>	<p>5 min</p>
		<p>Define parameters in groups (geographical and temporal scope, desires as compass, and speculation alignment)</p>	<p>7 min</p>
		<p>Creative Warm-Up: Individual Crazy Brainstorm (3 rounds of 2 min to build future per desire)</p>	<p>6 min</p>
		<p>Future-Making (with cards)</p>	<p>60 min</p>
		<p>Groups presentation</p>	<p>20 min</p>
		<p>Discussion after presentations</p>	<p>15 min</p>
<p>9. Co-tending</p>	<p>To support participants in carrying insights back into their lives, identifying what they wish to nurture, release, or continue practicing. Co-tending emphasizes that sustaining imagination requires ongoing care.</p>	<p>Meditation</p>	<p>7 min</p>
		<p>Journaling</p>	<p>5 min</p>
		<p>Polak Game</p>	<p>10 min</p>
		<p>Final discussion</p>	<p>10 min</p>

Appendix B: Pictures from the workshops

1. Workshop space



2. Creations that emerged from the Rooting stage



Appendix C: Card Prompts

Doing and making the future: art-based invitation for exploration – creating an artifact, doing something in the future

- act out an everyday interaction in this future
- create a flyer for an event in this future
- write or illustrate a children’s book in this future
- perform a routine task from this future
- create a collage with the tensions in this future
- create an “item from the past” that historians in this future would find interesting
- re-enact a moment of care or support in this future
- sketch an object that people use everyday
- create a public sign
- perform a ritual people share
- use materials to create a place of gathering
- draw public transportation
- move the way children play in this future?
- draw a map of a place where people gather in this future
- use a gesture to show how people greet each other
- use your body to demonstrate celebration
- create a menu from a restaurant or shared meal in this future
- create a lullaby in this future
- use your body to show how people take care of plants or the land
- draw the view from a window in this future
- show how people carry things. what are they carrying?
- how do you start your day in this future?

Feeling the future: questions related to visiting the future through your senses

- how does time feel in this future?
- how do people experience the pace of days?
- when does your body feel most relaxed?
- imagine the soundscape of a public space
- what does eating feel like in this future?
- how does the weather or climate feel on your body in this future?
- does your body feel tense in this future?
- imagine eavesdropping in this future – what do you hear?
- what does safety feel like in this future? safe for who?
- what does your body notice when you first wake up?
- what sounds are common in this future?
- what textures do people encounter?
- paint or draw the mood of this future using colour and texture
- what feels steady, predictable, or uncertain in this future?

- what smells feel like home in this future?
- do any worries or concerns shape daily life?
- Is there a sense of urgency in this future?

Living together: critical questions with relationality and care

- who do you rely on this future? who relies on you?
- what is it like to get help in this future?
- how is food grown, shared, and eaten? who gets to consume and who goes hungry?
- what knowledge is passed down, and how?
- how do people deal with conflict or harm?
- how do people experience life differently in this future?
- what does healthcare look like? how is it accessed?
- how do people take care of children?
- how do humans and non-human beings interact in this future?
- how do people take care of elders?
- whose lives involve more effort, risk, or constraint in this future?
- what non-human beings live close to people?
- how do people welcome someone new?
- who gets listened to when decisions are made?
- how do people show appreciation or gratitude in this future?
- how do different bodies move through this world? what kinds of supports exist or are lacking?
- how are places treated differently in this future? what is cared for, controlled, or neglected?
- how is responsibility shared in this future?
- how do people talk about fairness, responsibility, or disagreement in this future?
- do people trust in this future? who, what, and why?
- how do people show respect without words?
- how do children learn in this future? who teaches them?

Holding and shaping the future: critical questions related to systems

- what does “better” mean in this future?
- what technology is no longer used?
- what work keeps this future running that people don’t really notice?
- what do people try not to forget about the past?
- what is normalized in this future?
- how do people use or carry technology?
- what kinds of work are no longer required?
- what mistakes from the past are talked about?
- what changes made this future possible?
- how is technology distributed and used in this future?
- what problems from today still exist in this future?

- what from the past is still around?
- what languages are spoken? how do people communicate across languages?
- what is the architecture like?
- what do people measure, track, or pay attention to in this future?
- what happened last year that people still talk about?
- what is the economy like?
- what is considered waste? how is it managed?
- how do people move from place to place?
- what practices, ideas, or systems are less present or absent in this future?
- how are boundaries, territories, or movement organized in this future?
- how does water move through this future?
- how are communities organized in this future?
- what has changed in the ecosystems?
- what materials are used in this future?

