

“ The fool thinks
himself to be wise,
but the wise man
knows himself to
be a fool. ”

Measure For Measure, William Shakespeare.

The Technologies of Foolishness

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The Technologies of Foolishness¹

Introduction

Climate change, peak oil, over-population and ecosystem depletion are mighty challenges for humanity, permeating every aspect of our lives and dictating our future as a species. But perhaps our biggest test is finding the courage to face these challenges front-on and with compassion - how do you feel when you consider what we've done to our world? How do we accept our foolishness? Maybe we are not as wise as we thought; we have broken many things, are we now ashamed? As the eco-philosopher Joanna Macy (1998) puts it, "of all the dangers we face none is as dangerous as the deadening of our response".

This article suggests a creative response to these 'mighty challenges'. By not letting loose its know-how in creativity and innovation, the creative and cultural sector is missing a big trick because it could take a lead role in improvising the greatest show on earth - the post-carbon resilient society. A creatively 'Foolish' frame of mind (perhaps think of it as De Bono's seventh thinking hat²), may just provide some leadership technology to initiate this "letting loose" of know-how to help us all to respond to these challenges, re-connect with our natural world and imagine futures that are so rich and vivid they inform our current ways of being.

This will be an acrobatic article, leaping from the macro of global economics, biodiversity systems and seismic energy shifts in our world, to the universe that we have inside us as emotional, subjective meaning-seeking decision makers. It will sweep through the foundations of growth economics to psychology, deep ecology and innovation, landing us in the shoes of the creative 'Fool'.

Setting the scene

Humankind faces unprecedented challenges:

Fact 1. Climate change is happening:

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Assessment Report 4 states that "warming of the climate system is unequivocal"³, and the Royal Society⁴ are "highly confident" that greenhouse gas emissions are causing global warming. Climate disruption and severe weather events are increasing in severity and frequency.

Fact 2: Sometime soon⁵, perhaps already, the global flow rate of oil coming out of the ground will peak ("Peak Oil") and then decline inexorably thereafter. Rob Hopkins (2008), founder of the Transition Town movement puts this into perspective "Climate Change says we should change, Peak Oil says we will be forced to change".

¹ I am indebted to Imagination lab's Lego Serious Play research papers for the idea of this title

² After Edward De Bono's (1985) Six Thinking Hats intending broaden our approach to thinking. Of course a 7th foolish hat comes with bells on.

³ http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/syr/en/spms1.html) which goes on to say "as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level"

⁴ <http://royalsociety.org/General>

⁵ Richard Heinburg, former Chief Economist of a Canadian Investment Bank Jeff Rubin is predicting triple digit \$ oil prices by 2011. Richard Branson is warning of an oil crunch within 5 years (The Guardian 8th February 2010).

Fact 3: Global Population growth continues -It took from all of human history until 1960 to reach a population of three billion people; but only forty years to add the next three billion. There are 70 million more people on the surface of the planet this year than last year demanding more adding pressure to ecosystems, water and land use.

Fact 4: Oceanic fish stocks, ancient aquifers, and topsoil are all being depleted at unsustainable rates with consumption leading to collapsing biodiversity.

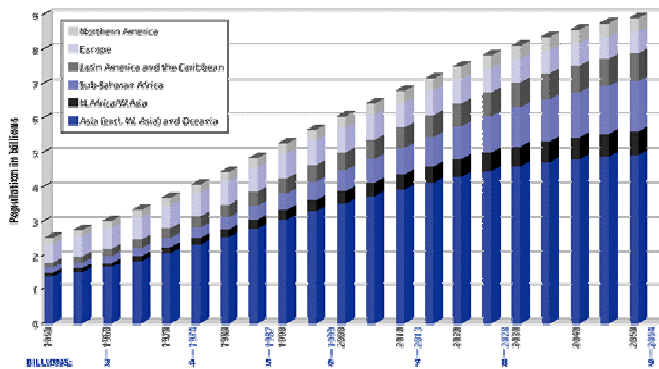


Figure 1: global population growth 1950 – 2050



Figure 2: Venezuelan response to peak oil: localised agriculture

Combined, these facts make not just a complicated puzzle that can be solved or fixed but a complex problem of a scale with no historical precedence and without any one clear “answer”. Facts 3 and 4 were drawn from Dr Chris Martenson’s *The Crash Course*⁶, a sustainability leadership programme that concludes “Within our lifetime and that of our children, these disparate facts will coalesce into the greatest economic and physical challenge ever faced by humanity. We need to begin telling ourselves new stories about who we are and what’s really important to us.”

Together, these facts are challenging the fundamentals of our industrial growth model. Growth is unsustainable, but the increases in our national debts in the West place incredibly strong pressures on our economies to grow similarly. After all, debts are paid back out of the future productive economy and if debts are growing continually, the economy has to as well, otherwise the debts cannot be repaid.⁷

⁶ A sustainability leadership programme <http://www.chrismartenson.com/crashcourse>

⁷ Richard Heinberg, Fellow of the Post Carbon Institute continues this line of thought “Growth cannot continue on a finite planet, yet we have justified present borrowing with the irrational belief that perpetual growth is possible, necessary, and inevitable. In effect we have borrowed from future generations so that we could gamble away their capital today.”

How do we respond?

So, no surprises, we live in an age of uncertainty⁸.

Our challenge then is not to find vast new resources to exploit, but to undertake the far more sophisticated and worthwhile task of using what we've got more creatively, more wisely. The response has to be about building a sustainable world. The Brundtland report (1987)⁹ defines sustainability as "...the importance of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". More recent thinking and action, particularly on the part of Rob Hopkins, the initiator of the ecological 'Transition Towns' movement (2008), identifies more specifically the need to develop our understanding of how systems adapt and thrive in changing circumstances – in other words, how do systems become resilient? What is clear is that our response has to be about adapting, experimenting, acting in new ways and changing habits: we have to find a creative response.

The Bakery conversation 14/11/2009: I walked into my local bakers and suggested that rather than put my two loaves and four rolls into separate plastic packaging bags and then into a plastic carrier bag, that they were put directly into my jute bag. The baker stood staring quizzically, the other customers went quiet, and I began to feel foolish. I explained I had been thinking about how she could use less plastic and that I can re-use packaging bags at home to keep bread fresh, and that this could work for all customers. She was clearly OK with the idea of re-using carrier bags but clearly not OK with re-use of packaging bags. I left and wondered how do we get beyond the bag conversation, how can I convey a sense of all of this as units of oil that will soon be scarce, and then onto what that means for everything we do.

Act 1: The opportunity for the cultural sector a new innovative business model.

As the designer Mat Hunter says in the introduction to the 2009 A&B report *Beyond Experience* "the world of business is fast realising that creativity is too valuable to be left to the creatives." The same can be said for the rest of the world.

The cultural sector has a unique role to play in deepening our understanding of sustainability, in inspiring behaviour change, in fostering a shifting sense of reality and in imagining new futures. This deep impact can act alongside other behaviour change mechanisms¹⁰ and can become the hub enabling other behaviour change mechanisms to turn faster.

The eco-psychologist Paul Mainteny makes explicit the responsibilities the creative and cultural sectors have in relation to our capacity to make meaning. "facts, information and logical argument may encourage changes in behaviour, but alone

⁸ Though lets keep a smile here. Aran Stibbe in his Introduction to The handbook of Sustainable Literacy sees the transition to low carbon/low consumption economy as a solution: escape from addiction and isolation of consumption, gain a sense of belonging in community, Improve mental and physical health through working in nature, reduce obesity and other diseases associated with a sedentary life style, live in a cleaner environment, enjoy a more meaningful employment

⁹ United nations World Commission on Environment and Development 1987

¹⁰ E.g. design of financial incentivisation (loft insulation schemes), information communication (IPCC reports), structural changes in education and economic systems.

they are not enough. The deep rooted causes of our ecological crisis are embedded in our emotional and spiritual yearning for satisfaction and meaningfulness. Behavioural change occurs when any information or argument actually moves us at these levels” (Paul Mainteny, 2009)

The new model for these sectors involves them taking up their responsibility in full. The making of meaning can be through the artist inspiring meaning through their art, but can equally be from direct experience through engaging with the process of creativity. Opening up this direct experience to all of society will help us to become resilient- to adapt and thrive. We must recognise that both the process and the outcome of creativity have a role in saving the world.

This is the new model. We have centres of creative process across the land – from theatres to gaming studios and we need to re-align them to our survival, in order to empower all of us.. Our response will involve:

1. Exploring meaning; the meaning of the changes upon us, our disconnection from nature and the implications of fully understanding our interdependence with each other and our environment.

What was the experience of the people in the gallery at the recent Royal Academy show, ‘Earth, Art of a Changing World’¹¹ and Sheffield Galleries’ ‘Can Art Save the World?’¹² Great art will move us, but creativity has much more to offer by opening the creative process to us all to explore the meaning of these forces at play and our relationship with them. What does it mean when we explore the fungus metaphor described by John Danvers? What are our new stories as sought by Chris Matteson? We’ve missed this trick of really offering creative engagement to and for the world.

“we have a paucity of stories that articulate what a low energy world might look like . What is hard, but important, is to be able to articulate a vision of a post carbon world so enticing that people leap out of bed every morning.. to make it happen” Rob Hopkins (2009)

2. Re-awakening the creative process in us all. Creativity can be a route to innovation in all aspects of our lives. This is a key aspect of developing a resilient society, an ability to be agile and imaginative in the face of unpredictable change, thereby enabling us to adapt and thrive.

3. Fostering our ability to act in this age of uncertainty. We need to hone skills of managing complexity and uncertainty and it seems the creative sector is good at this. According to Clare Cooper (2009) “the way people in the arts operate and organise themselves appears to offer many examples of how to grow the capacities we will require to flourish”. We will explore this further in Act 2.

¹¹ ‘Earth’, Art of a Changing World, Royal Academy December 2009 – January 2010 showed the response of 35 contemporary artists to Climate Change.

¹² Sheffield Galleries’ Can Art Save the World? November 2009 – January 2010 took Ruskin’s perspective on our relationship with nature to interpret implications of climate change.

Imagine turning all our creative programming into this kind of interaction, directed towards these three goals. The creative and cultural sector is well networked - globally connecting thinking and practice. What's more we can act in time. What we need more than anything now is timely action.

The Bakery conversation 5/2/10: By now we are on joking terms about the jute bag. Whilst serving me an assistant accidentally starts to put my rolls in a plastic bag, catches herself and laughs about force of habit and within seconds we have a cross staff conversation about the difficulty of habit breaking and the power it has over us.

Interlude.....

Stupidity can be described as lack of intelligence, Foolishness as lack of wisdom

To follow a line of reasoning from Albert Einstein, that “the significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them” – then we should not be seeking solutions at the level of intelligence. It is not our lack of intelligence (stupidity) that's the problem. Let's rise to the level of wisdom. I suggest it is our lack of wisdom, our foolishness, that is the problem. The sooner we accept our foolishness the sooner we can consider what wisdom it has to offer.

Fools¹³ express what can't be said, they ask the most ridiculous but demanding questions, they fail and fail well. So maybe the one part of us we think of as having least wisdom paradoxically has something to offer. Typical foolish behaviour.

Foolish Technologies

According to Wikipedia, technology deals with human as well as other animal species' usage and knowledge of tools and crafts, and how it affects a species' ability to control and adapt to its natural environment. What follows is a summary of what

¹³ I am using these archetypes of Fool and Clown interchangeably. Wes Nisker (2001) makes the following distinctions between the archetypes:

Clown: the most human of the archetypes, the everyman figure, showing us our vulnerability and our awkward human condition and encouraging us to laugh at ourselves. Stan Laurel is one such clown.

Fool: Nisker mentions two types of fool, the foolish fool and the great fool. Both are innocent. The foolish fool clumsily tries to live by the rules, but is inept, unsophisticated and silly. The great fool, Nisker says, is a rarity. At home anywhere, this manifestation of the archetype lives different values from the rest of us, shows us the impossibility of knowing anything for certain and stands in awe of the ordinary, seeing as if for the first time. Kind thanks to Chris Seeley

can best be described as the crafts and tools of the Fool¹⁴. Of course these merge and feed each other, but these technologies¹⁵ are made distinct to aid our journey.

Technology of Non-Distracted: Fools are not distracted by the noise of the over-communicating world, but more by what's in the here and now. Their attention and observation is strengthened from being more present, more in the moment as a result of non-distracted. In considering improvisation, Stephen Nachmanovitch, the author of *Free Play* (1990), describes faithfulness to the moment and present circumstances as continuous surrender: "we have to give up our expectations and control". Fools are not dominated by the mind, and so perceive with all senses; integrating mind, heart and body. Non-distracted also emanates from having a "beginners mind", not crowded with the knowledge of expertise. Though they are not naive, like a child, with "more a knowing or "second innocence" learnt from living life, warts and all" (Chris Seeley, 2010).

Maximising the possibilities that a leader perceives extends the realm of responses. This technology is best illustrated by seeing that the king has no clothes.

Technology of Enquiry. Fools are engaged with the world in a spirit of enquiry and animism. In a Stan-Laurel-kind-of-way, they have a questioning mind continually wondering "what if?". They are not actively seeking anything and so can become a conduit for the world to speak through. This animism, or perceiving the Earth and everything as alive is, according to the bio scientist Stephan Harding (2006), "primordial; ... the human organism is inherently predisposed to seeing nature as alive and full of soul, and ... we repress this fundamental mode of perception at the expense of our own health, and that of the natural world".

A critical faculty of a leader responding to sustainability is a questioning mind. For the Fool "a problem is a gift". Technology of Enquiry is well illustrated by Google's 20% rule – engineers are encouraged to take 20% of their time to work on something company related that interests them personally.

Technology of Liminality Fools are happy with contradiction and paradox, but also with being liminal, as they do not get stuck in their own fiction. They can be both tragic and joyful at the same time. In the 1939 Laurel and Hardy classic "Flying Deuces", prior to a joint suicide attempt Stan asks "what would you like to come back as?" Ollie: "a horse" Stan: "myself –I've always got along swell with me."

Technology of Complicity. Fools are connected to an audience, empathetic and "in tune" with them. This creates a space to perceive shared understanding of ourselves and each other. As consultant Chris Seeley says (2010) "the clown (Fool) makes direct contact with the audience, looking at them, listening to them, responding to them as a source of information. The audience informs the clown. Together clown

¹⁴ I am drawing from a range of personal experience and sources here including: first person experience as a clown from 1984 – 1989, from clown teachers Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux, Frankie Anderson, Gerry Flanagan and from Arts and Business sponsored action research project "Art of The Possible" with UBS Investment Bank applying mask and clown to teams and leadership with clown teachers Bob Pearce, Mitch Mitchelson and innovation consultants Synectics (December 2001 – December 2002)

¹⁵ I am indebted to Chris Seeley for the refinement of these technologies.

and audience perceive our shared humanity”). The decision to make the final 2012 Olympic pitch with children (future Olympians) as an integral part of the bid was an acute use of the Technology of Complicity.

Technology of Play: The Fool plays, experiments, prototypes. As play, by its nature, has no predefined outcome this does not lead to failure or success. Fools transcend the very idea of success and failure; they simply experience a range of shared delights and discoveries. From an audience perspective it appears they are happy to fail and fail often and so are following the innovation mantra of design masters IDEO¹⁶ “fail often and early to succeed sooner”. Play draws on all the technologies above and is grounded in spontaneity, authenticity and a sunny disposition. From a broader perspective the play philosopher Johan Huizinga (1950) has shown how play pervades every facet of our life and has proliferated into all sorts of highly evolved forms such as rituals, the arts and sports. The author Pat Kane (2001) defines play as establishing zones where we take reality lightly and joyfully. Play is consent, permission to jump right in and experiment. But let’s not forget that it needs courage to take these risks.

Foolishness invites a “deep appreciation for what is around us...trains us to experience the world differently, with utter engagement and lightness” (Chris Seeley again). Play is how we explore and innovate. Educational psychologist Brian Sutton-Smith (1999) sums this up by calling play 'adaptive potentiation': “We try out techniques, strategies, scenarios, personas, in delimited zones, where the usual urgent determinations of life don't automatically apply”. Adaptive Potentiation – is this not then a critical competency of resilience? a means to adapting and thriving in changing circumstances?

The Fool is an archetype in us all providing a way, a frame, a perspective we can all step into, giving us permission to play and imagine. I call this enlightened Foolishness.

¹⁶ IDEO brainstorm guidelines, See Tom Kelly(2001) The Art of Innovation.

Act 2: How does all this help Leaders drive the new model of creative process saving the world?

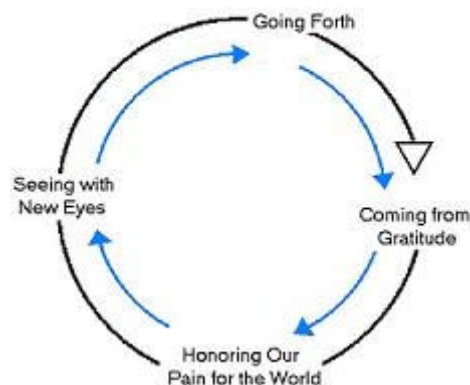
Standing firmly in the enlightened Fool's shoes, I believe these "technologies" offer critical sources for leaders to inspire people to apply creative process in response to our challenges; to engage meaning-making and imagination by us all that is strong enough to "re-view" our current perspectives. Leaders need to foster the right environment for their peoples' imaginations to flourish and boldly re-design their modus operandi in this new light.

The frame of mind of the enlightened Fool provides openness for leaders to take the critical steps of;

- Gaining a deep understanding of the challenges already described
- Grasping the implications of these amongst so much change
- Realising the potency of our sector's "missed trick" in supporting our response (i.e. "the new model")
- Creating the best adaptive working culture

These steps are mirrored in the work of Joana Macy in a model that she describes as 'the Work that Reconnects' (1998). Her cyclical model illustrates the implications of re-establishing a perception of humans as part of an interconnected ecological whole, which in turn helps us to act. This cycle will inform the structuring of this section about how leaders drive the new model.

Spiral of the Work that Reconnects



Coming from Gratitude: developing understanding of being part of nature and the implication of interdependence
Honouring Our Pain for the World: Accepting the reality and severity of our position and overcoming the numbing effects of distraction and fear
Seeing with New Eyes: reframing our perspective from this deep understanding, developing our ecological identity
Going Forth: acting on these, with no assurance that change happen in time

1 Develop the Leader's Understandings and Motivations

How do we face and establish a profound understanding of our collective position? This is possibly the biggest question faced by our generation, loaded with responsibility (its happening on our watch) and fear.

The Technology of Non-Distraction removes the oh-so-human diversions we provide for ourselves. As a result we can see clearly the hole we are in for what it is, but equally we can see nature for what it is (In Macy's model, *Coming from Gratitude*) and our absolute interdependence with it. With this understanding of connection we then can appreciate what is essential, and sense directly the destruction we are bringing on ourselves (*Honouring Our Pain for the World*).

Taking this understanding on and putting it into context amongst so many other priorities and changes is a leadership challenge. The Technology of Liminality can assist: being able to enjoy living in the full knowledge of potential disaster is a life of paradox and complexity. We need skills of being and acting in this liminal or dual state (*Honouring Our Pain for the World*).

The Technology of Enquiry enables us to explore the potential value of our sector in response to this deep understanding, to grasp that we've been "missing a trick" in not aiding the letting loose of creative practice in response to this need. The technology of Enquiry importantly encourages us not to do this alone and promotes expression and communication of this underexplored value of the creative sector to broader society. Working as part of a networked world aids leadership understanding of complexity and can bring about a more reflective approach as well as a route to greater influence. (*Seeing With New Eyes*).

2 Develop adaptive Culture/Ecology (*Going Forth*)

We have grasped the nettle of understanding and gained insight into how the creative sector can take up its role, providing us as leaders with motivation and direction to drive the new model. The next step is to inspire this in others and to enable the best environment so that their inspired actions can have impact. This is the stage of *Going Forth* in the Joanna Macy cycle.

The Technology of Complicity helps to create space for mutual understanding to take place. Here leaders at all levels can find the means of sharing their new understanding and motivation with all the organisational change drivers not just leadership but with stakeholders and external change agents¹⁷. Supporting this process is a role for the creative sector, one being explored by the likes of creative engagement collective Encounters¹⁸ who have developed their creative programme as an "Alchemical vessel" to aid the sharing of this personal understanding for leaders and teams.

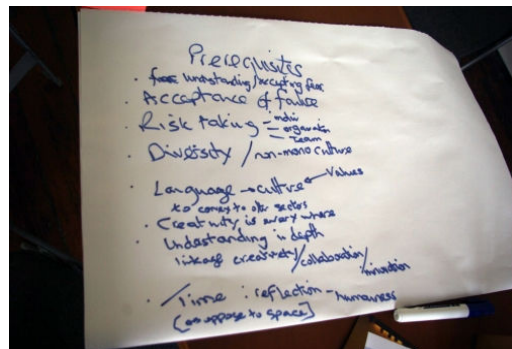
Having aligned understanding and motivation of our people, for leaders to develop the right culture, we turn back to Adaptive Potentiation and the Fool's pre-disposition to explore in the Technology of Play. Pat Kane (2001), in considering why does work need play, describes the need to establish a Ground for Play, the organisational pre-requisites for a playful environment being "a loose but effective governance structure, understanding that failure and risk is an inevitable part of the development process and some amount of resource for experimentation". Research into developing creative environments at Lancaster University¹⁹ has defined the predispositions to a collaborative environment as:

¹⁷ These change agents are identified and explored further by Herman Gyr and Lisa Friedman in *The Dynamic Enterprise*

¹⁸ Currently a series of projects, with plans to be based in a nature set centre in 2011. see www.encounters-arts.org.uk for more.

¹⁹ <http://www.oerc.ox.ac.uk/research/digital-economy>

- Acceptance of failure
- Risk taking: individuals, teams, organisations
- Non mono culture environments
- Language to convey culture and values to others
- Understanding of linkage: creativity-collaboration-innovation
- Time/space and quality environment for reflection/connection



These are all natural approaches for the enlightened Fool, first nature not second. So the archetype of the Fool can inspire the right environment for exploration and imagination. We can also conceive the leader as an architect of a broader innovation ecosystem²⁰ by integrating these playful behaviours, that are innately divergent, alongside more convergent, outcome-orientated design disciplines.

Ray Anderson, the owner and CEO of the Interface Flooring Company, provides a classic case study of the impact of this realisation when he turned a carpet business into a floor surface rental company, so taking responsibility for the material's re-use: "you will find a journey that is marked by innovation, as we completely re-imagined and redesigned everything we do, including the most basic ways in which we define our business".

As in all other aspects of nature, developing an adaptive ecology is an ongoing cycle of change. For organisations this means re-visioning of what success is, what value creation and growth look like and profound consideration of the implications of interdependence for partnerships and competitive behaviours and knowledge exchange that can be dispersed and owned across an organisation. This is adaptive potentiation embodied in an organisation, a route to becoming resilient.

Bakery conversation 17/3/10: Jill and I start taking risks. I suggest dedicated and branded re-usable bread bags for customers. "No, customers wouldn't want them, you would, they wouldn't" responds Jill. I left thinking OK we've got over risk taking of ideas, but for her to act, its going to take a crisis or a revelation.

²⁰ See Enterprise Development Strategy at www.enterpisedevelop.com and Lego Serious Play at www.seriousplay.com for examples.

Conclusion: In the age of uncertainty, the player is king?

If Jill was to swap her baker's hat for that of the enlightened Fool would she see what is happening and respond? The leadership reality is that we need to stimulate meaning making and the shared imagining of the implication of these changes so deep and vivid it moves our understanding into our action.

We must turn the sector's "missed trick" of empowering imagination and meaning making into the biggest number of our repertoire, so the sector can take it's central role in conjuring up humanity's greatest show, the post-carbon resilient society. This is the new innovative business model for the creative and cultural sector.

The leaders of the cultural sector can ignite this by establishing the right landscape for them and their people to literally play at being the Fool and so access technologies that fuel collective Imagineering. You are now given consent, permission to go play and take more risks to foster our collective capacity to "Adapt and Thrive" and start improvising the post-carbon resilient society show right now, with a cast of seven billion and counting.

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1/4/2010

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