



Careful
Industries

Belonging, Care, and Repair

Possible, Plausible and
Just Futures for Civil Society



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About Careful Industries

Careful Industries is a research organisation based in the UK. Through research and prototyping, we help our clients understand the social impacts of technologies and create new futures. Our sister organisation, Promising Trouble, is a not-for-profit exploring the potential of community technologies. Visit <http://careful.industries> to learn more or contact us at hello@careful.industries.

About Studio andnand

Studio andnand is a design studio specialising in working with problems that need to be explored and alternative/future possibilities to be generated with stakeholders from all levels, using design-led approaches informed by over a decade of experiences in hands-on delivering technology innovation and under half a decade on evolving design practices. Visit <https://www.andnand.studio/> to learn more.

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Careful Industries

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“The trouble is, we’ve all let ourselves become part of the killer story, and so we may get finished along with it. Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.”

Ursula K. Le Guin,
“The Carrier Bag
Theory of Fiction”



Executive Summary

Who makes the future?

The futures in this report offer glimpses of three alternative worlds in 2036: worlds where the most important things are belonging, care, and repair. They are neither utopian nor dystopian but somewhere in between; a little like real life, but fifteen years ahead.

Each future, or imaginary, is an invitation to civil society organisations and funders to look beyond the relentless present moment and plan instead for what might — or what should — come next; an inspiration to create the worlds we want, not just the worlds we think we'll get.

The themes explored include **personal identity and social division**, the desire for **spiritual purpose and belonging**, and the **redistribution and transfer of power**. Each imaginary touches on parts of human existence that tend to get pushed out of forward plans and strategy documents because they are intangible and difficult to measure — things that are often taken for granted until it is too late — and which civil society is in a unique place to shape and create.

These futures were developed in a series of workshops with people from across UK civil society in Autumn 2021. You can read the whole document to find out more about our process, or skip straight to Section 3 to explore the imaginaries. However you decide to read this report, we hope you find it intriguing and thought-provoking.

Dominique Barron, Rachel Coldicutt, Stephanie Pau, and Anna Williams



Introduction

What might a future hold in which belonging, care and repair are central tenets of innovation and institution building?

The outcomes of the Civil Society Foresight pilot show what world world-building can look like outside of the market and the state. They bring to life possible, plausible and just futures that are rooted in the human and planetary potential of community, connection, and wellbeing. This report is a guide to how those futures were created.

Using the practice of relational foresight outlined in [A Constellation of Possible Futures](#), we worked with civil society thinkers and doers to develop three new imaginaries for 2036, fifteen years into the future. The imaginaries are described at the end of this report, and are brought to life online with artefacts from these possible futures. They are intense distillations of complex concepts and they may seem surprising at first, but they are no different in their scale of ambition to flying cars or life on Mars or brain-to-brain communication devices; the only difference is that there is plenty of social and cultural permission for innovators to dream differently about technology, but little permission for most of us to dream differently about social relations. These imaginaries touch on fear, spirituality and love — topics that rarely arise in patent applications.

The prototype method develops the notion of relational foresight as a tool for civil society. It makes visible some of the possible, plausible, and just futures that rarely surface in more traditional, top-down foresight, and make it easier for infrastructure communities, civil society, funders, and policymakers to actively shape and nurture alternatives through strategic interventions.

The interventions created in these workshops point to a radically different way of thinking about the future. And although these ideas, interventions and visions only represent the individuals who took part, this report contextualises those findings in the broader sociopolitical domain.

This process also surfaced questions about the role of civil society itself: how radical can and should it be in the face of existential crises and deepening social divisions? Should civil society align with, or become, the status quo in the context of state and market failure — or should it constantly seek change and revolution? The imaginaries



in this report do not give direct answers to these questions, but they demonstrate the potential consequences of blurring the boundaries between the state and civil society, and show what an extended role for civil society in a failing system might look like.

Section one of this report explores the process we developed and took workshop participants through. This process was specifically designed to elicit a plurality of futures and multiple imaginaries from civil society. **Section two** of the report summarises our analysis of dominant trends seen in major trends reports — ones that do not represent civil society, but do represent the majority of outcomes from foresighting activities today. **Section three** explores the three major areas of need identified through the future worlds developed in the workshops. **Section four** outlines conclusions.

The process identified the following areas of need:

- Building **new infrastructure** of belonging through community engagement
- Developing **infrastructure for social repair** through lifelong learning
- Creating **new systems of care** and sharing the skills for making meaning

Human relationships and responsibilities are shaped by power and opportunity; they are not coincidental by-products of technical and economic progress, but fundamental building blocks of everyone's future. By sharing these possible, plausible and just futures — and making intangible human outcomes more tangible — our aim is to inspire more far-reaching and intentional investment in the social and sense-making infrastructures needed to support many possible futures, and more strategic, long-term planning for civil society.



These imaginaries touch on fear, spirituality and love — topics that rarely arise in patent applications.



Section One

The Process

Throughout Autumn 2021 Careful Industries worked with Stephanie Pau from [Studio andnand](#) to run a series of relational foresight workshops with thirteen civil society thinkers and doers and foresight practitioners. These workshops were an opportunity to test and iterate the methodology we outlined in [A Constellation of Possible Futures](#).

The participants were:

Anna Nicholl, Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Clare Wightman, Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire
Farah Elahi, Greater London Authority
Francesca Valerio, Migrants Organise
Georgina Voss, London College of Communication
Jessica Prendergrast, Onion Collective
Judy Ling Wong, Black Environment Network
Rabab Ghazoul, Gentle Radical
Richard Sandford, UCL Institute for Sustainable Heritage
Roisin McLaughlin, North West Community Network
Rupinder Parhar, Local Government Association
Stephen Bennett, Policy Lab UK
Will Tanner, UK Onward

The aim of these workshops was to create strategic foresight that allowed for the emergence of undervalued and underrepresented ideas. The first series was focussed on the concepts of power and justness; the second on life in the context of the climate crisis.



1.1 Uncomfortable objects

The workshop process was not created to smooth out disagreement, but rather to hold and develop multiple perspectives — to show a possible multiplicity of outcomes, rather than refine towards a single answer. It welcomed what anthropologist Tricia Wang terms “[thick data](#)”, otherwise known as “people’s emotions, stories and their models of the world”.

To surface this thick data, we used the term **preoccupations** as a prompt to create space for participants to articulate concerns or values that are often unspoken, particularly in formalised and corporate foresight processes, but which might combine to create and inform their worldviews.

To remove existing constraints and create space for speculation, we also asked participants to make two shifts to their perspectives. Firstly we asked them to imagine these preoccupations in the context of an **alternative, neutral universe** — one which was neither utopian nor dystopian. Secondly, they were asked to **look ahead to 2036**. These two shifts were intended to give some pragmatic freedom and liberate speculation from the limitations of the status quo, while still maintaining the context of a shared and imaginable reality.

In doing so, we were able to create a space to discuss uncomfortable topics, including:

- Emotions — including fear, grief and anger
- Areas of existential discomfort, such as making genuine connections across social and political movements
- Systems outside of the accepted status quo

As there was no requirement to settle on certainty and “known knowns”, the workshop environment created a space in which uncomfortable systems, objects and concepts were able to come to the fore.

The process was created to hold and develop multiple perspectives.

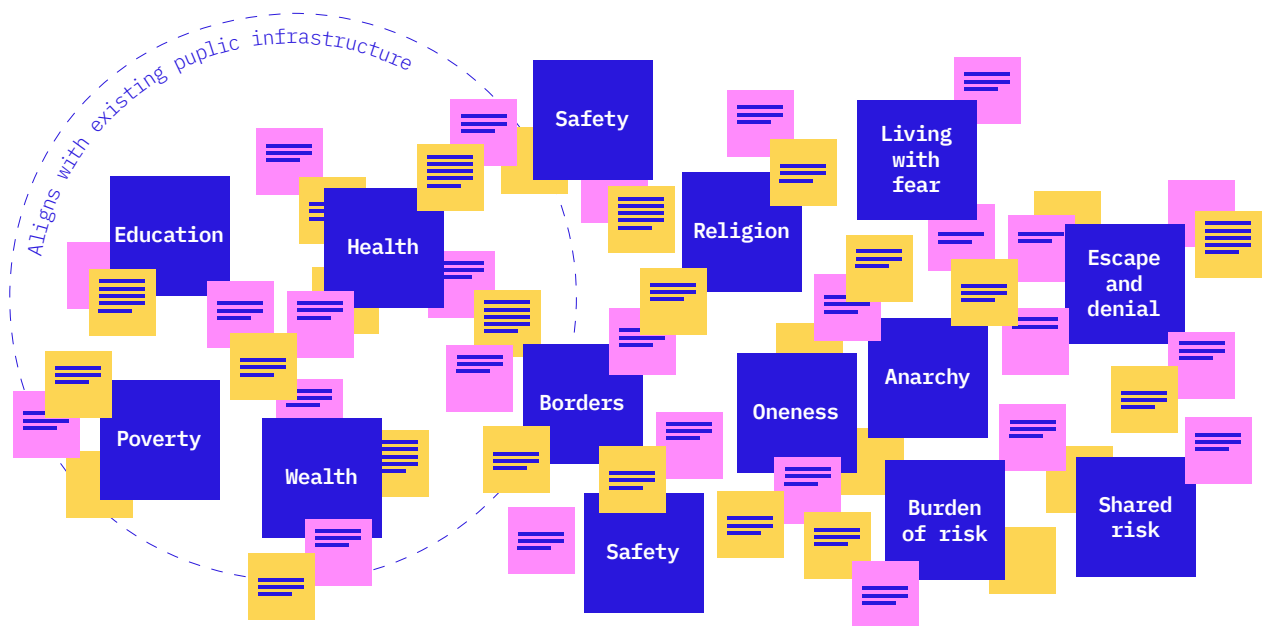


Figure 1 — A map of civil society's preoccupations in an alternative universe in 2036, from workshop series 1.

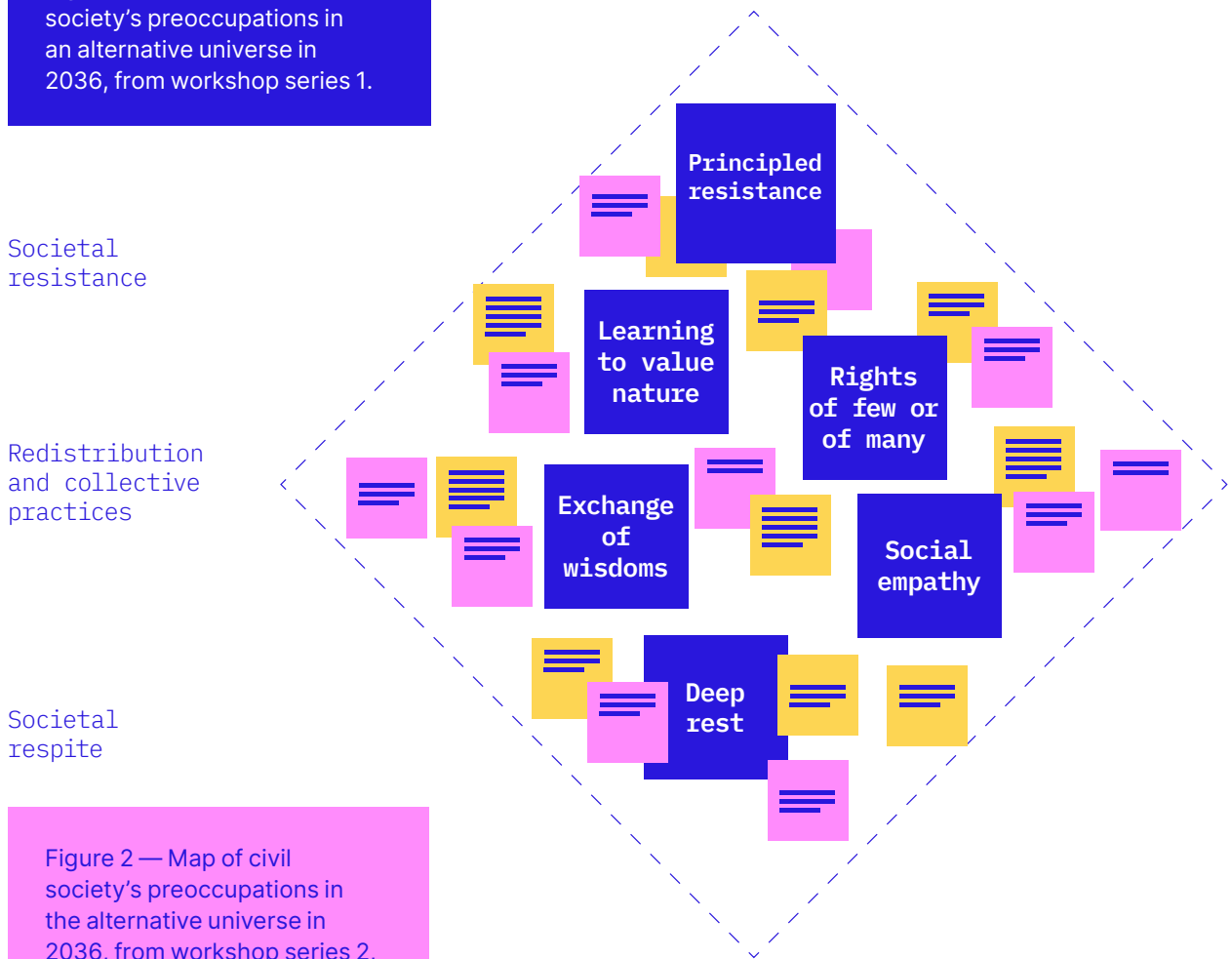


Figure 2 — Map of civil society's preoccupations in the alternative universe in 2036, from workshop series 2, organised in analysis after the final workshop.



1.2 Plural Pathways

Participants then developed and explored “interventions” – a thing or event that might happen in their 2036 alternative universe. Using the preoccupations as framing and context they mapped plural pathways from 2021 through to the world of 2036 in which their intervention is happening. Through this “backcasting” they worked through what might need to be in place to make these possible futures come about. Along the way, the groups also co-created artefacts and infrastructures, mapping some of the new institutions and narratives that would need to be in place for their future preoccupations to be realised.

The outputs of our workshops were then mapped in relation to the “official” foresight we had gathered; this allowed us to get a glimpse of the complex, plural realities that could unfold. From here, we co-created interventions.

In **Section two**, we summarise our research into dominant trends; **Section three** outlines the three key areas of need identified through the workshops. Each area of need stems from a future imaginary brought to life through a series of artefacts.

How to make these
possible futures
come about?



Section Two

Findings from official foresight

Foresighting is a popular activity in the private sector, and the scenarios, ideas, visions and rhetoric that these activities create about the future form a dominant narrative. We argue that these futures can broadly be characterised as “official futures”.

An official future is defined by Scott Smith and Madeline Ashby in *How to Future* as:

Dominant future narratives [or] so-called ‘official futures’... Organizations large and small lean on official futures as north stars or guidance systems, to keep employees, partners or constituents focussed on a mission ... and they reflect the overriding assumptions that are necessary to believe in a mission¹

An example of an official future given by Smith and Ashby is ‘Moore’s Law’.

... the 1965 observation in an industry paper by semi-conductor pioneer Gordon Moore, which stated that the number of transistors in an integrated circuit were likely to double every two years. Moore made this observation based on limited historical data but it soon became gospel... Many behemoth companies, like Intel and IBM, as well as tens of thousands of start-ups, plotted their research and development, as well as accompanying investment and strategy, according to Moore’s Law.²

Consequently, Careful Industries conducted a review exercise, to identify both implicit and explicit narratives that are part of official futures. The material reviewed included publicly available sources, from trends and foresight publications by major consultancies and organisations.

Footnotes

1. Scott Smith and Madeline Ashby, *How to Future: Leading and Sense-Making in an Age of Hyperchange* (Kogan Page Inspire, 2020), 20-21.
2. Ibid.



| The indisputables: Conceptual theories and ideologies | The topics: Exemplar themes across futures |
|---|--|
| Capital | The Physical Space |
| Resilience | Technology |

We divided the futures or trends into two categories. The first category is “the indisputables”, conceptual theories and ideologies which exist across all the official futures observed. The second category is called “the topics”, common exemplar themes which are investigated by official futures.

2.1 The indisputables

2.1.1 Capital

Each of the futures examined were bounded by the ideology, politics and economics of capital and capitalism. There are many forms of capitalism, and each of the reports take different parts of the ideology to form their vision of the future. In the traditional notion of capitalism, it is implied that private individuals and organisations will own assets that produce wealth. These assets could be physical, like land, or abstract, like patents and software. Other individuals will create wealth through labour.

Capitalist logic incorporates other ideologies that are present in Western philosophies — for example, that time is a linear construct and that we can use scientific theories and methods to draw a line from the past to the future. This concept is very much present in capitalism since in order to gain wealth from assets, there needs to be a theory about future profits. The futures examined in these reports also follow similar time horizons to these financial prediction instruments. The futures are typically more confident about horizons in the next 5-15 years. This follows a similar pattern to what is found in wealth management and investor relation reports.

Despite its pervasiveness, capitalism is not acknowledged in the official futures on a descriptive nor a normative level. However, there is implicit reference in the desire to show leaders of institutional assets, be that businesses, government departments or countries, that the continuation and growth of their assets should be their priority.

Capitalism is not acknowledged in the official futures on a descriptive nor a normative level.



An example can be found in the McKinsey report: "[The Next Normal Arrives: Trends that will define 2021 - and beyond](#)" published in January 2021. Its focusses included; improving productivity, expanding consumerism and investing in innovative technologies for economic impact.

2.1.2 Resilience

Whereas capital has been a recurrent theme in official futures for a number of decades, ideas around resilience are more recent. Ideas around resilience intersect with sustainability, and therefore environmental and ethical concerns fit into the "resilience" bracket. Despite the ubiquity of the idea of "resilience" the application of the concept differs. For example:

- **Resilience needs futurism:**
Using futurist methodologies and strategic foresight is a important part of the future itself. For example, the mandate of the EU Strategic Foresight department on "[future-proof\[ing\] EU policymaking](#)".
- **Sustainable practises for ensuring the future of the planet and of labour:**
The need for environmentalism and worker wellbeing comes from the need for continued economic prosperity. For example, the World Economic Forum's "Chief Economists Outlook" from June 2021 looked at inequalities exacerbated by Covid and proposed upskilling and reskilling policies which would improve the labour market. McKinsey [identified how stakeholder capitalism](#) is good for profit: "a majority of the executives and investment professionals surveyed said they believed that environmental, social, and governance programs already create short- and long-term value and will do so even more five years from now. In the same report they looked at the environment: "There is a case, then, for businesses to take action to limit their climate risks—for example, by making their capital investments more climate resilient or by diversifying their supply chains".
- **Predicting geopolitical outcomes for profits:**
In order to make strategic decisions, business leaders need to have a good idea about international relations, trends and politics. This can come in many forms, whether predicting how future conflicts might disrupt supply chains, or understanding how currency fluctuations will impact business profitability. Bain produced a report in July 2021 looking to predict [how Chinese businesses will operate worldwide and how Western businesses will operate in China](#). This report began by calling the British East India Company and the Dutch East India Company: "17th century pioneers", and taking a view on geopolitical tensions simply through the lens of resilience and profit.
- **Sacrificing short-term profits for longevity:**
Bain produced a report in July 2020 called "[Have We Hit Peak Profits](#)", which looks at how businesses need to adapt for a future where corporate profits are much lower than in previous years.



The need for environmentalism and worker wellbeing comes from the need for continued economic prosperity.

Each of these lenses perpetuates the idea that current institutions should exist in the decades to come.

From these examples, we can see that the term resilience holds both old and new ideas about capitalism. Some veer towards simply increasing wealth for private stakeholders, and others take a more modern approach to discuss ideas like equity and environmentalism. However, each of these lenses perpetuates the idea that current institutions should exist in the decades to come, and that the strategic foresight initiatives will help shape a future in which that is guaranteed.

In essence, the idea of resilience perpetuates the stability of existing power structures. Those with existing authority do not want to disrupt the status quo, and although they envision futures where this could happen, they fear disruption, and so seek to create futures which mimic the past and the present.



2.2 The topics

2.2.1 The physical space

Physical spaces are no longer the sole space in which humans can interact. The Covid pandemic has further accelerated this change — it became dangerous for lots of people to congregate in the same physical space. This means that themes like the future of the office, retail, supply chains and transportation have been an ongoing theme for corporate futurists. They look to advise clients on how they should manage their existing operations and portfolios in order to profit and be resilient in the years to come.

Reports include: "[Pandemic, Parcels and Public Vaccination: Envisioning the Next Normal for the Last-Mile Ecosystem](#)" and "[A Framework for the Future of Real Estate](#)" both published by the WEF in April 2021. In the McKinsey report: "[The Next Normal](#)", published in January 2021, multiple references were made to flexible working, supply chains and travel.

Land and assets were inextricably linked to physical space in the 20th century and before, and so it makes sense that organisations are thinking about how these assets can continue to be profitable. What's more, much of industry is attached to human needs like agriculture, shelter, energy and healthcare. These are distributed by a network to ensure a physical product arrives in a particular location.

2.2.2 Technology

One of the most recognisable symbols in technology futures is the Gartner Hype Cycle. This charts which technologies are up and coming, and how long it will take for them to be part of business as usual. In the preface to [the August 2021 report](#) the authors write: "Our 2021 Hype Cycle highlights emerging technologies that will significantly affect business and society over the next two to 10 years. It includes technologies that accelerate growth, engineer trust and bring order to the chaos of a changing world by sculpting change." These reports encourage technology leaders to consider the ways they can transform their business, and explore the potential of these technologies for various use cases.

A technology's inclusion in the hype cycle makes it more likely to become part of societal infrastructure in the future. Consequently, many developers want to make sure that they are placed in the hype cycle in some fashion.

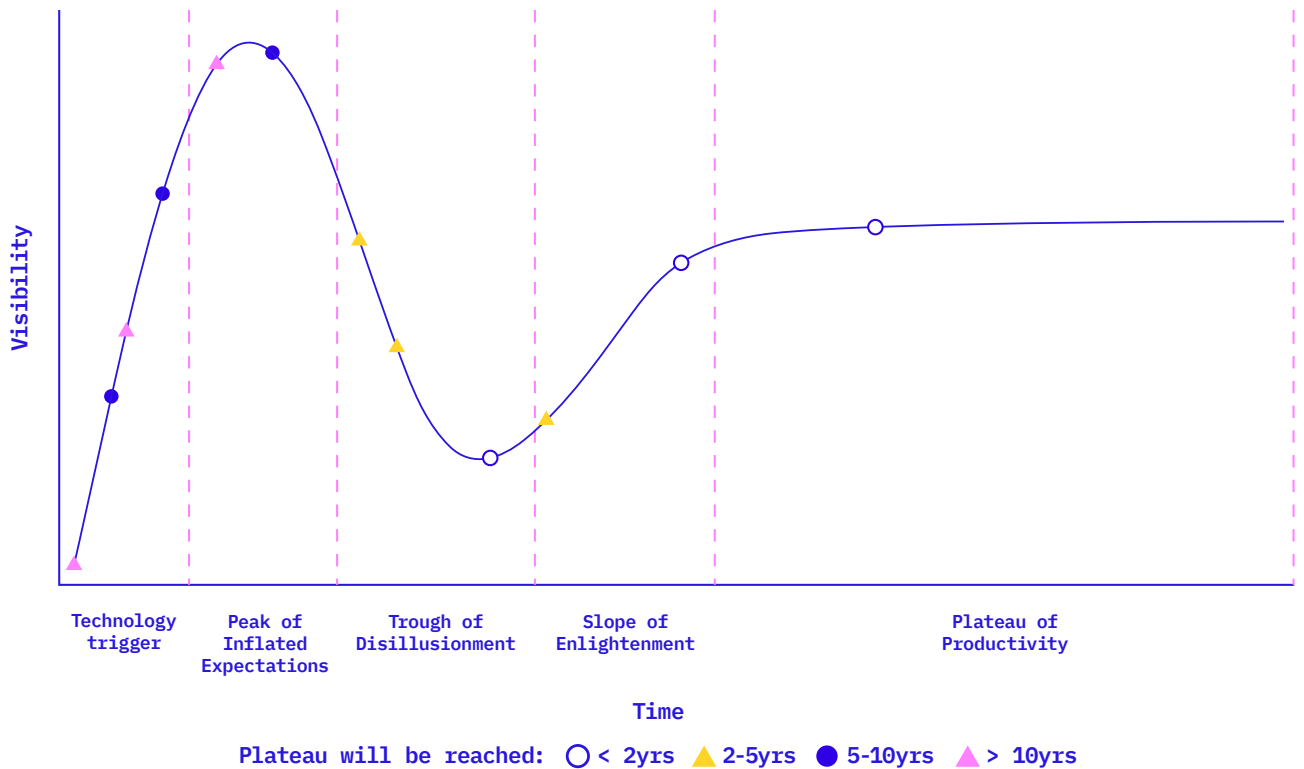


Figure 3 — Hype Cycle for Emerging Technologies. The cycle charts which technologies are up and coming, and how long it will take for them to be part of business as usual.

Adapted from [Jeremy Kemp](#) via [Wikimedia](#) under a [CC BY-SA 3.0](#) license

Most official futures include predictions about how technology will contribute towards institutional assets and growth. The reports we examined from 2021 looked at themes that have been common for the past decade, for example, around data collection and personalisation for consumers (see [“Are You Ready for the New Era Of Consumer Data”](#) by Bain in October 2020; [“Learning from the Future”](#) by Accenture; [“Digital Assets, Distributed Ledger Technology, and the Future of Capital Markets”](#) published by the WEF in May 2021; and [“Technology Futures: Projecting the Possible, Navigating What’s Next”](#) by the WEF in April 2021).

Two reports looked to coin phrases for a future kind of reality where physical “mixes” with the digital. McKinsey stated that the future will be [“phygital”](#) and Accenture used the phrase [“real virtualities”](#) when it comes to where we work, consume and socialise in the future. There was also interest in biotechnology for innovation — this was talked about by both McKinsey and Accenture in the previous reports.

It is fair to say that all of these themes around technology are driven by economic necessity, rather than other metrics like human wellbeing. Futures around technology are also driven by some idea of what is already being developed, as opposed to what might be developed in the future. This is particularly acute when it comes to the Gartner hype cycles.



Section Three

Areas of need

Our participants developed three future worlds. These future worlds are complex yet incomplete, and grapple with hard concepts including emotional uncertainty, anarchy and unrest. Each world explores a specific need, at a societal and systemic level. Each area of need is coupled with a specific intervention.

This section of the report explores the need that each world highlights, and brings some background explanation to each intervention. The three areas of need are:

- Building new **infrastructure of belonging** through community engagement
- Developing **infrastructure for repair** through lifelong learning
- Creating **new systems of care** and sharing the skills for making meaning

3.1 New infrastructure of belonging

Using practical action to establish belonging and solidarity across social divisions

Recurring concerns: isolation or exclusion coupled with emotions such as loneliness, denial, fear, blame and anger.

Recurring hopes: community and inter-community action and engagement

What is belonging?

Belonging concerns the cognitive and affective attachments of individuals in a group; to belong is to feel natural and unthreatened in a group.

Oneness and Anarchy

Oneness was defined by the participants as interdependence that builds hope and cohesion. It might manifest as global, unified actions such as movements for solidarity; its opposite forces were identified as *fear* and *anarchy*.

Fear and anarchy were defined as related to behaviours and emotions that seek comfort and/or express discontent — these include an increased propensity among



some for conspiracy, apathy, and loneliness; in others this might inspire a search for meaning and explanation, expressed through spiritual practice or affinity with a belief system.

Although *oneness* and *anarchy* might seem unrelated, both represent a need for belonging and recognition, and demonstrate the importance of identity. The participants recognised that, under duress, feelings of *fear* and *anarchy* can spark the splintering of larger societies into like-minded ideological groups, and conflict can arise between those groups, while *oneness* can also lead to stifling uniformity. The most preferred state was identified as a *oneness* that looked for relations and connections “within and between liberations” and across borders — a whole made up of small parts loosely joined.

Uncomfortable observations

The uncomfortable aspects of *oneness* were identified as:

- The things we don’t know how to talk about, such as death, blame, anger
- The things we don’t know how to do, such as forging connections between different liberatory movements
- The things where systems are not in place to provide the necessary help

The participants also explored the notion of civil society as “alternative anarchists”, and interrogated the dilemma brought about by a desire for balance: should civil society be radical enough to create social change but not so radical as to tear society apart? What is the relationship of civil society to incumbent power, and should it exist to support failures within the status quo, or agitate for and create better alternatives?

Should civil society be radical enough to create social change but not so radical as to tear society apart?



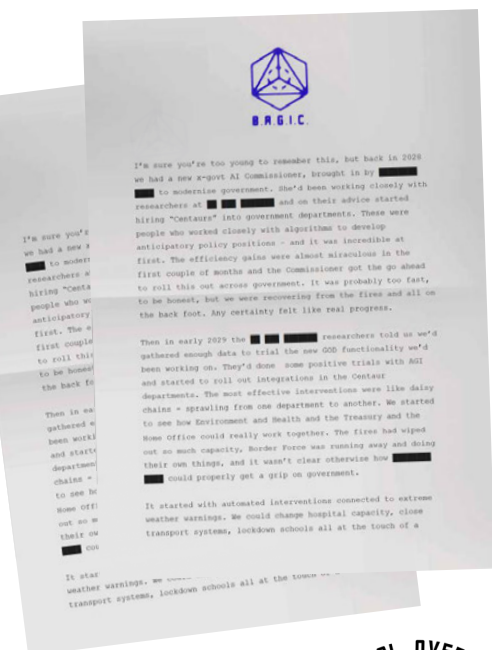
These considerations led to the creation of the following intervention.

The intervention: Civil Contingencies Volunteer Corps (CCVC)

The Civil Contingencies Volunteer Corps (CCVC) is an established national body for climate repair and social cohesion. Membership is mandatory for all citizens.

Widespread climate migration is now an accepted part of life and the CCVC takes responsibility for welcoming and embedding climate refugees in society. This has become possible because government policies are now directed by a Benevolent Artificial General Intelligence (BAGIC), which calculates and shares the benefits of an embedded system of care and welfare. This has been in place since the Great AGI Disaster of the early 2030s, when artificial intelligence brought about the collapse of shared public infrastructure and inspired different approaches to self-organisation and new forms of civil society.

While on the face of it there is unity in society, there is also a thriving counter-culture, with different kinds of underground groups exploring different ways of living. As the CCVC's remit grows to include social monitoring, some of the more politically active counter-culture groups are becoming agitated, and civil unrest seems possible.





Participants explored some potential unintended consequences, such as:

1. **The CCVC would ground human relationships in real contributions** (or actions) as opposed to polarised abstract conflicts. However, this also raises important questions related to power and participation such as *who defines these contributions?*
2. **Loss of self-organisation:** Initially, the Civil Contingencies Volunteer Corps would be sparked by people self-organising to support others in their communities, in ways similar to the self-organisation that took place on WhatsApp and social media platforms at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as the Volunteer Corps becomes a more established organisation, it might become a formal organisation that adopts a centrally organised structure. This risks removing the people power and organic, spontaneous self-organisation that led to its initial formation.
3. **Common frictions in collective actions:** After the initial interest in the Civil Contingencies Volunteer Corps, new considerations about boundaries and expectations for participation would arise. These might include a lack of volunteers; people being penalised for lack of participation; and disagreement about priorities for the CCVC.
4. **Suspicion and group think:** citizens might be penalised for prioritising the needs of their families and kinship groups over others.
5. **New injustices:** a misalignment of values with delivery could see the CCVC turn into a citizen-surveillance army.

3.2 Infrastructure for social repair

Exploring the role of spirituality and wisdom in building personal and social resilience

Recurring concerns: inflexibility; denial; fragility; fear of hidden societal horrors emerging/being exposed; securitisation; carceral and punitive justice

Recurring hopes: lifelong learning; educational reform; belonging; resilience; regeneration; preservation; justice; restoration

What is repair?

This refers to social and emotional repair as well as physical maintenance.

The participants identified social repair as the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to adapt and transform. The capacity for social repair depends on every member of a society having regenerative capacity, developed through education and the normalisation of spiritual practice.



Spirituality

The participants considered *spirituality* as the manifestation of a common practice both within and beyond formally recognised religious beliefs. This might include New Age, indigenous, technocratic, and/or more-than-human practises, or the formation of localised groups based on shared belief systems, such as gangs.

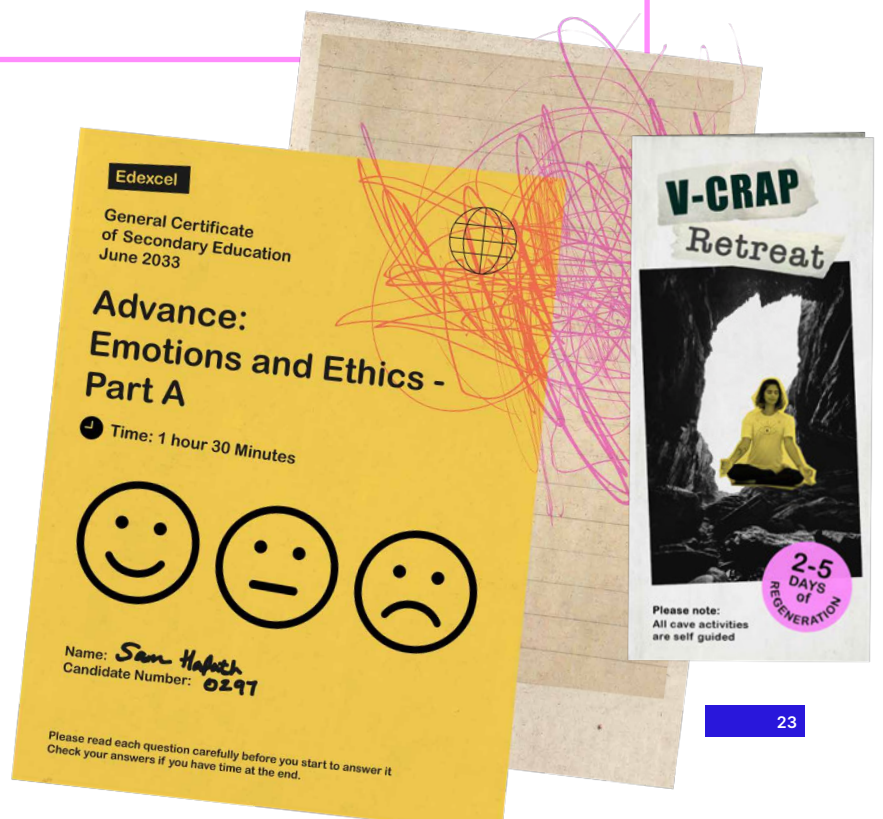
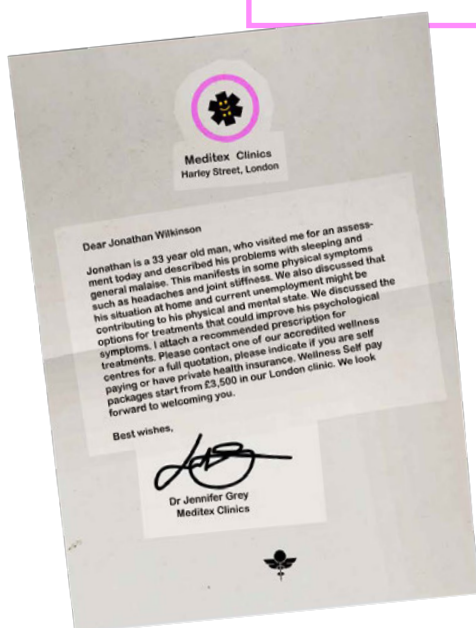
Spirituality was framed as a form of uncommon norms leading to the formation of groups, commitments, energies, and common practises. Common value systems and the necessary evolution of social contract were considered as part of this, including mechanisms for judgement on “good” and “evil”, punishment and forgiveness.

These considerations led to the creation of the following intervention.

The intervention: A lifelong spiritual education

In the alternative universe of 2036, education is no longer just for children and the curriculum has evolved to cover social and emotional subjects, including connection, fear, imagination, and what it means to be human — and more-than human. There is a module (optional or mandatory, to be discussed) in which adult pupils spend two months in isolation in a cave, to attend to their spiritual growth. This might be part of a nationally funded gap year scheme.

Education was chosen as the focus of the intervention because it would enable ongoing change, and the normalisation of spiritual isolation would create an opportunity for everyone to more deeply understand their personal energies, emotions and relationships. This is a reconception of education as a path to wisdom; rather than learning facts, its focus is on creating emotionally intelligent minds.





Participants explored some potential unintended consequences, such as:

1. **A potentially negative impact on existing infrastructure:** the dominance of spiritual education could lead to the de-prioritisation of more rational subjects; for instance, maths might be cut from the curriculum to make space for hope.
2. **New harms may emerge,** due to an increased range of human expression and lack of guidance: for instance, educators may turn into cult leaders; caves might be damaged due to frustration.
3. **Positive impacts on mental and physical health:** by shifting the curriculum to focus more on energies and emotions and with the sabbatical spent in the cave, people would learn to better care for their mental and physical health. Also, by being able to better care for and understand themselves, people could develop better skills for relating to one another and solving conflict in more constructive ways.
4. **Impacts beyond education settings:** for instance, new settlements and relationships may develop in and between cave spaces; some people might choose to retreat from society; people with caring responsibilities would require alternative care infrastructures to support their retreat.

3.3 Developing new systems of care

Exploring how empathetic connection and communication can help to overcome fear and hatred

Recurring concerns: intergenerational unfairness; xenophobia; scarcity; debt; system failure; climate anxiety

Recurring hopes: developing social connections and relations; developing new systems of care in which people are not marginalised and care is equitably distributed; and developing somatic and global/indigenous practises.

What is care?

Rather than health or social care, care in this context relates to respect, empathy, and communicating and learning across boundaries.



Alienation and division

Many of the possible futures our participants described were peppered with crises that might deepen inequalities, entrench individualism, and foster fear and hatred. These settings included: rising levels of xenophobic and racist crime, the widespread implementation of automation in the workplace, the realisation of the Metaverse, the dramatic failure of social care, shortages of goods, and a rebellion against consumerism.

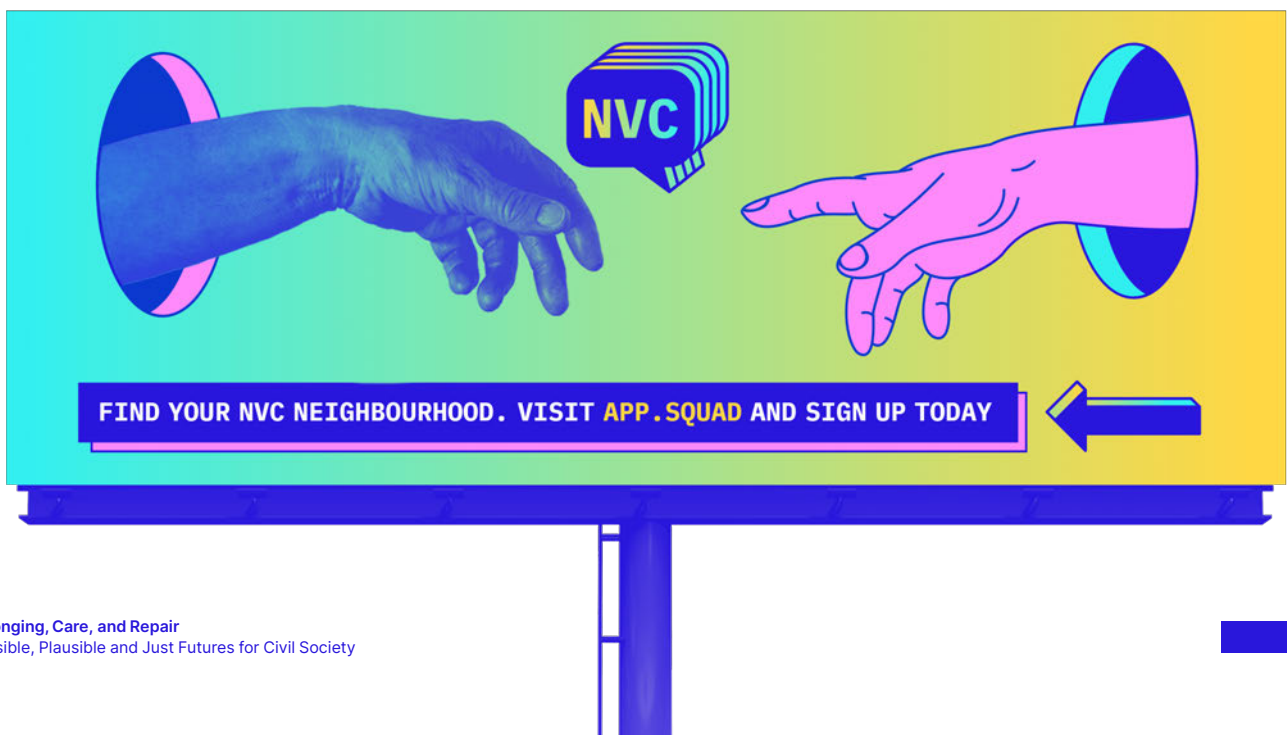
In these settings, initiating acts of care would require recognising our own needs as well as the needs of those we are alienated from and extending empathy and compassion in spite of and across divisions.

Nonviolent Communication™

The participants explored how the principles of Nonviolent Communication™ could form a basis for this system of care and connection across boundaries.

The goal of Nonviolent Communication™ (NVC) is to achieve interpersonal harmony and build non-coercive cooperation through the deployment of “[four key concepts: observations, feelings, needs and requests.](#)” NVC requires practitioners to notice without evaluating, and make requests that reflect their own needs without centering value judgements.

The [Centre for Nonviolent Communication’s Needs Inventory](#) groups human needs in the following categories: Connection; Physical Wellbeing; Honesty; Play; Peace; Autonomy; and Meaning. Recognising and responding to our own and others’ needs across these six indices is holistic and fully human, and helps set aside judgement about who might deserve to have which needs fulfilled.





These considerations led to the creation of the following intervention.

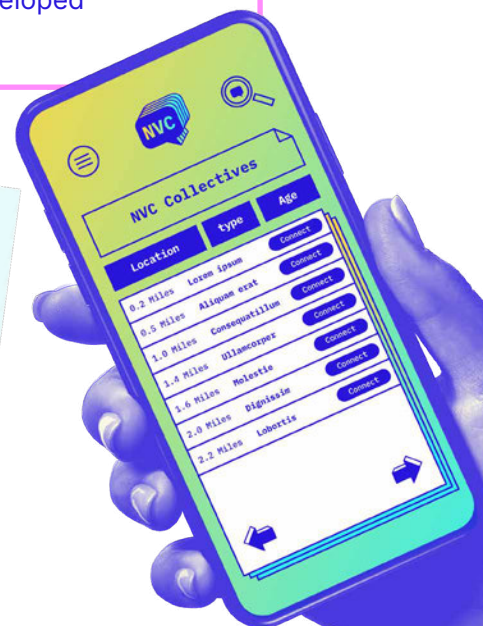
The intervention: The Intergenerational Neighbourhood Practice of Nonviolent Communication™

After more than a decade of tumultuous social uprising, an Intergenerational Neighbourhood Practice of Nonviolent Communication™ is established to build bridges across deepening social divisions.

Social divisions have continued to widen among multiple sectarian lines. Health and social care systems did not recover from the early 2020s pandemic, and are close to collapse; this systemic failure increases mutual suspicion and distrust between the young and old, while the collapse of supply chains drives deeper localism and fear of outsiders, leading to a surge in xenophobic hate crimes; poverty increases as governments tackle debt, prices rise, and sustainable luxury consumerism persists for a few. Life at the intersection of multiple crises increases fear and distrust.

Meanwhile, the practice of NVC has gained traction across a number of domains: one well-known practitioner has recently won the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of their efforts to reduce global conflict; primary schools throughout the UK have eradicated bullying using NVC; informal NVC collectives are popping up all over social media; and the principles of NVC were central to the work of a recent Marshall Prize winner.

After riots sweep through major cities, the Intergenerational Neighbourhood Practice of NVC is rolled out through communities as the result of a coordinated campaign from civil society and empathetic, collaborative relationships are developed at a hyper-local level, between neighbours who otherwise have little in common. This leads to the establishment of well-developed hyperlocal communities of care.



Participants explored some potential unintended consequences, such as:

1. A positive consequence could be that it lays the groundwork for **wider divestment from existing systems** that maintain violence e.g. policing and prisons and create new communal places.
2. It could create **new physical and emotional infrastructure** — new communal spaces and new social connections across boundaries.
3. Unintended **tensions and inequality** could be created, for example, increased tensions as newcomers reject neighbourhood culture, exposing people to unsafe spaces. It could lead to an increase in housing inequality (as some neighbourhoods prosper and others, not practising NVC, do not).
4. It could create space for change but **there isn't always control over who instigates change**. There is a possible unintended consequence that the original instigators of change become displaced by other groups, organisations or governments that employ the same message for different ends.

Initiating acts of care would require recognising our own needs as well as the needs of those we are alienated from and extending empathy and compassion in spite of and across divisions.



Section Four

Observations and conclusions

All the needs and interventions identified through this process focus on people, emotions, social relations and social negotiations.

From dominant trends to “ways of being”

The pathways or imaginaries described in this report pick up on technologies because of the dominant trends which we asked participants to use when building their future pathways. By focusing on technical artefacts, conventional foresight methods can be bounded and framed in a way that allows us to imagine what we are already familiar with.

It is easy to imagine a future artefact, for example a technology, its material form and function, however it is difficult to imagine more intangible things like the future of social negotiation, future sources of wisdom, or the way humans might relate. A significant outcome of the pilot was that the participants were able to explore future “ways of being”, whether that was described through future states of emotion or future sources of wisdom. This opened up a place of creative problem making, one where issues that we might not know how to deal with are brought to the fore.

More practically speaking, it was difficult for participants to recognise or understand the meanings behind the “official” futures. Is the vague, jargon language used in many “official” futures reports a way to circumvent real engagement with civil society and society at large? If civil society struggles to understand what is put forth by the “official” futures, what does this then mean about how we can relate to and contextualise those futures?



The role of civil society

Through the interventions, participants also questioned and challenged the role of civil society organisations. The questions that arose included:

- How closely should civil society align with incumbent power?
- Should civil society step in to compensate for day-to-day systemic failure, or seek revolution and architect new systems?
- Should it do all three of those things — and where does governance sit when civil society takes over and runs systems that support the status quo?

What next?

The next challenge for this process is to understand how these outputs might be most useful to those who need them. What alternative funding strategies or policies might they inspire — and what greater depth of data and analysis would be needed to support their development?

While the group of participants in this process was relatively small, the process of relational investigation freed them to work deeply and collaboratively. Some participants experienced discomfort in working with imagination and uncertainty, while others adapted quickly to the process; this difference in cadence allowed a natural pragmatism to emerge, and while the scenarios may seem remote from current life, they capture some of the deepest and most difficult to resolve dilemmas of our present age. Belonging, repair and care have been deprioritised in favour of growth and productivity; the easiest way to restore them is to imagine them on some future plane. Restoring them will require courage, vision and investment.

The imaginaries set out here show the need to midwife and invest in infrastructure that ameliorates fear and division in the face of numerous existential crises. The trails left by the brief flourishing of togetherness experienced in the pandemic inspired and gave hope and inspiration to our participants; our hope is that they have also laid a foundation for a shimmering constellation of alternative futures.



Careful
Industries

Credits

This report was written by Rachel Coldicutt, Anna Williams, Dominique Barron, and Stephanie Pau. Careful Industries collaborated with Stephanie Pau, Director at Studio andnand, to design and facilitate the workshops that informed our research and this report.

The report was designed and illustrated by Honest Studio. Kim Plowright provided production support, and also built the website. Operational support was provided by Ashleigh Folan and Aurélie Coulibaly.

Thanks

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