



CLA Special Issue Introduction

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Technology Culturalist and Decentered Futurist

The Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) special issue continues a busy year for CLA following the release of the latest book, CLA 3.0: Thirty Years of Transformative Research and the special CLA session at the Asia Pacific Futures Network (APFN) in Sept of 2022. Importantly, it allows the work of the authors contributing to this special issue to be showcased.

The CLA approach – as theory and methodology - works to create a more diverse and inclusive vision of the future. It can be used to surface and explore the underlying stories and power dynamics that shape the way individuals or groups relate to each other. It can also reveal existing patterns of exclusion and privilege that lead to exclusionary practices. By mapping out stories and metaphors, CLA creates an environment open to different perspectives, leading to better decision-making and more equitable outcomes. At a practical level, CLA offers individuals the inner awareness to sense and discover how the layers of external beliefs and structures constrain personal agency. By examining the present, the goal is to understand the barriers that constrain the present and open possibilities to explore new futures. This approach is both introspective and collaborative, acknowledging that you cannot envision an outpost in the future without addressing what drives the present forward. CLA works to create alternative futures by making everyday assumptions problematic and subject to examination (Inayatullah et al., 2022).

In conversation with Sohail Inayatullah, his recollections of the origins of CLA started with the misalignment of narratives, feeling that individual narratives never supported a reasoned outcome (Mercer & Sweeney, 2022).

"Voices flew past one another. Some shouted more data: others cited long philosophical tracts from their favourite philosophers (Marx or Hegel), and still, others spoke in metaphor language and finally, there were those in organizations merely wishing for some policy recommendations...."

The dissatisfaction with the argumentation that did not result in practical solutions drove the need to organize differences in narratives in a way that could be transformative. CLA came into being at the Bangkok World Futures Studies Federation course in the 1990s from the need to connect the narrative, structures, world view and metaphors into a unified method (Mercer & Sweeney, 2022). CLA has seen continuous growth in research awareness in the last 30 years and diversification of techniques and approaches through hundreds of workshops and research projects.

As the recently published third edition of the CLA reader (Milojević, 2022) attests, CLA as a research method and community continues to evolve both in-depth and adaptability. First, it can discriminate and map the differences between worldviews and foundational narratives. Second, it can be used to describe and envision a transformed future where many futures can be seen and created. Third, it can nudge organizations or professions from the current path toward an emergent future. Fourth, it can be used to explore the story and metaphor they tell about themselves and move towards a new self-identity creating a new guiding metaphor (Inayatullah, 2022).

The articles contained in this special issue explore many of the research methods available to CLA practitioners. The Adebowale and Agumba article uses CLA to explore the myths that frame the narratives about construction worker productivity (CLP) and create a detailed description of stakeholder perspectives. The study uses the ever-deepening layers of CLA inquiry to reveal that the intra-action between emerging technologies, construction managers, workers, and every project participant is essential for productivity growth. They argue that fully integrated systems would promote CLP growth and nudge professions and industries towards more desired environments for workers and stakeholders to benefit all involved.

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Adam Cowart's article delves deeply into the myth and metaphor layer of CLA, helping us to understand the intricacies of emplotment (arranging metaphors along a historical timeline as means to understand the narrative) as an organizing tool to bring greater fidelity to the deepest layer of CLA. He looks at the role of the metaphor to bridge the gap between the stakeholder's beliefs and the outcomes of the story. Situating the metaphors and myths distinctly along the narrative timeline helps to identify the misalignment of stakeholder narratives and provides clues to where the story may evolve in a post-truth world.

Peter Scupelli directs us toward the educational field when he asks if it matters when and how design students learn CLA and, in the process, creates a foundation for students of CLA to think more systematically about complex societal challenges. His contemporary research proposes three changes to how CLA can be taught to specific groups of students. The research provides a valuable framework for design educators to consider integrating CLA with design practices. The inclusion of CLA will encourage students to think more deeply about the implications of their designs, and educators can foster a more engaged and informed design community.

Veli Viramjoki's article offers an insightful look at the need to move beyond the traditional view of science and embrace the plurality of our understanding of the world. The paper establishes that one possible way to study the possible futures of science is to employ CLA to surface insights from the philosophy and history of science and science studies to understand better the complexities of the social, cultural, and political structures that shape our understanding of science. His argument provides a critical call to action for us to look beyond the traditional view of science and embrace the world's complexities.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in October 2022 hosted a workshop hosted by Ivana Milojević, Sohail Inayatullah, and Dr. Susann Roth with the sponsor, Samatha Hung. The included article summarizes the main points discussed at the workshop: the need to move away from "Nowism," the need to look beyond gender identity and create a 200-year present. In this present, grandchildren's future is foremost in the policies being created today. It also highlights the challenges that participants faced, such as the power of patriarchy, traditional hierarchical organizational systems, and women not always supporting each other. Finally, it emphasizes that if participants worked together and imagined outside the box, they could create a positive future.

Cate Houston's article "Futures with Friends" is a powerful, transformative journey of self-discovery. It can be a freeing experience that helps to create a sense of self-efficacy, enabling us to live a life of purpose and meaning. It encourages us to tap into our creativity, embrace our strengths and weaknesses, and plan for a better future. It is a testament to the power of CLA of the self.

The final piece in the special issue is a book review of the third instalment of CLA readers, "Thirty Years of Transformative Research" by Andrea Dieck.

The CLA approach offers practitioners a way to begin to think about how to bridge the gap between present beliefs and future possibilities. In other words, it can provide a space for open dialogue and creative thinking about potential solutions to problems. At a professional level, CLA can be used to examine the human-technology relationship with the goal of discovering the dispositions and dependencies that make up the 'Habitus of Technology' (Mercer, 2022). At a workshop level, CLA facilitates conversations and engagements between different stakeholders and provides a platform for developing more inclusive approaches and solutions. The Special Issue offers that CLA is a powerful tool for exploring the complex and entangled nature of our beliefs about the future. It has the potential to enable us to create better futures by providing insights into how we understand and interact with each other and our planet.

References

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