

Field of the Future Blog - Medium | Co-creating the Emerging Future with “Gen Z”

6.652

High school teachers and students reshaping Education in Taiwan

Everyone is a Museologist — drawing by MengLin Chu

What point have we reached now, in the critique and reshaping of our education systems? Back in the late seventies, Pink Floyd's rebellious cry of “Hey, Teachers, Leave Them Kids Alone!” in the hit song “Another Brick in The Wall” advocated for an approach to teaching that would guide young people towards the discovery of their own abilities and inclinations, rather than subjecting them to the imposition of pedagogical frameworks that suffocated creativity, individuality and critical capacity.

Over four decades later, the work that a group of Taiwanese educators has been bringing into high schools in Taipei in the context of the u.lab 2x — Accelerator for Systems Transformation is a living example of the inversion of those old learning structures. It harnesses the approach and methodologies offered by Otto Scharmer's Theory U teachings: where the student becomes a co-pilot of the learning process, or is even put into the driver's seat.

This, however, is a particularly bold stance in the Chinese cultural context where young people are typically expected to forge their way into adulthood through meeting the — sometimes very rigid — educational and social expectations of their families. Counter-current educational models such as the internationally-recognized early childhood Anji Play curriculum that is “grounded in love, risk, joy, engagement, and reflection”, which Adam Yukelson wrote about in 2018, are generally few and far between.

The Big Idea

The Taiwanese team of six educators, facilitators and practitioners came together in late 2020 under the umbrella of an initiative that they named “Co-creating the emerging future with Gen Z in Taiwan,” to embark upon the u.lab 2x journey that launched in February 2021.

Chun-Ying (Roach) Chen is a Science teacher, Crystal C. Y. Huang is a coach and facilitator, Jayce Pei Yu Lee is a visual artist, Menglin Chu is a teacher of Social Studies, Civil Ethics and Virtue, Yuchung Cheng is a Chinese language Art teacher, and Yi-Tzu Lee teaches English as a foreign language.

Quotes from the Taiwanese teacher team

Their particular focus has been to invite teenagers and high school students into an adventure of exploring what it means to imagine their future from new vantage points, through the application of Theory U and Presencing methodologies as offered by the u.lab 2x experience. They have observed that “at this stage of a student's development, the degree of plasticity is considerable.”

Who Needs to Play?

3D Mapping by the teacher team

Upon exploring the system through the technique of 3D Mapping, the Taiwanese team realised that their project would need to take into account entities such as: the government education authorities, parents and parent groups, teacher groups, mainstream and social media who have influence and control over the right to speak in education, university academic units, related institutions for teacher training, and school organisations.

After having mapped the wider system, however, they chose to narrow the scope of their project to the more immediate players that they could more directly influence: the high school teachers, high school students, and graduates within five years of graduation.

New Kinds of Relationships

Inner Voice of the Student — image by MengLin Chu

High school students are at a point in their lives where they are “curious and confused about what it means to be growing up or looking forward to the future.” In the Chinese cultural and educational context, there is a considerable lack of space to “breathe” and “explore” freely. The ambiguity and uncertainty of shifts currently unfolding in the world seem to present young people with choices that point to both risk and opportunity: on the one hand, an environment riddled with restrictions; on the other hand, a chance to boldly and collectively explore the boundaries of the existing, and push beyond them.

The question then becomes: in this process of exploration, can high school students find out who they are, what is most meaningful to them, and who they want to become? What might it mean to include their imagination and their wholeheartedness in the construction of the future world that they want to live in?

Moving into Spaces of the Heart

<https://medium.com/media/d343b4013c89608ff24cc72d0e098389/href>

Yi-Tzu observes that through the practices of opening the heart and paying more attention to emotions and feelings — where role-modelling of openness, candour and vulnerability on the part of the teacher speaks much more eloquently than theory — the students begin to see and reveal themselves to a greater degree and establishing with them new sorts of relationships.

Yuchung cautions: one important lesson that she has learnt is to refrain from the impulse of imparting opinions,

suggestions or advice. "Don't even hold them in your own mind, of how you think it 'should be'." Connecting within the Realm of the Non-verbal Jayce remarks that Theory U encourages forms of communication which are very effective in presenting thoughts in non-verbal ways. This enables teenagers to better connect with a given situation and thereby also find and craft their own unique forms of expression. Crystal adds that she has noticed how the tools in the hands of the students come alive and are able to shift empathy in unprecedented ways. Making It Happen The Taiwanese team found that the available theories and resources that could help open up new types of inquiry within the education system were mostly tailored to business people and adults. The presentation, languaging and contextualisation of the resources had hitherto been built mostly on adult learning and could not easily appeal to teenagers. This is why they set out to shape a modified framework that could be relatable and engaging for their students, using language, perspectives and themes familiar to young people. In order to better understand the stakeholders of their project, they conducted interviews with youth, college students and graduates. Flexibility and Personalisation of the Tools The "Finding Who I Am" exercise This helped the teacher team to create prototypes and small-step classroom experiments around how to introduce the Theory U tools in more approachable ways for the students: for instance the "Stakeholder Interview" was reworded in a way that young people can better understand; the Four Levels of Listening was made more tangible for them through a familiar game, called "passing the ball", which enabled them to grasp through direct, lived experience, the differences in levels of listening. <https://medium.com/media/3f22cf5466a1fa9c50ac09cf99e8e9dc/href> From Stakeholder Interviews, to Coaching Circles, Dialogue Walks, Scribing, the Social Presencing Theater (SPT) Stuck exercise, Journaling Questions, each teacher shared their own preferred tool but the consensus was that the richness of the Theory U palette resides in the infinite ways in which each student can use them as standalones or in freely combined manners. Learning to Loosen and Let Go Whilst they have been working with an array of clear and immediately applicable methodologies, the Taiwanese team has also understood the importance of surrendering to not always having ready-made answers to emerging questions. The learning about themselves has often been about setting aside their own impatience; about letting go and letting come; about admitting to not knowing — to themselves, and to their students. "By learning to loosen and let go", observes Yuchung, "some things will just unfold naturally, according to their own rhythm." <https://medium.com/media/999e00d50d6537999b771d1affa65e3e/href> Nuances of Language: Barrier or Opportunity? One question that intrigued me particularly in my conversation with the Taiwanese team was the topic of how they approached translating the language of Theory U from English

to Chinese. <https://medium.com/media/da6529b3531ba1bf5c41d9bab72969e/href> What emerged from the conversation was that I was in fact asking the wrong question. Translation in this case was not so much about how to find fitting equivalences in vocabulary when transitioning from English to Chinese, but more about how to convey the essence of each methodology through the aliveness of first-hand experiences. Yuchung chuckles: "In general, teenagers don't really listen to what others say: they live mostly in their own space." This is why the teachers have been looking for ways to design experiences that include mutual participation, reviewing, questioning and reflecting back on those experiences. Holding Discomfort Self, Others and Discovery Taiwanese youngsters are not typically brought up to think in terms of searching for their own, unique, personal value. Emphasis is placed on self discipline and diligence, and learning is approached with a view to achieving prescribed outcomes, with the attention turned towards the outside. Therefore, veering towards learning methods and processes that focus on exploring notions of "self" and "innermost calling" is a deep paradigm shift. In the words of Yuchung: "In this process, we ultimately need to return to ourselves." <https://medium.com/media/85c8efc626a2cc19344f5823a870d006/href> Jayce and Yi-Tzu admit that allowing space for questioning and pondering, without hurry, is an essential part of the journey for the educators themselves, so that they can be empowered to enact the change together, through shared intention and a trust that gets built over time. Crystal remarks on the importance of staying aligned with each other on intention, whilst also staying open to adapting along the way, and being able to integrate the work into the busy-ness of daily life. "We must remain fluid,

like water." <https://medium.com/media/86acf4f7ce5b4a25556ac9fdddfa4258/href> Shedding the Former Self <https://medium.com/media/b0a9997f5fc9dc3ed795256ba50fedb8/href> Yi-Tzu speaks about the responsibility and challenge of holding her students' dilemma, when they ask: "Teacher,

am I therefore called to throw away my old self, and everything that I have been brought up to build towards, for the past ten years?" Seeking ways to best support their students in their inner and outer journeys is an important and urgent responsibility that these teachers hold, with humility and passion, as they accompany them into exploring the territory of their emerging future self. Heartfelt thanks to Crystal, Jayce, Yuchung and Yi-Tzu for the interview and their involvement and infinite patience in correcting my Chinese and double-checking all parts of the post-production for accuracy ; to Priya, Emma, Hannah and Randi for the editorial support; to Stefan for the very valuable advice on final touches regarding video production. This series of interviews with Otto Scharmer on the topic of Education in China might also be of interest. Co-creating the Emerging Future with "Gen Z" was originally published in Field of the Future Blog on Medium, where people are continuing the conversation by highlighting and responding to this story.

The Seneca Effect | Limitarians and Cornucopians: what Surprises from Technological Progress?

3.768

Resource depletion, ecosystem disruption, population growth, and technological change are interacting with each other in a tsunami of changes that always take us by surprise. The surprises that technological progress may be bringing are among the most unpredictable drivers of change. Yet, it is not impossible to reason about how our society could be transformed by some disruptive technological innovations. Here, Luca Pardi discusses the most recent report by "RethinkX," a group of remarkably sharp and creative people. They are hard to define as "pessimists" or "optimists," but they surely understand that change is unavoidable. by Luca Pardi

The debate among limitarians (Robeyns, 2017) and cornucopians is periodically morphing into that among doomsters and optimist-utopians. The limitarians have a generally gloomy view about the future availability of resources while the cornucopians tend to believe that shortages, always possible for many reasons in the short run, were proved not to be a problem in the past, so will not be in the future, at least in the long run. Doomsters-limitarians are also pessimistic about the environmental crisis and its paradigmatic representation: the climate change predicament. Optimists retort that the problem is amplified by anti-capitalistic ideological views and that a combination of technology and local and global policies will draw us, as has always been the case in history, out of dire straits. And the debate goes on forever! There is a Think Tank named RethinkX that tries to be above or, better, ahead of this ideological deadlock. They are both: doomsters and optimists with a strong slant toward technological disruptive innovations. In a crescendo of techno-optimistic hypes they reach a climax in their last document *Rethinking Humanity* where they envisage that: The prevailing production system will shift away from a model of centralized extraction and the breakdown of scarce resources that requires vast physical scale and reach, to a model of localized creation from limitless, ubiquitous building blocks – a world built not on coal, oil, steel, livestock, and concrete but on photons, electrons, DNA, molecules and (q)bits. [page 5] This amazing statement summarizes and amplifies the outcomes of their previous documents about food, energy, and mobility. According to RethinkX each of the main five producing sectors of our global civilization: food and energy production, materials extraction, mobility, and communication/information, will witness a jump of at least one order of magnitude in efficiency, thanks to a combination of Schumpeterian (disruptive) innovation and cultural change within local communities. All of this in the span of time between now and 2035. Pretty good! And here it comes the doomsters side. The intervening decade will be turbulent, destabilized both by technology disruptions that upend the foundations of the global economy and by system shocks from pandemics, geopolitical conflict, natural disasters, financial crises, and social unrest that could lead to dramatic tipping points for humanity including mass migrations and even war. In the face of each new crisis we will be tempted to look backward rather than forward, to mistake ideology and dogma for reason and wisdom, to turn on each other instead of trusting one another. If we hold strong, we can emerge together to create the wealthiest, healthiest, most extraordinary civilization in history. If we do not, we will join the ranks of every other failed civilization for future historians to puzzle over. Our children will either thank us for bringing them an Age of Freedom, or curse us for condemning them to another dark age. The choice is ours. [page 6] A new dark age is not ruled out, the apparently tragic outcome of an unrealized transition, should press us to act now. And "us" is not a general "us" it is exactly us, you that are reading this post as well as me writing it and those who generally in the last few decades showed to be concerned about the destiny of humanity and civilization. Incumbent leading classes are not included in the "us" they are simply unable to help much: Dark ages do not occur for lack of sunshine, but for lack of leadership. The established centers of power, the U.S., Europe, or China, handicapped by incumbent mindsets, beliefs, interests, and institutions, are unlikely to lead. In a globally competitive world, smaller, hungrier, more adaptable communities, cities, or states such as Israel, Mumbai, Dubai, Singapore, Lagos, Shanghai, California, or Seattle are more likely to develop a winning Organizing System.[page 6] They do not say that there will be salvation, but that we have the technical means and the human resources, to get there. It is a question of finding the social and political means. The fact that technology is always a source of new problems is a useless truth and useless is to complain about it. Taking technology away from humans would be

like removing fangs from lions or stings from wasps. We have been like this since before we were Homo sapiens. Five million years ago Homo habilis was already doing things our chimpanzee cousins can't. Humans must follow their path to the end because it is theirs. Fortunately, the path is not unique and our intelligence must apply to understand which paths appear to be less traumatic. The bad news is that nobody will come to save us from outside leading the cavalry, we are alone. Is this actually bad news? Robeyns, I., 2017. Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: the capability approach re-examined. OpenBook Publishers, Cambridge, UK. Luca Pardi is a senior researcher in chemistry at the Italian Research Council (CNR), former president of the Italian section of the association for the study of peak oil (ASPO). He is the author of the recent book "Picco per Capre" dedicated to peak oil

Barking Up The Wrong Tree | How To Be Resilient: 4 Steps To Happiness When Life Gets Hard

10.204

*** Before we commence with the festivities, I wanted to thank everyone for helping my first book become a Wall Street Journal bestseller. To check it out, click here. *** The pandemic still isn't over. Life still isn't back to normal. And that means a lot of us are still on edge. Frustrated. Disgruntled. At times, we're downright angry. And that saps our resilience. Our ability to cope and live a good life. Dealing with anger is difficult because, frankly, we get terrible advice about handling it. People say you should "get your anger out." Wrong. Research shows venting just makes it worse. Sure, developing self-control and using time-outs can help but neither fix the underlying problem. You and your anger are still stuck together. (Facebook relationship status: "It's complicated".) So what do we do? Have no fear. Your favorite cognitive arms dealer has the weapons we need to effectively fight anger and win. And, believe it or not, it's as simple as "ABCD." We're going to get help from the groundbreaking work of Albert Ellis. According to an APA survey of psychologists he was the 2nd most influential psychotherapist ever. Sigmund Freud came in third. Drawing on Stoic philosophy, Ellis developed a powerful system called REBT. Here's what Wikipedia says about it: In general REBT is arguably one of the most investigated theories in the field of psychotherapy and a large amount of clinical experience and a substantial body of modern psychological research have validated and substantiated many of REBT's theoretical assumptions on personality and psychotherapy. This stuff works. His book is "How To Control Your Anger Before It Controls You." Let's get to it... "The Calls Are Coming From Inside The House" Eleanor Roosevelt said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." Guess what? That's true for anger too. Anger isn't caused by pandemics or traffic or anything external. Anger is our own fault. Yeah, I said it. But this is a good thing because if it weren't under our control, we wouldn't be able to do anything about it. Ellis said it comes down to ABC. A is Adversity. The external thing that happens to you like traffic. C is the Consequences. Your feeling of anger. But A doesn't directly cause C. We got B in the middle there. And B is your Beliefs. What do beliefs have to do with it? Say I stick a gun in your face. (That definitely qualifies as Adversity.) You think you're about to die. (Beliefs.) You're terrified. (Consequences.) But hold on. You take a second look and realize I'm actually holding a water pistol. Still scared? Nope. What changed? Only your beliefs. Events don't upset you. You upset yourself because of your beliefs about events. And when your beliefs change, your feelings change. So what kind of beliefs cause anger? We create anger through absolutist, command-oriented thinking and expectations about the world. More importantly, we get angry due to irrational beliefs. Let's say I tell you solving this crossword puzzle is going to be difficult. You try it. It's difficult. Would you get angry? No. You had a rational belief. But often when things don't go your way in life you do get angry. Do you believe that life must always be easy, simple and convenient? Or someone is mean and you fly off the handle. Do you really believe people are obligated by the laws of the universe to always be nice to you? You may want to answer "no" but if that was really the case would you react with anger? You knew the crossword puzzle was going to be hard, it was hard, and you didn't get angry. You also know life doesn't always go your way and that people can be jerks. But for some reason when these things happen it surprises and angers you. What gives? It's due to irrational beliefs. Underneath it all, we often do expect everything to go our way, even though our conscious minds know that's ridiculous. We do expect everyone to be polite all the time and that's why we're surprised when they're not. And we act like none of this has any right to happen to us. That we should never be inconvenienced. You don't need to live at 221B Baker Street to realize this isn't very rational. Anger doesn't come from the external world, it comes from these impossible, irrational expectations we often have. When we think we are in control of reality and life reminds us we're not, we get angry. Ellis says that often our beliefs are: "The world (and the people in it) must be arranged so that I get practically everything that I really want when I want it. And further, conditions must be arranged so that I don't get what I don't want. Moreover, I usually must get what I want quickly and easily." Some people immediately push back when I explain this. They say that others "should" behave nicely, and so their anger is justified. (These people make me want to use my secret agent cyanide tooth.) Anytime you find yourself using the words "should", "must" or "supposed to" you're headed for anger. All of those words are clever ways of implying other people

"cannot" behave badly. But people can and do behave badly at times and you know that. You can certainly prefer they behave better but "should" is a one-way path to frustration because you're denying reality. Until somebody builds a bug zapper for jerks "should" is not going to get you any closer to happiness. "Should" is denial. Like some metaphysical trump card you can play to alter the universe. Sorry, not gonna happen. (If you want to stay angry head over to Twitter. You'll fit right in.) I'm not saying it's good or right that people are mean and I'm not saying you should put up with it. But once you start down the road of "should" you're implying you can control their behavior and you can't. That's an irrational belief. It's not going to result in the universe suddenly setting them straight; it's going to result in you upping the dose on your blood pressure medication. (To learn more about how you can lead a successful life, check out my bestselling book [here](#).) You cannot control everything that happens but you can control your beliefs. When beliefs are rational, we're good but when they're irrational – oopsie – we get angry. So how do we make our irrational beliefs more rational? Dispute As the old joke goes: How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice. And unconsciously we have been practicing our irrational beliefs for a very long time. We may not be aware of them but they become clear when we get angry at things that are totally unsurprising. Traffic is bad on a Monday morning. You get angry. What's the belief? "Traffic should not occur when I am in the car." Or maybe, "I must never be inconvenienced." How rational are those? Well, we have ABC and now we need to add D. You're going to face Adversity. You'll have Beliefs about it. Those will determine the Consequences. And when the consequences are anger, we need to Dispute our beliefs. You want to challenge their accuracy or usefulness to see if they are irrational. Say somebody cheats you. You get angry. What's the belief? "People must treat me fairly." Time to dispute. Is this rational? It would be nice if people treated you fairly but, no, they don't have to. You can prefer they do but insisting that the world bend to your will is just going to make you lose your cool – and often lead to poor decision-making. Now you can and should express dissatisfaction. Nobody's saying you need to roll over and take it. But when your "preferences" become "musts" you're just going to drive yourself crazy because you're implying this cannot happen. As if you had the power to control it. And you don't. Changing demands to desires eliminates anger. You can still do things to counter the adversity. In fact, you will usually do a better job of it because you'll be able to think clearly and better problem solve. How many times have you made a stupid decision because you had a head full of steam? When you're angry you have the brains of a King Charles Spaniel. Flying off the handle is not known to be a quality of top negotiators. Any time you find anger rising, check your underlying belief. Is it some version of, "Life must be easy and people must be kind and fair"? Not terribly rational. Change "musts" to preferences, demands to desires. Then problem solve or negotiate with a cool head. This leads to a lot less time screaming into a cushion. (To learn the two-word morning ritual that will make you happy all day, [click here](#).) Okay, we're inching toward pragmatism. Problem is, if you only dispute your beliefs after you get angry, this is all going to take a loooong time to sink in. So how can we speed up the process? Carnegie Hall. Practice. And how do we practice...? Make Yourself Angry Yes, literally. Ellis calls it "Rational Emotive Imagery." (You can refer to it as "Beast Mode" if you like. Your call.) Sit down, close your eyes and imagine something that really gets your goat on a regular basis. Don't just "think" about it, totally experience it in your mind. Go full Dark Side of the Force [here](#). Let the anger flow through you, Luke. Feel the "must" and "should" beliefs at their mightiest. They must not treat me this way! Life should be easy! Get the adrenaline flowing... Feel it? Now just like you did with disputing, start questioning your underlying beliefs. Shift them toward something more rational: "I don't like when they treat me this way, but people sometimes behave badly. I know that. I'd prefer they didn't but it's irrational to believe I can control them." Feel the difference it makes when you stop trying to control what you cannot control. Giving up your anger doesn't mean you're powerless or giving up hope. You'll be able to handle the situation in a smarter way once you accept that the universe is not here to do your bidding. You've done this little exercise before at times without realizing it. You dealt with that annoying person, they acted annoying, you got angry... but then you realized, "Seriously, what did I expect? This is how they are and I know that." And then the anger dissipates. You're not thrilled but you don't lose your cool. Shift your beliefs from irrational to rational and the anger evaporates. Practice this a few minutes a day and you'll start to improve. (If you find meditation boring maybe making yourself furious every day is more your style.) Seriously, this is a software update for your brain. Make a note of any insights you have. See what works for you, what helps you make the shift, and leverage that next time Adversity hits. You'll see results from Rational Emotive Imagery faster than you think. Practice long enough and your frustration tolerance will

increase. You will no longer be stressed by difficult situations. “Injustices” will become “challenges” and you’ll make better decisions on how to deal with them. This is how you become an unflappable cool customer at the negotiation table of life. (To learn the 5 secrets neuroscience says will make you emotionally intelligent, [click here](#).) Okay, it is my very rational belief that we have learned a lot. Let’s round it all up and find out how the above can not only eliminate anger but also lead to a very happy life... Sum Up This is how to deal with anger and be more resilient: ABC: You cause your anger. Larry doesn’t. Larry is just Adversity. The Consequence is anger. But if you change your Belief that Larry must behave in exactly the way you have deemed appropriate, that Consequence can change. Irrational Beliefs: Eliminate “must” and “should” from your belief vocabulary. They’ll drive you crazy and make your therapist consider early retirement. Dispute: Eric, is it an ironclad, immutable law of the universe that people must agree with everything you write? Is that really rational? Practice: Experience the power of the Dark Side, young Padawan. Let the anger flow through you... And then shift those beliefs. Feel the difference. And join the emotional Jedi. By now it’s quite clear that if you walk around with the underlying belief “Conditions must always be the way I want them to be” you’re going to make the Incredible Hulk seem like Mary Poppins. But this post isn’t just about anger. Albert Ellis found that irrational beliefs are the cause of nearly all of the emotional difficulties we face in life. Believe “I absolutely must perform well!” and you’re going to be anxious at work. Believe “I must have the success and happy family that my friends on Instagram seem to have” and you’re going to be depressed. From How To Control Your Anger Before It Controls You: To make yourself feel needlessly angry, anxious, or depressed, you almost always escalate your desires into assumed needs, your preferences into demands and insinuations, your relative wishes into absolute dictates. When it comes to your emotions, your enemy is not traffic, or that person at work, or anything external. It’s your own irrational beliefs. And if you don’t change them, life is going to be an endless white-knuckle endurance test. But I don’t want to get preachy. (The day I start referring to these blog posts as “manifestos,” hooo-boy, look out.) Think about it. If you think things “must” go exactly the way you demand, you are almost certainly wrong because there are so many ways to live a good life. A happy life. You did not expect to be exactly where you are now. That is true for the bad but also for the good. You have faced many adversities and overcome them. Those previous “musts” came and went. And they will again — but we always seem to forget that in the moment. (You made it through a pandemic, my friend. You can handle anything.) Accept life as it comes. Accept that you cannot control everything in it. Acceptance does not mean “giving up.” It means “not living in denial.” Acknowledge reality and you can avoid so many awful feelings. You’ll be more resilient. And then — with a cool head and a smile — you can endeavor to change those things you don’t like and make life better. So dispute those irrational beliefs and live a happier life. But, hey, I can’t control what you do. I’m not going to say you “must” or even that you “should.” But I’d prefer it. Join over 345,000 readers. Get a free weekly update via email [here](#). Related posts: [New Neuroscience Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy](#) [New Harvard Research Reveals A Fun Way To Be More Successful](#) [How To Get People To Like You: 7 Ways From An FBI Behavior Expert](#) [The post How To Be Resilient: 4 Steps To Happiness When Life Gets Hard appeared first on Barking Up The Wrong Tree](#).

Astral Codex Ten | Open Thread 198

1.8

This is the weekly visible open thread. Odd-numbered open threads will be no-politics, even-numbered threads will be politics-allowed. This one is even-numbered, so go wild - or post about whatever else you want. Also: In case you missed it last week, I'm accepting grant applications. So far many people have generously volunteered to help fund grants, and relatively few people have submitted really high-quality ideas I'm excited about. So no need to volunteer more funding, but if you have great ideas please send in an application form. So far I've got about 100 applications. Types of grant proposals I need less of on the margin: Social media sites Education and science communication projects (these are great, we're just kind of heavy on them right now) Attempts to develop new ways to think about psychology Things on blockchains, although if your idea is actually good (eg <https://www.gwern.net/CO2-Coin>) this doesn't have to be a dealbreaker Lifestyle products that would make people feel self-actualized Cool startup ideas of unclear charitable relevance Perpetual motion machines (yes, really) People who say they want to leverage new ways of thinking to create coordinated high-impact outcomes or whatever, without explaining what specific things they are going to do. Things that will help advance cutting-edge AI research. Remember, I think AI might be bad, and I hope it comes as late as possible so we have more time to prepare. If you have proposals to hinder the advance of cutting-edge AI research, send them to me! Or if you have proposals to help AI safety research, send those too (people who are just looking into normal AI applications for health care or whatever don't have to worry about this). People saying "I don't need money, I just want your official stamp of approval so I can use it to convince other people". I have already committed to throwing money at things, including unlikely-to-work-but-could-be-cool things. But if I have to stake my reputation on it then I'll be looking it over with a fine-toothed comb and being super-conservative. Types of grant proposals I need more of on the margin: Basic research into important scientific questions Biomedical research Well-thought-out proposals to enact political change Field-building Forecasting Anything that might lead to 20,000 clones of John von Neumann High-impact, concrete proposals to help the global poor The questions I most often had after reading people's applications were "why would this be good?", "why isn't this a for-profit startup?", "but what actual, concrete things are you going to do?", and "if you care so much about this and you're a software engineer at Google and it only costs \$1000 why haven't you just funded it yourself?" If your applications answer those questions, you'll have a better chance of getting accepted, or at least of saving yourself an email conversation with me about them.

Paul Bricman | Reflections | conversational multiverses

5.828

conversational multiverses In this article, I want to unpack a cluster of ideas about limitations and opportunities in the user experience of digital conversation, especially human-machine conversation (e.g. interacting with a virtual assistant). To put my own oversimplified spin on Hebb's already oversimplified rule, I believe that thoughts which are active together (i.e. on top of mind, the ACT-R or conceptarium reading of "active"), get wired together through associations. Therefore, it makes most sense for me to first go through a list of four idea-ingredients which lead me to the main insights, before serving the novel ideas in the second half of this piece. That said, going through the slightly chaotic line of reasoning in its entirety will probably make the first part a bit disorienting, so brace yourself. First, during my experimental reflection sessions, I'd keep going back and forth between mind maps drawn on a whiteboard and the conceptarium running on my laptop. This friction prevented me from becoming more fluent in injecting serendipity in my thought process through conceptarium queries, so I started looking for digital alternatives – mind mapping software. Having temporarily settled on XMind, I tweaked my AutoKey bindings as follows. Whenever I have a node selected, I can just press a hotkey to trigger a script which searches for related thoughts in my conceptarium, before finally listing them as children of the original node a couple moments later. Essentially, this mechanic expands mind map nodes into related past thoughts of mine in an unpredictable way, which can be spotted below as the items between quotes. This idea-ingredient connected human-machine interaction with tree structures. Screenshot of XMind coupled with the conceptarium integration Second, I've been thinking a bit about what I heard David Dohan and Benjamin Leveritt describe independently in the same exact day. Rather than through a chat UI, a more intuitive way of interacting with autoregressive language models (e.g. GPT-3) might be to frame it as a deck of Tarot-like cards. For instance, a card titled "The Skeptical" might be associated with a prompt which nudges the language model into looking for loopholes in your argument. Alternatively, playing "The Entrepreneur" might nudge the model into coming up with ideas on how to apply your ideas. A few of my thoughts on this were the following. What if you had physical cards detected via webcam which rendered this whole interaction physical? What if you stamped random objects around the house with NFC tags to trigger certain behaviors (e.g. an angry-looking plushie could be "The Skeptical," its synthesized voice matching the character). This idea-ingredient somehow brought games and language models in the same sentence. Third, we've talked a bit about handling large game trees in reinforcement learning at uni, with a focus on the iconic AlphaGo. There's this popular animation published by the people at DeepMind which depicts the large ever-expanding game tree of Go – the many many ways the game could go from a certain board configuration. This idea-ingredient reminded me of the connection between games and tree structures. And that tree expanding from left to right looks an awful lot like the growing mind map... Fourth, and thankfully finally, there's Moire's awesome Loom project which explores possible fictional universes dreamed up by GPT-3. You can branch out into other versions of the artificial narrative as it unfolds. This last one connected language models with trees in my mind, and brought in this framing of the multiverse. Screenshot of Moire's Loom interface to the multiverse (Source) You've made it halfway through, so let's now digest what this constellation of trees, games, language models, and human-machine interaction means. Text-based interaction as we know it is extremely linear, usually top-to-bottom. When you chat with someone (or something), there's no notion of rewinding your conversation to a previous point. Whenever you hit a dead end, there's no way of undo-ing your way to a previous moment before branching out in a different direction. What we usually do is try to course correct from there, which might seem enough. But then try telling a designer who spent the last two hours in Photoshop that they can't press undo and reinstate a previous version of their work to branch out. Try telling a developer that they can't revert to the codebase of ten commits ago, that they should get to that point by strictly moving forward. The undo mechanic is extremely valuable. So why not be able to move around the tree where branches are possible ways in which a conversation can go, possible trains of thought? Sure, there are replies and threads. But threads are usually of limited depth (e.g. Discord, Slack), and a message can't be the root of multiple threads – you can't split the conversation in more than two directions (Reddit being a noteworthy exception). What's more, replies in IM chats are still forced into the same linear medium in a pretty awkward way. They don't

really backtrack your way out of a local optimum, they're mostly useful for referencing information. You're stuck in one or at best a handful of conversational universes, with no means of probing the infinite breadth of the conversational multiverse. What if instead of interacting with digital systems through makeshift chats designed to recycle our mental models of texting with friends and family, we granted first-class citizenship to the conversational multiverse and embraced the tree-based mechanics it came with? Instead of Niklas Luhman having a linear conversation with his Zettelkasten, he could peek into the countless trains of thought in his conceptual vicinity and seamlessly rewind them, go back in time and change them. Just like I configured my system to expand nodes into previous thoughts, you could have Dual-like skills or Elicit-like tasks transform information in predefined ways, Tarot style. Press a hotkey to generate ten shortcomings of an argument before addressing the strongest ones, and intermittently call for the AI when in need. And when you hit bedrock while mining conceptual space, you can just scroll a bit to the left and explore another line of reasoning, take a different path in a memex style. Vannevar Bush meets time travel. While Moire's trees depicting literary multiverses are quite homogeneous, in that all nodes tell part of a narrative in a similar way, the nodes in a conversational multiverse are also characterized by which participant contributed them, whose reply it is. Each branch of a conventional game tree, be it for Go or Tic-Tac-Toe, contains an alternating sequence of moves made by the two players, a constant back and forth, similar to a conversation. Given this game tree-like structure of human-machine interaction, it's natural to then borrow insights from reinforcement learning about dealing with the huge number of ways in which the conversation can unfold so that you can render debates productive. For instance, can you apply a far relative of the alpha-beta pruning algorithm in order to narrow in on promising avenues for discussion? Can an artificial system develop the intuition of "we're onto something..." to scale the user's intuition in parallel across branches? If I were to hazard a guess, I'd say that the reason why tree-based and non-linear mechanics more generally aren't that popular in our tools is that they break symmetry. Branching out from a node means you can't fit everything into a neat grid anymore, and there might be some subtle cognitive heuristics which make us prefer grids and matrices because they're easier to conceptualize and abstract with. Though one noteworthy mechanic which uses language models in parallel across separate threads is Andreas Stuhlmüller's tabular experiment below. In an Excel-like setup, each column maps row inputs in a way specified by the table head. It's really a clean map from a functional programming perspective, because each element gets turned into exactly one element, preserving symmetry. Though this gets me thinking: would other functional patterns like filtering and reducing have their place as mechanics in the conversational multiverse? language models + dataframes = ♥■ pic.twitter.com/jCvR8YnPUg— Andreas Stuhlmüller (@stuhlmueeller) May 17, 2021 Wrapping up, a medium in which parallel conversational timelines are projected onto a navigable canvas, coupled with frictionless access to knowledge stores and language models as "computational spirits," would make for a transformative IDE for thought, problem solving, and decision making, as per David's vision. The good news is that all the technology quoted above already exists and is already quite mature. The bad news is that most of the knowhow about the true potential of NLP models is locked up in a handful of academic silos and visionary minds, among which Moire, David, Andreas and Ben mentioned above. This knowledge will inevitably take time to propagate, and this article is me doing my part in this process. What's yours?

Study Hacks - Decoding Patterns of Success - Cal Newport | The Bestselling Magic of the Writing Shed

2.384

A few years ago, my family faced a housing dilemma. We lived at the time in our first house, a small cape cod near the top of an elongated cul-de-sac, situated on a bluff above Sligo Creek, a half mile outside downtown Silver Spring. We had two kids who comfortably shared an upstairs bedroom. But then my wife and I decided they needed a new brother, and we soon realized that we might not actually have anywhere to put him. So we started thinking through options to gain more space. At one point, I landed on what I deemed to be an ingenious plan. We would give up my home office and instead build, in the corner of our small backyard, a custom writing shed. Inspired by the cabin Michael Pollan built in the woods outside his home in Kent, Connecticut, I began to daydream about making that short walk from our back door to a wood-paneled oasis; heated in the winter by a marine pellet stove, and cooled by tilt-open windows in the pleasant DC spring. For various reasons, including the potential illegality of cramming an outbuilding of this size into our cramped yard, we ended up instead buying a new house ten minutes down the road. But the daydream of my impractical writing shed lingered. Which is all a long way of establishing the importance of what happened earlier today. I was watching an old episode of a promotional show called Disney Insider with our youngest son (now three), when we were suddenly confronted with a great example of a writer who actually acted on my impulse. The segment in question focused on Eoin Colfer, the Irish author of the massively successful Artemis Fowl book series. At the time of the segment's filming, Colfer lived in a modest row house near the town center of Wexford, Ireland. After the birth of their first child, he converted a shed in the back of their narrow garden into an office, and, by the looks of it, he did it right. The building is clad in red stained wood, with visible slatting and a modern slanted roof. Inside there's room only for a desk that faces wall-to-wall windows looking back at the house. Behind him is a simple shelf holding the books crafted in the space. It's actually hard to find images of the shed online. The picture at the top of the post, extracted from Colfer's Twitter account, is one of the better examples I could find. Here's another incomplete image that showcases the shelf behind the desk: And one that reveals some of the front windows: The television segment we watched did a much better job of showcasing the shed's pleasing, depth-supporting aesthetics, both inside and outside. But the above images provide a good general sense of the space. Perhaps non-surprisingly, Colfer no longer writes in this modest shed. A little internet sleuthing reveals that he eventually moved to a stately manner house, situated on 14 acres in the countryside outside Wexford proper. The property included a collection of free-standing stables and garages, one of which was converted into an elegant new office clad in light American oak. Even more recently, Colfer sold this property to move to Dublin. When you sell 25 million books, you have options. It was nice to see, however, that the spark that initiated this wildly lucrative and impactful writing career was a small but intentional shed built at the back of a narrow garden. Perhaps my daydream wasn't so far-fetched after all. The post Blog first appeared on Cal Newport.

Subconscious | Subconscious Alpha

2.704

I'm closing in on a functional MVP for Subconscious, targeting an alpha in Q1 2022. Short term, the alpha will be a tiny, single-player iOS notes app for self-organizing ideas. You own your data, Subconscious just saves it to plaintext files. The simplest thing that could possibly work. If you like Notational Velocity, you might like this. Long-term, I want to build toward a multiplayer tool for thought. Multiplayer social hypertext, built on open web3 protocols. Like Twitter meets Wiki. The internet of ideas. So, a little app with big dreams. Give it a shot if you have moderate expectations and are willing to be open-minded and patient as we build the plane in-flight. Sign up for Subconscious Alpha Waitlist

What I'm thinking about: networks

I recently ran a series of scenario planning exercises exploring the trajectory of forces driving the web3 phenomenon. This led me to pull two good books off of my shelf: Scenario Planning (Lindgren, Bandhold, 2009), and Learning from the Future (Fahey, Randall, 1998). Both offer useful exercises for scenario development.

Coming away from this process, I was newly surprised by the uneasy collision of two systems: states and networks.

Gordon Brander @gordonbrander

The story of the 21st c is about new networks cutting through formerly self-enclosed spaces. Network vs territory... Sketching to think.

December 1st 2018

1 Retweet 13 Likes

Internet money. What does it mean to make money legible to software? What does it look like when markets and Turing-completeness intersect? How might markets be programmed? What would a market look like without humans in the loop? Smart contracts all the way down? Smooth money, striated citizenship. What does it mean when money and information can pass through borders, but people can't? Stateless money, stateless people. Two very different meanings. Algorithmic trading and algorithmic surveillance. Exchange and control. How will these forces intersect with other borderless forces? Climate, migration, arbitrage, The Klept, work-from-home, 3D printing, drones, AR, VR, pandemic... Network society. Others were asking these questions 20 years ago. Mark C. Taylor's "Moment of Complexity" opens this way:

While moments of radical transformation can never be defined with precision, the collapse of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, signaled a decisive shift from an industrial to an information society. With the ostensible triumph of multinational, informational, or digital capitalism, walls, which once seemed secure, become permeable screens that allow diverse flows to become global. What is emerging from the flux of these flows is a new network culture. [...] This trajectory suggests that the moment of complexity can be understood in terms of the shift from a world structured by grids to a world organized like networks. [...] What, then, is a grid, and what is a network? This question, which generates many more questions, is deceptively simple. We might begin to appreciate its complexity by conducting what Kierkegaard once described as a "thought experiment."

Imagine a grid. What is its structure? What is its function? Are all grids the same or are they different? If they are the same, why? If they are different, how? Do grids change or remain the same over time? What is the relation of parts to whole and whole to parts in grids? When did grids first emerge? Where did grids first emerge? Who invented the grid? Where can grids be observed today? What is a grid today? What is not a grid today? What is the function of grids today? What is the architecture of grids today? Are grids simple or complex? Imagine a network. What is its structure? What is its function? Are all networks the same or are they different? If they are the same, why? If they are different, how? Do networks change or remain the same over time? What is the relation of parts to whole and whole to parts in networks? When did networks first emerge? Where did networks first emerge? Who invented the network? Where can networks be observed today? What is a network today? What is not a network today? What is the function of networks today? What is the architecture of networks today? Are networks simple or complex? What is the relationship between grids and networks? How do you build things together as a network society? How do you learn together as a network society? Does a network society need tools for networked thought?