

Reimagining a Regenerative Future -Part 2

Scripting new stories, seeking the unseen, unheard, unknown, unacknowledged...



[Fearless Collective Belonging Mural by Shilo Shiv Suleman and NuVu Studio](#)

The end of the human race will be that it will eventually die of civilization.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Emerson's line couldn't have been truer as we enter the third decade of the 21st century. The world is literally and metaphorically dying from 'civilization' and its ramifications. If we dig deeper, we can see that underlying the visible are stories — intangible, invisible, and pervasive; all the more powerful because of that. They are scaffoldings propping up entire civilizations. Hence, the stories we tell and live by have power beyond imagination to shape and direct civilizational trajectories. The stories become compasses encompassing our values, beliefs, norms, structures, policies, and practices. In short, entire worldviews are encapsulated in stories.

[Shilo Shiv Suleman's](#) mural above, evocatively titled Belonging, made me wonder how many of us feel that we really belong to the world we inhabit. It also made me mull over the need for fearless depictions of our almost

surreal realities. The creation of beauty is as much an act of defiance as it is an act of aesthetic power. These strange, somewhat disjointed musings led me to wonder how have we arrived at this juncture where we face imminent extinction of most species, acute loss of biodiversity, collapse of the known world, and an ever-yawning divide between the privileged handful and underprivileged billions. This led me to conclude that the stories we are driven by and which form the foundation of our civilization need to be thoroughly scrutinized, deconstructed, and rewoven.

The simultaneous collapse — ecological, economic, socio-political, cultural, and spiritual — of the past few decades culminating in the pandemic is a clear lesson for us to reimagine our foundational narratives. Maybe, it is time to ‘un-civilize’ our stories, time to unshackle them from the credos of an obsolete world order and the delusions of modernity and techno-fantasy. It is time to liberate our stories from the *myth of progress*, the *myth of human centrality*, and the *myth of our separation from ‘nature.’* These myths are all the more dangerous and insidious because we have forgotten they are myths.

Our current narrative reflects the dominance of Eurocentric, Western worldviews with its accompanying ways of being, seeing, relating, and doing. This worldview — through centuries of imperialism and imposition — has marginalized and delegitimized all other ways of being on and relating with the planet. It has claimed the superiority of universalism by posing as ‘objective truth.’ This de-contextualization and de-placement of the Western narrative has blinded us to its specious origins (*Eurocentric, white, male*) and have made it a part of the ‘universal unconscious.’ Donna Haraway called it the ‘god trick.’

Only as we collectively grapple with the collapse of the ‘normal’ as we knew it in the wake of the pandemic, does the underlying narratives become visible. The veil of illusion is ripped off, and the papered-over brokenness beneath stands revealed. Once seen, it cannot be ignored as innocuous. Its edifices — feeding on inequality and power, commodification of nature, atomization of individuals, and polarization of the human species — have created a vastly unequal world in an abundant planet, leaving scarcity, poverty, and desperation in its wake — culminating in ecological disasters, existential crises, and misery for the most vulnerable millions. It is, therefore, time to untangle ourselves from the chains and tenets of neoliberalism, neo-colonialism, and capitalism that are still running the show. It is time to hospice the imposed universalization of an essentially narrow worldview ‘controlling’ a world that is unfathomably myriad, diverse, complex, interconnected, and alive: a wonderfully *pluriversal planet*.

After a quarter century of complacency, in which we were invited to believe in bubbles that would never burst, prices that would never fall, the end of history, the crude repackaging of the triumphalism of Conrad’s Victorian twilight — Hubris has been introduced to Nemesis. Now a familiar human story is being played out. It is the story of an empire corroding from within. It is the story of a people who believed, for a long time, that their actions did not have consequences. It is the story of how that people will cope with the crumbling of their own myth. It is our story.

~[The Dark Mountain Manifesto](#)

‘UN-CIVILIZING’ OUR STORIES

How do we step into and embody an essentially pluriversal planet in reimagining a regenerative future?

How do we co-create the new narratives honoring our myriad ways of being, seeing, sensing, and learning?

How do we liberate ourselves from the ‘dangers of a single story?’

The hubris of a single cosmology and its accompanying expressions of modernity — infinite growth on a finite planet, technocracy fast approaching techno-fantasy (techno-lunacy?), relegation of half the globe to obscurity and invisibility (*acknowledging that global south exists everywhere*), and profound separation from ‘nature’ — has brought our civilization to the edge of annihilation. The even greater conceit is, of course, the confidence in human capacity to control and coerce the universe to human whims. And this is only made possible by the seeming ordinariness and triviality of daily life where much stays the same from day to day, where the improbable seems far away. This disguises the fragility that lies just beneath the placid surface, torn apart with ease by a tornado, a wildfire, or a pandemic.

“Human civilization is an intensely fragile construction. It is built on little more than belief: belief in the rightness of its values; belief in the strength of its system of law and order; belief in its currency; above all, perhaps, belief in its future.” ~[The Dark Mountain Manifesto](#)

Now, the familiar story of a civilization corroding from within is playing out — a story of humanity’s Faustian bargain with the Universe, and its consequences. As we linger in this liminal space between stories where one world is dying and the other is yet to be born, we must slow down. *“The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying but the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear,”* wrote Antonio Gramsci. The rise of ‘morbid symptoms’ are evident in the rise of authoritarianism, state surveillance, hyper-nationalism, and all forms of supremacy and oppression around the globe.

To counteract these mighty forces, we must slow down. We must shift from the superficial and outward busyness as a means of escape; we must stay with the trouble, befriend uncertainty, and listen to what the chaos is telling us. We need to move away from the lures of ‘civilization,’ from its known contours, and worn-out pathways. And then act from a place of humility, fierce compassion, and radical tenderness for all of Life. **The journey towards a truly regenerative future has no known trails; the paths will be made by walking, being, and embodying our truths as individuals and collectives.**

This is precisely what we are witnessing in the dispersed movements of dissent dotting the globe today — from [#BlackLivesMatter](#) to [#FarmersProtes](#), from the [#MeTooMovement](#) to [#FridaysfortheFuture](#). These are uprisings of ‘ordinary’ people in small, diverse pockets challenging the dominant and major narratives and politics. People going far beyond themselves and risking tyranny, torture, and arrest — students, farmers, activists, artists, writers, lawyers, journalists, housewives, environmentalists, ecologists, scientists, and every other ilk — coming together in defense of the planet, demanding a compassionate healing, demanding greater equality and transparency, demanding legal rights for the environment, and demanding fairer representation,

and justice. These inchoate, self-organized, people-led movements are grass roots, pluriversal, and interconnected. Paul Hawken called this “*the movement of movements.*”

In these hidden voices lie the seeds for a regenerative future, an anti-fragile planet, the beauty of authenticity and wholeness. These voices eschew human supremacy and Western worldviews, reject the tricks and ploys of modernity with its promises of perpetual growth, and disregard ideas of separation from nature. These voices arising from the wilderness are literally ‘Gaia’ speaking on behalf of LIFE, demanding a civilizational story that is life-affirming and soul-nourishing. Humanity has been coerced and lulled into enduring and abiding by rather specious dogmas because other stories haven’t risen yet with a cohesive and binding force.

The rules of our world are laws, and they can be changed. Laws can restrict or they can enable. What matters is what they serve. Imagine a law that starts from first do no harm, that stops this dangerous game and takes us to a place of safety... [Polly Higgins, 2015](#)

I believe that the life-force of LIFE is way more powerful than anything humans can envisage. And life will reassert itself. Through us. Through the uprisings of pockets of humanity across the planet coming together in defense of all sentient life. Through the movement of movements. **Beneath the apparent destruction lies the humus of rebirth to be composted with radical humility, candor, and fierce compassion.** It is telling that ‘humus’ and ‘humility’ both come from the same root meaning ‘on the ground,’ inviting us to reimagine the future from a place of grounded-ness as we co-create narratives towards a regenerative future.

When we zoom out, we can see the overarching commonalities across these disparate and diverse pockets of resistance and dissent spread across continents. These grass roots movements are shifting the civilizational narrative and collective consciousness, hollowing out the dominant one, and crafting a radically distinct one — based not on any single ideology or dogma but values like love for the planet, inclusivity and compassion, equality and justice, on making the invisible visible, and bringing legitimacy to that which the mainstream has disregarded for centuries. However, what is missing is a cohesive and unified thread to hold the nascent and emergent narratives together.

These responsibilities are to be considered in the practices of storying the past, living the present, and weaving new futures. ([GTDF](#))

However, liberating the stories from the dominant ideologies is going to be fraught with obstacles and impediments posed by those in power who will use all machinations of privilege, power, and propaganda to maintain the status quo as they immensely benefit from it. The current narrative cannot exist without extraction, exploitation, expropriation, dispossession, ecocide, and deprivation because it is in denial of *five fundamental truths*:

- **Denial of limits.** The conceit of the current narrative lies in not accepting the limits of humanity and the planet. By seeking infinite growth on a finite planet, the story has catapulted us into decay and destruction.

- **Denial of nature.** Nature is perceived as inert matter, something ‘out there’ to be plundered at will. Its value lies in being of service to the infinite growth of our civilization. This ultimate denial and separation have culminated in disaster.
- **Denial of other worldviews.** The enforced invisibilization and delegitimization of all ways of being except for the dominant Western one has led to a world in crisis. A single cosmology cannot encompass or make sense of the unfathomable variety of this universe. We live in a pluriversal planet.
- **Denial of the humanity of all.** By refusing to recognize and honor the humanity of all, the story has been effectively ‘weaponized’ to create a world of vast inequality, injustice, polarization, and exploitation.
- **Denial of our interconnectedness.** The story works by insisting that we see ourselves as separate from each other and all sentient beings, by pitting humans against humans, and by denying our entanglement with a living, diverse, complex, and intelligent universe.

All of us are struggling together toward a time when the human spirit can find more room for itself in the societies we create. We are all participating in enlarging the spaces in which we together dwell, so that they might hold more of the greatness of each of us. ~[Margaret Wheatley](#)

ACTIVATING EXILED CAPACITIES

Beyond ideologies and dogmas, which are really levers of oppression, lie the narratives of humanity — **pluriversal, inter-related, contextual, and emergent**. This evolutionary shift is already underway. The future exists in the present. The reimagining and envisioning of a different future are happening. Everywhere. In visible and invisible ways. In the fringes and margins. But no longer contained and confined to the peripheries; instead, spilling over into the heart of society, erupting like shoots of hope amidst forces of destruction and decay. Forcing us to see and acknowledge the unseen, unheard, untold, and unrecognized narratives that contradict the constructed reality of mainstream propaganda.

These movements are underscoring another shift — from one where civilizational edifice were constructed by a few (*mostly European white men*) and founded on Eurocentric worldviews to one where emerging stories are being co-created through grass roots movements, and dialogic, collaborative practices, are emergent, embodied, deeply contextual, and yet, profoundly global. These nascent narratives surpass the barriers of separation and integrates a fundamentally different worldview — one that is not confined by the particulars of place and time, and yet holds context as foundational to its emergence. It is both a synthesizing and decentralizing force — holding space for diversities within the whole. And thus, aligns perfectly with the principles of living systems.

*Do we believe we are participating in a world that knows how to organize itself?
Do we believe that qualities of commitment, compassion, generosity, and creativity exist in
everyone and can be evoked?
Can we embrace, what Keats described as ‘Negative Capability?’*

It happens when we honor and welcome myriad different ways of being, seeing, sensing, and learning — those ways that have been for too long relegated to the peripheries of civilization, those ways that have been superseded by the enforcement of a homogenized way of perceiving and being in the world. It happens when those who can no longer abide by the current narrative come together to co-create and reimagine new stories. It happens when those stories consigned to the margins for centuries are pulled into the center, crashing through our defenses and willful blindness, their wisdom integrating and interweaving to form the tapestry of new narratives. It happens when we find the courage to go just beyond ourselves, befriend our emerging selves, let go off what no longer serves, and make life-affirming choices.

What needs to be done is to make these core characteristics of the new narratives visible, tangible, and widespread. We have to traverse “*beyond ourselves*,” as David Whyte poignantly said, to go where we must.

Just beyond

yourself.

It’s where

you need

to be.

Half a step

into

self-forgetting

and the rest

restored

by what

you’ll meet.

There is a road

always beckoning.

~David Whyte, Just Beyond Yourself

You can read and download the first part of the article here: [Reimagining a Regenerative Future - Part 1](#)

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