

UK **LAUNCH** 04/09/2024 @ JOHN HANSARD GALLERY Southampton of **book**
Neuro-Futurism and Re-Imagining Leadership (Kai Syng Tan 2024) Correct as of 19/08/2024

Script of performance-lecture

Neuro-Futurism and Re-Imagining Leadership: Catalysing Change through Artful Agitation

KEY: **Pink**: Some keywords | *: Video clip | **Bold**: names

CREDITS: Music: Philip Tan. Film excerpts: *How to Thrive in 2050!* (Tan 2021) – watch [full film](#) on Vimeo @kaisyngtan. Further reading: Book chapters 2, 8, 12, 14, 17.

***SEAGULL**

Here we are, in **Southampton**.

It's my first time **here**, and I'm looking for a new flat, in what would become my new **stomping ground**. This would be my 9th **'home'** in my 18 years on this island. And when in Rome, or GREAT Britain, you talk about the weather. Obviously **migrants** have been swarming to the Motherland for its gorgeous seasons, often all in one single day. Magical.

As luck would have it, lightning strikes, and destroys the Google-maps app on my phone.

I become lost, so I wake up the **octo-pussy** on my body, whose **tentacles** helicopter me into the City Art Gallery, which is about 200 steps from here (John Hansard Gallery), or roughly 2000 steps for those with short legs.

EXHIBITION

Lo and behold, there's an exhibition, entitled *Found Cities Lost Objects: Women in the City* curated by **Lubaina Himid**.

Maps, she says, are **instruments of power**. The science of cartography allowed colonisers to navigate space in order to appropriate it, and exploit resources. Cities can be 'disabling'.

At the same time, they can also be places to make history, make money, and predict the **future**. Through maps made by women artists, Himid wants us to 're-view our own relationships with the city' and 'gain a greater sense of self', to re-claim 'lost lives and lost objects'.

Himid introduces us to a Londoner whom, after getting LOST from using an out-dated map, decides to draw her own. She would wake up at 5 am daily, to walk, eventually covering more than 3,000 miles to index 23,000 street names across the capital. In 1936, **Phyllis Pearsall** publishes her first *A-Z Atlas to London*, which Himid describes as a 'staple of Londoners' glove compartments and handbags for decades', transforming Pearsall 'from bed-sitter to house-hold name'. Himid labels her as 'one of the most successful business-people of the twentieth century'. HOWEVER, Pearsall identified as an **artist** – like Himid.

Himid, who was born in Zanzibar, was the leader of the Black Art Movement of the 1980's. This was a pivotal development in the history of art that's been all but forgotten. Or ignored. Or *erased*.

NEURO-FUTURISM'S BRAND OF LEADERSHIP

As I leave the gallery, I wonder: Aren't Pearsall and Himid the **embodiments of leadership** through how they **MAKE**:

- **make mappings,**
- **make art,**
- **make cities,**
- **make WORLDS,**
- **make meaning,**
- **make new paths,**
- **make change and**
- **make futures?**

After all, the term 'leadership' originally referred to 'travelling, endurance and guidance'. Doesn't this evoke the **LABOUR, blood, sweat and tears of path-finders** — especially those **DIS-ABLED of resources**. WHY HAVEN'T we been **studying, elevating and CELEBRATING** the efforts of those who are **DIFFERENT** — either by **DESIGN OR CIRCUMSTANCES, OR BOTH?** Aren't they **Deviant AND Defiant Doers, Dreamers and Daredevils**, because they have to work *within* and work *around* dominant, normative systems that are often NOT made BY them or FOR them?

Their **ARTFULNESS** — by which I include not just their art, but their **ARTISTRY, IMAGINATION, WIT, GRIT and resource-fulness** — that they **MOBILISE to DISRUPT** and **hack** into systems that are often harmful to survive, and even **thrive and OFTEN CORALLING others along the way** — **SURELY THAT'S leadership?** Could we **GATHER** these **NON-NORMATIVE and NON-NEURO-NORMATIVE** forms of change-making and future-making and call it 'Neuro-Futurism'? prioritises **Power-sharing, Play, Planet and People from all walks** — **GUIDED** by those who are **DIFFERENT AND ARTFUL** — including humans like Himid, Pearsall, and and non-humans like the **octopus?**

*ARTFUL OCTOPUS

*If you're looking for a mascot to bring to life what it means to **thrive**, look no further than the octopus.*

Pre-dating dinosaurs, octopuses have lived for 296 million years.

*The 300 species have beak-like jaws and superior eyesight, their soft bodies **rapidly contorting** to infiltrate small cracks. Octopuses have **3 hearts and eight tentacles**, each of which with a mind of its own, and carrying half a billion neurons or **'excitable cells'**.*

*Like Homo sapiens with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD octopuses are **insatiably curious** crafty, and **allergic to boredom**. One octopus at an aquarium learnt to switch off lights while another escaped from its tank, but on dry land, died — killed, literally, by boredom.*

OCTO-PUSSY

And if we're looking for a **hyperactive** OCTOPUS in the form of a **CRAZY CAT** WOMAN, look no further.

Hi, I'm Kai. I'm a **chimera**, a tentacular *Octo-Pussy* — **TERRIBLY** original, I know.

I've been chewing over leadership, the future, and the future of leadership, ever since I had **motion-**

sickness. The late founder of mobilities studies **John Urry** describes the world as 'being on the move' and an 'oyster' for those who are mobile.

But with the revolting turn of events — pun FULLY intended! — the world has MOVED on, and backwards, and is in **motion AND COMMOTION**, while the oyster has become rancid for many....

Sorry that's a BAD taste joke. OBVIOUSLY, Plebs (plebians) *cannot* afford oysters — or oysters-mushrooms — to begin with.

P-PROBLEMS85

I don't know about you, but I *do* have a Problem with this! Have Pale, stale approaches to 'leadership' Perpetuated our **Problems with a capital P**:

- Power imbalance
- Public service that ignores 'public' and 'servitude'
- Policies that Persecute the Poor or Peculiar
- Practices that EXECUTE non-white body-mind-worlds
- Pipe-line Problems, not just for oil — thanks Putin — but for FRESH Prototypes of Power.
- Poverty — of imagination — just to name a few?

Since 'standard' approaches to 'leadership' stink, *surely* we have to **Protest**, by coming up with **creative, atypical tactics**, and instead have a whale of a time?

*WHALES

(Text on screen as placards held by protesting killer whales.) *Whale sounds and sirens*

Techne = Art. Augment reality. Digital = tech and toes. Make life High Definition. Elevate Humanity See with your heart. Thrill my body. Blow my mind. Feel others' body blows. Embody others' pain and joy. Make your heart sore = soar. Make my day. Exercise your rights. Kick up a Storm. Sight + Site of Dissent. Equity. Creativity. Justice.

Don't you dare. Don't you care?

SPOILER ALERT!

First, the bad news: There are NO quick fixes, NO straight ANSWERS. Yet, there's also NO time for despair, NO room for fear. We MUST CONTINUE TO

- to ASK QUESTIONS
- to ASK BETTER questions
- to DEMAND BETTER,
- to BELIEVE that there CAN be BETTER news,
- and that WE have the AGENCY to make the news BETTER
- so as to dismantle VIOLENT master narratives and practices
- by SHOUTING BACK,
- JOINING FORCES and

- CO-CREATING BETTER TOOLS.

Racism — and oppression in general — function to DISTRACT you from doing the work, explains novelist **Toni Morrison**. It WEARS YOU DOWN so that you run out of time or energy to WORK THINGS OUT or to THINK for yourselves.

This is where artists can step in, to help CONNECT the dots AND to be dotty. By doing so, we're merely FOLLOWING in the footsteps of ARTFUL movers and shakers before us, like **Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith**.

CLARIFYING NEURODIVERGENCE

And THIS is the juncture to clarify why neuro-futurism must be an ANTI-COLONIAL process.

SURE, this is NO EASY FEAT, because the SET-UP — again PUN FULLY intended — that non-oyster-eaters haven't signed up for constantly RE-affirms the West's view of itself as THE centre of knowledge, THE arbiter of WHAT COUNTS as knowledge, and THE ONLY source of 'civilized' knowledge. To PUSH BACK and to PUNCH UP, we cannot PULL any punches. There are many CREATIVE responses: We MUST

- RE-WRITE and RE-TELL our own STORIES
- RE-claim LOST OBJECTS and LIVES
- RE-CONNECT including with non-humans and the environment.
- AND RE-SET NEW VISIONS

— just as Himid has urged. THEREFORE, neuro-futurism doesn't just seek to INVERT medical and other deficit models of disability, BUT ALSO DISRUPT the dangerous, single story of neuro-divergence. Instead of Rain Man, autistic tech-bros – funny how cartoon tycoons are APPLAUDED for being WEIRD, and those of the WRONG class or WRONG colour are MOCKED — neuro-futurism proposes OTHER role models and OTHER models of leadership. The fight against ABLEISM WILL FAIL if

- white supremacy
- sexism
- classism
- Islamophobia
- TRANS-phobia
- XENophobia
- and OTHER TERRORIZING cultures and structures are reproduced.

So yes, you QUEER neuro-normativity AND hetero-normativity, but neuro-queering MUST be an INTERSECTIONAL, ANTI-COLONIAL PROCESS BEYOND BODY-MINDS and BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE of the global north.

Furthermore, to TEMPER the narrative of neurodivergence as a superpower or identity, which CAN be reductive, NEURO-FUTURISM explores the TRANSFORMATIVE AND INNOVATIVE capacities of ADHD, autism, dyslexia, Tourettes, and more.

These principals come to life in the **Neurodiversity and/in Creative Research Network**. Members include neuro-queering proponent **Nick Walker**, artist **ASHOK MISTRY**, people from the global south, clinicians, allies, AS WELL AS people BEYOND the 'classical' remit of neurodivergence, such as those recovering from stroke, leading to PRODUCTIVE antagonisms governed by kindness and LOVE.

As dyslexic author **Octavia Butler** states, 'Kindness eases change. **Love quiets fear**'.

COCK-ROACH PREMISE

Speaking of love and inter-species entanglement:

Do we know what this is? Don't be shy, This is a SAFE SPACE for FLUID knowledge-exchange!

Let me enlighten: **Tinder** is a terribly tacky and trashy dating app. I'm speaking scientifically, obviously, drawing on my *extensive* scholarly research and field work.

That's why I've invented **Hinder**, where you swipe right to members of other species, including those who AREN'T your type, OR STEREOTYPE, to co-create *better* futures together.

Could I have a **GUINEA PIG** – I mean VOLUNTEER? WHO wants to help OCTO-PUSSY FIND her SOUL-MATE in the form of THIS GOOD-LOOKER? ... ANYONE? Don't be shy, I don't bite – though YOU might! We'll be READING a section from the book together The pain won't last for TOO long -- it's a **SPEED-date** – so it's **SHORT, BITTER-SWEET and SOUR** – just like Yours Truly.

PLEASE?

LOVELY, we've found our EXPERT IN LOVE! Hi! I'm the Octo-Pussy. Who are you? What are your preferred PRONOUNS? Are you OK with reading off the screen? Let's dive straight in.

***COCK-ROACH: INTERACTIVE PERFORMANCE**

OCTO-PUSSY

Who are you? What have you got?

COCK-ROACH

Hi! People call me Cocky.
I'm 320 million years young,
so I've been around the block.

OCTO-PUSSY

Just 20 million years older than the octopus then.
Look, I'm *not* ageist, but you *are* too old for me.

COCK-ROACH

Wait — there're 4600 species of us.
What are you looking for?

OCTO-PUSSY

Not much, just someone to **change the world** with. Too soon? Or too late?

COCK-ROACH

Better late than never. I'll be your perfect **side-kick**.
From ice-cold places and deserts to nuclear radiation attacks, we've survived,
-- and will likely continue to **thrive** --
in your climate disaster movie un-folding now.

OCTO-PUSSY

Impressive. Humble too. And inquisitive.

Let me tell you what I love, which is what poet-teacher **bell hooks** says about **love**:

*The moment we choose to love, we begin to **move against domination, against oppression**. The moment we choose to love we begin to **move towards freedom**, to act in ways to **liberate ourselves and others**.*

Thoughts?

COCK-ROACH

Why do women
love talking about love?

OCTO-PUSSY

Old school. Charming. Come on then, give me quality **dad jokes** on tap

COCK-ROACH

Sure! I can wing it anywhere.

OCTO-PUSSY

Hilarious. Is that why you're
creepy, hiding in dark and filthy spaces?

COCK-ROACH

Well, that shows that
I'm not afraid to get down and dirty — especially with you.

OCTO-PUSSY

So hot. Can you tickle my mind?
bell hooks has me hooked. She says:

***Leaders** are individuals who are **accountable to the group**,
who show **love** and **compassion** through their actions,
and can engage in **successful dialogue**.*

OCTO-PUSSY

Does that ring any bell?

COCK-ROACH

Taco Bell?

OCTO-PUSSY

FFS.

COCK-ROACH

Wait! I've got another dad joke.
I excel in team app-roach — geddit?

OCTO-PUSSY

G*d knows why I'm single.

COCK-ROACH

It gets better – your (sic) in luck!
I eat any-thing. I can even live for weeks

without my head!

RE-STRATEGISER

Stop beating around the bush. Show me your team-work
and eating capabilities. Chop chop!

COCK-ROACH

This is what I call a
'successful dialogue'!

COCK-ROACH ENDS

Wasn't that a GREAT DATE? ROUND OF APPLAUSE. THANK YOU!

And thank YOU for being GOOSE-BERRIES.

LOVE

If you LOVE that, you're in luck. The four-letter word – love – underpins my **A-Z** of 26 leadership strategies – though just not in the usual order!

My brand of LOVE and Leadership are **feet-stomping ACTION VERBS**, **away from arm-chairs and comfort zones**, as **EMBODIED EXERCISES AND EXPERIENCES**, NOT just perfectly-formulated text or theory on paper.

Un-learning Tentacularly, for instance, proposes **9 ARMS-MINDS**, each beginning with the letter C, like courage, critical creativity and **COLLAGE**, and are **DRIVEN** by **3 hearts**: of **intersectionality, neuro-divergence and decolonisation**. **Un-learning Tentacularly** pitches the **OCTOPUS** against the **white elephants** of **racism, ableism and elitism**, and aims to generate **SEA CHANGE** within AND beyond the **ivory tower**.

MAPPING /LEADERSHIP: RELATIONAL + MOBILE + CYCLICAL270

Furthermore, Neuro-Futurism is a MAP with MANY maps – or as I call them, **MAPPINGS**, which I use as both a noun AND verb, and which further reference yet other mappings and **KNOWLEDGE FORMATIONS**

HOW IDEAS, ISSUES, PEOPLE, STUFFS, **INTER-TWINE** with ONE ANOTHER (and are NOT distinct or separate), AND HOW THEY'RE **DYNAMIC, CYCLICAL** or **unstable PROCESSES** (instead of static, linear and CAUSAL) are HALLMARKS of NEURO-FUTURISM as a MAPPING and LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK.

The **Fascist** riots – of the 1980s, THIS summer, and others to come – SHOW how colonialism lives on, and continue to **run and RUIN lives**. But that's just the **VISIBLE** tip of the ice-berg. It's what we **DON'T** see -- the **INVISIBLE** but **DEEPLY-INGRAINED cultures and structures** that we've inherited – WHERE the most difficult work is, and where **creativity, creation, and co-creation** are **VITAL** – and where **ARTFUL** strategies like neuro-futurism can step in.

bell hooks clarifies that the value of art isn't to 'tell it like it is', but to **'imagine what is possible'**. Neuro-Futurism seeks to

- VISUALISE and MAKE VISIBLE the hidden or erased
- to open up spaces for RE-NOURISHMENT,
- as well as reflection,
- AND re-strategising – because wins aren't fixed, and we must stay vigilant and push back the push back
- and, following Afrofuturism, which is a powerful cultural movement where artists, authors, and musicians re-write history and re-INVENT alternative futures of BLACK LIBERATION, ENVISAGE new futures,

To RIDE above the ROUGH SEAS, we work with STUDENTS/LEARNERS who help us UN-LEARN harmful habits and help BREAK vicious cycles. We also COLLABORATE with the next generations of artists whose practice nourish new queer and anti-colonial narratives and who WILL change our future. *No pressure!*

As Octavia Butler, who's the MOTHER of AFRO-FUTURISM warns, unless we build 'different leadership' by 'people with more courage and vision', we'll 'all go down the toilet'.

SO, JOIN US –

Let's stop dumping poo into our seas and future. Let's IMAGINE the *IM-POSSIBLE!* Customise my toolkit! Hack into MY version of neuro-futurism.

Make art, worlds, future, knowledge and trouble. Become more ADHD – take risks! DISMANTLE the master (sic) narrative of leadership. Become our partner(s)-in-crime – not performative allies. USE your privilege to do the heavy-lifting. DEVISE YET OTHER ANTI-COLONIALIST and NEURO-QUEERED ACTIONS where diverse, divergent and NEURO-DIVERGENT People and Places, and BIO-DIVERGENT Planets can Prosper via Play, Poetry, and (com-)Passion.

PALESTINE

IN FACT, you can START [HERE](#).

Draw on the mapping – AND BUY IT!

100% of the funding will be donated to [Visualizing Palestine](#) which has agreed to collaborate. Since 2012, this independent, non-profit collective has been utilising data and research to disrupt dominant narratives about Palestine. Bring this home!

UNTIL THEN, the artwork will be displayed [HERE](#)

*CAT

And [here](#) we are, in Southampton, This is my 16th [home](#), if we added Tokyo, Chicago, and a certain small tropical island.

Cats, like seagulls, THRIVE in cities, and are EXQUISITE food thieves. They're [itinerant](#), roaming the streets, to [re-cover](#) lost lives and lost objects. They're also ARTFUL, stopping you on your tracks, ASKING for LOVE!

We COULD be here ALL DAY ... I certainly could ... but the [deadline](#) for neuro-futurism is 2050, so there's no time to LOSE. [Let's get going.](#)