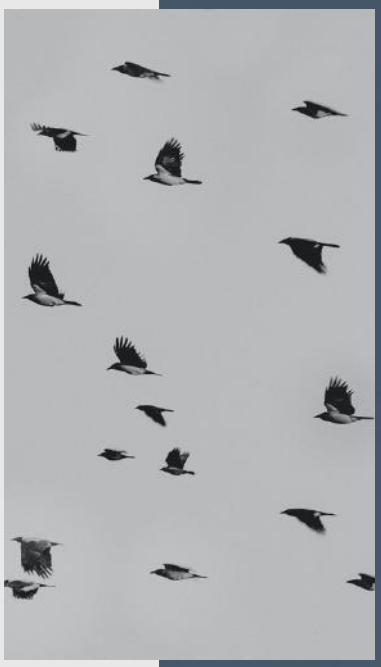
Naia Trust

Earth-Centred Consciousness

Research Overview

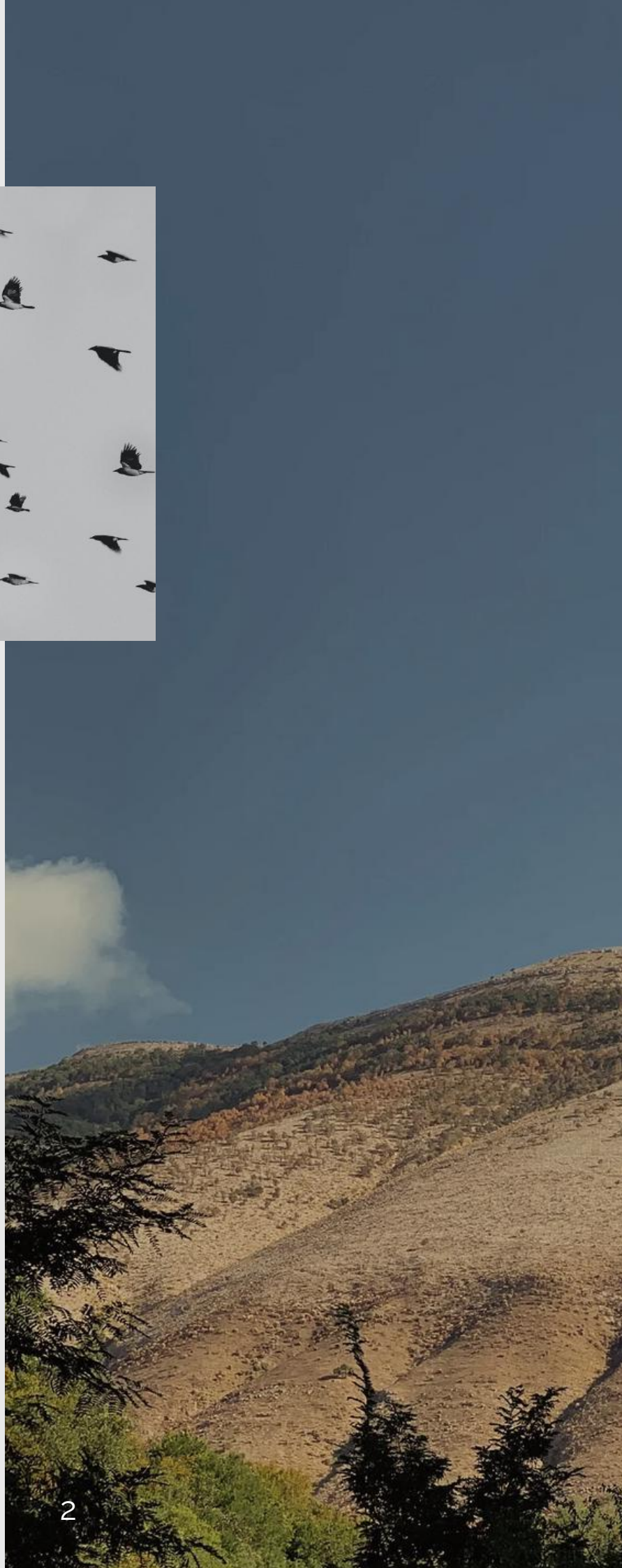
Earth-centred consciousness within the context of the metacrisis.

Sensemaking / 2024



"To repair this damage we can't any longer take what we call nature for an object. We must merge it again with our own nature. We must re-integrate ourselves in specific geographic places. We have to incorporate nature again in the moral universe we inhabit"

~ Barry Lopez



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Note: Many photos in this report were taken by Alexa Firmenich

Letter from our founder

At the root of any culture lies the fundamental question: Who are we as a people? Why are we here? What frames of reference should guide our sensemaking and meaning in the world?

Religions and faiths often answered these questions; today, the market economy seems to be the force providing much of the meaning and architecture of what constitutes an aspirational life.

There were times where the development of wisdom – by this, I mean a deliberate and conscious exploration and formation of the psyche and human being – was placed at the forefront of civilisational priorities. As EO Wilson says, today we have "palaeolithic emotions, mediaeval institutions and godlike technology". We need our emotions, our psychology, our wisdom, to be as cultivated as the inordinate power we wield.

These technics shared some patterns: they encouraged restraint (understanding the concept of natural limits to growth); compassion and care for one's community; rites of passage that marked critical life events, coming into adulthood, elderhood, and being part of a larger system than one's ego; a sense of responsibility for the whole, and critically, reciprocity with the Earth.

Many lineages framed our human narrative within expansive cycles of death, transformation and rebirth, where the notion of an individual self was subsumed into a great arc of time that imparted humility and perspective.

These practices for developing a human soul were ingrained within the culture itself, their repetition part of community life and embodied group learning. We were built, shattered, rebuilt, contextualised within a human story and an Earth story that contained and transcended our own. It included other species as worthy protagonists, collaborators and companions.

If we are to positively evolve our human impact on the planet and work with the great challenges and opportunities on the horizon, then some of this basic wisdom-building needs to be brought about as soon as possible, to as many as feasibly possible.

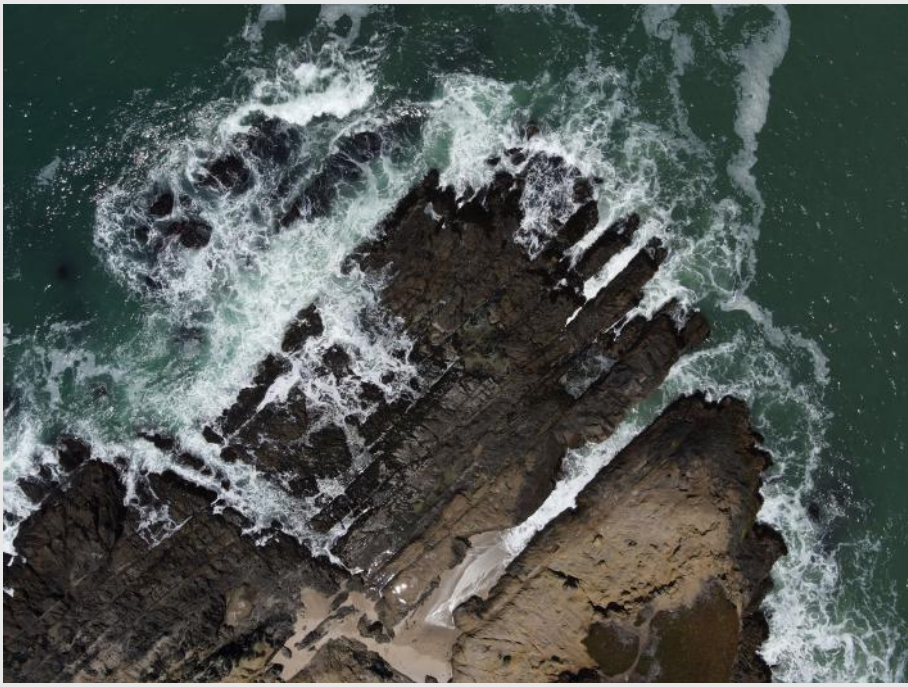
Another way of speaking about this is that we should attempt to "change the paradigm out of which the system emerges". It is a spiritual transformation, one that touches the root of human meaning making. Form follows consciousness, and our solutions will only be as resilient and intelligent as the soul they emerge from.

Alexa Firmenich

FOUNDER AND
PRINCIPAL, NAIA TRUST

Overview

Context



Naia Trust is an animist steward of capital.

In January 2024, Alexa Firmenich brought Daniela Litowitz and Yasu Mali onboard Naia Trust (structured as a single family office) to support the co-creation of a new funding stream, honing on 'earth-centred consciousness within the context of the metacrisis.'

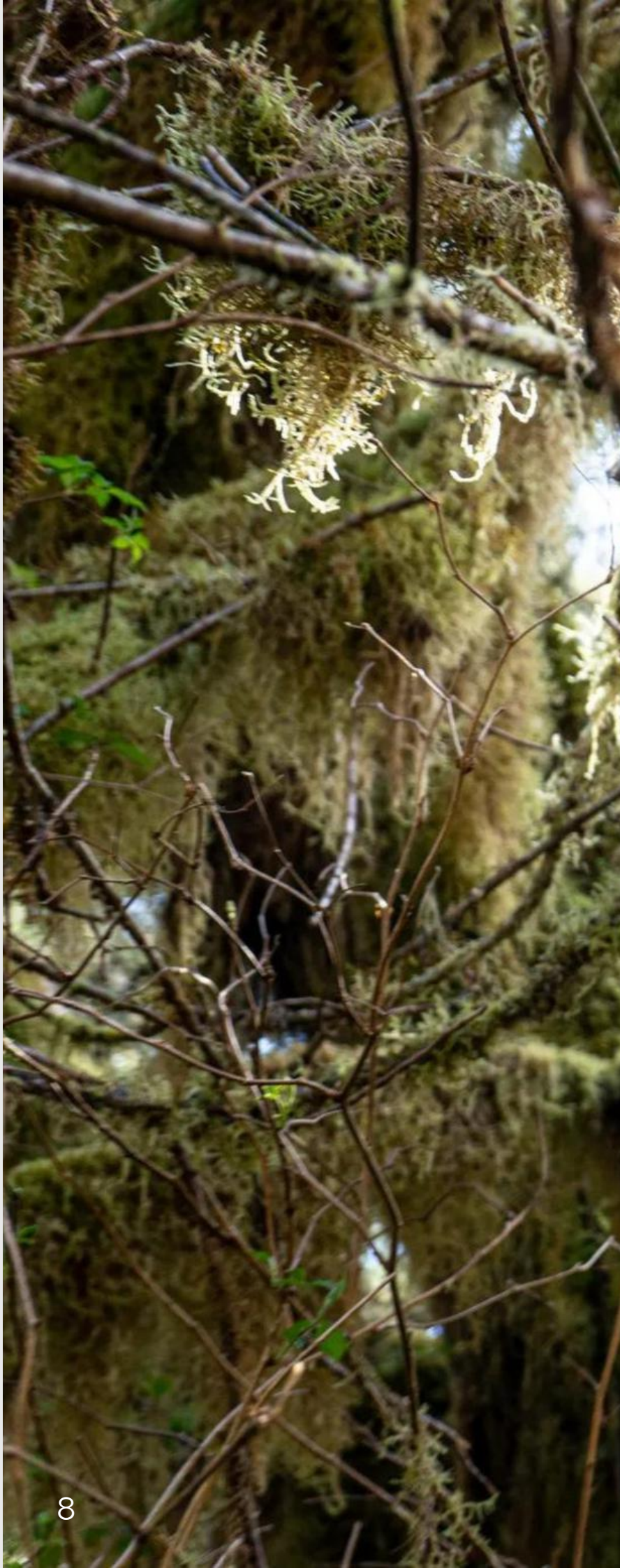
This write-up is the consolidation of a six-month research project undertaken by the team to better understand this landscape and our role as funders in catalysing, convening, and creating programmes within this space. Our wide ranging conversations took us across a vast spectrum of themes and actors: from renegade artists creating ecocentric art with haptic suits, to birdwatching for inner city youth, to kincentric leadership frameworks, to grief circles for young climate activists.

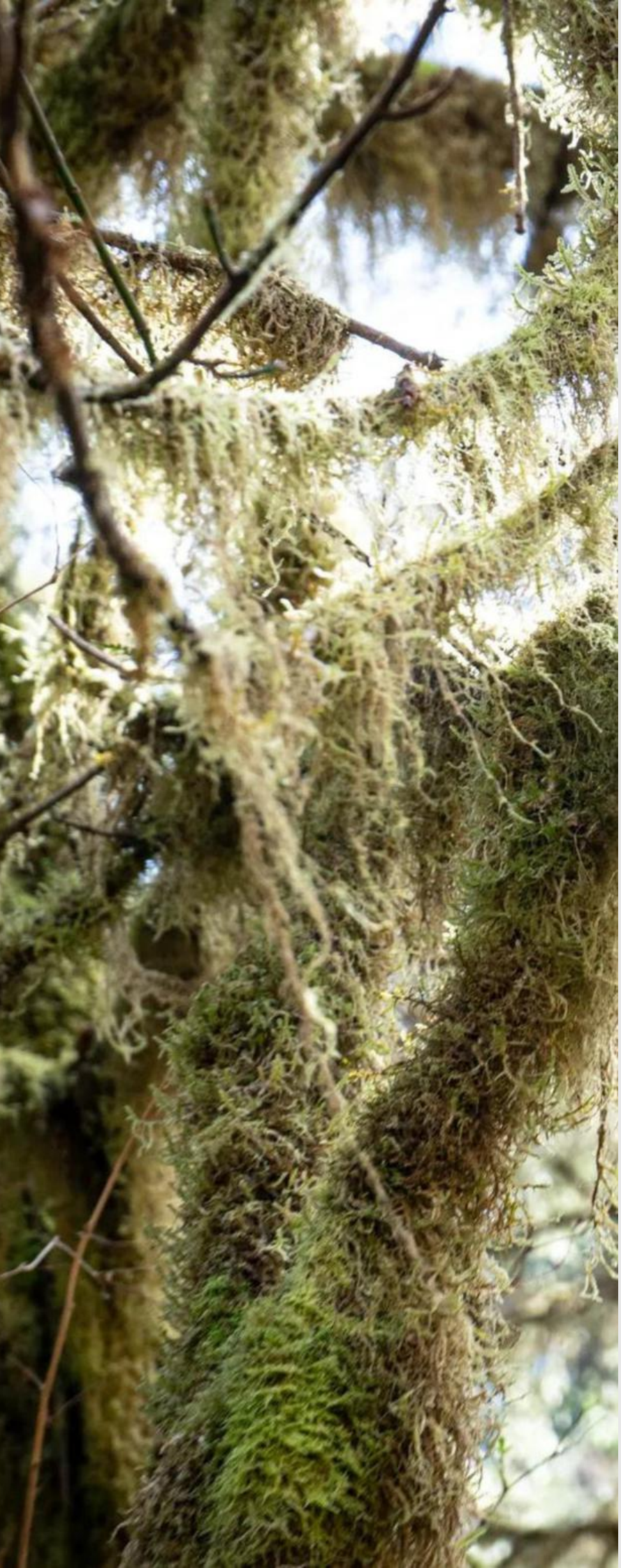
A Note On Language

We chose to focus on **'earth-centred' consciousness** as it is our belief that the evolution of human education and inner development must be framed within a less narrow anthropocentric lens, integrating ontologies of existence amongst many other species in the web of life. Much of the current climate and social 'crisis' solutionism is lacking sensitivity to a worldview of interbeing / relationship with the earth.

Many climate and nature-based solutions still view other species as assets, resources, inputs, solutions, rather than as living entities with their own rights and livelihoods. This also applies to the vast realm of what today is called "inner development" and its dissociation from an embodied conversation and sincere relationship with nature and non-human life.

By **'metacrisis'** we refer to an underlying crisis within and between all the world's major interconnected challenges. The metacrisis is characterised by the recognition that these individual crises are not isolated but are deeply interrelated, stemming from fundamental flaws in our global systems and worldviews. We often tackle symptoms and not the cause – hence our decision to focus on a 'consciousness' and education funding stream. Many in the field use the term 'polycrisis' to describe this same phenomenon. We recognise the value in both terms and work with them both to the extent that it supports meaningful action.



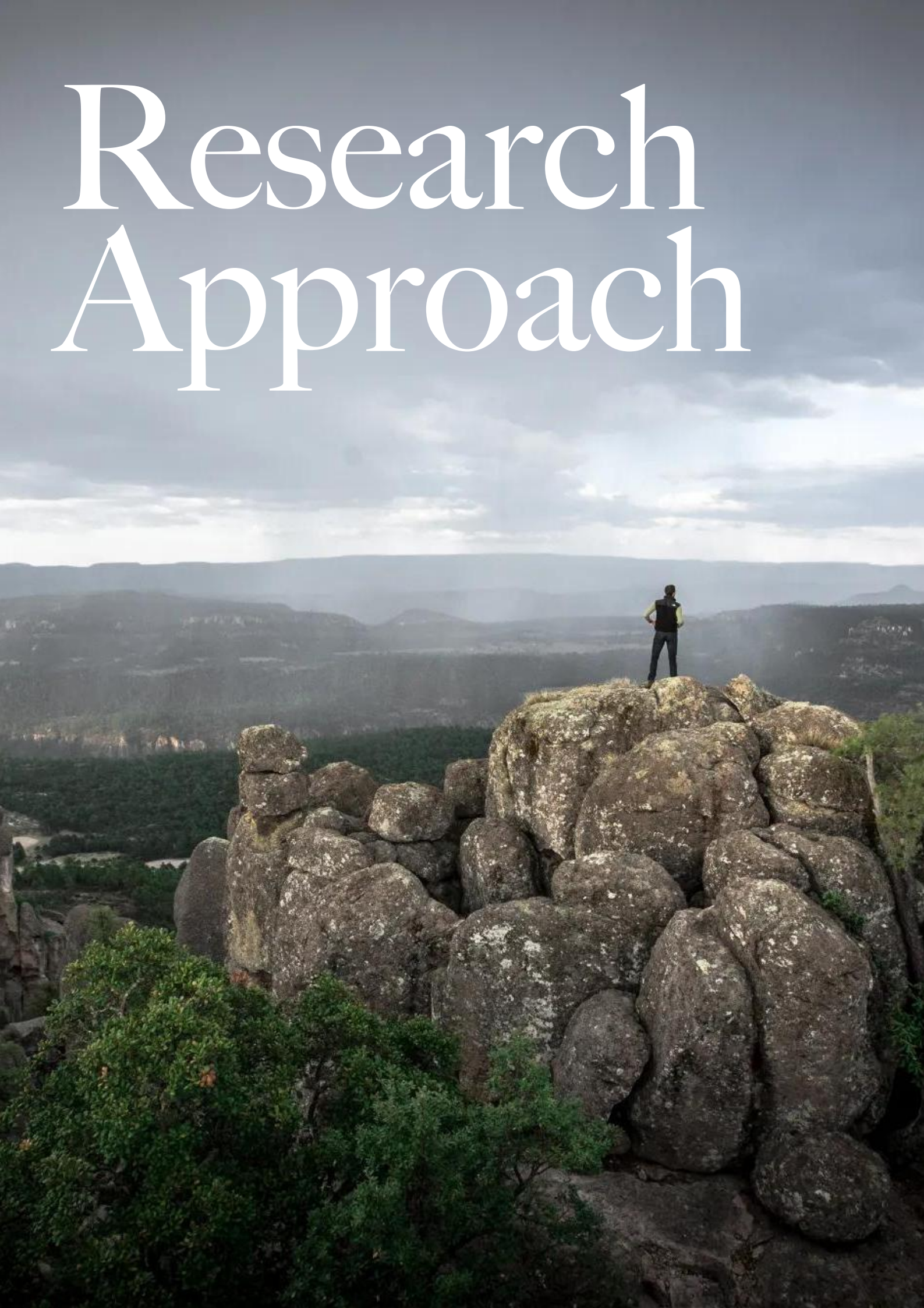


By **animism,** we are speaking to both a philosophy and embodied practice of relating to the whole world around us as living, conscious and related to us. As animists we value 'nature' and other species for their intrinsic existence, and attempt to move beyond language of instrumentalisation into one of deep relationship. Animism is one of the earliest and most enduring forms of spiritual beliefs, deeply embedded in the practices and traditions of many cultures around the world. It emphasises the interconnectedness and sacredness of all aspects of the Earth.

Interbeing is a term coined by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. According to the concept of interbeing, nothing in the universe exists independently; everything is part of a vast web of existence where each element relies on others to exist and thrive. This understanding fosters a deep sense of empathy, compassion, and responsibility towards all forms of life and the environment, highlighting the importance of mindfulness and harmonious living. Much can be said about the latest decades of scientific discoveries in quantum physics and other fields that demonstrate this concept.

Climate: When we refer to climate or the climate crisis, we are alluding not just to runaway atmospheric conditions and rising CO_2 concentrations, but to the wider set of planetary boundaries that are being exceeded, shooting the world past ecological tipping points.

Research Approach



Where We Began

Guided by the first permaculture principle of "observe and interact," we embarked on a journey of listening and deep curiosity. This principle emphasises putting ourselves in the landscape, engaging directly with organisations and funders, and creating opportunities (such as this document) to foster dialogue with the hearts and minds already dedicated to this space.

Through this process, we aimed to sensemake our approach to transformation, grounding our efforts in both observation and active interaction.

2024 Timeline

- **Jan-Feb: *Forming***: formed as a team, developed internal culture workshops, established scope of work and narrative, initial mapping of landscape, identified research topics.

- **Mar-Apr: *Listening***: designed research process, began listening sessions, re-branded Ground Effect as Naia Trust.

- **May-Jun: *Experiencing***: met first grantee partners in this stream and convened workshops, in-person strategy sessions, initial assessment of listening sessions and adjusted focus, conducted ongoing listening sessions and informal conversations, attended external events.

- **Jul-Aug: *Harvesting***: consolidation of listening sessions and process to date, ongoing research.

- **Sep-Dec: *Refining***: use this document to deepen conversations with new and existing partners and hone our focus,

Questions we were seeking to answer

01 What topic areas should we cover?

What terms do we feel most resonant with? e.g. eco-centric, animist, non-dualistic, dharmic, consciousness, spirituality.

02 Who should we be targeting/reaching?

Who are we best placed to serve? Based on who we are and who we already have access to? e.g. grassroots activists, youth, next gen wealth holders, business leaders, broader public, etc.

03 Can greater connectivity be built between existing approaches, synthesised, harmonised?

Should we be content with 'a thousand flowers blooming', or could something new be catalysed within and between existing ecosystems?

04 What activities / programmes feel most aligned for us to fund? And in what order or priority?

Do we have a sense of what kinds of inner work are needed most urgently? (Should we look at vision quests before eco-anxiety, early childhood development before CEO education?) Do we want to focus on courses, narrative work, land-based centres, campaigns?

05 What levels of intervention do we want to engage in?

Global, regional, local or some combination? Place-based vs virtual?

06 What don't we want to engage in? What is 'out of bounds'?

What approaches and dynamics should we be aware of but not necessarily support?

07 Who else is already doing this that we can learn from and/or partner with?

Process

We started by researching an initial list of 114 organisations recommended by our networks, which we narrowed down to 60 for additional desktop research. Of these, we identified 29 to have initial conversations with through semi-structured listening sessions. We also drew on insights from many informal conversations with other people and organisations we have worked with or respect within the field. While these were not formal listening sessions, they have been included here in acknowledgement of their contribution to the space. We also identified over a dozen aligned funders to connect with and learn from.

See the appendix for a detailed list of the individuals and groups we spoke to, both formally and informally, as well as the questions we asked. To maintain discretion, we have not included names, titles, or direct attributions. Instead, we have summarized the key themes that emerged from all conversations within each category.

In parallel we used the Three Horizons framework, a simple futures methodology for mapping emergent landscapes of change to look at 'The future of Earth-centred consciousness by 2040 within the context of the Great Transition/ polycrisis/metacrisis' and overlaid some of the key organisations on our radar. **View our initial map here.**

There are many organisations listed here which could fall into *every one* of our research categories as they seek to address interwoven challenges. We recognise that like a library system or sections in a bookstore, categories can be helpful (especially when their limits are recognised), but they're certainly imperfect. We use them here to help signal to elements of our thinking we wish to highlight, while remembering the greater whole.

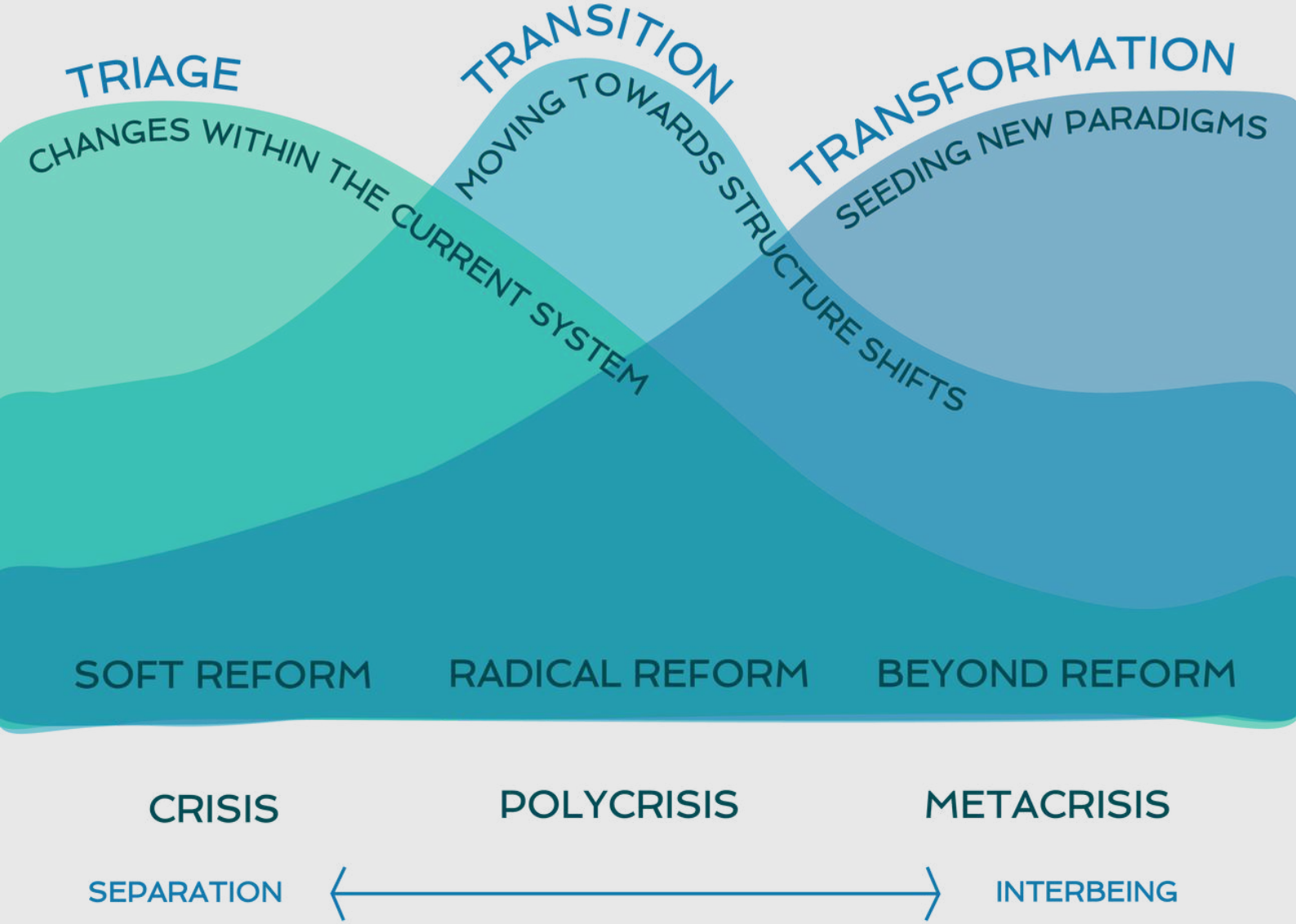
Preliminary research categories:

- **Inner resilience:** grief, emotional & community processing
- **Lighthouses:** practice hubs & centres for transition
- **The imaginal:** experimenting with animate futures
- **Celebrating cycles:** ceremony, rituals, & rites of passage
- **Dharma:** non-duality & compassion
- **Tipping points:** movements & narrative shifts

Our conversations also helped us develop our internal approach to team culture, grantee partner management, a due diligence framework and backend operations (not included here). *Please note this document is a snapshot of a moment in time in our thinking which will evolve over time and with subsequent input.*

Insights

Frame for Transformation



*The lower half of this frame for transformation is based on the work of the Vanessa Andreotti and the '**Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective**'.*
as well as our own interpretation and contributions from other frameworks.

Frame for Transformation

We started with an enquiry as to what a 'Theory of Change' would look like for Naia Trust, but we felt this framing was too narrow given the impossibility of any one theory's sufficiency in articulating such a complex landscape of change. Instead, we embraced a way to frame transformation that does not claim to be a fixed formula, but rather identifies phases of the transition required, leaving plenty of room for intuition, unforeseen pivots and external guidance.

Our frame encompasses both market and philanthropic investments, drawing on several complementary frameworks we respect, and is accompanied by a set of guidelines.

Key elements of our frame for transformation include these three horizons of change:

1. Changes within the current system (Triage): This horizon refers to immediate interventions in the system to contain and mitigate the cascading complex crises we are facing. We believe actions taken in the next decade will significantly impact the Earth's vital lifelines and cultures for centuries to come.

2. Moving towards structural shifts (Transition): We always consider whether our investments will steer us towards profound shifts in socio-political structures and our relationship with nature – this timeline is about building bridges. With a focus on 10+ year horizons, we are impatiently patient, insatiably curious, and experimental in our theses.

3. Seeding new paradigms (Transformation): In this time between worlds, we aim to seed new consciousness and spiritual transformation centred on interbeing with the Earth, recognising that our actions may bear fruits in distant times. We explore how an earth-centric, animistic worldview can help the broader public restore wholeness to the non-dual self through ritual, practice, community belonging, reverence, and joy.

We have also been inspired by the encouragement of Vanessa Andreotti in her body of work *Hospicing Modernity* to exercise 'self-reflexivity' when attempting to speak about theories of change or transformation. Her social map of the different orientations to modernity – soft reform and radical reform – can be overlaid onto the frame of triage and transition. She also asks us to look 'beyond reform' to the messy unknown space of transformation. Here we recognise that humility is called for as we seek to hospice that which no longer serves, while dancing between different approaches to reform at different times.

Guidelines that inform our approach

01

Start from where we are.

Our cultural, geographic, spiritual, and place-based context is important.

02

Place spirit at the centre of everything.

Respect, honour, and collaborate with the unseen and wider field. Ask permission.

03

Identify 'Islands of Coherence'.

Support the small pockets of the future that already exist. Help them thrive, grow, and inspire others.

04

Support whole ecosystems.

Connect the dots, no silos.

05

Think in long-term horizons.

Plant seeds. Be patient. Form trusted and enduring partnerships.

06

Identify positive tipping points.

Movement building and narrative shifts are important. Look for opportunities to support momentum for crucial tipping points. They might not be obvious.

Research Categories

01 **Inner resilience:** grief, emotional & community processing

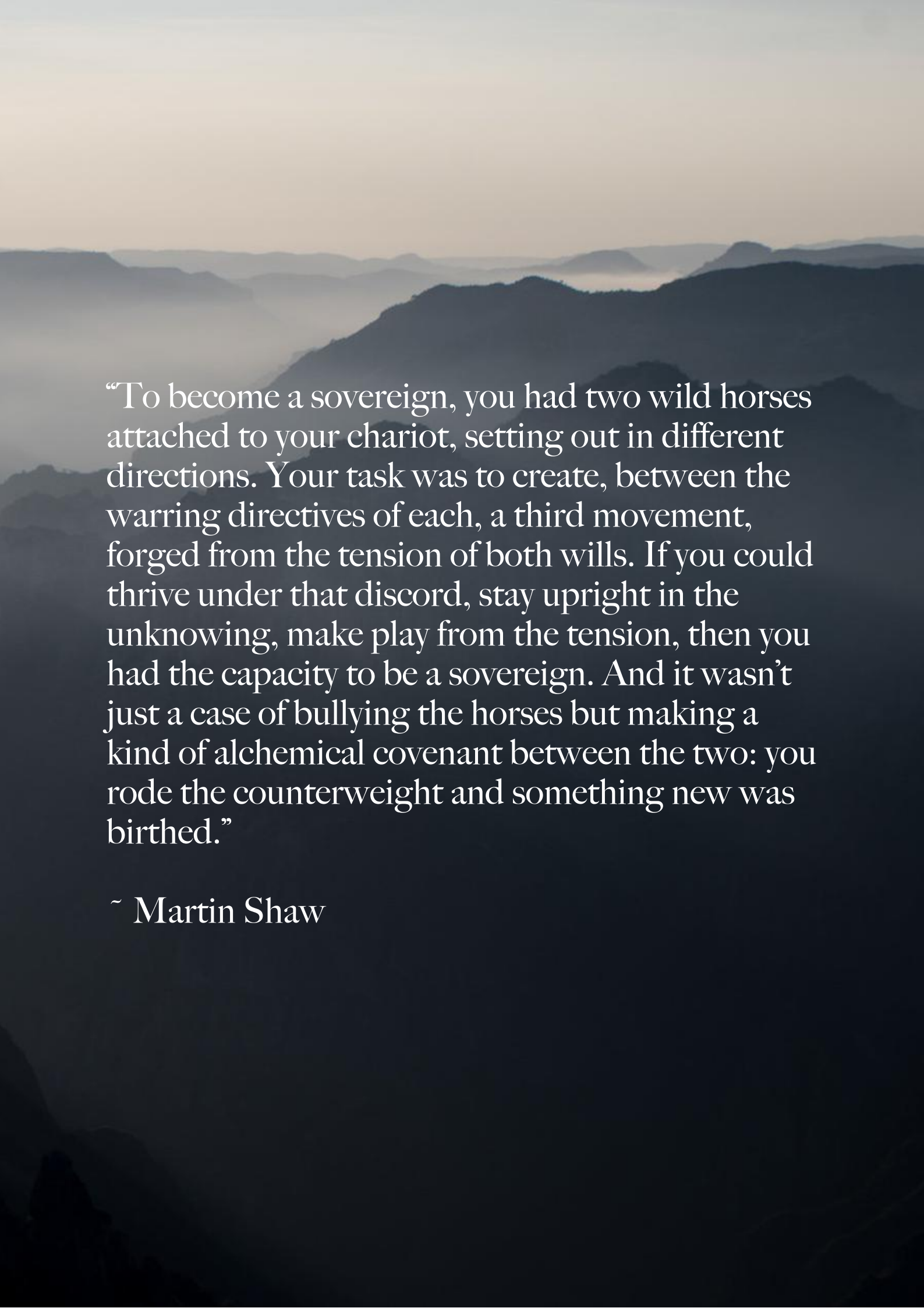
02 **Lighthouses:** practice hubs & centres for transition

03 **The imaginal:** experimenting with animate futures

04 **Celebrating cycles:** ceremony, rituals, & rites of passage

05 **Dharma:** non-duality & compassion

06 **Tipping points:** movements & narrative shifts



"To become a sovereign, you had two wild horses attached to your chariot, setting out in different directions. Your task was to create, between the warring directives of each, a third movement, forged from the tension of both wills. If you could thrive under that discord, stay upright in the unknowing, make play from the tension, then you had the capacity to be a sovereign. And it wasn't just a case of bullying the horses but making a kind of alchemical covenant between the two: you rode the counterweight and something new was birthed."

~ Martin Shaw

Inner resilience: grief, emotional & community processing

Overview

Our exploration into inner resilience sought to understand the mechanisms by which individuals and communities can transform experiences of loss and breakdown into sources of strength. Recognising and processing on a mass scale the deep-seated pain linked to environmental degradation, species extinction, cultural disconnection, loss of livelihoods and home, and societal disintegration, feels vital for the path forward. There is also a deeper conversation to be had about Western culture's relationship to death and impermanence, and the lessons many indigenous cosmologies can teach us about cycles of transformation.

This is a vast space with many potential starting points. We were already in conversations with practitioners who were looking at resilience through a climate and mental health lens, so our initial conversations have focused on the important work happening there, along with our mapping of different organisations focused specifically on grief (our team has taken courses with the likes of the Good Grief Network, and Francis Weller). We will continue expanding this research into grief, community processes, and place-based resilience going forward.

- **Unthinkable** is a new nonprofit led by Dr. Britt Wray, tackling the hidden mental health crisis within the climate crisis. Their work includes research, public engagement, and community-minded psychosocial support interventions to help people cope with the emotional toll of the climate emergency. **What if addressing the hidden mental health crisis could unlock greater resilience and renewed action in the face of our current crisis?**

- **The Work That Reconnects** offers support, connection and inspiration to people around the world who practise WTR, a well-known body of work developed by Joanna Macy. WTR is transformative group-work, designed to support participants in turning despair and apathy into constructive, collaborative and embodied action. **What if, by moving through grief and loss, and recognising them as sources of deep care, we could channel despair into meaningful action?**

- **Climate Cares** is based at Imperial College in London and is the first academic centre in the world focused on the intersection of mental health and climate change. Their research aims to understand how climate change impacts mental wellbeing and explores ways to build psychological resilience in the face of climate-related stressors. **What if integrating mental health support into climate action could enhance community effectiveness?**

- **Climate Mental Health Network** is a collaborative of community advocates in the United States focused on mental wellbeing and climate crisis emotions. They work with parents, educators, children and young adults, building evidence-based intervention models and fostering community connections. **What if widespread awareness and support for climate mental health would be commonplace, and run by local communities themselves?**

- **COP²** is a global network of more than 450 organisations managed by the Billion Minds Project at Columbia University, working to embed psychological resilience within climate resilience. Their aim is to empower the next generation to take meaningful action towards mitigating climate change – from care providers to decision-makers, and smallholder farmers to climate experts. **What if billions of people had the psychological resources to spark change and to care humanely for each other and the planet?**

- **Force of Nature**. Through workshops, campaigns, and educational resources, they seek to help young people transform their climate anxiety into action, and then connect them with the resources to influence the decisions shaping their future. **What if sustainably resourcing young people to take action started with understanding their climate emotions?**

- **The Wellbeing Project** is a decade old systems orchestrator that works with over 1200 organisations to transform the culture within the social change sector to prioritise inner wellbeing for changemakers. They also have a newer initiative focused on Ecological Belonging. **What if inner wellbeing was mainstreamed in global changemaking and social impact organisations?**

- **Starter Culture** works at the intersection of personal, collective and cultural transformation. Their earth-centric, inner-led unlearning journeys support change-agents to decolonise-at-depth by transforming their own relationships with power. Their offerings integrate their design principles across our categories, including personal and collective shadow work, the imaginal, ritual and ceremony, and reverence to seasonal cycles. ***What if transforming our relationships with power is the essential ingredient in becoming earth-centric?***

- **The Resilience Project** is a youth-led initiative supporting young climate activists by prioritising their mental health and emotional resilience. Through their Resilience Circles and immersive residentials, they empower young people to transform climate anxiety and burnout into sustained, meaningful action. **What if building emotional resilience and community support in youth climate leaders could sustain a global movement for climate justice and wellbeing?**

- **Global Diversity Foundation** is a nonprofit dedicated to safeguarding biocultural diversity and empowering local communities. A cornerstone of their work is a fellowship program designed to strengthen the leadership and technical capacities of Global South conservation changemakers. Fellows are integrated into the Global Environments Network (GEN), a transformational community of over 800 individuals and organisations, providing ongoing collaboration and mentorship. **What if empowering local leaders could create resilient, self-sustaining communities that are equipped to protect both their cultural heritage and natural ecosystems?**

Key themes

Building practical tools for difficult times.
Creating practical tools and community workshops is crucial for supporting mental health during the climate crisis. Resources like guided journals, eco-anxiety toolkits, climate cafes and peer support groups offer tangible ways for individuals to navigate their emotional landscapes. However, many of these tools are still in their early stages, requiring further testing and evidence to ensure their effectiveness for the broad populations that need them (youth, parents, educators, policy makers, scientists, etc). There is a lack of funding for the "soft infrastructure" to build a practitioner ecosystem to help sustain the work.

Turn grief into action.
Eco-anxiety, anger and grief can be powerful motivators when witnessed, honoured, moved through, and that energy channelled into renewed force and meaningful action. By facing our grief head-on, we can turn despair into a force for collective action and resilience. More on this in our founder Alexa's episode on her podcast Lifeworlds.

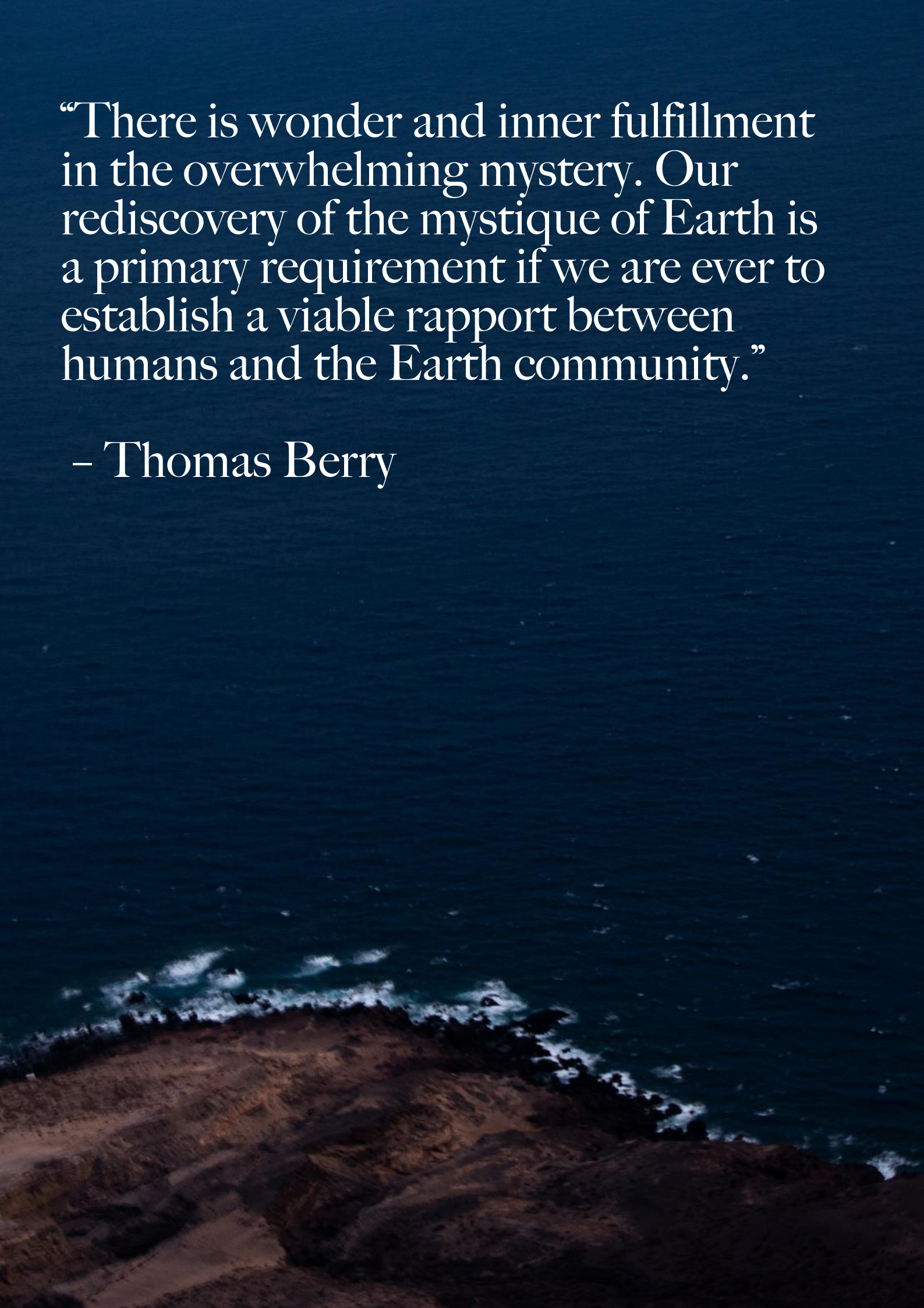
Community is at the core.
A community focused approach is needed to prepare local groups to adapt to a rapidly shifting context, as well as supporting individuals to become more resilient and transform their eco-anxiety. Creating containers for people to surface challenging emotions safely happens more effectively in trusted groups. Also, to scale up the amount of people receiving the necessary care, we need to begin training communities themselves to hold these processes with and for each other ('train the trainers').

Bridging the gaps.
The climate, mental health and psycho-social support spaces speak different languages. There is an opportunity to bring those worlds together yet many practitioners exist in silos. The funding in these fields is also compartmentalised. There is a challenge in how to adapt inner resilience into existing climate adaptation work and leadership training.

Further Exploration

We want to deepen our understanding of contexts where inner resilience is being practised in concert with 'outer' resilience, i.e. in place-based contexts where people's approach to living is purposefully designed to withstand the heightened social and ecological impacts of breakdown. Indicative projects we seek to learn from:

- **The Transition Network** approach: inspiring a global movement of local communities to strengthen and resource themselves.
- **Global Ecovillage Network**: working on community resilience and toolkits in the face of breakdown and discontinuities.
- **Ecological Belonging**: a collaboration of The Wellbeing Project and Georgetown University to build a hopeful ecological narrative, via academic research, artistic exploration, meta-curriculum development and civic education.



“There is wonder and inner fulfillment in the overwhelming mystery. Our rediscovery of the mystique of Earth is a primary requirement if we are ever to establish a viable rapport between humans and the Earth community.”

– Thomas Berry

Lighthouses: practice hubs & centres for transition

Overview

The intention for this stream was to learn from the great alternative education centres of our time who have stood as beacons of inspiration for what's possible in the world in terms of holistic education, curriculum, community living, and engaged action. Through our conversations, a higher order set of questions emerged: **what is relevant to 'teach' humans in the face of the future that is emerging (skills, capacities, knowledge, embodied wisdom), who is teaching it, in what format, and where? And where are existing models of education wholly inadequate and ossified?**

- **Black Mountains College** is an exciting new entry into the ecological learning space with a specific focus on educating the next generation to live in a warming world. They are the first university for climate change in the UK. **What if all university curricula, from philosophy to engineering, were taught in the context of a warming world?**

- **Advaya** is an integrated transformative learning platform aimed at shifting consciousness. Their courses and membership model is a unique contribution into the online consciousness and ecological learning space. **What if transformative learning platforms could provide the world's greatest practitioners and thinkers with a platform to reach hundreds of thousands of people, offering new ways of being and seeing?**

- **Embercombe** is a small land-based centre focussed on connection to nature as a path to greater connection with land and self. Their courses span inner development and land rewilding. **What if many more centres emerged that were focused on reconnecting with nature and transforming our relationship with the Earth?**

- **College of the Ancient Forests** seeks to restore right relationship between plant elders and humans. The College responds to needs within the ancient rainforests on Vancouver Island, to educate young people to face human wrongs whilst simultaneously contributing to an alternative to logging for First Nations. **What if classrooms were outdoors and learning came through taking right action for human and ecological stakeholders?**

- **St Ethelburgas** sits at the intersection of climate and peace. Their projects include community reconciliation, refugee inclusion, radical resilience, viewpoint diversity, and spiritual ecology. **What if we included peace with Earth as part of peace on Earth?**

- **Commonweal** is a non-profit organisation based in California, dedicated to health, healing, environment, and justice, initially with a focus on cancer, death transitions, and healing circles. They have a cluster of work called Omega around resilience in the face of the polycrisis. **What if land based organisations became resilience centres for both rural and urban communities, physically and emotionally preparing people for times of great transitions?**

Key themes

Online, and building community.
Moving beyond the solitary consumption of content, there is now a growing appetite among participants for cohort-based, online communities that emphasise collective learning and growth. This shift is enhanced by thoughtfully designed offerings from content providers who recognise the value of interactive, in person community-focused experiences.

The rise of online learning.
There are now many more platforms that offer courses that are either free or significantly cheaper than visiting in-person retreat centres. Pro: greater potential for rapid narrative shifts through wide-spread earth-reverent content. Con: further loss of connection to place and others i.e. real rocks, rivers, and human bodies!

Orphaned and/or dying curriculums.
We have noticed that many of the longest established and famed institutions or centres are facing challenges keeping their doors open, and therefore scale back on or end their offerings. We are wondering what will happen with all this rich content and where it might be brought to.

The need for in-person praxis.
Despite the rise of online education, the value of place-based and in-person learning (along with co-living) are irreplaceable. Physical presence in lived space and nature transforms learning into a deeply immersive, sensory-rich experience.

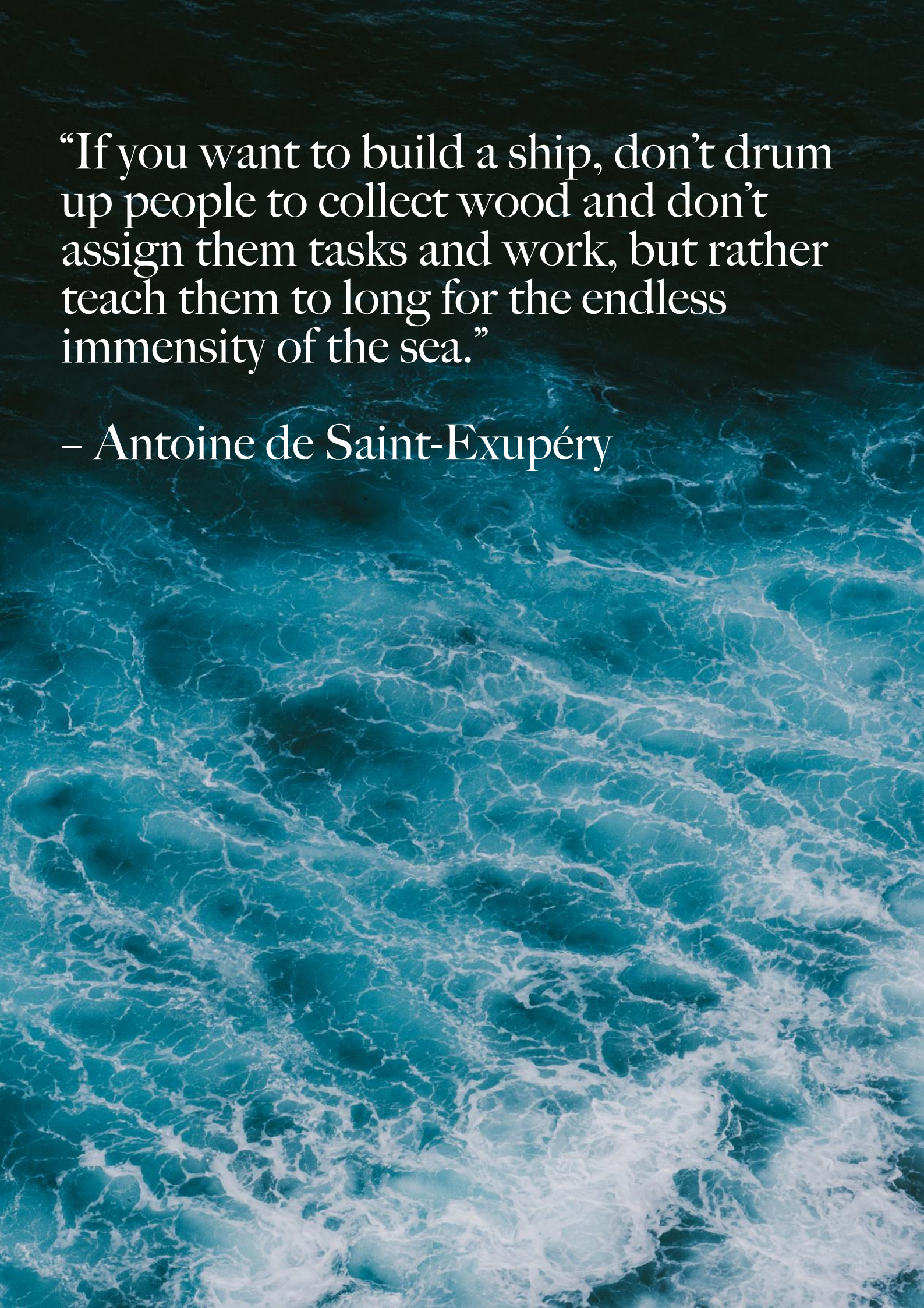
This embodied learning nurtures a deep sense of belonging and stewardship, embedding ecological principles into the very fabric of one's being. It also sobers us up to what it actually means to 'live in community' and develop essential skills in conflict resolution, communication and sharing space. Shared experiences in place also builds more resilient communities.

Struggling centres.
The covid pandemic and rise of online learning coupled with the rise in cost of living, particularly energy, and small cohorts of students, has deeply impacted place-based organisations' ability to survive on programme revenue alone. This, coupled with the usual costs associated with providing food, accommodation, admin, pastoral care etc, has posed significant challenges for some land-based centres.

Further Exploration

We have a strong desire to further understand the necessary ingredients for thriving place-based centres supported by revenue models that can sustain them. We are also curious about the role that these physical centres may play in supporting community resilience during the decades to come, acting as both lighthouses of different educational models adapted for the current day, along with being repositories of local wisdom, sharing libraries, agricultural resources, crisis toolkits, and neutral safe spaces where people can practise the social fabric necessary to live together well.

One example of a lighthouse we want to better understand is the University of the Forest, an eco-versity rooted in indigenous traditions and customary laws led by Chief Ninawa of the Huni Kuin in the Brazilian Amazon, governed by both human and non-human elders. Their digital campus, in collaboration with Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures, aims to equip learners to show up in the world with reverence and respect towards the living planet we are all part of.



"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

– Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The imaginal: experimenting with animate futures

Overview

It's difficult to create a new vision for the future without the space to creatively imagine what it could look and feel like. Our inquiry here is therefore to understand who is contributing to the imagination space more broadly, and to include a specific focus on imagining animate futures. That is, the inclusion of the more-than-human world into our culture, policies, and communities.

We are grateful to Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) for building the imagination field through their work on Imagination Infrastructures and Rob Hopkins' book – From What Is, To What If? which has also inspired our 'What if?" questions throughout this document

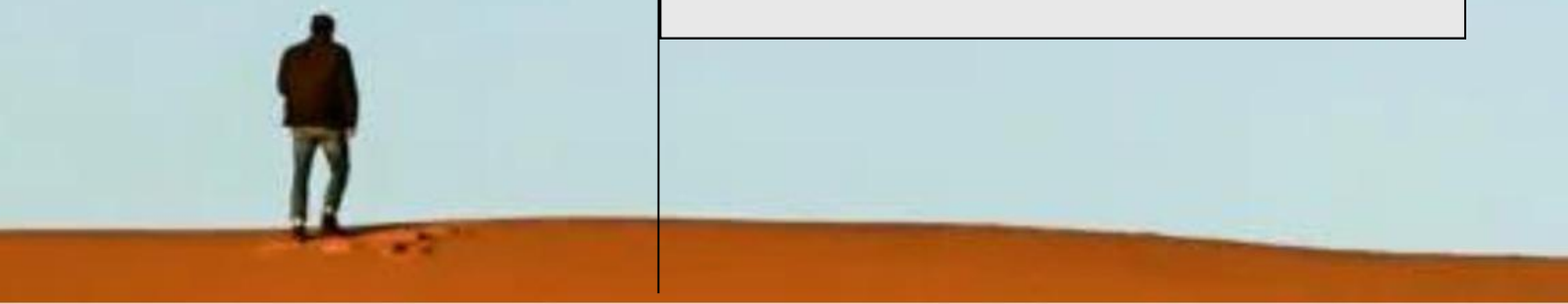
Our listening sessions sought to understand creative formats that others are offering as possible sites for expanding the imagination field in an animist direction..

- **Kincentric Leadership** is laying the foundations for a new paradigm of leadership and polycrisis mitigation grounded in kincentric ecology. What if policymakers and business leaders included the intelligence and sentience of the living world into all their decisions? **What if nature had a seat on every company board or city council?**

- **Animate Earth** is exploring the role of Land Stewards in listening to and being guided by the energies of the land through their work with landowners and farmers. **What if every land steward asked permission and was in relationship with land before constructing their vision on it?**

- **Town Anywhere** is using large-scale participatory community visioning experiences to help people face the polycrisis with agency. In one day's workshop, up to 300 people collectively imagine and build the town of their desired future. **What if every council and local government hosted a Town Anywhere process to inform their future?**

- **Marshmallow Laser Feast** is working on the principle that there are no individuals in nature and everything exists in relation to everything else. They are an artist's collective working with the latest innovations in digital technologies such as virtual reality, collaborating with scientists and researchers to create immersions into the invisible worlds of nature. **How would policy makers act differently if they could have a visceral experience of becoming an ancient tree, flowing into the mycelium or having their breath become the forest?**

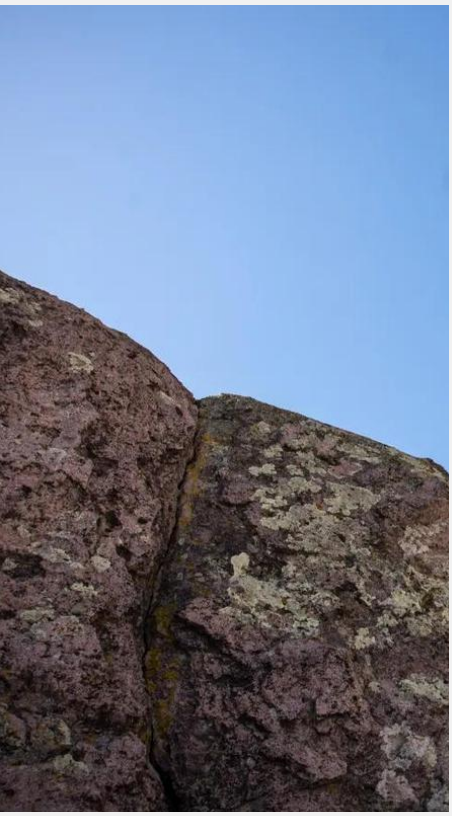


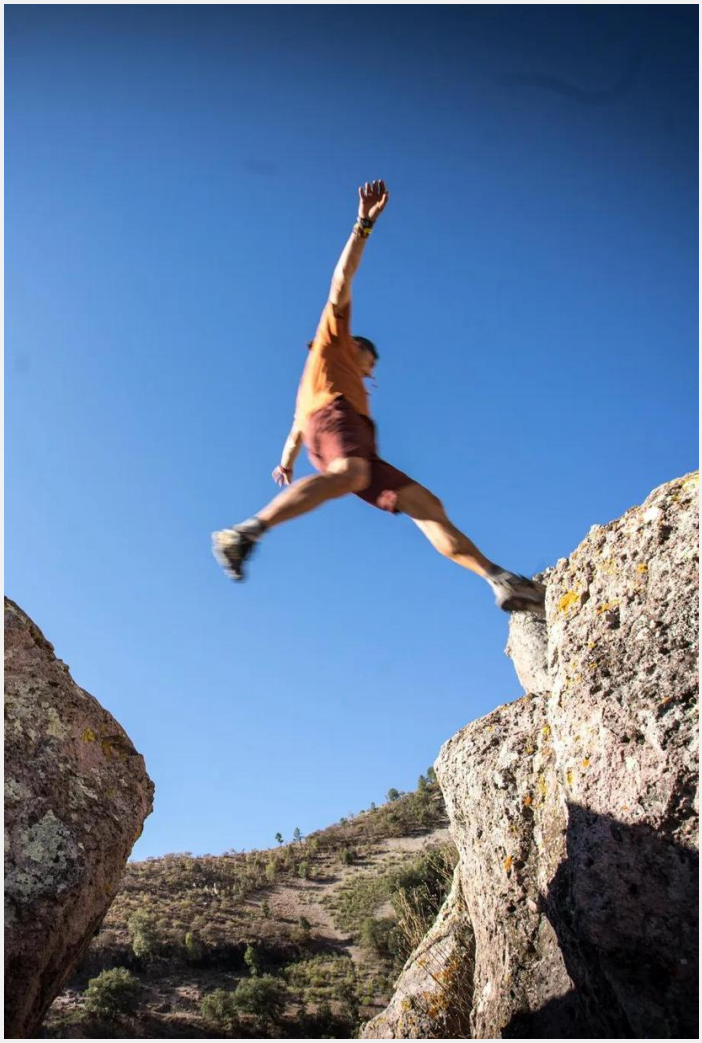
- **Moral Imaginations** a nonprofit led by Phoebe Tickell in the lineage of Joanna Macy, dedicated to building moral imagination by training 'Imagination Activists'. They work across the public, private and community sectors to help shift mindsets, values and worldviews towards radical kinship with the human and more-than-human worlds, present, past and future. **What if actively using our imagination could open up new ways of knowing and connect us with our inherent interdependence to life and our responsibility to be in right relation with Earth living systems?**

- **OpenAREA and Flock Together** are using art and creativity to open up public natural spaces to demographics who have traditionally felt alienated from 'nature'. **What if youth centres were held in tiny urban forests? What if young people from minority backgrounds felt London's nature reserves or bird watching was part of their identity?**

- **Ministry of Imagination Manifesto** is a compilation of the wisdom from Rob Hopkins' podcast guests. It includes over 600 deeply thoughtful, considered, audacious and ambitious policies covering everything from free art materials for all, to a Universal Basic Income. **What if these policies actually got implemented?**

- *We are also scoping and funding in our Ecology Grants stream several programmes linked to multispecies representation and jurisprudence - **please see more on our website**.*



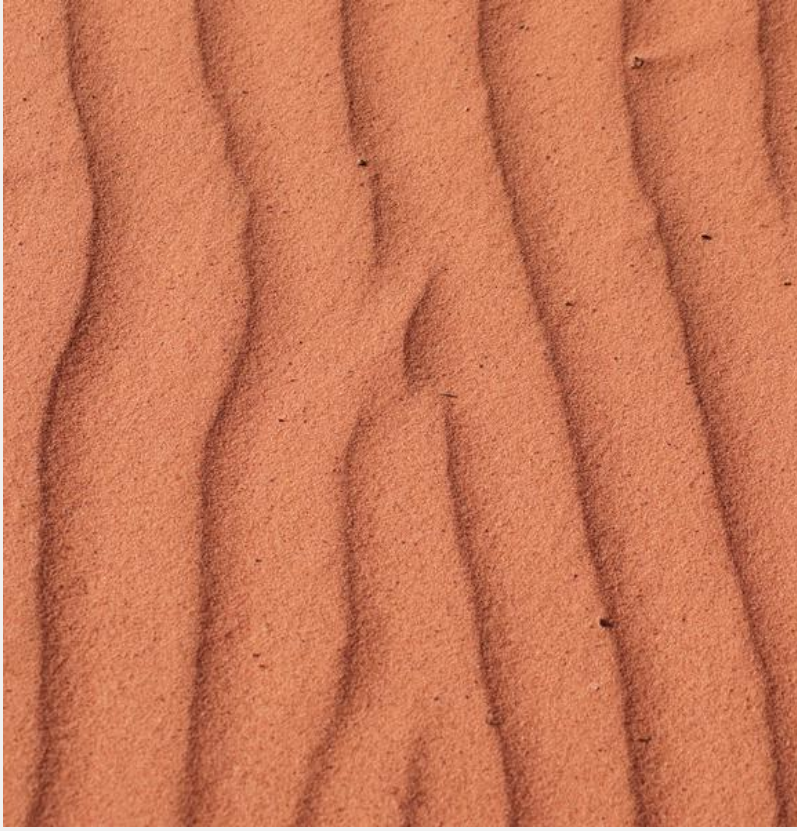


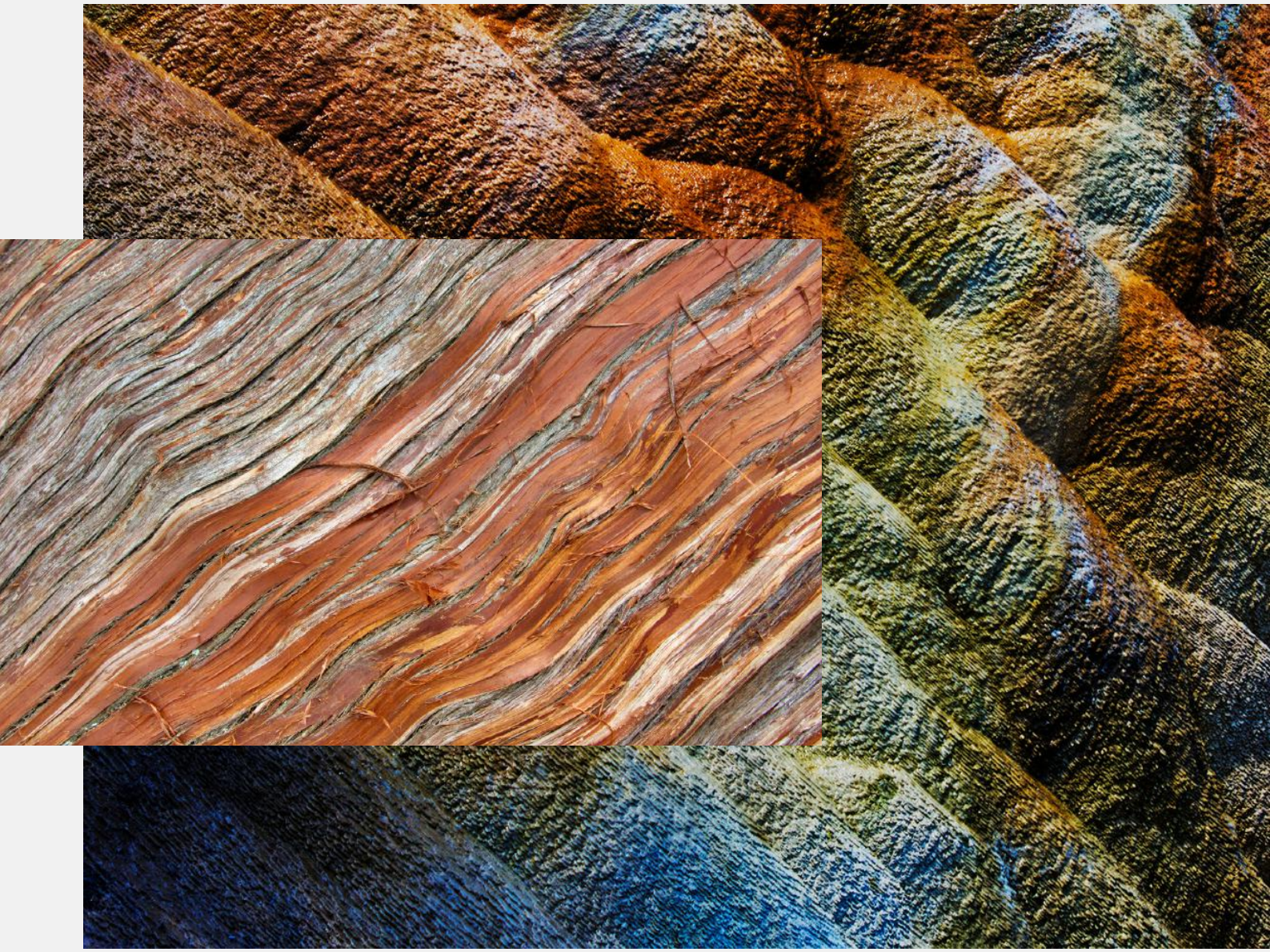
Key themes

Rehearse the future with deep immersion.
Let people experience the possible future in the present, instead of just telling them about it. Have them visit the future, sit in a council of more-than-human beings, hear, taste, and touch what a future built in response to the metacrisis might feel like (both in its beauty and potential pain), for example by practising living in and rebuilding during and after breakdown. Humans learn (and change their minds!) most powerfully through embodied experience, and it is through this practice that communities are both woven together and will know how to respond creatively, not simply out of fear.

There's a big role for creatives.
Without stories, art, culture, and experiences that include the more-than-human world alongside daily human experiences, we're not going to get very far in repairing our broken Western culture. As one contributor shared: "When we went to the moon, it wasn't JFK's idea. Jules Verne had written a book 100 years before imagining going to the moon. And then scientists read that, and then they did more science, then comic books, and jazz records, and trashy B movies all started talking about going to the moon and by the time we got there we'd already been there so many times. Like we'd rehearsed it." What would it look like to start telling large-scale, inspiring stories of how we could relate to each other and the more-than-human world in a shifting climate?

Growing the movement for imagination activism.
There are many nascent approaches and methods for cultivating and teaching imagination, but not yet wide adoption or application, let alone with an animist lens. There is a need to get the best approaches into schools, governments, councils, climate conferences… You name it. This requires training the trainers in imagination activism. There are currently only a handful of groups doing this globally and almost no one focussed specifically on imagination activism in service of animist futures.





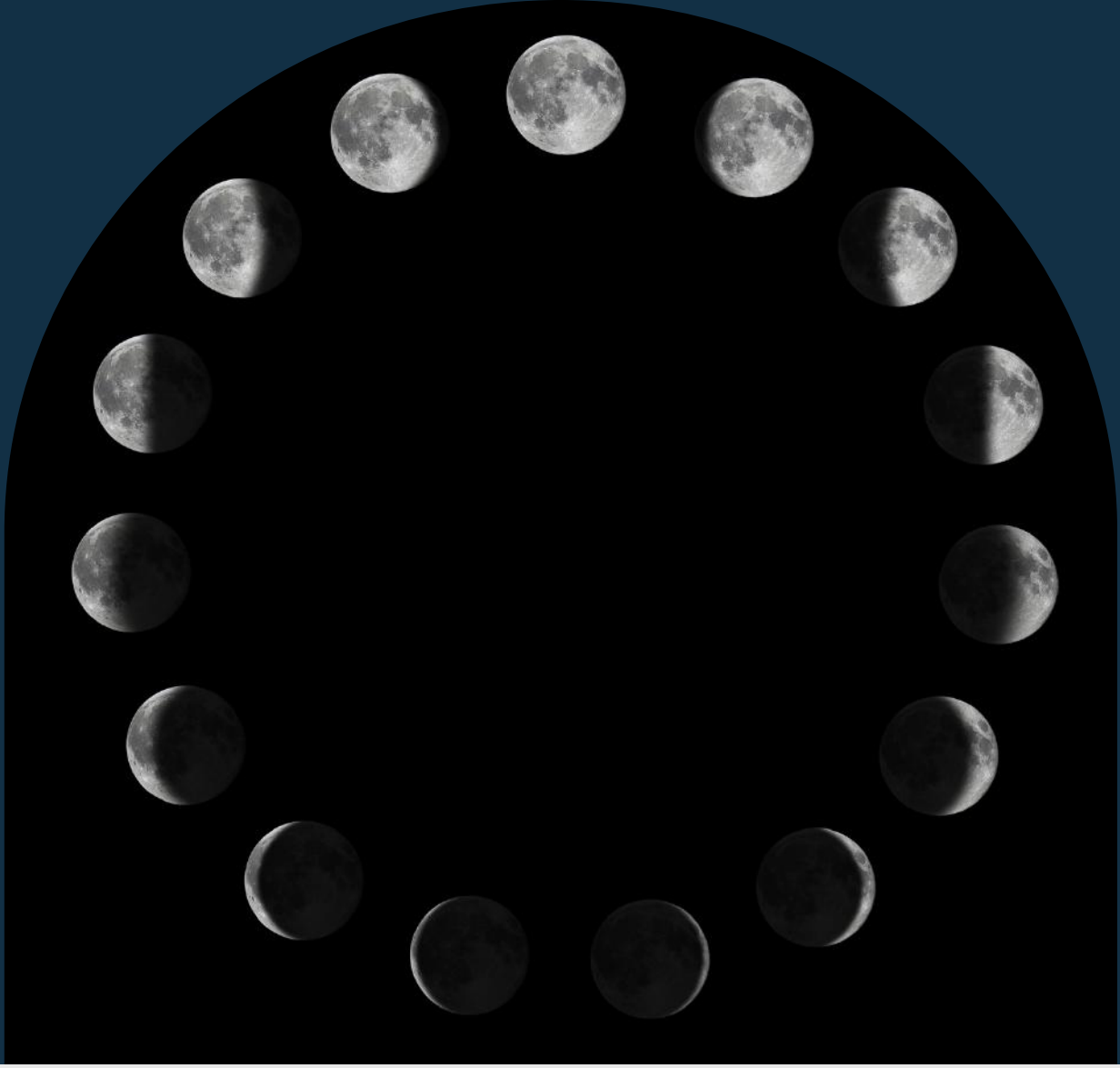
Further Exploration

We are curious to understand how some of the best imagination and community tools can be applied directly to integrate animist principles. For example, what could we learn from the pilots for Citizens Assemblies about how to include the more-than-human world into policy making? We'll be talking to the Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities, Bard College and groups like MOTH to explore this further.

Or, what could a community visioning tool like Town Anywhere help unlock if the preparation for town building included a half-day of participants learning about and embodying the lifeways of their local natural stakeholders such as trees, birds, pollinators and rivers?

We are aware that there are also groups, perhaps less in the limelight, who are doing imagination work in service of animist futures, such as indigenous futurists and practitioners that we have yet to engage with.

In this stream we think we might end up experimenting with novel approaches that may, with time, contribute to the flourishing of imaginative animist practice for wide groups of citizens, whilst also piloting small-scale experiments for specific groups of people with reach and influence e.g. journalists, policymakers, investors.



Celebrating cycles: ceremony, rituals, & rites of passage

Overview

This stream of inquiry developed from a recognition that one of the most powerful paths to nurturing reverence for all life is through understanding and honouring the cycles of life and death – the seasons that exist within nature, including our own lives. We have been severed from ways of being that existed for millenia, such as ceremony, ritual, and rites of passage, but our necessity and ingrained longing for them still exist, now manifested maladaptively in other 'rituals' modern culture has replaced them with (Friday night binge drinks, to list but one!).

We are exploring these ancient communal practices as a doorway to creating greater balance with the natural world and our understanding of the wider arcs we exist within.

This space is thankfully broad and growing fast. Given the breadth of it, we began with an inquiry into rites of passage and solo time in nature, often referred to as 'vision quests'. However the scope for research in this work is much much wider than this initial entry point. We're just getting started.

- **Way of Nature** are merging social, ecological, and spiritual consciousness for the restoration of our sacred relationship with Mother Earth, All Our Relations, and Source Nature. **What if reverence for nature was again widely accepted as the universal connective tissue for humanity across all belief systems?**

- **Regenco** offers and trains others in grief tending and rites of passage, or "Land Time". They are deeply connected with the Wilderness Guides Council, a network of wilderness guides who have been building the field for 30+ years. **What if there were enough elders to steward rites of passage for every young person?**

- **The Earth Elders** is a recently formed global nonprofit that aims to champion the protection of 52 biocultural territories, elevating indigenous stewardship through a network of elders and working to protect traditional knowledge to defend the planet's last remaining intact ecosystems. **What if place-based biocultural hubs served as a safety net for nature and ancestral wisdom, conserving them for future human generations?**

- **School of Lost Borders** have over 40 years experience bringing rites of passage into the modern world through vision fasts, trainings, and transformative nature-based programmes. **What if ceremonial perspectives were integrated into everyone's daily routines, life, and work?**

- **Living Connection 1st** is the evolution of Jon Young's 8 Shields approach and provides an online 'village' and community for members to connect with nature, themselves, and each other. **What if we started building villages based on a deep understanding our ourselves as Nature?**

- **Church for Earth** is indeed, a church for the earth, born out of the necessity of crisis and a shared longing for us to come together and create places where Earth lives and breathes at the centre of community life. **What if every town had a Church for Earth, or Earth Temples? How might that change our communities' engagement with their local environment?**

- **Rooted Healing** is committed to rekindling humanity's relationship with nature through the power of ceremony, ritual, and community-based learning. They offer immersive workshops, retreats, and "slow learning" online courses that provide a sacred space for exploring eco-guardianship, guided by ancestral wisdom and practices. **What if every community had access to tools and sacred ceremonies that help reinhabit land and reconnect individuals to the cycles of life, fostering collective healing and resilience?**

Key themes

Nature without faith.
Everyone we spoke to mentioned the universal simplicity and potency of nature as a Great Teacher. Immersion in nature can be an accessible route into self-realisation and reverence for something that includes and transcends one's own life. It does not require faith or religion, and in this way has the potential to be widely accessible – an entry point to divinity without dogma.

Access to nature is not equally distributed.
One of the challenges is inequity – not everyone feels 'nature' is for them to walk in or enjoy, let alone having access to green spaces or seeing themselves as part of nature and participating in a nature-based retreat. There is a great opportunity to widen the scope of who has access to land experiences, and the powerful initiations conducted there. Many contributors commented that their audiences are predominantly white Europeans and there is much work to be done in decolonising the field.

Protect what is sacred.
Preserve and protect lands where rites of passage and biocultural protection take place. This should start with the cultures who still have practices connected to the land and hold direct lineages with rooted ways of being.

The crucial role of elders.
It's tempting to focus on initiations for young people but without elders who have been through their own rites, it can be difficult to create the appropriate container for young people. This is a huge challenge and also an opportunity – to remember the importance of honouring intergenerational voices to ensure the continuity of wisdom and time tested traditions.

Terminology.
'Vision Quests' have become the catchall term for solo multi-day retreats in nature, but some feel this term is best used for indigenous community rituals and a specific cultural context. In Western Europe and North America, other terms such as Wilderness Quest, Vision Fast, Land Time, Sacred Passage, or Solo Vigil may be more appropriate.

Further Exploration

Through our conversations we felt a ripeness for bringing rites of passage closer to the mainstream, perhaps in a similar way to how we've witnessed the rise of mindfulness in recent years. We're wondering what it would look like if every young person had the chance to do a rite of passage as standard. What would that change in our world? What are the existing networks of guides and practitioners who have been laying the groundwork for the past 40+ years? To that end we will be speaking with The Wilderness Guides Council, Weaving Earth and Animas Valley Institute to further this inquiry.

We are also tracking the proliferation of plant and fungi medicines (both responsibly used and respected, and not) and are wondering how the consecration of these medicines with properly trained guardians, rooted in ancestral traditions, may potentially play a role in this stream of inquiry to honour the power of ceremonies and celebrate cycles of life. To this end we have a pending conversation with Indigenous Medicine Conservation Fund, as one example.

"Amidst the polycrisis we face today, the practice of dharma is essential as it fosters a sense of inner resilience, ethical conduct, and interconnectedness, guiding us toward compassionate action and sustainable solutions."

- Joanna Macy

"The Dharma of Resilience in a Time of Crisis."

Dharma: non-duality & compassion

Overview

We recognise that defining Dharma is challenging, as different traditions offer distinct interpretations. Our explorations here emerge from where we feel best placed to understand and support: namely, the traditions we are personally engaged with and practice regularly – those of various Buddhist lineages.

Dharma and Dharmic practices provide profound guidance for navigating the complexities of our times. Dharma itself is a path (within which exist many paths) that cultivates inner resilience, ethical and compassionate conduct, and a sense of interconnectedness. We have directly experienced ourselves how the ancient teachings of Dharma, from a multiplicity of lineages, can shift fundamental perspectives about the nature of reality and help us navigate the world with more clarity, love and acceptance. These teachings often enable individuals and communities to act with greater compassion, navigate challenging inner states with more equanimity, and begin to see the world through non-dual perspectives that emphasise the wellbeing and freedom of all sentient beings.

- **Plum Village** is a global community of mindfulness practice centres that provide retreats and teachings on engaged Buddhism, founded by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. Their online course titled 'Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet' has already reached thousands of people. **What if, supported by Zen Buddhist tools, global activists and leaders cultivated the personal resilience, mindsets, and wellbeing required to effectively tackle the challenges they face? How might the principles of mindfulness and interbeing transform our collective response into something entirely different?**

- **The Loka Initiative** is housed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and supports faith-led environmental and climate efforts by capacity building and forging partnerships across faiths, scientists and wisdom keepers of indigenous traditions. **What if key faith leaders had training in biodiversity protection and disaster preparedness, to lead their communities through the unknown? What if we activated the powerful networks of faiths around the world to revive their ancient teachings on care for the Earth? And what if faith leaders and scientists collaborated to foster resilience in communities most affected by climate change?**

- **MAPLE** is a non-profit, residential contemplative training centre based in Vermont. They offer in-person and online courses in Buddhism, AI and existential risk, as well as Vision Quests on the land. **What if integrating contemplative practices with the exploration of existential AI risks could influence how new technologies are built and propagated?**

- **ARC** is a now sunsetted programme that inspired us a case study, understanding that the first environmental campaigners were religious groups – in all their sacred books and through their traditional practices runs the thread of the protection of sacred sites and care and compassion for the natural world. They helped religions link with key environmental organisations – creating powerful alliances between faith communities and conservation groups. **What if monks were the stewards of protected areas, ordaining trees for perpetual cultural protection? What if ecology and faith were brought explicitly closer?**

- **Rigdzin** is dedicated to the preservation and continuation of the Tibetan Buddhist teachings, in collaboration with traditional lineage holders. Rigdzin teachers are trained in an ancient way of transmission known as a "pointing out" style of teaching. This style of teaching is uniquely fit to make the essence of Mahamudra and Dzogchen teachings accessible for contemporary practitioners. Rigdzin offers teachings throughout the world with the explicit intention to help all beings flourish. **What if greater numbers of the world's leaders – across policy, tech, finance – had access to these teachings?**

Key themes

Preparing with practicality.
We heard the importance of faith and Buddhist groups developing practical skills for adaptive living in our changing world, which includes disaster preparedness in monasteries. Whether they are Zen practices to integrate into climate action or wilderness and survival skills alongside psychological resilience, this moment in our collective calls for preparedness of both inner and outer realms.

Awareness and new views as a healing force.
The spiritual dimension of suffering, both individual and collective, will only increase with the crises at hand. There are ways to shift powerlessness, apathy, polarisation and materialism, which themselves are root symptoms and causes of said breakdowns. It very often begins with how we interpret the inner challenges we find ourselves in and frame them internally, instead of 'solving' or moving quickly past them.

Long term play.
Dharmic lineages and faith communities (as well as indigenous cosmologies) are committed to their paths, communities and ecologies well beyond an election cycle, and beyond even current climate and social cycles. They have withheld and transcended rises and falls of civilizations for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, and many of their core teachings are just as relevant today as ever before.

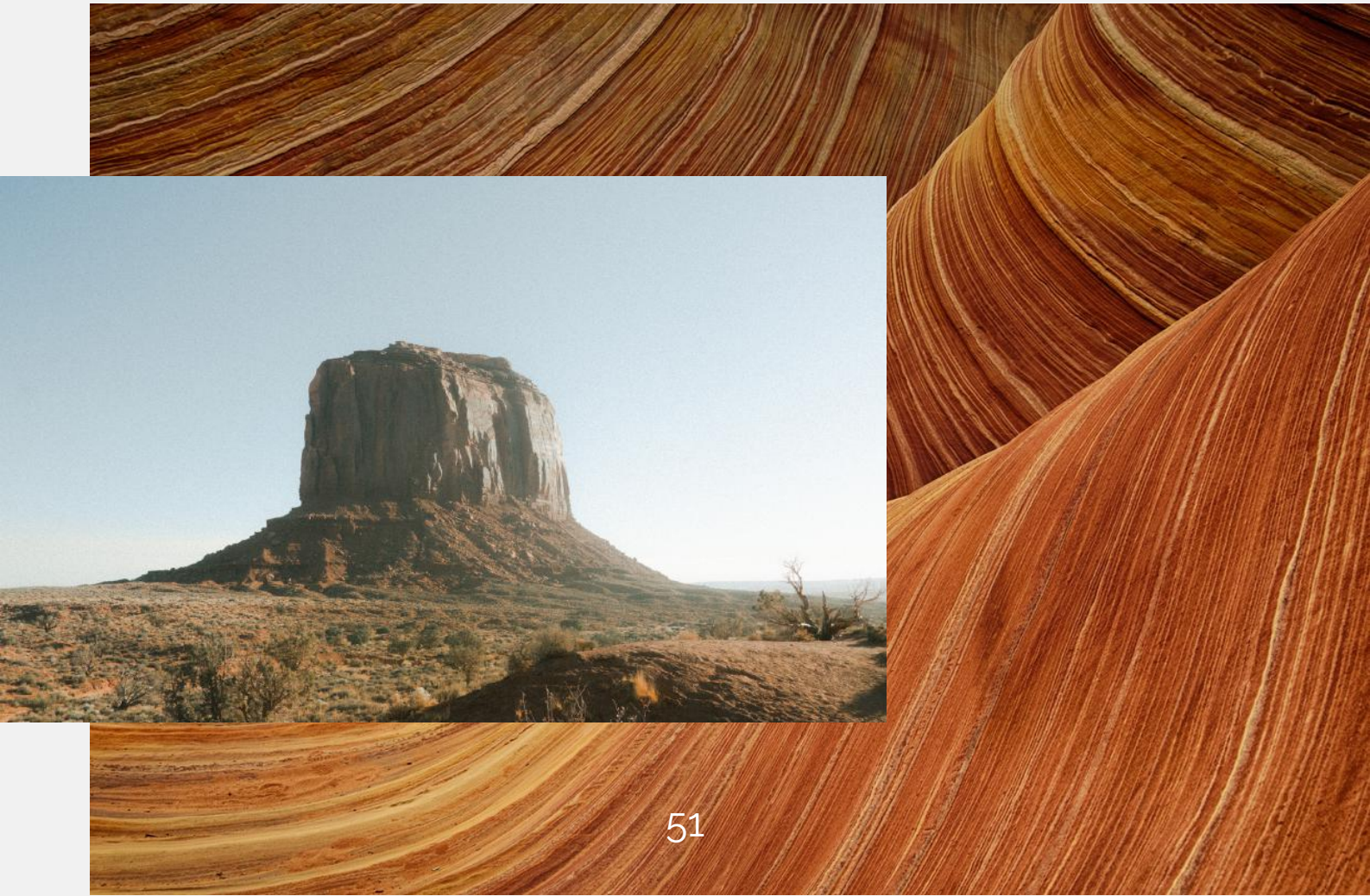
Action here will be about helping generate fertile psychological and spiritual soil for centuries to come; keeping critical traditions alive as seeds for new civilizations; and acknowledging that humans will always be asking fundamental questions about existence, and therefore there is a need for spiritual guidance irrespective of the uniqueness of any moment in time.

Further Exploration

We have additional work in this stream to better understand Dharma's role in supporting inner resilience and compassionate action. For example, how might we help embed dharmic principles into programmes on mental health and leadership/activist training? Do we want to support bringing these spiritual practices to a large audience, or to specific audiences in the populations we might want to work closely with? And how does ecodharma differ across lineages, geographies and with distinct populations - are there forms of spiritual practice that are more adequate for the current context?

Pending conversations:

- One Earth Sangha
- Mind & Life Institute
- Eco Dharma
- Bhutan as a case study for implementing Dharmic principles on a country level



Tipping points: movements & narrative shifts

Overview

We included this stream to acknowledge that one of the key ways we would like to operate is through the creation of widespread social 'positive tipping points' – critical thresholds in systems, processes, or behaviours where a small change or intervention leads to significant, beneficial, and often self-reinforcing transformations. Once these tipping points are reached, the momentum created propels further positive change, creating a virtuous cycle.

We seek to find the points where our 'small' efforts can cause the greatest ripple. We've come to see this workstream as a cross-cutting theme that should inform the majority of our decisions, and have therefore included it as a guiding principle in our approach to investing. The insights shared here are reflections from our engagement with organisations we respect within this space.

“Cause-and-effect assumes history marches forward, but history is not an army. It is a crab scuttling sideways, a drip of soft water wearing away stone, an earthquake breaking centuries of tension. Sometimes one person inspires a movement, or her words do decades later, sometimes a few passionate people change the world; sometimes they start a mass movement and millions do; sometimes those millions are stirred by the same outrage or the same ideal, and change comes upon us like a change of weather. All that these transformations have in common is that they begin in the imagination, in hope.”

– Rebecca Solnit

- **Cohort 2040** is operating on the basis of derailment risk, i.e. the worst results of the polycrisis will distract us from the energy and political focus to address the underlying causes. Scenario workshops on various negative tipping points are aimed at next generation policymakers. **What if all policymakers rehearsed the future as part of standard risk preparedness?**

- **Longpath** is an organisation dedicated to promoting long-term thinking and future-conscious behaviour by seeding transgenerational empathy. Their initiatives also cut across the imaginal space. **What if embracing a long-term mindset could lead to fundamental narrative shifts that shorter time frames could not enable?**

- **Global Optimism** is spotlighting examples of positive transformations that are already unfolding. Part of their work brings leaders in the climate and biodiversity space together with Zen monastics to cultivate resilience within the movement. **What if a tipping point emerges when hundreds of leaders share a series of spiritual practices and understandings?**

- **Dark Matter Labs** are focussed on building the underlying infrastructure to support a new civic economy by focussing on the 'dark matter' – monetary, economic, governance, regulatory and policy systems. **What if new language and frameworks in realms like new economics, governance and social structure could propagate widely, seeding movements around the world?**

Key themes

Lack of coordination across actors working towards similar goals.
Many actors in fields like climate, social justice, environmentalism, existential risk, and land redistribution often operate in silos, which hinders the formation of a cohesive movement. When people don't recognise or align with each other's causes and approaches, it weakens collective efforts. The polycrisis/metacrisis itself is complex and overwhelming - often made so broad by its various definitions. Addressing this gap requires developing specific anchoring concepts, a shared terminology, along with curated time together in person, to rally more as a movement.

Find the acupuncture points in the system.
Work at the systems and population level where small changes can trigger large results. This could look like: economy, education, policy, bioregions. Identifying the positive tipping points in each, where there is already momentum, and help precipitate a cascade of change.

Allow experimentation.
Funders should be willing to go on a joint learning journey characterised by trust and emergence. Tipping points and narrative shifts could lie in plain sight, or emerge under the right conditions. This is a way more experimental space than other funding areas.

We need storytellers and artists.
Human minds and hearts are changed by experience, emotion, and art. Not by facts alone. In generating tipping points, we acknowledge and elevate the role of those in society who work on 'the imaginal' (as per our imaginal category) and see these points as deeply interrelated.

Further Exploration

As we will be moving this category to a cross-cutting theme going forward, our conversations will focus on learning from the experts in the field, such as Professor Tim Lenton from Exeter University, on research into positive tipping points for human and earth systems. Our intention here is to ensure that while our approach to funding places spirit at the centre, this is coupled with a deep understanding of the social sciences that have closely studied large scale transformation.

What we heard from other funders

Local vs global approaches to transformation.
Thinking at a global scale can be harmful for local practices as well as cultural and ecological diversity. Global 'lighthouses' are an important part of the transformation that needs to take place but there is great power, potential, and uniqueness to supporting the 'song' of just one place.

Use language that already has traction. Sometimes it will be more helpful to talk about the 'metacrisis' or 'polycrisis' in terms of 'risk'.
Sometimes about climate change, sometimes social justice. Sometimes healing, sometimes health. We need to meet groups where they're at and move towards deeper shared understandings.

Be open to the unlikely.
New solutions will come from the edges and might not yet be known. Look for the people who are singing a slightly different tune and be willing to initially fund them alone, then build greater support and funding cohorts.

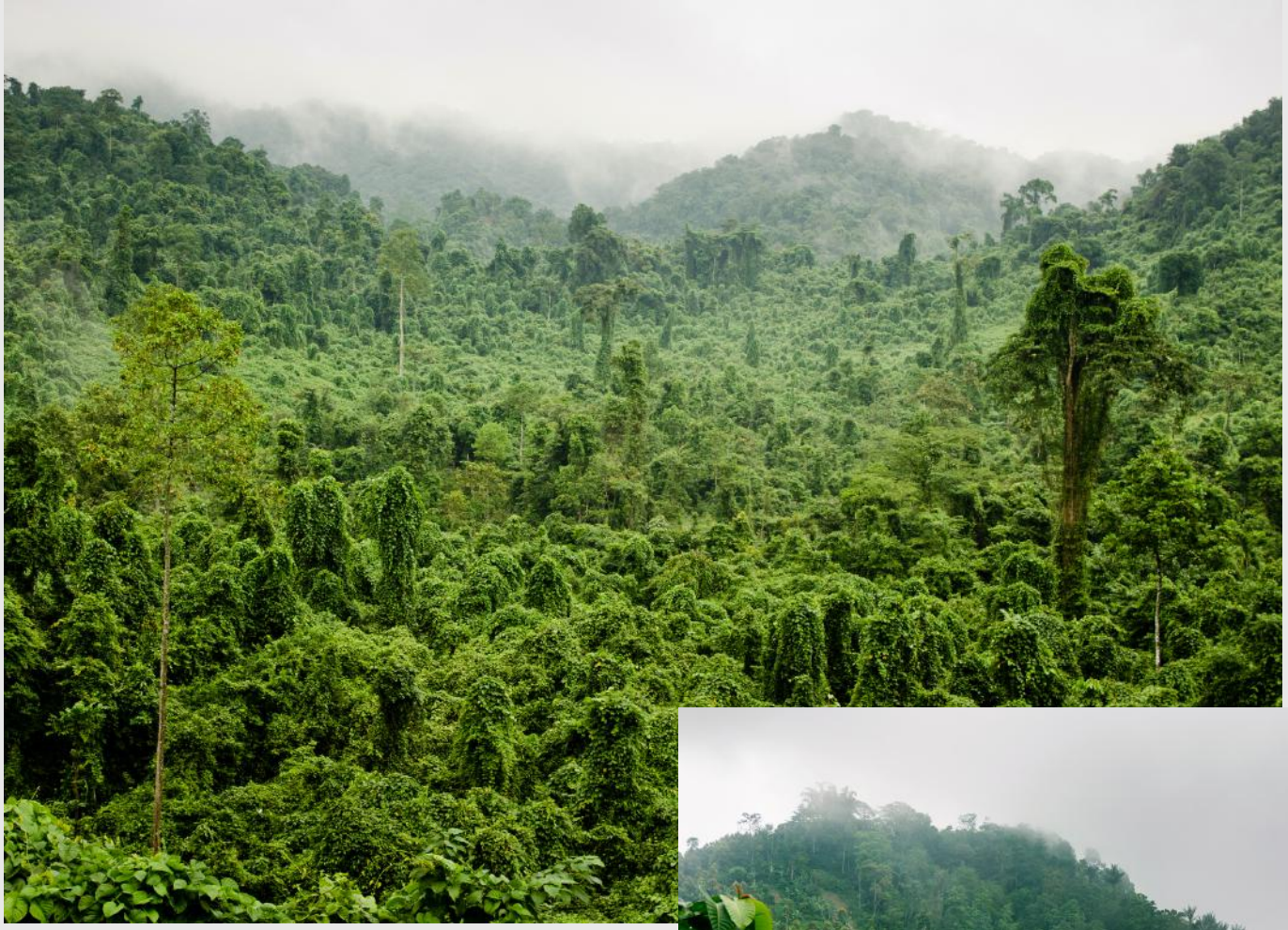
Don't limit people with funding restrictions. No one has the answer, life is emergent.
Let people be honest and open. Free them from having to 'get it right' and produce something shiny and perfect.

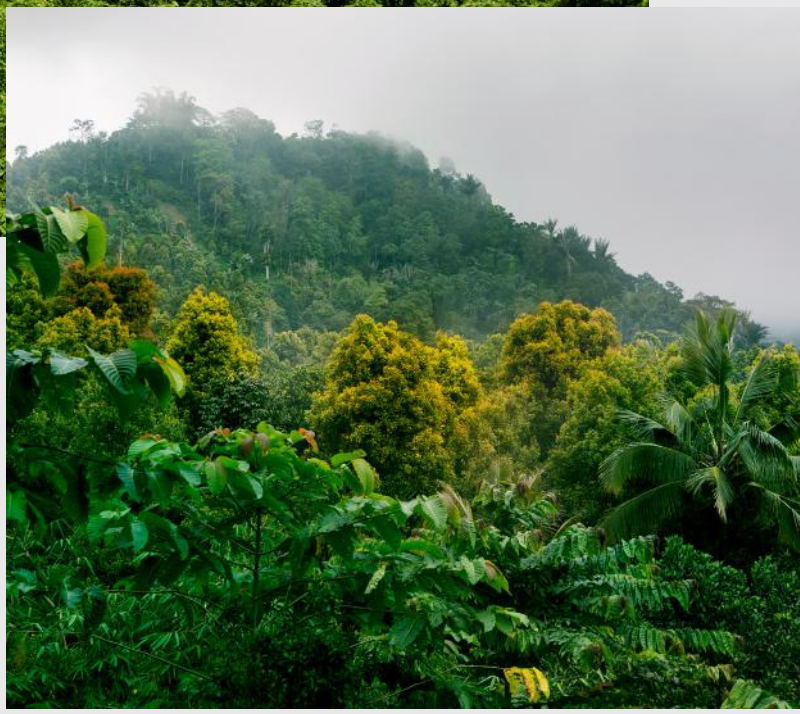
Balance practical with magical.
Support visionary ecosystems and actors through practical concrete redesign of the system as is – land contracts, policy changes etc – with the ideas from the edges i.e. mystics, shamans, storytellers.

Non-traditional approach to metrics and reporting.
Look for a return we can see with our own eyes or learn in conversation with partners. If spirit is at the centre of what we do, it's probably not going to make sense to measure our impact in traditional ways.

Think long term.
What are the seeds that we can help water that will be there 100 years from now? Look for the paradigms, practices, attitudes, and spiritual teachings that will help humanity pass through whatever edges it will experience.

What we think is ours to do





Regional & audience focus

Given our cultural and geographic makeup as a team, our focus is on regions where we have direct networks along with linguistic, spiritual and cultural heritage – specifically **Europe, North America, Central and South America.**

Our priority is in bringing earth-centred consciousness into areas within these regions where separation from the more-than-human world is most acutely felt. We are therefore committed to working with the following population archetypes. We recognise these populations are still broad and we will narrow our scope as we continue testing and learning.

- **Young people** as custodians of future culture/architects of the future **(18-30yrs)**
- **Funders and investors** committed to positive impact
- **Keepers of animist and kincentric practices**
- **Senior policymakers, decision makers and community leaders**
- **Storytellers, journalists, cultural commentators, artists and influencers**

We will channel our efforts in three ways...

Our approach will strive to balance poetic imagination with pragmatic action. To do this, we know we'll need to form deep partnerships with projects and players already underway; convene wisely to weave ecosystems together; and collaborate generously to create new offerings that meet the emergent needs of this space.

For now, we foresee ourselves operating across three areas of activity: **Catalysing, Convening, and Creating.**

1. Catalysing

Finding and supporting the seeds of new or existing projects, people, ideas, and organisations that are in service to the evolution of earth-centred consciousness. We have a few initial grants in this area and will slowly build out more. Our priority is in deep partnerships for the long term.

2. Convening

What we know we do well is in bringing those with financial and social capital together to experience the beautiful work already happening in this space and support deepening commitments to all life.

- **Hosting allied funders and investors -** drawing on our network to support other investors on their own journey of including the more-than-human world into their lives and ultimately, investing approach, ideally through embodied experiences in inspiring natural settings.

- **Supporting keystone individuals -** people who are deeply rooted within a specific ecosystem e.g. mental health, climate, politics, journalism, who could create significant ripples through their exposure to animist principles.

- **Partnering grantees and funders -** connecting the dots between people who have the same vision but hold different parts of the puzzle: people with brilliant consciousness-shifting projects, and people who want to fund brilliant consciousness-shifting projects!

3. Creating

Where we spot opportunities to create specific projects or offerings that uplift our catalysing and convening activities. Some of these may take years to come to fruition, we're patient but ambitious! Current ideas include:

- **Lifeworlds Festival:** a joyful, imaginal 2-3 day experiment participating in a "pocket of the future", where practitioners of inner and outer consciousness work can come and meet and blend their disciplines. Then opening to a curated audience of community leaders, investors, policy makers, academic deans, futurists, corporates, philanthropists, elders, and youth groups. A festival where many of the ideas described above would meet and mesh with the latest earth science, agriculture principles, technologies, etc.

- **Earth Temples:** What if every city had at least one Earth Temple, or in some places, an Earth Church? A quiet place for contemplation as a sanctuary to be in deep reverence with all life.

- **Rites of Passage:** What if we created a wide scale movement for rites of passage? What infrastructure and ecosystem support would be required to catalyse a shift in which every young person had the opportunity to deeply experience themselves as nature as an initiation into adulthood?

And how we want to do it...

Long term partnerships. Committed to forming deep and lasting relationships, walking with partners – grantees and fellow funders – over multiple years.

Unrestricted funding and multi-year grants. Recognising that short funding cycles place undue stress on organisations, especially those with small teams and limited resources and that core operations support the lifeblood of projects, we aspire to unrestricted funding where it aligns with our funding guidelines.

Success indicators. Traditional ways of measuring impact are often not commensurate with the work we seek to support. We'll collaborate with grantee partners to co-define unique success indicators.

Reporting. Traditional reporting structures are cumbersome for grantees and funders alike. We'll co-agree what the most useful outputs of any given grant will look like in terms of learnings for us and our grantee partners, as well as the wider field, with an emphasis on light workloads.

Non-financial support. What other forms of resource can we provide? Championing our grantee partners' work, and/or connecting them with our network and growing roster of courses, guides, coaches or mentors who may be helpful on their journey.

Treat money as a living entity. Honour, give gratitude, and name the energy it carries: where it comes from, its impact in the world (both positive and negative) in our own lives and those of our partners. We want to explore the ability to code capital in a different way.

What's next and questions we're still holding...

01 What are we missing?

We want to test the ideas and learnings in this document with close allies and friends over the next six months so we can get clearer on our direction. This document is intended as a conversation starter. Please reach out to us with any feedback and suggestions!

02 Levels of intervention.

What constitutes 'life support' grants vs. systemic/ecosystem interventions that will maintain integrity in the long run?

03 Our knowledge gaps.

What else might we learn about that will support our wise decision making? We strive to remain diligently updated on geopolitics, power dynamics, decolonial thought, systemic risks and our own biases.

04 Indigenous partnerships.

What is the appropriate way to integrate working with local wisdom keepers and their communities through this consciousness funding stream? We already partner with several IPLCs (indigenous peoples and local communities) through our other activities. Where are the natural points of collaboration and opportunities to deepen with integrity and form enduring partnerships?

05 Governance board and board of advisors.

What trusted guides do we need to engage with to support us on this journey? We'd like to have a wisdom council that represents true elders, Nature, and the next generation.

06 Breadth vs depth.

Probably our greatest challenge (and blessing!) is that our research categories are still very broad. Over the next months we'll test how we can refine these, asking: What ecosystems do we want to commit to nourishing? Are we the right people to bring support here? Who else is doing this? We will be holding ongoing additional research conversations, as well as new contacts that have emerged from our initial sensemaking efforts.

07 Signposting to others.

How can we make our research most easily available to others on a similar journey? We're looking into creating an open-source tool, enhanced by AI, of our research and resources enabling wider access and collaboration to both individuals looking for signposts on their paths and organisations looking to deepen in one of our particular research categories. Version 1.0 is already live on Notion and can be accessed here.

Questions for aligned funders:

We want to keep learning from peers as we refine our approach.

01 What are the unstated assumptions that would be useful to clarify as we continue this work?

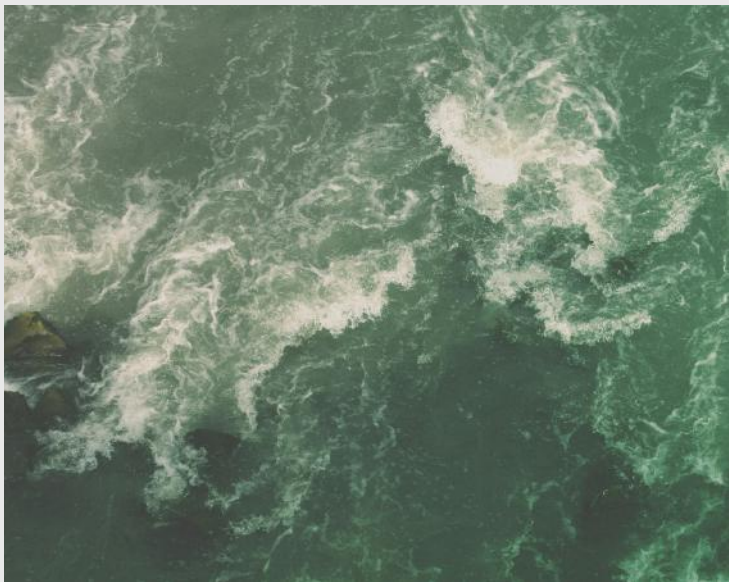
02 What is your approach to long-term and unrestricted funding?

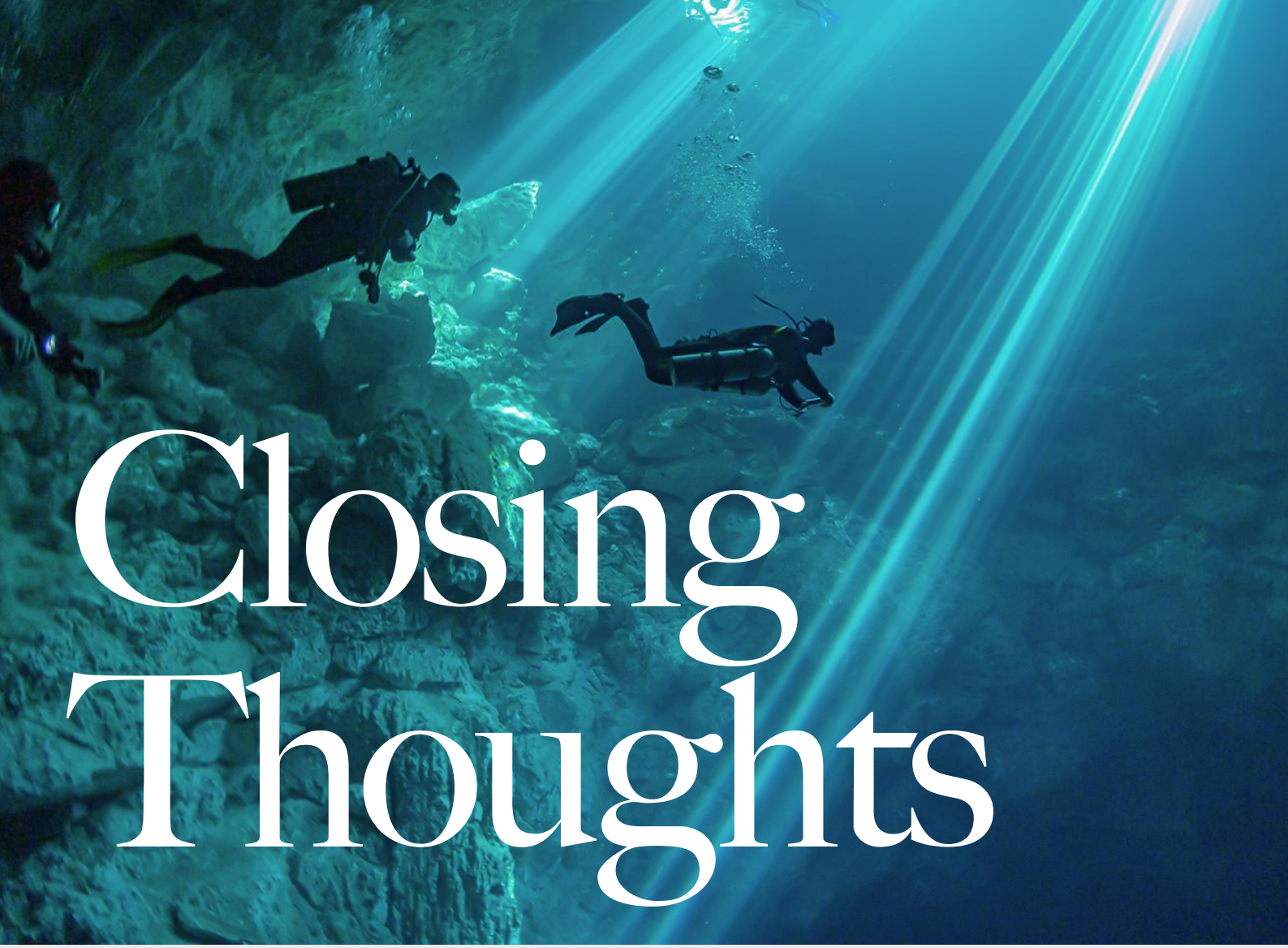
03 How do you structure and approach requests for funding proposals, if at all?

04 How do you approach metrics and reporting? Particularly in a context of trust-based philanthropy?

05 How do you balance convening your own events/groups with other funding activities?

06 What is your approach to nurturing whole ecosystems, not just individual grants?





Closing Thoughts

We don't want to be singing into an echo chamber. The intention of writing and sharing the living process we're in is to elicit a dialogue – we want allies; we want to know where our thinking can grow; where else we might orient towards; and, at its core, this is all just a heartfelt prayer and wish to be of service to the world.

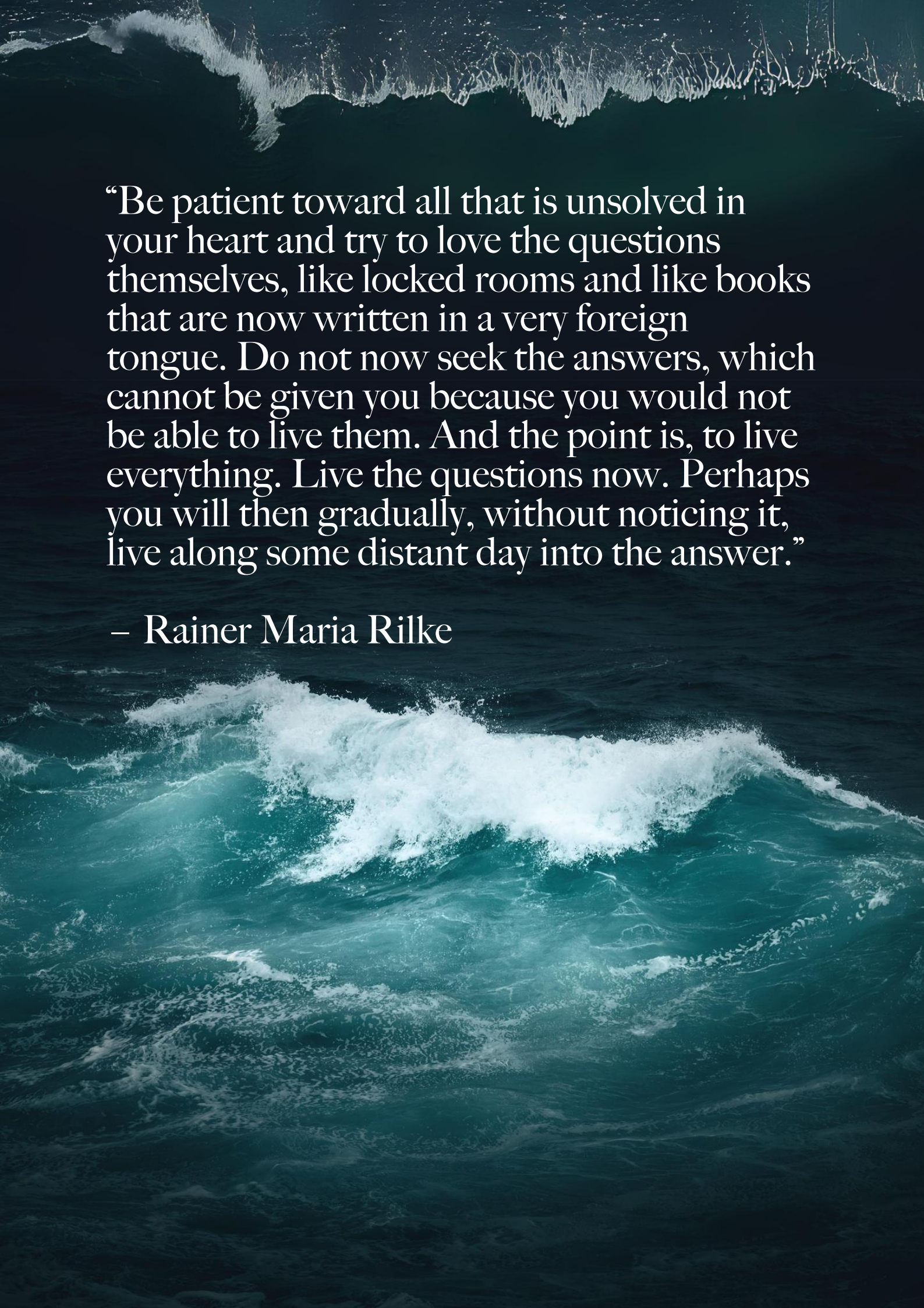
Categories are limiting. Organisations are always more complex than an initial conversation or website scroll or a three liner. Paradigm change takes generations, and it can take an instant.

Maybe like yourselves, we are in love with this world, and acknowledge the brevity and preciousness of our time here on Earth. Perhaps the questions being asked, the experiments undertaken, the friendships and challenges along the way, are the beauty of the path itself.

We are incredibly grateful for all the people we spoke with and interviewed for this report – thank you for your time and all you do in the world.

We would love to hear anything this report has sparked in you. If you feel called, please do reach out to us at info@naiatrust.com.

The Naia Trust Team



“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

– Rainer Maria Rilke

Who we are

Alexa Firmenich is an investor, consultant and facilitator focused on climate and biodiversity. She was most recently co-director of SEED, a new centre of the Crowther Lab at ETH Zurich developing the world's most holistic measure of biodiversity to crystallise the value of nature into the global economy. Parallel to her work with Naia Trust, she is trained as a group facilitator in leadership development and ecological pedagogy, designing multi-day learning journeys within landscapes. She is also an author, podcast host of Lifeworlds, a founding board member of Terra Habitus, a Mexican environmental fund that operates large-landscape conservation and watershed restoration, and a wilderness guide.

Daniela Litowitz is a strategist and facilitator with 20 years of experience driving systemic change across the U.S., the Middle East and Latin America. She has worked with futurists, venture capitalists and other visionaries to build large-scale movements from idea to manifestation. Previously, Daniela held leadership roles at Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Jerusalem Venture Partners. She holds a Master's in International Affairs from Columbia University and co-founded TEDx events at the United Nations, Columbia University and in Jerusalem. She is the Founder of Casa de Ayni, a holistic leadership school inspired by the philosophy of Ayni, an Andean principle of sacred reciprocity. She is a 500 hr Hatha yoga teacher, a student of H.E. Garchen Rinpoche of the Drikung Kagyu lineage and a graduate of VITAL, a professional training program to provide safe, ethical, and effective psychedelic healing and integration.

Yasu Mali has spent the last decade facilitating leadership transformation in service of the earth. As a Partner at Leaders' Quest she works with global companies and foundations responding to social and ecological pressures. She is the co-founder of the Three Horizons Network, supporting organisations such as Chatham House Sustainability Accelerator and WWF with the capabilities to better navigate uncertainty. She has trained hundreds of international leaders in futures thinking across business, policy, finance, and the third sector. Yasu is also a Strategic Advisor to Intelligent Life, a platform seeding a new paradigm in human consciousness. Previously she co-founded Liquid School, a consultancy supporting corporations to integrate sustainability into business. In her capacity as a board member to the nature-based leadership centre Embercombe, Yasu helped shape a new strategic direction towards rewilding people and land. Her great love is Martial Arts which she practises in the Chan Buddhist philosophy.

Appendix

Other sources that have informed our exploration...

In addition to desk research, and both formal/informal conversations, the members of our team attended the following events, courses and retreats for inspiration and to broaden our perspectives. These served as additional input and sensemaking across our research categories:

Online courses

- **Rooted Healing:** Explores deep ecology, consciousness, embodiment, and integrative healing through immersive online courses that connect inner and outer landscapes for eco-guardianship.

- **Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet:** A course hosted by Plum Village focused on applying Zen principles to environmental activism and sustainability.

- **Contemporary Spirituality:** An Advaya course exploring the foundations of meaning and belief in the modern world, connections between the sacred and profane, and topics including altered states, eco-spirituality, and sacred activism.

- **Cartography of Grief:** An offering exploring grief and end-of-life care from a holistic and ecological perspective from Marika Clymer.

- **Apprenticeship with Sorrow by Francis Weller:** This course delves into understanding and processing collective grief in the context of environmental and social crises.

- **Transformative Equity Diversity & Inclusion:** An introductory course with Open Edge.

- **Active Hope:** An online resource library and course showing us how to strengthen our capacity to face this crisis so that we can respond with unexpected resilience and creative power. Drawing on decades of teaching an empowerment approach know as the Work that Reconnects by Joanna Macy, the authors guide us through a transformational process informed by mythic journeys, modern psychology, spirituality, and holistic science.

In-person retreats & Training

- **Social Presencing Theatre** - a transformative practice from TheoryU that uses physical movement to map systems change, and bring participants to real embodied presence to foster awareness and unrevealed insights about the space they operate in.

- **Mapping Revelations** - a gathering of 100 practitioners, philosophers, scientists and artists for an experimental exploration of consciousness frameworks.

- **Padmasambhava retreat at Garchen Buddhist Institute** - teachings and mantra accumulation with H.E. Garchen Rinpoche of Drikung Kagyu lineage.

- **Kincentric Leadership** - Weaving within the Wider Web of life, an exploration of kincentric leadership practices (Naia Trust hosted retreat).

- **VITAL Psychedelic Practitioner training** - a comprehensive 12-month educational course for medical specialists, mental health professionals, therapists, and wellness practitioners seeking to integrate psychedelic knowledge into their practice.

- **Rewiring Food Consciousness** - a retreat based on food psychology and hypnotherapy. A deep dive into the conscious and subconscious dimensions of eating and nature.

- **Essentials of Ritual** - A residential week with Colin Campbell and Animate Earth for those who would like to explore and undertake ritual with others, and also to begin to learn the essentials of holding this kind of work for different purposes.

- **Restaura** - A gathering and festival honouring diverse indigenous traditions, ancestral wisdom keepers in an exploration of intergenerational connection and a celebration of being alive. 2024 centred around the Four Contemplations, an essential Tibetan Buddhist reflection on the reality of existence.

- **Medicine Festival** - A gathering of wisdom-keepers, indigenous peoples, and artists of all traditions, gathering in prayer and celebration.

Professional conferences

- **JRF Next Frontiers Conference** - Brings people from across the finance ecosystem to explore transformative approaches to wealth management and redistribution, philanthropy, and investment.

- **Nature Based Solutions Initiative** - Annual Oxford University conference dedicated to exploring solutions that harness the power of nature to address environmental challenges.

- **CREO -** An impact-driven conference that brings together leading innovators and investors on scaling up climate investing.

- **Impact Safari** - A deep dive into impact investing with seasoned and newer investors looking to align their capital with their values.

Books we've been reading

- **At Work In The Ruins** by Dougald Hine
- **Science and Spiritual Practices** by Rupert Sheldrake
- **Hospicing Modernity** by Vanessa Andreotti
- **From What Is to What If** by Rob Hopkins
- **Any Human Power** by Manda Scott
- **Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet** by Thich Nhat Hanh
- **Passion of the Western Mind** by Richard Tarnas
- **Hope in the Dark** by Rebecca Solnit
- **The Spell of the Sensuous** by David Abram
- **Coming Back to Life** by Joanna Macy
- **The Way of The Earth: Encounters with nature in ancient and contemporary thought** by T.C. McLuhan

Initial Research List

As mentioned above, we began our research with 114 organisations to research. We are in the process of creating an open source sensemaking tool for other individuals and organisations who will find such a mapping beneficial on their journeys.

The first iteration can be found here on Notion: a **Naia Trust public mapping.**

Funders we spoke to

- Full Circle Foundation
- BESS Foundation
- Be the Earth Foundation
- Kalliopeia
- One Small Planet
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Kindred
- Blue Initiative
- Berggruen Institute
- Bertha Earth
- Robert Ho Foundation
- Kokoro
- Imaginal Seeds
- Small Giants
- VKRF
- Omega

Funders that we want to speak to

- Templeton Foundation
- Viriditas Foundation

Shortlist orgs for listening sessions and informal conversations

Inner resilience

- Unthinkable
- The Work That Reconnects
- Climate Cares Centre
- Climate Mental Health Network
- COP2
- Force of Nature
- The Wellbeing Project
- Starter Culture
- The Resilience Project
- Global Diversity Foundation

Lighthouses

- Black Mountains College
- Advaya
- Embercombe
- Schumacher College
- CIIS
- Global Ecovillage Network
- College of the Ancient Forests
- St Ethelburgas
- Commonwheal

The imaginal

- Kincentric Leadership
- Animate Earth
- Town Anywhere
- Marshmallow Laser Feast
- Moral Imaginations
- OpenAREA
- Ministry of Imagination Manifesto

Celebrating cycles

- Way of Nature
- Regenco
- The Earth Elders
- School of Lost Borders
- Living Connection 1st
- Church for Earth
- Rooted Healing

Dharma

- Plum Village
- Loka Initiative
- MAPLE
- ARC
- Rigdzin

Tipping points

- Cohort 2040
- Longpath
- Global Optimism
- Dark Matter Labs

Listening session questions

Getting to know you: Where are we meeting you on your journey? What chapter of your organisation are you in? (priorities, pivots)

Your unique contribution: In what ways does your organisation's approach differ from or complement other initiatives in this space?

Navigating our collective crisis: In the context of the emergent metacrisis, are there courses / approaches / interventions that your organisation has intentionally developed to address these unfolding crises?

Connecting with others: Is there a need to be connected with other initiatives in your space in order to share learnings and build momentum? If so, is anyone else doing this?

Gaps and Opportunities: From your perspective, what are the most significant gaps or unmet needs within your space? What opportunities exist that are currently under-explored?

Advice for Funders: Based on your experience, what advice would you give to philanthropic organisations like Naia Trust looking to invest in projects at the intersection of inner development, consciousness, earth reverence and the metacrisis? How can funders best support meaningful and transformative work in your area?

Your dreams for the future: When you look to the future, what's giving you hope, what seeds are you planting? What is on the horizon for your work and your organisation?