

On Collapse and Regeneration

Walking the Line Between Denial and Despair

On Jan 16, 2020, Jenn our new incoming NewStories Executive Director wrote: *[This article from Jem Bendell came](#) through my feeds today. I don't agree with everything he says but it is very similar to the discussions we've been having. Love the term "Deep Adaptation" to describe this. With much love, Jenn*

Her inquiry inspired me to write this piece.

Lynnaea Lumbard, Board Chair, NewStories, January 18, 2020

Dear Jenn,

For many years, [NewStories](#) has been working with the [Two Loops](#) map of a world in transition. The first loop represents the rise and fall trajectory of our current civilization, based on a set of worldviews and values which emerged in the Scientific Revolution of the late 1700's. We at NewStories talk about this loop as having peaked and being in decline. The second loop shows the birth cycle of a new emerging civilization based on a different set of beliefs and values which alter our relationships to Earth and to other humans. Initially it too seems to decline before the new ideas and values systems begin to gain strength and become a new blueprint, a new possibility, a new kind of civilization for Humanity. This pattern parallels the metaphor of imaginal cells emerging in a cocoon initially being killed by the old cells before they get strong enough to coalesce into a butterfly.

down, communications stop, water runs out, millions have diseases, and the animals go extinct along with the birds and the bees, we will feel it.

It is a very sad thought that only very rich could survive, or only the people with guns, and we end up truly in a Mad Max world.

Many, perhaps all of us are experiencing this collapse at an array of different levels of acceptance or denial about what we see is happening. Some people truly believe that climate change doesn't exist, it won't affect my life, and/or there's nothing I can do about it so I will go about my life with the attitude of business as usual or party on. Others like Bill McKibben have been warning us for years that we needed to do something, but with some underlying belief that we actually had the capacity to turn it around or churn up enough political will to bring those carbon numbers down.

Only recently have we moved into a different phase of the transition process. Many are now beginning to realize that we're not getting out of this, that the consequences of our much earlier inaction and lack of cohesive vision are wreaking havoc on our ecosystems, and threatening our basic needs to survive. Many highly respected scholars and researchers go as far as to posit humanity's extinction as a species. Rick Ingrasci recently sent out Ian MacKenzie's article "It's Already Too Late." <https://medium.com/@ianmack/its-already-too-late-reflections-at-the-end-of-the-decade-d3d2f414f547>.

Much of the debate, even among those who have recognized the signs for years, comes down to how much collapse are we imagining and where do we see ourselves on the loops. Two voices have stood out in this debate. The first is Jem Bendell, who only started publishing his writing on Deep Adaptation two years ago. He has been holding the pole of 'we're wasting valuable time energy and resources if we are not willing to accept what is inevitable.' In some ways his emphasis evokes the Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' stages of grief process where we come to accept death, in this case that our civilization is destined to end in collapse just like every other civilization in human history.

I spent last evening with Lucinda Herring, a Funeral Director who has written a book on [Reimagining Death](#). Our small dinner party took a deep dive into the death process and what we are likely to experience as things get really tough for our community. We knew somehow that we will all be called into the service of helping people or their loved ones to die and, perhaps as important, to die to the dreams we've had for our own future or the future of Earth. We recognized that we are already living in a constant state of grief for the loss of so many things we cherish.

Jem holds the position that (a) societal collapse is already underway and will get worse when industrial agricultural fails in the next decade or so, (b) that this is likely to be massively disruptive, perhaps even catastrophic, and (c) human extinction this century or next is possible. In other words, we're doomed, we're collapsing, let's face it and learn to adapt to a radically altered world. Civilizations all over the world have experienced collapse, almost always for the same basic reasons—overshooting their environment. Yet it's one thing to experience collapse in a contained group or ecosystem--Easter Island, Mayan, Aztec, Roman—but quite another to face

the collapse of the planet's ecosystems as we humans have known them. Earth has gone through many great changes, many of which have produced the next stage of evolution. Photosynthesis, rise of animals. She's been hit from the outside by meteorites and gone through more catastrophic changes. She may survive into a new incarnation of how further life evolves here on Earth, but will we?

Many good things come out of facing death directly. It reorganizes priorities and has us ask deep questions about what really matters. New skills arise, new perspectives emerge. Many communities, including Cortes in British Columbia, are starting to work within the Deep Adaptation model, exploring the questions of 'how then shall we live?' How will we be present to a radically changed world which may bring our own death sooner than we imagined? To me, this is working with the bottom part of the first loop, under the bridge, learning to be with the collapse itself.

A counterpoint to Jem's work is Jeremy Lent's work (<https://www.jeremylent.com>), also deeply thoughtful and researched. Jeremy sees many of the same patterns of collapse, but contexts it as the opportunity for Deep Transformation. He heralds our capacity to transform ourselves, our world-views and our actions. It's as if he is looking at both loops, not just the first one, as well as the changes in the middle. A very provocative dialogue occurred in writing on-line several months ago on Facebook. Here is Jeremy's response to Jem's article above that you sent me: <https://patternsofmeaning.com/2019/04/11/our-actions-create-the-future-a-response-to-jem-bendell/>. And here's Jem's response back to Jeremy: <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2019-04-15/responding-to-green-positivity-critiques-of-deep-adaptation/>. Jeremy has spoken at both the Summer and Winter Gatherings in the past couple of years—you might want to think about coming to one of them this year and bringing your children.

Having a doctorate in Transformational Psychology, I tend to fall into the Deep Transformation camp. I do see that we are not going to escape the collapse of much of what we hold dear and that we do, indeed, need to prepare for the possible, the probable and the likely. At all levels, from food and water to psychological tools and spiritual practices for holding center and finding calm in the midst of chaos. Actually, as we talked last night at dinner, not just finding calm but also joy and vitality.

I see this as the task that New Stories is addressing. How do we understand enough to see what's happening, move out of denial and to begin to process our grief about it? Then how do we find joy in every moment we're alive while also acknowledging that we are never away from the grief of the losses we are experiencing. The grief sounds like a deep mournful bell, just out of earshot, like a gong in a deep dark river flowing underneath us in the bottom of our souls.

[Great Transition Stories](#) help give a context for how life goes through transformations and names some of what is emerging as part of a new paradigm. [NewStories](#) also focuses on working with groups and communities of how to move groups of people through the traumas of actual catastrophes. And in fact we can't train people fast enough and probably need to put energy into creating or connecting networks of facilitators ready to work in communities as they face disruption and collapse.

As much as we could name many who are outlining the gloom side of things, there are also vast numbers of people who are working for Regeneration. Just today I received this invitation from Magenta Ceiba who is executive director of the Bloom Network. community@bloomnetwork.org. She's doing a series of zoom calls on Flipping the Media Narrative towards Regenerative Cultures, very aligned with what we are doing. Her work is very similar to some of what we do, though directed towards a different generational audience. She is someone you might find interesting to meet. Michael Dowd is another colleague who has vast materials on what he is now calling Post Doom, <https://postdoom.com>. He just posted a [conversation with Terry Patton](#) (a very brilliant evolutionary/integral thinker) on this same topic. And, of course, we are on the Collapse and Regeneration band-wagon also. I, along with Heather, Jon and Sommer, will be taking the Regeneration meme into the Evolutionary Leaders Conference we are holding at the Whidbey Institute in June.

For me, transformation has been my life's work. I have seen and experienced transformation happening in an instant. A complete reset of beliefs and energetics resulting in spontaneous remissions from cancer, or a complete drop of an attachment to years of work in an instant. Poof. That happened to me right before I took on NewStories in 2008. My trajectory or the form of it changed—I trans-formed, changed form overnight. Well, it did take a little while for the new form, NewStories, to come in. I also hold the fractal belief of 'as above, so below', that the same patterns occur at different levels of scale. And my working assumption has been that the processes that allow an individual person to transform can be applied in the larger collective of humanity. That's how one can talk about [Humanity Growing Up](#). Or [Humanity being Initiated](#).

We have tended to take our current model of Patriarchy as an end game, as humanity's maturity, its being grown up. But what if Patriarchy is a stage in Humanity's development, like an adolescent boy pushing away from his mother who thinks he can do anything he wants, take or rape anything he wants with no consequences. Growing up would be recognizing the consequences of one's actions. Growing up for the masculine is NOT the lone ranger but coming into the sacred marriage of the masculine and feminine and entering into community via the world tree (as the shamanic initiations call it).

As far as we may collapse, as painful as I know I will experience the losses, I still hold out the possibility of transformation, of a global mind shift that can redeem humanity. Will I live through it? Maybe, maybe not. Maybe it will take generations, though there have been changes in culture that have happened much more quickly, like the fall of the Berlin wall or the mobilization of women for the war effort in WWII. But this is a global change that's needed, the hope embedded in the story of [Humanity as a Superorganism](#). Will we be able to bring the random pieces together to see that we are a unified whole? There is a difference between unified and uniform. We are each important parts of the whole, we are not the same, any more than the liver and the heart and the brain are the same. Yet they are part of the whole.

Our work over the next few years is to walk the line between denial and despair in ourselves, in our organization, and with the people we facilitate. Neither are an option. We must face the truth of the collapse that is unfolding and do our best to meet the challenges of rapid change without falling into despair. We need to feel our grief and also find our joy in celebration. I believe that holding the tensions between these opposites will eventually engender the transcendent function

that will take us to a new, never before experienced consciousness. We must be brave and steadfast and take care our ourselves and others.

We each have choices to make, and the choices we make today determine tomorrow. I am deeply encouraged by your choice to join the [NewStories Team](#). May we continue to co-create the future we want to live in together.

With love, gratitude, and anticipation,

Lynnaea
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Here are some follow up explorations:

Why the World Doesn't End: Michael Meade.
The Archetype of the Apocalypse: by Edward Edinger

And some relevant and provocative quotes (courtesy of Michael Dowd):

“Civilization is, by its very nature, a long-running Ponzi scheme. It lives by robbing nature and borrowing from the future, exploiting its hinterland until there is nothing left to exploit, after which it implodes. While it still lives, it generates a temporary and fictitious surplus that it uses to enrich and empower the few and to dispossess and dominate the many. Industrial civilization is the apotheosis and quintessence of this fatal course. A fortunate minority gains luxuries and freedoms galore, but only by slaughtering, poisoning, and exhausting creation.”

~ William Ophuls

“When you’ve driven down a blind alley and are sitting there with your bumper pressed against a brick wall, the way forward, the only way to progress, starts by backing up. Revving the engine and hearing it labor and rattle as the gas gauge moves steadily toward that unwelcome letter E, or praying for a techno-miracle, are not particularly useful responses.”

~ John Michael Greer

“Human society is inextricably part of a global biotic community, and in that community human dominance has had and is having self-destructive consequences.” ~ William R. Catton

“The most difficult transition to make is from an anthropocentric to a bio-centric norm of progress. If there is to be any true progress, then the entire life community must progress. Any progress of the human at the expense of the larger life community must ultimately lead to a diminishment of human life itself.” ~ Thomas Berry

“The end of the human race will be that it will eventually die of civilization.”

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

“All of our exalted technological progress, civilization for that matter, is comparable to an axe in the hand of a pathological criminal.” ~ Albert Einstein

“Forests precede civilizations and deserts follow them.” ~ Francois-Rene de Chateaubriand

“Sustainability as usually understood is an oxymoron. Industrial man has used the found wealth of the New World and the stocks of fossil hydrocarbons to create an anti-ecological Titanic. Making the deck chairs recyclable, painting them red or blue, feeding the boilers with biofuels, and every other effort to ‘transform’ or ‘green’ the Titanic will ultimately fail. In the end, the ship is doomed by the laws of thermodynamics and by implacable biological and geological limits that are already beginning to bite. We shall soon be obliged to trade in the Titanic for a schooner — in other words, a post-industrial future that, however technologically sophisticated, resembles the pre-industrial past in many important respects.”

~ William Ophuls