

ACTIVISM REVISITED:

Personal reflections on trying to make a difference

By Daniel Christian Wahl

If success or failure of this planet and of human beings depended on how I am and what I do [...] HOW WOULD I BE? WHAT WOULD I DO?

—R. Buckminster Fuller

We cannot individually comprehend the range, depth and detail of the consequences we are collectively generating for ourselves.

—Tom Atlee (2002)

My plane is inbound to Amsterdam. For the next two days I will be joining a group of innovators, futurists, designers, activists, and technologists who have been invited on behalf of the Dubai Futures Foundation to brainstorm and envision what the Museum of the Future exhibition for the 2017 Dubai Government Summit might reveal to its visitors about the world of 2050. How did I end up in this film and on this plane?

For more than five years I would not fly to avoid the carbon emissions and environmental impact associated with this mode of transport. I wanted to walk my talk. I was somewhat indignant of

people who jetted around the planet, in a similar way I had been indignant about meat-eaters when I was a vegetarian for a year. I still don't eat much meat, but I don't judge others for it anymore.

I started flying again, to teach sustainable design and futures techniques to activists, innovators, policy-makers, and students. I traveled by plane to do foresight work on climate change impact and community resilience with government agencies, to take part in climate summits and activist gatherings. I also built up a fair few "love miles" when visiting family and friends.



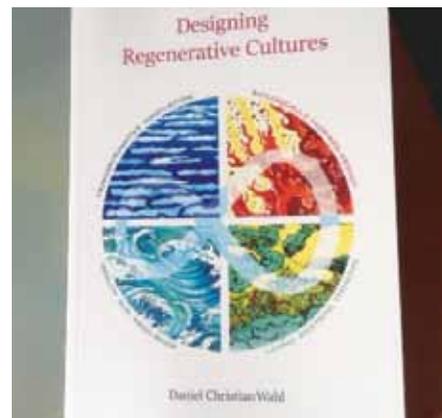
May East (first from the right) at the launch of the UNESCO Global Action Program.

Gaia Education

May East teaching a Gaia Education course to women in a village in Senegal.



The Museum of the Future, to be opened in Dubai in 2018.



Gaia Education

Gaia Education

Dubai Futures Foundation

On digging trenches, creating an other, and fighting against

There was a time when I would have questioned my own integrity and commitment to the cause over these actions. Have I sold out? Well, I am not sure if I earn enough to call it that. At least I make myself believe that I do most of my work to contribute to the emergence of diverse regenerative cultures, thriving local communities, and vibrant regional economies in global solidarity and collaboration.

Do I really not earn enough to call myself a sell-out? Enough seems to me a curiously relative concept that is subject to very different interpretations depending on someone's point of view or level of consciousness. Our perceived needs seem to increase rather than decrease as we get wealthier and move in wealthier circles.

Over the last few years I made it my regular practice to "count my blessings": health, a loving partner, good friends, meaningful work, access to beautiful nature, a roof over my head, running water, clothes to wear, and food to eat. None of that can be taken for granted in today's world. Not to mention the rank and privilege that come with being a white male in his mid-40s with a B.Sc. in Biology, a Masters in Holistic Science, a Ph.D. in Design, and a German passport, who speaks three languages fluently. Who am I to ever complain about income or really anything else?

I do make it a practice to gently point out to self-righteous activists—still stuck in the fight-the-system or blame-the-perpetrators loop—who are angrily mobilizing against the evil "one percent," that most of the folks who camped out in front of Wall Street during Occupy were in fact themselves part of the top 10, many of the top five, and some even the top one percent of the global wealth pyramid (see www.theguardian.com/money/2015/oct/13/half-world-wealth-in-hands-population-inequality-report).

I personally know more than a handful of anti-globalization or climate change activists who are expecting an inheritance approaching a million dollars, simply because the properties their parents and grandparents live in have shot up in value. Expecting to own a

million dollars in assets puts you into the top one percent yourself. According to the Credit Suisse "Global Wealth Report 2015," 80 people (who would find a seat on a London double-decker-bus) own more than half of the world's wealth, while the bottom 71 percent of humanity share only three percent of global wealth.

Have a look at www.globalrichlist.com and enter your annual income and where you live in the world. I did that for someone getting by on less than 12,000 dollars a year in Spain, and guess what, that person is still in the lucky top 10 percent of the global comparison.

My point? What is the purpose of self-righteous finger-pointing and feeling superior about our transport or dietary habits, our political convictions, our oh-so-evolved level of awareness, or for being a little further down the global wealth pyramid constructed on hundreds of years of colonialism and exploitation of people and planet?

What is the point in beating oneself up over one's own imperfections or privileges we were born with? We need to start with self-compassion and gratitude for what we have, and then reach out to others to co-create a world that works for all of humanity and all of life. Trench-digging activism, based on more of the "them-against-us-thinking" that got us into this mess in the first place, will not heal this ailing world.

On building alternatives and activating a more beautiful world

To make the world work in the shortest possible time for 100 percent of humanity, through spontaneous cooperation and without ecological offense or the disadvantage of anyone.
—Buckminster Fuller

To shift from a "story of separation" to a "story of interbeing" is how Charles Eisenstein framed the transition ahead in *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*. In my recently published book *Designing Regenerative Cultures*, I explore how we might be able to individually and collectively facilitate culturally creative conversations

that will help us to co-create this future.

We are capable of shifting our culture's guiding myths and central story from the narrative of separation to the narrative of interbeing. Together, and only together as one humanity in service to life, will we be able to create that more beautiful world. It is already all around us, but the story of separation makes us blind to seeing it.

During my time at Findhorn, I had the opportunity to collaborate with May East on a wide range of projects. May is Brazilian and has been an activist since the 1980s. She is a cofounder of the Global Ecovillage Network and Gaia Education, and directed the United Nations training centre CIFAL Scotland. More than most people I know, May embodies the role of a global change agent and bridge-builder between the often-separate worlds of civil society, business, and governance.

Her work stretches from teaching capacity-building courses to activists all around the world, to working with local and national governments on a wide range of sustainability issues, and delivering sustainability training courses for UNITAR and UNESCO. May has actively contributed to the collaborative process that formulated the new UN Sustainable Development Goals.

May and I share our passion for helping diverse constituencies and stakeholders explore whole-systems design solutions that draw on collective intelligence and integrate diverse perspectives and needs into a win-win-win approach. I firmly believe that through bridge-building and new types of collaboration across "the trenches" we will be able to co-create a more sustainable world. We need to maximize the edges. The good old permaculture design principle suggests that the more diversity we integrate, the more creative, diverse, and generative our solutions will be.

May once shared her personal practice of activism with me: "The first thing I do after my morning meditation is to consciously choose

where I will put my attention that day, what conversations and projects I will *activate* through the power of my attention."

We are all activists, activating one story or another through the power of our attention and the way we participate in our communities. We can choose to activate and embody the story of separation or the story of interbeing. We can choose what kind of world we want to bring forth together with the people we are in contact with.

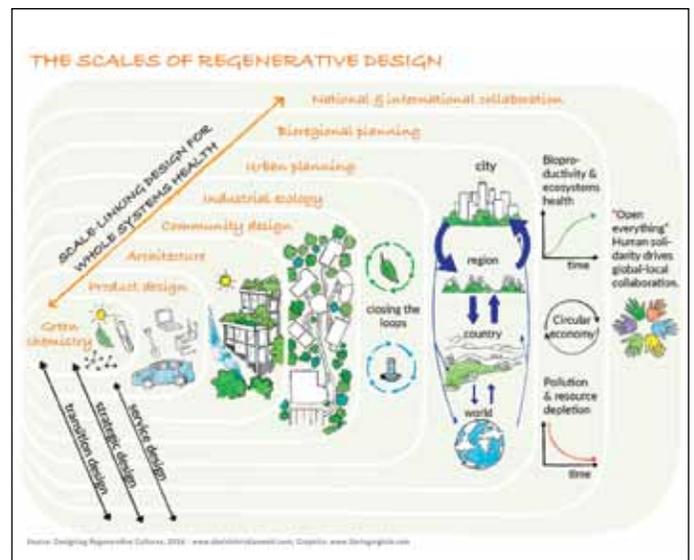
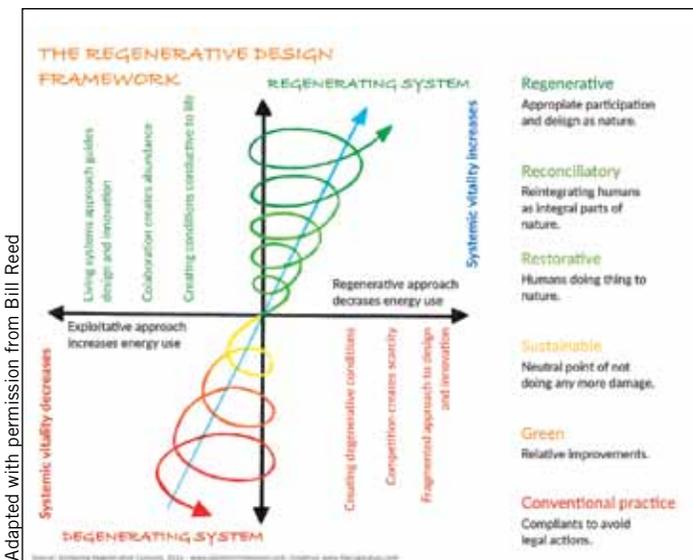
We are all designers! Regenerative cultures are co-created by people who have become conscious of the way their participation activates certain possibilities—people who share a vision for a better world, collaborating to co-create a thriving future for all Life. Mindful practitioners and conscious activists ask themselves every day: How can I activate the future potential of the present moment by living a more beautiful world today?

The first step is to be *aware* of what we are activating in the world by the power of our attention and the story we propagate through our thoughts, words, and actions. We all are, already, shaping the future of things to come, by the power of our attention and by both our actions and our failures to act in the face of converging crises and abundant opportunities to create a more beautiful world. 🌱

of things to come, by the power of our attention and by both our actions and our failures to act in the face of converging crises and abundant opportunities to create a more beautiful world. 🌱

We are capable of shifting our culture's guiding myths and central story from the narrative of separation to the narrative of interbeing.

*Daniel Christian Wahl is an educator, activist, and consultant, specialized in whole systems design and transformative innovation for regenerative cultures. A member of the International Futures Forum, a fellow of the RSA, and a Findhorn Foundation fellow, he has co-authored all four dimensions (social, ecological, economic, worldview) of Gaia Education's UNESCO recognized online curriculum in Design for Sustainability (see www.gaiaeducation.org/index.php/en/how/learning). His book *Designing Regenerative Cultures* is published by Triarchy Press, 2016 (see www.triarchypress.net/designing-regenerative-cultures.html).*



Adapted with permission from Bill Reed

Graphic Design, Flavia Gargiulo