InfluencerCon Presents

ALCHEMY
Gatekeepers & Crashers: Thriving Or Dying?
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INTRODUCTION
GATEKEEPERS/CRASHERS: Thriving or Dying?

What is Influencer Conference?
Influencer Conference (InfluencerCon) exists at the intersection of values, culture, creativity & commerce.

InfluencerCon is a global content platform that identifies and supports influencer culture globally. Influencer culture is the unique space occupied by artist, entrepreneurs, innovators, philanthropist & technologist. By bringing tastemakers and game-changers across industries and territories together, InfluencerCon establishes itself as the standard bearer for those who are pushing boundaries and creating what is “NEXT”.

InfluencerCon breaks down traditional “silo-ed” thinking and encourage cross functionality. Our community presents a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in authentic influencer culture. Creativity, open and fair exchange, passion, collaboration and a commitment to rich and authentic experiences are critical elements of influencer culture. In turn, the InfluencerCon global community connects those engaged in meaningful and sustainable pursuits and assists them in actualizing their vision.

What is Alchemy?
Alchemy, is a digital journal that serves as an expansion of our conference theme.

The definition of alchemy is the medieval forerunner of chemistry, based on the supposed transformation of matter. It was concerned particularly with attempts to convert base metals into gold or to find a universal elixir. This defines exactly what we are seeking to do. Convert ideas and insights into something larger, more connected, shareable with universal elements. Alchemy allows us to go beyond our host cities and engage influencers who might not be able to attend or speak.

“Gatekeepers/Crashers: Thriving or Dying?”
The advent of technology and digital media was supposed to herald the end of the age of gatekeepers. The 21st century promised the democratization of communication and access. Now, almost 15 years into a new century, it begs the question whether that has that truly been the case? Has the power and privilege of gatekeepers subsided or, has the expansion of technology actually had the opposite effect, increasing their reach and power?

For all of the talk of the democratization of the creative process, gatekeepers are more firmly entrenched than ever. How do creators of arts based culture navigate and succeed, as the gates get higher? How do well-meaning gatekeepers connect to and enhance existing cultural ecosystems? We pull the covers back and reveal the true machinations behind culture, commerce and influence by bringing gatekeepers and gatecrashers face to face a modern day showdown between new age Visigoths and their roman emperor counterparts.
CREDITS
Philip L. McKenzie is the Global Curator of Influencer Conference. Influencer Conference is a global content platform that brings together tastemakers in the arts, entrepreneurship, philanthropy and technology to discuss the current and future state of influencer culture. From its beginnings in 2010 in NYC, InfluencerCon has grown to include London, Berlin, Detroit, Sao Paulo, Mumbai and Tel Aviv. Philip is responsible for building and working with global teams, identifying trendsetters for participation and the synthesis of the global theme.

Prior to that he was the Managing Partner of FREE DMC, an influencer marketing agency that specialized in integrated marketing strategy, digital content creation, and experiential events. In his roles with FREE DMC, Philip created strategic experiential campaigns for Jaguar, Sprite, Remy Martin and Belvedere Vodka to name a few.

After completing his MBA at Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business, Philip joined Goldman, Sachs & Co where he worked in Domestic Equity Trading. His first trading responsibilities were in the Healthcare sector followed by a role in Consumer Products where he traded companies such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Proctor & Gamble and McDonalds to name a few.

Philip is a passionate supporter of the arts. He has been a Supporting Partner of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre since 1999. He is formerly a Junior Associate of the Museum of Modern Art and a member of the Apollo Circle of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He is a rabid music fan and accomplished DJ. He spends his summers attending as many Dave Matthews Band concerts as humanly possible.

Prior to his Duke MBA, Philip earned a bachelor of business administration from Howard University majoring in finance with a minor concentration in philosophy.

Philip resides in Brooklyn but travels extensively wherever the wind takes him. He is working on a book with co-author, Michael Brooks titled *There Are No Shortcuts! A Revolutionaries Guide To The Future.*
Yves Louis-Jacques is a parter and strategist at InfluencerCon. He holds a dual Master of Public Policy degree from Sciences Po Paris and Columbia University, as well as a BBA from Howard University. Prior to InfluencerCon, Yves advised international donor organizations and INVESTMENT advisory firms on frontier market investment opportunities and facilitation initiatives. Yves also served as a financial analyst at the Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates in Abu Dhabi, where he tracked the performance of the UAE’s real estate market and analyzed the stability of the financial sector.

He was also a partner for FREE DMC, a marketing and content agency, where he led brand strategy and partnerships. Yves’ career began at Accenture, where he spent 8 years leading client engagements in the public service and media and entertainment groups. His work included organizational assessments, strategy support, and the implementation of financial reporting and market analytics solutions. Mr. Louis-Jacques is a Haitian national and speaks both Kreyol and French fluently.
Maitreyi Doshi-Joshi is a Graphic Designer and a Community Artist based in Pune, India. She is the founder and Principle Designer of Maitri Designs, a design studio that works on Print, Web, and Community Art Projects. Maitreyi, She has worked with the World Wide Workshop, New York as a Special Project’s Coordinator. She has worked as the Outreach and Marketing Coordinator with the Creative Alliance, Baltimore.

She moved back to India after living and working in the US for 6 years. She worked with Elephant Design as a Designer.

Maitreyi, was one of the delegates representing India at the Junior Summit held by MIT Media Lab, USA. She was part of the youth caucus that lobbied for youth participation at the UN World Summit on Information Society. She has published several articles on design, information, and communication technologies. Her activism gave her a chance to travel extensively at a young age.

Maitreyi has graduated from Concord University in rural West Virginia, USA with a degree in Graphic Design, Studio Art, and Political Science. Maitreyi’s desires to use art, and graphic design as a tool for social change lead her to pursue a Masters degree in Community Arts from the Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, USA.

She currently has started her own design studio called “Maitri Designs” which works on all kinds of Design and Community Arts.
“Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we’re being brainwashed to believe.

The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling – their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability.

Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them.

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.” - Arundhati Roy, War Talk

“When I decided to examine what it means to be a gatekeeper or a gatecrasher I initially approached it from a common ideological assumptions. My first assumption was these concepts are opposed to one another. There is a gate i.e. a barrier of some sort that must be accessed by those on the outside. That access comes only through a gatekeeper, a person or institutional control designed to limit access to those who have power. My second assumption was to
“We are all gatekeepers. We all have the means to control access to something, even if that something is “only” ourselves.”

particular status that is in constant flux with situational bias. Rather than being portrayed as oppositional points along an axis I would offer they have a yin-yang relationships. Rather it is our connection to these terms that imbue them with power and explain how we relate to them.

We have so democratized the idea of gatekeepers and gatecrashers it might be more a more realistic view that we are all gatekeepers, in one fashion or another. What needs to be contextualized is how we relate to these terms and how we use our newfound power as gatekeepers. The old way of thinking about and accessing the power dynamics of gatekeepers and gatecrashers is over and that leaves fertile ground for something new to flourish.

We are all gatekeepers. We all have the means to control access to something, even if that something is “only” ourselves. As our data becomes more important to corporations and governments alike, perhaps that is enough. But we’ll save that for another time. So if we are all gatekeepers where does that leave us? We must re-imagine our relationship to that nomenclature and ultimately to each other. The existing gatekeeper/crasher paradigm is an adversarial binary. It functions so well because it supports the existing scarcity model. Opportunities, access, financial resources are positioned as finite and scarce. If that is the status quo then gatekeepers are in possession of something powerful and valuable. Gatecrashers need those same resources and compete in order to gain them. On and on it goes. If that logic is turned on itself you begin to sow the seeds of change. If the world is an abundant place, with resources (however one measures them) for everyone then there is no need to compete in a zero sum framework. If we view each other as gatekeepers then we have a significant opportunity to alter that power relationship with each other.

Our world should become one that is networked in order to support and help one another realize our potential. Our duty is to re-imagine a gatekeeper not as a point to block or obstruct access but rather as a point to gain entry. If each of us is a mode of influence in a networked system that is open and managed from a position of abundance it is possible to outweigh the monopolistic interest of institutional gatekeepers. Such a system requires that its participants are held to a high standard and we are self policing. The behavioral norms, expectations, tools of measurement, and relationship to power of traditional gatekeepers must be rejected. In a world where we are all gatekeepers we can leverage our collective networks to become more connected and build sustainable movements that serve our community and ourselves.
An ‘Oríkì’ for the Times: Reflections on Wonder and Change

Economics of Happiness Conference, Portland
February 27 – March 1, 2015

This past year, on an October afternoon, we carefully secured the last piece of luggage to our truck, said a half-smiling, teary-eyed goodbye to our house, and drove away from our University home. We called that home Aurora, and my wife and I had lived in her dancing lights for a few years during our work as lecturers in a university in Nigeria. She had blessed us with so many gifts, so many treasured memories: we watched Alethea, our one-year old daughter, spit out her first maybe-words in Aurora; we planted our first garden under her amused gaze, and experimented with fusing Indian and Nigerian cuisines when we weren’t attending meetings or marking examination scripts. In many ways we were born in Aurora, but now it was time to say goodbye – perhaps for the very last time.

As I drove away, careful to acknowledge the rattling protests of the humongous heap of books and unwieldy furniture we had accumulated during our sojourn as academics, I started to think about what we were doing – and how I didn’t quite have a name for it. Our colleagues did. Some thought leaving the privileged positions we occupied in search of some kind of bohemian existence was a ‘mistake’; our students and a few friends, quite sad to see us go (even though we are expected to return to the University in two years), felt that our quest for a smaller life and keener days was inspirational. Between Ej, my wife, and I, our families wondered if we would earn just as much money as we had earned lecturing.

Bayo Akomolafe (PhD)
Coordinator
International Alliance for Localization

Bayo Akomolafe is a lecturer and ethnopsychotherapeutic researcher in Covenant University, Nigeria. He is also the Coordinator of the International Alliance for Localization, whose mission is to protect and renew ecological and social well-being by promoting a systemic shift away from economic (and epistemic) centralization or globalization towards localization. He is an international speaker, author, and poet-activist for a radical paradigm shift in collective consciousness. Bayo and Ijeoma, his wife of Indian descent, are passionate about alternative futures - and spend their days unlearning with Alethea-Aanya, their young daughter.
However, through the interstices of a thousand labels, behind the many names people had contrived to understand our transition and make sense of our movement, we had a song; a queer kind of knowing that didn’t lend itself easily to the logics and data about how life ought to be lived. We had something ‘else’, something wilder, something that would not be contained in the chaste and claustrophobic boundaries of an explanation: we had an Oríkì.

An Oríkì is a cultural spectacle among the Yoruba; it is a deep spiritual reckoning with entangled worlds, hidden histories, peeping ancestors, and roving essences.

Where I come from, among the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria, names are important. They tell stories. My name is Adebayo. It means ‘I have met ease and pleasantness’ – a claim my wife would gently repudiate! My other name, Akomolafe, means something close to ‘one who teaches others the good life’. But it wasn’t until recent that I realized that I had a gift deeper than names could convey, more nuanced than a birth certificate has space to accommodate. An Oríkì is a cultural spectacle among the Yoruba; it is a deep spiritual reckoning with entangled worlds, hidden histories, peeping ancestors, and roving essences. It is often embodied by praise-poetry. It is said that one who doesn’t know his Oríkì has lost his spiritual story. Oríkis are like names, and yet they are very much unlike names – names are fixed, often brief, and often embarrassing – especially if your parents deem it fit to call you Voldemort or something that might be a fitting moniker for a biological curiosity. Oríkis have no such fixity. If you happened upon a name, materially reconfigured and embodied, it might look like a red spot in an ocean of white – tame and unassuming, serving to identify a location, to mark a spot. An Oríkì on the other hand would look like fire – not a cultivated bonfire but a wild uncircumscribable harlot with golden hues as plumage, pulling in the sun and the sky and the soil into its dancing fury. To evoke an Oríkì is to wonder after the ‘essence’ of the recipient, to be in the moment while weaving a tapestry of adoration that might include dance, song, story, poetry and even gift-giving. It is a name without alphabets, the wonder beneath it all, names made keener.

So when, last year, a feisty Yoruba woman and academic colleague, bemused by the seemingly intractable assemblage of Indian-Greek names we had given to Alethea-Aanya, asked me if I had an Oríkì for our daughter, I didn’t know what to say. But it made me wonder if beyond names, beyond the neurotic rituals of language, beyond our best tools and analysis, there was an Oríkì for these times of upheaval and awakening.
Margaret Wertheim, in her recent article – The Limits of Physics – reminds us that all languages parse the world into categories – but not every aspect of our experiences fits neatly into those categories. While some cultures learn to respect ambiguities and definitional monstrosities as critical to the continuance of said cultures, other collectives become ‘obsessed with ever-finer levels of categorisation as they try to rid their system of every pangolin-like ‘duck-rabbit’ anomaly. For such societies... a kind of neurosis ensues, as the project of categorisation takes [more and more] energy and mental effort’, and, ‘whatever doesn't parse neatly in a given linguistic system can become a source of anxiety to the culture that speaks this language’.

Today we are witnessing this exhausting anxiety as we reach the ends of our tethers. As dominant myths and single stories about what it means to be alive wither away, as climate change reminds us that we are perhaps not lords over nature as we used to think we were; as the growth paradigm reinforces an techno-consumerist empire of multinationals; devastated ecosystems, dwindling diversities and broken communities; as education-so-called strips from us our sincerest questions and inmost songs; as nation-states and representational politics fail to address our profoundest hopes and tensions, and as the prosperity and happiness promised by compliance to industrialized society hollows out, we are faced – as it were – with questions about what a more beautiful world could look like, and what we can do to make it real for us and for our children.

In an effort to make sense of all of today’s unfolding anomalies, many insist that today’s challenge, today’s gripe is between ‘us’ and ‘them’, between those who are awakened and those still asleep in the clutches of the Matrix, between the 99% and the 1%, between evil and beauty, between justice and injustice, between the North and the South or between both and the modern abstraction of linear growth, between individualized actions and systemic changes, or between an old story in demise and a new story we haven’t yet found words for. Most of us that will speak during this conference have strong and justifiable reasons to frame today’s chaotic changes as the tensions between a world imprisoned by a techno-economic, hegemonic ideology of growth, exploitative trade treaties, markets and a planet yearning to be healed by human-scaled economies, regulated banks, and renewed connections between nature and culture.

“We are faced – as it were – with questions about what a more beautiful world could look like, and what we can do to make it real for us and for our children.”
However, around the world, in puddles of unconferences and conferences, in symposiums and summits, in hotel rooms and school halls filled with activists whose faces bear tell-tale signs of wear and tear, of glimpsed hope, of reanimated despair, we are pushing our linguistic powers to an extreme; we are coming up with ever new ways of modelling how change really happens; we are inventing new categories of thought; we are tasking our volition storehouses and seeking smarter ways to rouse people to the urgencies of the hour; we are urging ourselves to be practical, to focus on the facts – the real stuff. But as our language gets more and more sophisticated, the more distant, it seems, a more beautiful world gets. Our increasing sophistication betrays our deepest anxieties about a universe that will not be comprehended, a cosmos that will not be summed up and reified in theory – no matter how passionate. A world that will not be named.

What all this means is that we do not know. We do not know how to resolve our current crises, how to bring about a more beautiful world; we cannot tell, with absolute certainty, whether strategy is preferable to being in the moment, or whether the North and South should indeed work together, or what it even means for a paradigm shift to happen. It is perhaps unresolvable in principle. We do not understand why we live in a world like this, why a techno-economic monolith rises and rises, its shadow greying our clouds and piercing our soils. And even though we have incredible conceptual and critical tools, we do not know how to come out of it – or even if that is the ‘right’ question. It seems the more we try to transcend the system, the more we behave just like it. Our uncertainty doesn’t exist because of a lack of evidence, or poor articulation, or any practical reason. Much to the contrary, the more we probe the furthest reaches of inner and outer space, the more we realize how entangled we are with the problems we strive to get rid of, with the ‘other’ we hope to save, with the systems we seek to switch off, and with the incomprehensible.

But what if our not knowing is our greatest asset yet? What if our journeys truly begin when we don’t know where we are going? What if, like interstellar travellers in search of a home, our deepest feelings, the fluffy stuff we usually do away with, are just as important, just as real – or even more so – than our best statistics and our most practical insights? Could it be that even our smallest actions count in ways our system change dynamics are blind to? What if we could treat the unknown, the unthinkable, beyond data, as a resource – instead of an inconvenience?
Many elders from indigenous non-western cultures spoke about this. They urged us to slow down in times of urgency; they urged us to be at peace when we are lost – for it is then that other paths are noticed. They told us that the dark makes everything possible. What they meant, I think, is that we need a change of awareness, not a change of speed, in order to happen upon new and brighter days. The test was to see how entangled everything was – and how nothing stands alone; to see how we could not depend upon or trust ourselves to know the next moments. In a poetic sense, they might have said, ‘let’s stop pretending to be humans, and dissolve into our mother trees, into the clouds, into rock and fish.’

Perhaps if some of those elders were to address mainstream activism today – what with all our models, numbers, data sets, compelling theories and ideological divides – they would say that conventional activism valiantly attempts to address what only the whole can ‘do’, and that by moving towards what cannot fit our data sets – what might properly be called ‘magic’ – we recognize not only our worlds anew, but ourselves.

The elders would urge a keener sensitivity; they would call for an Oríkì. And I offer one today: that behind the names we give to our crises and the names we give to their proposed solutions, behind our most fervent ideals, beyond the pragmatism suggested by wielding numbers and graphics, there is a magic afoot, and the cosmos is probably mattering and unfurling in ways that weave together our discontent, our failures, our ignorance, our incoherence, our bumbling inadequacies, our victories, and our contradictions. And we see this magic at the edges of our linguistic systems, where causal relationships no longer adequately account for change, where agency and will and awareness aren’t individual attributes, swaddled in grey matter, but breathing in stone, in rock, in fountain, in yawning sun and teenage moon.

We are collectively being ushered to a very strange place - one which obstinately refuses the characteristic earmarks of location, of fixity, of dimension, and logical convenience. “We are collectively being ushered to a very strange place - one which obstinately refuses the characteristic earmarks of location, of fixity, of dimension, and logical convenience. “
challenge of humanity - if there ever was or ever will be such a thing as ‘humanity’ - is to embrace the unthinkable, to move towards the anomalous, where a pregnant nothing swirls.’

Today, I celebrate the great and persistent work of amazing people and voices across the planet, and the utility of bold notions and invitations like localization – and their subversive presence in the world. I recognize the turbulence in our conversations about how to address change, and the riddles that are thrown up every time we consider competing worldviews and what they have to say about our times, who we are, and what we have at our disposal. I honour our furious intentions to rid the world of exploitative ideologies; I honour our anger, our despair, and our furrowed eyebrows. I honour our victories – however short-lived they may be. I make no claim that all these have some kind of ontological meaning deeper than experience itself. I merely urge us to see the wilder connections, the ‘deeper’ entanglements, and to perhaps learn to trust our deepest feelings – even though they defy conceptualization. I urge us to recognize that enchantment isn’t that much in short supply as, well, counterculture often grimly pretends it to be. I urge you to see that those things that don’t fit neatly into our models and data, into our great plans for systemic shifts, often matter the most.

So remember, if you can, the miracles in your life: the first smile of your firstborn child – the smile that pierces the sky; remember how you felt knowing you are loved by another, how undeserving you often feel of another’s affections and attention. Remember the gift of food – the textures that have no names, and the sprightly bursts of colour and life where soulful meals are shared with friends. Remember the ones that have broken through the veil, and walked into the blaze of the distant sunset; remember their parting words, their fragile grip, their closing eyes. Think of how you feel knowing that 300 girls – none of whom you know – are still missing, 300 days after they were kidnapped from their beds in a Nigerian school, by men with trucks and guns. Think of what you’d give to have them returned – if your own daughter were one of them.

We live in Orikis, in colours awash with fragrance and memory and longing, in textures, in grief tinged with satisfaction, in joy stitched with the pain that it is finite, in shadows and light, in tears in spite, in moments that will not be named, in hopes the boundaries of which we haven’t tested, in feelings truer than words.

“I urge you to see that those things that don’t fit neatly into our models and data, into our great plans for systemic shifts, often matter the most.”
Our feelings may not have any utility, any practical worth outside the city square where the contests between concepts and labels play out, but that doesn’t make these little moments any less real or valuable – and perhaps recognizing this and resting in the peace that comes with this is our deepest challenge as a culture, and the end of it. In the words of Alice Fulton, ‘we have to meet the universe halfway; nothing will unfold for us unless we move towards that which looks to us like nothing: faith is a cascade’. Our deepest challenge today is to transcend not only the fear that we are alone, and that we are not doing enough – but the fear that if we do not do, nothing matters. We must (and I use ‘must’ with more than a sprinkling of hesitation) trust that things count even when they don’t add up.

Should we let go of our insights, or fall into a self-indulging hole hoping that things unravel in ways we expect them to? Does pointing to a ‘deeper’ place, a subterranean stream beneath the surface, mean that we should not speak out against fracking, against GMOs and mining? Is this another postmodern attempt to reduce everything to language, to say that the world isn’t real, to deny the very real corporate agendas that are framing insidious trade treaties like TTIP? Am I attempting some kind of reductionism with blue-sky allusions to magic and trust? Will any of that save the day? I don’t know. I think that our concerns with justice and the objects of these concerns are very real, but I suspect it would be a mistake to take as less real the ideas that our best data may no longer be enough, the insight that it is our culture – our ways of making meaning and combing experience for patterns (and not the earth) that is in crisis; our ways of responding to crises is part of the crisis. Let us get involved, let us turn inward, let us localize and do all in our power to call out the insidious activities of a global corporatocracy – but let us do so, knowing that what seeks to emerge, what wants to come about, will not necessarily lie at the end of our genius, or at the tips of our sophistication and our agendas. We can no longer conveniently brush away the idea that our toughest attempt to adequately represent the world in terms of social justice is occasioned by the very conditions that the world is produced from, and that what is seeking to emerge – though sympathetic to careful analyses and clarifying insights – is too promiscuous to be faithful to our efforts alone.

This is the Oríkì of our times, the subtle energies the call to localize gently coincides with, the soundtrack we often don’t get to hear when we huddle together to contemplate our precarious circumstances. This is the hidden motif we cannot yet understand, the emblem that is beaten into the monolith that guards the gates of the unknown country we are wandering towards.

This is the ‘song’ we heard that solemn October day, as we left the campus to frame a life outside the spectrum of the normal – the soft, whispery tones that pierced through our best judgments and invited us to find our way by a different kind of faith. We turned to each other, Ej and I – as our truck crossed the University gates – and we sighed. We reached out for our hands, as if to anchor ourselves to what was most precious to us. “We are going home”, she said. And I knew, with a knowing that is powerful and true, that it was so.
Meet the New Gatekeepers

Michael Brooks
Producer/Contributor
Majority Report

The old media gatekeepers are in real trouble. From the whining from CNN reporters that President Obama would be sitting down for interviews with Youtube stars after this year’s state of the Union to the fallout from Brian Williams fantasies of war heroics, the mainstream press is under greater and greater scrutiny.

Starting with the explosion of the progressive blogosphere during the Bush era, when a bunch of progressive web writers stood up to challenge the Administration on its lies and the press on its laziness (and also lies), journalists, writers, entertainers and analysts have used the new mechanism’s of distribution from blogs to now podcasting and youtube to open new conversations that bypass the old gatekeepers.

In someways this is nothing new, and a major aspect of the Obama era has been folding in previously insurgent voices inside the mainstream. Ezra Klein is a great example of a progressive college blogger who now is an all purpose and incredibly successful media entrepreneur. The Young Turks and the program I am a contributor on the Majority Report, remain voices with genuine left wing edge and distributed through podcasts and Youtube.

So the media landscape has been shaken up and new voices have opportunities to broadcast, write and share. This is the good news. The challenging news is that this landscape is now defined by a different type of gatekeeping. The challenge is manifesting in three distinct ways.

Michael Brooks is a Contributor and Producer for the three time awarding political Podcast and Youtube program the Majority Report. His writing has appeared in Al Jazeera, the Washington Post, Good and the Huffington Post and he has appeared as an analyst on Al Jazeera, Arise TV and France 24. Before that he worked co-founded an arts and performance platform in Western Massachusetts where he performed stand up and sketch comedy and he co-authored the Buddha’s Playbook, a synthesis of Mindfulness Meditation and Behavioral Economics. He holds a BA in Politics from Bates College.
“We are all going to have to come together to figure out new ways of creating sustainable livelihoods and funding media. Whatever way this conversation goes, it will mean a rethink of companies as diverse as Huffington Post and Google operate.”

First: everything is smaller and more bifurcated. The focus on building a media career in today’s environment is in finding your niche and developing your own community. In practice this leads to a many different types of gatekeepers, gatekeeping in smaller worlds. So the gatekeeping game is still being played.

Second: the new relentless focus on analytics and clicks, creates a new form of digital and mechanical gatekeeping that can marginalizes certain voices and types of analysis. The gatekeeping of a singular focus on analytic contradicts the free form aspiration and spirit of a more open media.

Third: and most importantly, the gatekeepers of the large media and technology conglomerates that dominate the new media landscape have done nothing to create economically viable model for media producers. We are all going to have to come together to figure out new ways of creating sustainable livelihoods and funding media. Whatever way this conversation goes, it will mean a rethink of companies as diverse as Huffington Post and Google operate.

So the old gatekeeping are collapsing, new ones are taking their place and in all scenarios we need to find ways of creatively, empathetical and energetically taking on the new challenges established by the new gatekeepers.
Our thematic question regarding Gatekeepers/Gatecrashers is designed to challenge the idea that one must be one or the other i.e. it is “either/or” dynamic. How do you see the dynamic between gatekeepers and gatecrashers playing out in your life and in your work?

This dynamic has always existed since the beginning of the Internet but I think what is changing today is the fact that old gatecrashers are becoming the new gatekeepers.

If you look (not only in the travel industry), you can see that now the new start-ups are the ones who are trying to change the rules for the old start-ups already in place. As an example, this is also what is happening for communication platforms like Facebook VS Snapchat. The old one is becoming a gatekeeper by trying to close its frontiers, with more control and less open data. At the opposite Snapchat is trying to be the new gatecrasher by creating a new model that soon will also need a lot of money to continue to grow. That’s why I think the monetization race of every Web services and platforms leads inevitably to this type of dynamic.

From my personal point of view, this dynamic leads to two opposite things. First, from my personal life perspective, it could have a negative impact on the long term because the control of the knowledge and the communications is limiting how people can learn and grow. More we have gatekeepers, more the information is transformed. In a world where people are asking for more transparency, it is really hard to think about the fact that the information we have access to is only produce by people who are paying to be displayed (and as a good example, we can mention that Facebook is now limiting the natural
reach of their posts to only 4% of the audience).

On the other hand, from a business perspective, the new dynamic between gatekeepers/gatecrashers is really creative in terms of new opportunities. The Web is still evolving very fast and if you take time to really understand where are the strengths today so you can try to imagine what will be the threats tomorrow.

On the other hand, from a business perspective, the new dynamic between gatekeepers/gatecrashers is really creative in terms of new opportunities. The Web is still evolving very fast and if you take time to really understand where are the strengths today so you can try to imagine what will be the threats tomorrow.

Lodging (Hotels, Resorts, Hostels) have long been controlled established powers (GateKeepers). How have you seen that changing to be more open and with more alternatives?

I think the hospitality industry is one of the perfect examples about what is happening and what I mentioned previously. 15 years ago, Internet emerged as a new way to book a room and travel. Lodging, at this time, acted as controlled established powers (gatekeepers) and decided to do not trust and move into this new movement (few of them did but it wasn’t a global move). This behavior leaded to the birth of companies like booking.com and its competitors, who had in mind to disrupt the way people find and book a room.

Recent acquisitions like Buuteeq by Priceline or the new beta programs like Google Hotel Finder (and Google Flights) also show that all industries are moving really fast to maintain their positions and strengths.

How would the travel industry benefit from new players using various technology/mobile platforms?

In the travel industry landscape we can definitely see that the market is going mobile very fast. For all clients I work with (mainly hotels), 50% of visitors of their websites are now generated from a mobile device, and it is amazingly growing!

In parallel, technology becomes really the key to better understand and control direct revenues. Travel professionals are trying to use more and more digital platforms and ecosystems to drive direct traffic and revenues in

“I think the hospitality professionals have now understood how to react and how to move to the new alternatives in order to be more open and satisfying for their customers.”
“By providing a complete suite of social analytics and bloggers outreach tools, we really help the travel industry to take benefit from content and influencer campaigns.”

In order to compete with old gatecrashers like online travel agencies. They are trying to build their own communities, to manage their own communication tools, and to master their revenues sources.

How do you see yourself (Buzz & Go) positioned within the travel industry to be a force of disruption and added value?

At the beginning of this adventure, I started with two very simple observations:

a. Why do hotels and lodging professionals continue to spend plenty of money in advertising or PR campaigns that don’t work anymore for the next generation of travelers?

b. Why few people still believe in an intermediation system between influencers and professionals if we now have all digital tools to allow a direct communication between them?

In parallel, I spoke with a lot of bloggers and digital social media gurus that were always complaining about the fact that it is really difficult to travel and to explain to others the impact of their social media businesses.

Since I was myself in contact with many hotels, I decided to create the first travel platform for next generation travelers and digital influencers.

In one hand we help influencers to find their best spots where they can go easily in exchange of content and publications. In the other hand, we help hospitality people to better understand what is the real impact and results of their digital PR campaigns. Our added value is to connect easily the travel industry with these creative social media people and help them to do what they do the best: create and share content.

From the hospitality perspective, it is a unique chance to create better and quality PR campaigns, where the new generation of travelers is really on: social networks. By providing a complete suite of social analytics and bloggers outreach tools, we really help the travel industry to take benefit from content and influencers campaigns.

What would you determine are the most significant obstacles to a democratization (more inclusive, more socially effective) of the travel industry?

I actually see two obstacles. First, the “real” power of social media platforms to connect people with people: when the natural reach of the information is threaten, it could be really complicated to become visible without paying millions of dollars in advertising.

The second thing is regarding the privacy and the data usage made by big companies: if people start to become anxious and are not sure how their information/data will be used, it could be a really strong obstacle to a worldwide democratization.
Q&A with Gilad Goren

Gilad Goren is the founder and Executive Director of Travel+SocialGood, the first conference series/global community aimed at propelling the travel industry to meet its potential for positive impact on a global scale, founded in partnership with the UN Foundation’s +SocialGood network. Gilad is also founder of Only Six Degrees, an impact travel consultancy focused on education and travel experiences crafted for impact. In partnership with big-wave pro-surfer and activist Easkey Britton, Gilad launched Sustain the Stoke as the first impact surf travel brand, producing epic trips that

Our thematic question regarding Gatekeepers/Gatecrashers is designed to challenge the idea that one must be one or the other i.e. it is “either/or” dynamic. How do you see the dynamic between gatekeepers and gatecrashers playing out in your life and in your work?

The question of gatekeeper/gatecrashers is quite an interesting one, especially for those of us who have ‘change’ in their mission statement. The gatekeeper is as much a state of mind as it is a role. It is simply amazing what a single ‘no’ turned into a ‘yes’ can spark. The life of a gatecrasher can be quite syziphian, seeking out that one ‘gatekeeper’ who turns to become an enabler. I’ve experienced this, dare I say, sacred transaction myself. For me it was the first decision-maker who embraced the vision of Travel+SocialGood, and agreed to have their brand get involved. While the financial involvement was a boon, the intangibles, the gatekeeper’s support and advise, truly enabled Travel+SocialGood to reach a new level of impact. I’d say this is a microcosm of what the dynamic you ask about entails.

How has the needs and profile of new travelers, particularly millennial offered a challenge to the traditional power brokers of the travel industry?

I actually believe that the ‘needs of the millennial traveler’, as expounded by all the consultancies and experts of the world, are much akin to the desires of most travelers across demographic lines. The difference, which rings true of the millennial as a shopper and employee, is that the Millennials are the first generation to loudly voice their desires. This can be attributed to the loss of loyalty to established brands, many of whom had
betrayed their predeccesors, and to the emergence of two-way communication streams such as social media and blogging. Millennials seek authenticity, experience, self-fulfillment, positive impact, and the ability to brag. Simply put, cookie-cutter tours do not enable them to do any of the above. Defining your vacation by luxury accommodations can take you only so far in an age when extravagance seems gauche. Those standards no longer suffice. Traditional travel powerhouses made their money off standardization and volume, or off the high-margin luxury travel afforded by the few. With the former losing steam, and the latter increasingly sought out by vendors, the space for experiential travel opens up, providing the space for a new breed of travel-providers to shine.

The Tourism Bill of Rights, based on the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights mentions “the right of everyone to rest and leisure..” How does this idea intersect with a growing desire to be socially conscious and locally engaged when traveling?

This is a problematic question, as the UN Declaration of Human Rights is meant for the entire world’s population – even those who earn less than two dollars a day. Needless to say, the Tourism Bill of Rights is a bit less relevant to a majority of the population. I will say that the growth in demand for transparency, accountability, and true impact in the travel space has been proven in an increasing mass of studies. This is undeniable, and I find it shocking that the world of travel is yet so behind on its potential for positive impact on a global scale. But of course, every challenge is indeed an opportunity as well. I hope that as Travel+SocialGood grows, it will be able to gain traction as an agenda-setting organization, furthering its mission of propelling the world’s largest industry to embrace its role as a globally dominant force for social good.

In your estimation, how has technology served to disrupt the travel industry? What are effective tools that the “new traveler” can employ to be a gatecrasher?

Technology has completely reshuffled the cards throughout the entire industry. For many veterans in the space, technology has stripped away their secure corner of the market. For those who adapt and innovate, technology has provided the platform for success. Overall, the emergence of technology provides the opportunity for the democratization of travel, and the tools to meet needed standards of transparency. The key question right now is who will lead the push to proper utilization of these new tools for good. For the individual traveler, the change has already been made clear.

Gilad had the opportunity to push the message of travel and impact at the United Nations, the NY Times Travel Show, The Nexus Youth Philanthropy Summit, and more. He holds an MA in Comparative history from Brandeis University and currently resides In New York City.
“For those who adapt and innovate, technology has provided the platform for success. Overall, the emergence of technology provides the opportunity for the democratization of travel, and the tools to meet needed standards of transparency.”

Folks are booking entire itineraries online without a single phone-call. People are able to garner use of an endless number of research sources, and become veritable experts on a destination before even setting foot in it. On the other hand, this immense deluge of data and opportunities has created a flood of noise with little curation or qualification. The next stage in development within this space will certainly be the reintroduction of the curator within a twenty-first century framework.

Beyond that, the largest concern I have with the democratization of travel, as opposed to an obstacle to it, is the lowered bar of entrance to providers who aren’t exactly concerned with global amelioration. As the industry continuously breaks new records in fights, arrivals and revenue, questions of environmental degradation, economic empowerment, cultural preservation, and the related must always be raised. Are we traveling in a way to empowers the communities we visit? Are we making sure those incredible sites we visit are preserved for future generations? Can we chase our fantasies abroad without endangering the world we have come to fall in love with every time we leave home? We could answer all three with a resounding ‘yes’ if we want to.

What would you determine are the most significant obstacles to a democratization (more inclusive, more socially effective) of the travel industry? The most significant obstacles to the democratization of the travel industry may actually be the very assets that enable its transformation. With a deluge of sources for information, inspiration and booking, one loses their North star, and can retract to old routines. As with other industries, standards and points of authority are needed to ensure that democratization of the industry develops with fairness and accuracy as pillars.
Throughout the course of modern history, empires have ruled and gatekeepers have governed. However, at any one moment in time many of these empires and gatekeepers have failed to recognise what Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, said about ‘change being the only constant’. And so, both empires and gatekeepers have come and gone.

**Changing Empires**

Indeed, the greatest (apology that’s my bias coming through) – I should say the largest empire in history was the British Empire. The immortal words in the poem by James Thomson (taken from ‘The Works of James Thomson’ published 1763) and the images of privileged, well educated, white, British men building the empire may have set the tone for the original gatekeepers of the modern era. “Rule, Britannia! rule the waves: Britons never will be slaves.” Indeed, the poem is still a jolly good patriotic tide for us Brits and is sung at the ‘Last Night of the Proms’ at the Royal Albert Hall; our heartfelt remnants of a glorious empire. The sun has indeed set on the British empire and the baton for the most powerful ‘empire’ was handed to the economic and cultural powerhouse of USA in the early 20th century.

Bob Dylan may have been prophesising when writing “The Times They Are A-Changin ” back in the not too distant past, 1964 to be exact, a period of mass social change post World War II. Dylan’s song became an anthem for those particularly involved with the civil rights and anti-war movements. The sentiments from then still very much resonate today with groups and organisations challenging gatekeepers and dominant forces.
And even as I write, many are charting the decline of the USA; its global influence as an empire and the rise of the emerging market ‘superpowers’. These new ‘superpowers’ have realised opportunities by reaching out to their significant home populations as their own spending power via trade and connectivity via digital increases. The world has become smaller, more accessible and crowded at the top. In the space of a decade the Global 500 (the world’s 500 biggest corporations by revenue) has transformed. In 2004, the majority were North American (40%+) with second place taken by western European companies – now Asia is home to more Global 500 companies than North America, and China alone (with 95 companies, c.20%) has more than UK, Germany and France combined. And so, those in the privileged position of being similar to the gatekeepers constantly receive more help than others. Potential gatecrashers suffer from the consequence of inaction and the danger is that the status quo is maintained; change then is not the constant, for the time being.

Looking through the lens of progression on the corporate ladder in USA or UK – gatekeepers though not all necessarily ‘pale, stale and male’ are still characterised by privilege, social status and economic wealth. However, we have gatecrashers coming to the party given social change, increased social mobility, an evolving world order and digital pervasiveness opening up new markets and opportunities.

Who are gatekeepers?
Gatekeepers can be defined as those who control passage through a gate. When discussing all the aspects of diversity, inclusion and equality in modern society we tend to view gatekeepers as those maintaining the status quo and limiting access to opportunity: not quite embracing change as the only constant. Henri Tajfel, the psychologist, wrote about ‘minimal group’ identities and became interested in the psychology of prejudice given his experiences in World War II. He stated that ‘us’ and ‘them’ identities can be easily developed and that the allocation of resources to members of one’s own group at the expense of others can take a much subtler form – yet still exact a high price on those who are not part of that ‘in group’.

And so, those in the privileged position of being similar to the gatekeepers constantly receive more help than others. Potential gatecrashers suffer from the consequence of inaction and the danger is that the status quo is maintained; change then is not the constant, for the time being.

Gatekeepers and ‘access to opportunity’
Gatekeepers generally limit ‘access to opportunity’ to those like them or to those who are deemed as being part of

Dowshan Humzah started his career at Procter & Gamble in brand management leading the Hugo Boss fragrance portfolio in the UK. Most notably, he led the launch of Hugo which still remains P&G’s most successful fragrance launch to date. He then moved into the technology space heading up International Products & Services for Orange in the early days of mobile where he developed and helped realise the vision of ‘passport, tickets, money, Orange’ – normalising roaming and international calling. He was then part of the broadband revolution and joined ntl (now Virgin Media) leading broadband products and eventually becoming Director of Marketing, Strategy & Planning for Internet where he led ntl to market and product leadership in the UK as well as developing the next generation network strategy. His most recent roles in a blue-chip were for The RSA Insurance Group as Product Director for More Than where he built profitability in a time of market shrinkage and then became Business Transformation Director for RSA UK to develop the new
the dominant ‘in groups’. By focusing on ‘access to opportunity’ we call for action to create a level playing field that allows individuals to progress and support social mobility and equality.

For some this drive for diversity is seen as means of promoting one group over another – given preference as opposed to merit and ‘reverse gatekeeping’. Though, I am sure many individuals feel that some of the traditional power brokers, gatekeepers or those at the top of society (sarcastically categorised as ‘pale, stale and male’ in the west) – have achieved their position by being privileged to be part of a certain ‘in-group’ or have had significant support (financial or otherwise), a strong influential network and copious ‘access to opportunity’. Diversity matters and is about ensuring equality and winning the war for talent in an open, fair and transparent manner.

Related to this diversity should not just be viewed solely from the ‘seen or visible’ aspects such as gender, ethnicity and age (which are, especially gender, easier to define, identify and measure) but also from the ‘unseen or hidden’ aspects such as experience, background, upbringing and thinking style. It is these broader aspects that truly drive behaviour, performance, influence and impact – and in capturing diverse people from those groups you generally capture those from the typical verticals of gender, ethnicity and age.

For organisations and businesses, there is a need for leadership teams to evolve in order to better reflect new customer bases, ‘emerging market’ opportunities and greater competition. As barriers come down, talent pools are broadening with increased access to education, opportunity and social mobility. And so, women and minorities, gatecrashers in the politest terms possible, are increasingly challenging the status quo of gatekeepers and exercising the basic democratic right to vote, progressing in professions and

Dowshan strongly believes in ‘merit based diversity’ in its broadest sense and focuses not just on the ‘seen or visible’ aspects (such as gender, race or age) but more so on the ‘unseen or hidden’ aspects such as experience, background and thinking style. He has delivered a number of ground breaking projects supporting ‘access to opportunity’ - working with organisations to help develop the next generation of talent and encourage greater diversity. Dowshan believes that all too often ‘access to opportunity’ is limited to the ‘privileged, well-resourced or well-networked’ few – and this must be broken and broadened at all levels from students to executives.

He is a partner in two digital ventures. With one of them, a digital and social media agency, he has shown how technology can support this drive for ‘access to opportunity’. An example is integrating digital and social

...
media with the curriculum in schools to deliver more engaging lessons in order to drive attainment, aspiration and ‘employability’ for the young (especially those from not-privileged backgrounds).

- Dowshan has been a visiting lecturer at Goldsmiths College, University of London on the potential of digital media, as well as being a public speaker on digital and social media (presenting at conferences such as: Professional Publishing Association’s Customer Direct, LFB’s New Way of Seeing Social Media and B2B Marketing’s Leaders’ Forum). He is seen as a digital industry ‘thought leader’ having presented at numerous international conferences and written articles on topics as broad as Internet Product Development through to Digital Innovation in Education and New Revenue Streams in Publishing.

- LinkedIn Profile: http://uk.linkedin.com/in/dowshan

The business case for gatecrashers and diversity

It is generally accepted that having a broad range of opinions and styles leads to better decision making – and so, diverse team composition in these respects (be it visible such as gender and race; or ‘unseen’ such as differences in background, experience and thinking style) should lead to greater social and economic value.

McKinsey & Company have recently presented compelling analysis showing a statistically significant relationship between more diverse leadership/teams and better financial performance of corporations.

The data set comprised of many hundreds of corporations from North America, Latin America and UK and correlated diversity (gender and race/ethnicity in leadership teams) with financial performance (average Earnings Before Interest and Tax (EBIT) for the period 2010-13). The size of the dataset provides confidence in the outcomes and has the rigour deeply associated with McKinsey.

The companies in the top quartile of gender diversity were 15% more likely to have above median financial returns, relative to their national industry median. Companies in the top quartile of racial/ethnic diversity were 30% likely to have above median returns. When broken down, most relevant for UK plc and UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was that companies with a 10% higher gender and racial/ethnic diversity on management teams and boards had EBIT that was 5.6% higher whilst in the US it was 1.1% higher.

A pertinent conclusion from McKinsey was the unequal performance across companies in the same industry and same country implies that diversity is a competitive differentiator that shifts market share. Equally, McKinsey stated that “critical mass is required to drive decisions and impact”. For me, this further reinforces the need to build the talent pipeline and recruit and promote top talent on merit across the board as opposed to making ‘token appointments’, forcing quotas/targets or merely looking to reach targets via non-executives to support a better financial return.

Being your true self and valued for who you are

It is a real testament to leaders, sports stars and media personalities who have risen through the ranks whilst having to hide their true self. A good recent example is that of Tim Cook, CEO
Apple publishing an open letter on 30th October 2014 coming out. In his letter he stated being gay has given him a deeper understanding of what it means to be in the minority and provided a window into the challenges that people in other minority groups deal with every day.

Whilst obvious physical aspects of gender and race in the whole cannot be hidden – there are elements of our beliefs, background, personalities and orientation that individuals may choose to hide in both the work environment and society at large to better fit with the gatekeepers. Tim Cook stated that he had been open with many people about his sexual orientation and that plenty of colleagues at Apple knew he was gay. However, he stressed that he had the good fortune to work at a company that loves creativity and innovation and knows it can only flourish when you embrace people’s differences. Not everyone is so lucky.

It is a shame that any minority would feel the need to hide ‘who they are’ and, in essence, ‘hang their personality on the coat hook outside of their office or workplace’ as opposed to bringing in all that richness and personality.

The irony with business leaders like Tim Cook is that had they been open about an aspect of their background or life at the beginning of their careers they may not have progressed to the highest levels of corporate office given hidden bias, prejudice and discrimination. This is sad and partially explains why many people choose to hide their true identities even today to fit in with the gatekeepers.

“\textbf{The irony with business leaders like Tim Cook is that had they been open about an aspect of their background or life at the beginning of their careers they may not have progressed to the highest levels of corporate office given hidden bias, prejudice and discrimination. This is sad and partially explains why many people choose to hide their true identities even today to fit in with the gatekeepers.”}

A lesson from recent history revisited by Hollywood

The recent film, Selma, has bought to the fore once again the notion of gatekeepers and gatecrashers. Selma, as is well known, relates the story of Dr Martin Luther King and the people of the civil rights movement marching over the Edmund Pettus Bridge from Selma to Montgomery to highlight inequalities particularly as regards the voting rights in 1965. It is hard to believe that this is recent history - less than 50 years ago.

Cynically we may reflect on the lack of recognition given to the movie and its lead actor by the gatekeepers of
various award ceremonies (such as the Oscar academy) who may not have felt a resonance or comfortable with Selma. However, a message from Selma to the generation of today is that the people, regardless of status, background or any other grouping, should be the gatekeepers and the purveyors of true power as opposed to it residing in the hands of the few or the privileged.

On winning the Oscar for Best Song in a Motion Picture, the rapper Common with John Legend said: “Recently John and I got to go to Selma and perform Glory on the same bridge that Dr King and the people of the civil rights movement marched on 50 years ago. This bridge was once a landmark of a divided nation, but now is a symbol for change. The spirit of this bridge transcends race, gender, religion, sexual orientation and social status.” All of the people belonging to these ‘minority’ groups can be viewed as gatecrashers exercising their democratic right for equality and inclusion to be on a par with the then (and to some extent the now) gatekeepers.

Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin group of companies and a renowned business gatecrasher upsetting many traditional business leaders and industry dynamics, observed that many of the 2015 Oscar winners’ speeches focused on and reflected the times we live in and challenges of many minority or disadvantaged groups.

The ultimate gatecrasher?
Perhaps the ultimate and best known gatecrasher of recent times is President Obama. One always assumes that in elections in a democracy there are no gatekeepers – just the people; however selection committees, due process, media coverage, financial support and, of course, voters’ own bias all act as ‘gates’. In 2008, 43 years after Selma, the US electorate chose Barrack Hussein Obama (I stress the non-European nature of his name) – a black man, with African roots and an ‘Islamic name’ to be its 44th President.

Indeed, Barack Hussein Obama could only just be classed as ‘privileged’ given his elite education at Colombia and Harvard law school and traditional in his career as a Law Professor and then Senator. However, these were meritocratic achievements and allowed him to mix with traditional gatekeepers. Coupled with a degree of mastery, funding and charisma he was able to engage with the gatekeepers and electorate. However, that is all history now and President Obama was re-elected in 2012 to serve a second term.

And so, given the special relationship between The UK and USA, I would like to end with part of President Obama’s address to our UK gatekeepers, Parliament, in the grand and history laden Westminster Hall on 25th May 2011: “…it is possible for people to be united by their ideals, instead of divided by their difference... it’s possible for hearts to change and old hatred to pass... and the grandson of a Kenyan who served as a cook in the British Army to stand before you as President of the United States.”

Thank you Mr President (and grandson of a Kenyan who served as a cook in the British Army) - and that is why ‘access to opportunity’ is so important and how gatecrashers can make an impact challenging the status quo of their former colonial gatekeepers.
To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing.”

- Raymond Williams

There is a war going on right now, as you are reading this. It is a war that all of us are participating in, whether we know it or not. And it is a war whose stakes are so high that the very future of our economy, our environment and our children’s lives depend on the outcome.

This battle is a battle for ideas—the beliefs and values that govern how the entire world works. And the only way to join the battle is to question your own assumptions and make sure that what you believe—about yourself, the world, and the connections between the two—fits what you feel in your deepest core. You, me and everyone else who cares about our shared future as a species must do this if we are to thrive ourselves; and ensure our world thrives too. As William Blake said: We “must create a system or be enslaved by another man’s.”

Below, I share with you five of most radical ideas any of us can think. They are radical because they challenge the current system and the individuals and organisations that benefit most from it. These ideas fly in the face of five ‘Noble Lies’ (as Plato called them), basic assumptions about who we are and what our role in life is that are the foundation of all modern economics, politics, business, medicine and individual lifestyle aspirations.

To embrace the radical, we must first be prepared to give up the comfortable.
This can be challenging; a red or the blue pill moment.

What makes it more tricky is that many of the rich and powerful ridicule these five radical ideas, trying instead to sell us all on a ‘rational’ worldview that puts profit and productivity ahead of just about everything else. They have achieved this feat by claiming that the way things are fits the ‘natural’ order of things; that survival of the fittest is a genetic imperative; that the profit motive is elemental and benefits everyone eventually; and that we are all self-interested, rational, utility-optimisers. We—as a race and planet—are now paying for the consequences.

Walking in the footsteps of the great critical thinker Michel Foucault, it is time to ‘excavate’ the foundations of our political, social and economic systems and identify the out-dated assumptions that lie at the heart of them. Then we can, one assumption at a time, decide if they seem to be timeless and true; or false and failing. Are the ideas we run our lives on creating a world of enlightenment, empowerment and enjoyment; or a world of depression, disease and devastation?

I believe that the big five myths whose time has come are:
1. The myth of the machine: The universe is like a clock. We are cogs within it. We must work and to produce to be of value. If value can’t be measured, it doesn’t really exist.
2. The myth of the self: We are atomic units, discrete individuals, destined to be alone (and lonely)
3. The myth of competition: We are all inherently selfish and naturally competitive, driven by survival to fight tooth and claw for what we feel we need
4. The myth of personal ownership: Whatever we find or make we should own—no matter how much others may need it
5. The myth of growth: We have to constantly accumulate more wealth, and create more value, in a world of unlimited natural resources

These ideas may look innocuous, but they are profoundly dangerous. The work as a nested hierarchy, one scaffolding on the surface of the other, ever upwards towards rampant capitalism, corrupt politics and painful, disconnected lives.

Instead, if we switch on, we can embrace five bold ideas:
1. The idea of the organism: The universe is alive, organic, interconnected. We are here to create and express
2. The idea of interdependence: We are profoundly interconnected in
ways that we can fathom and ways we cannot. The more we feel the interconnection, the more we thrive.

3. The idea of collaboration: We are all as inherently kind and compassionate as we are selfish; and can always work together towards a common purpose.

4. The idea of sharing: We can share resources, even if that means we ‘lose’ personally; we can give before we get to create a win win win for all.

5. The idea of flourishing: We can conserve our resources and focus instead on personal growth and mutual thriving.

These 5 big ideas have not been plucked from thin air—more wishful thinking by an unrealistic optimist. Each is grounded in the latest scientific research into physics, networks, social psychology and animal behaviour. Each has precedent both in the historical record and in tribes and cultures different to our own. Each has been taught for millennia by countless wisdom traditions and indigenous myths. Each has been leveraged for extraordinary impact by the greatest thinkers and leaders of modernity, from Leo Tolstoy to Nelson Mandela. Each is a systemic ‘sweetspot’—what Buckminster Fuller, the legendary designer and innovator, called a ‘trimtab’—where a small shift can create disproportionately large change. This is all about cultural, cosmological, metaphysical acupuncture!

If we are willing to surrender the old assumptions and embrace the new ideas—which fit emerging scientific evidence far better, we can change everything that we have created in the ‘real’ world. That includes global warming and child poverty. The Inner Revolution has the power to sweep all before it. Our worst problems can disappear remarkably quickly, as they are simply crystallisations of what we collectively belief. However, this process is not one that can be carried our purely cognitively, as we will all immediately recognize. Many of the five myths are rooted deep within our minds and bodies, attempting to keep things safe. They are locked in by emotions; emotions designed to protect us from uncertainty and threat.

The Inner Revolution can only happen when we surrender the old beliefs so we free space to welcome in the new ones. Without a way to unlock the emotional fear that holds our old beliefs in place, we cannot make the transition (which is why so few people have). We certainly won’t be able to stay transformed. Threats to our livelihoods, friendships, autonomy and more are likely to flip us back into the old ways of thinking. We have to switch on and stay switched on.

“If we are willing to surrender the old assumptions and embrace the new ideas — which fit emerging scientific evidence far better, we can change everything that we have created in the ‘real’ world.”
“We are transforming our understanding of human nature away from a worn out cultural narrative towards a fresh, vibrant one...”

Reconnecting our heart - to the universe, to spirit - is the best (and possibly only) solvent string enough to dissolve away our stubborn beliefs and the emotions that lock them in. After 20 years of research and practice, I have developed the Breakthrough Biodynamics process to do this (detailed in my book Switch On: Unleash Your Creativity & Thrive with the New Science & Spirit of Breakthrough). It links spiritual awakening with psychological liberation and, ultimately, social emancipation.

The core of the Inner Revolution has to be spiritual, not political, in nature. As a brilliant historian, Lynn White, wrote in a prescient essay in 1967: “Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not.” We are transforming our understanding of human nature away from a worn out cultural narrative towards a fresh, vibrant one: We get to enjoy knowing ourselves as conscious beings that are intrinsically part of, and inextricably interlinked with, a creative, dynamic, conscious universe. Without this, the revolution may be televised but it will not last.

Rosa Luxemburg, one of the pioneers of socialism, said this: “Socialism in life demands a complete spiritual transformation in the masses.” Unfortunately, the Communist movements tried to take an expedient shortcut and miss out the spiritual process - uncontrollable and idiosyncratic as it is - and instead change the people through repression, regulation and re-education. It did not work - could never work - because our indomitable human spirit must be inspired to be liberated; not forced to comply to the will of others. Most governments and social organisations still attempt to change the world using the same crude levers instead of the messy and marvellous experience of transformation.

This kind of radical self-consciousness—bringing with it the often uncomfortable realization of the complicity of each of our everyday thoughts in the creation and maintenance of a system that, well, sucks for most—is the key to bringing into existence the concrete social justice, environmental sustainability, economic equality and inter-racial peace so many truly hope for.

“Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism.”
- Martin Luther King
‘Hack’ The System

‘Hack’ the system: What I have learned about gate crashing corporate systems to contribute to an innovative culture

Being curious has taken me to different geographical places and resulted in continuous career- and personal developments. It led me to work at a variety of start-ups, agencies, organizations and innovation cultures. Looking back I have found that having worked within these different working cultures, is probably the best work experience you can ever gain. In this article, I would like to share what I have taken with me from working within innovation cultures at large organizations.

To stay competitive and survive the changes organizations are facing today, many traditional organizations need to reassess the way they build relationships with customers. My role has always been to help decision makers at these organizations, with people- and trends insights, to create innovation solutions for business challenges. But how can companies implement these insights when the traditional way of doing business feels dated and mismatched with the pace and needs of the customers in the real world? How can we help organizations to adapt their cultures in response to changing customer mind-sets and needs?

We have to break the rules and hack the system.

Many organizations that grew in the first half of the last century, such as Philips and Volkswagen have been built on the basis Taylorism. A theory with the main objective is improving economic efficiency, especially labor productivity, for example how a factory would work most efficiently.
“An innovative culture requires diverse and trans-disciplinary teams. Typically, teams consist of about 5-8 participants from as diverse backgrounds such as engineering, architecture, social science, art and design. Global diversity is also very important: international and transcultural teams generally do better than culturally homogenous teams.”

This theory is at the hart of the organizational culture and structure and works efficiently. However, most employees are not used to looking outside this traditional playing field. That’s where change in mindset needs to happen, a new way of thinking that goes beyond an internal focus-hierarchy, rules and regulations- to an external focus- listening to customers, sharing ideas and collaborating. Hacking this system of internal focus is nevertheless not something to take easily. The key to becoming part of this new mindset lies in building a working culture where leaders and members are all part of shaping the future of the organization.

3 key-elements for hacking the system

Hacking the system demands for agile methods, teams with diverse skills and competences, and a clear definition or measurement of the desired result. One approach of engagement that is getting increase traction is the practice of Design Thinking. The mindset and practice of Design Thinking is fundamentally optimistic, collaborative, and focused on uncovering a variety of solutions to solve a challenge. Organizations are not only encouraged to apply a wide and interdisciplinary range of research methods - taken from the humanities, social sciences, and engineering – but also to really understand user needs but also to design, prototype and test actual solutions. When using these tools organizations are able to pull multiple perspectives together to solve complex problems driven by a human-centered-, system level point of view.

Secondly, an innovative culture requires diverse and trans-disciplinary teams. Typically, teams consist of about 5-8 participants from as diverse backgrounds such as engineering, architecture, social science, art and design. Global diversity is also very important: international and transcultural teams generally do better than culturally homogenous teams. As a result of the learning process, Design-Thinking generates T-shaped people, with excellence in their specific (analytical thinking) field but also with excellence in bridging the gap between disciplines (creative thinking).

And last but most importantly, an innovative culture demands for internal back up- and including, involving and engaging internal and external stakeholders. The business world sees the advantage of human-centered design, but is still looking for its ‘credibility’ or proof of success, to apply it to their out-facing business challenges as well as their internal practices. One reason for this is that the process of researching, adapting or and
developing of new offerings is a still a dynamic processes in which things can turn out differently than planned. Therefore Design Thinking is seen as a ‘high-risk business’ in the traditional sense and as such organizations are gatekeeping the way to building an innovative corporate culture. However the insecurity about human-centered design can be avoided by backing up these creative methods. Not just with numbers, but by facilitating an ongoing conversation within the organization and build or strengthen a culture of mutual trust.

What I have learned in the past years is that change won't come just looking to your left and to your right. It is a journey we should take organizations on, to help them trust the methods by engaging in interactive workshops, experience empathy towards their customer and collaborate internally. Try to make organizations see where opportunities lie in the mindset, practices and cultures of a diversity of dynamic contexts.

Summary

The problem: Change is constant, but big organizations have difficulty to be agile, to be open and to stay relevant to customers. How can we help them to ‘hack’ the system- to innovate, stay competitive and close the gap between “inside and outside” listening.

The approach: To survive the changes organizations are presently facing, organizations need to reassess the way they are structured, function and build relationships with customers.

The solution: A people-centered approach like Design Thinking has emerged because it provides us with useful methods and tools to bridge the gap with customers externally and guide the future processes within organizations internally.

For more information please contact hortensekoster@trndmrkr.com
Standing at the Gates
(Part 1)

I don’t know if I am becoming more argumentative and cantankerous as I get older, but I find myself in more and more arguments with strangers. The latest episode has stayed with me, partly because on paper our backgrounds and ambitions should have aligned.

I was sitting on a patio of a Mexican restaurant in Cape Town, next to a friend of a friend, a young Italian woman who lives in Silicon Valley. Conscious that this montage of globalization would not have been possible twenty years ago, I asked what brought her to the city. She told me how she is a recent graduate of Singularity University, an ‘innovation lab’ based in NASA’s Ames campus in northern California founded by Ray Kurzweil (father of the Singularity, the idea that a super-intelligence will result as man merges with machine in the year 2045) and Peter Diamandis (founder of the X Prize and eager planet miner and solar system colonizer).

She explained that she had previously worked at a ‘tech incubator’ in the ‘Valley’ and how she was focused on ‘disruptive thinking’ and ‘exponential technologies’ that could save the world. As she glowed in reverence for the curriculum at Singularity University, she explained how she and her classmates have created a mobile application that will help accelerate education for up to one billion people, largely in developing countries, by ‘gameifying’ education. Hence her trip to South Africa.

Somewhere between ‘productization’ and ‘monetization’, I interjected by stating that the only proven model for exponential growth has been the computer microchip processor. Moore’s Law is not a universal law. In fact, over the past two decades we have had an
increase in poverty and inequality, increasing food famines, and experts predict mass resource wars as we move to ‘peak everything’. The Earth has lost 50% of its wildlife in the last 40 years, and according to the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) we will lose half of the planet’s biodiversity – that’s half the living plant and animal life in the world – as we mitigate for a four degree-Celsius rise in temperature by 2050.

As these statements challenged the core of my new friend’s Panglossian world-view, I saw myself fall quickly out of favor. The politeness of new acquaintances gave way to a hostile barrage of illogical suppositions. “Would you have us go back to a primitive way of living? How are you living your supposed values as you drink bottled water? And who wouldn’t choose hope over despair?”

It was of course not my intention to elicit this type of reaction. I was hoping to encourage the next generation of idealist to expand her scope to include a more structural analysis of our current situation. But as always, ideology is a constant background condition. It strikes me that the real divide here has two axis lines. The first is the whether or not one believes the world is getting better or worse. The second is whether one believes that history matters.

Quite simply, if you believe the world is getting better and history is inconsequential, the technoutopian world-view has a natural gravitational pull. It doesn’t matter that we are creating unprecedented rates of species extinction, or that our current system amplifies the historical injustices of colonialism, imperialism, genocide, slavery, misogyny and racism, or even that perpetual growth has planetary bounds, as our ingenuity and technological prowess will inevitably overcome all of these inconvenient truths.

And of course, the question of who is the world getting better for is never questioned. The Western hope in technology as savior is conveniently self-enforced by material comfort and privilege, and shelters us from recognizing that eight out of ten of our brothers and sisters are living under $5 a day, the threshold which the UN body UNCTAD says is the minimum to achieve “a standard of living adequate for health and wellbeing”: the inalienable right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

If one believes that things are getting worse and history is important, the corollary is that things can of course get better. True optimism is not whitewashing away anything but
“Our education system is molded on the ‘victors of history’, the elite perspective and selective memory. Those considered talented are usually those who show a deep and unquestioning acceptance of this perspective, who do well on standardized tests and faithfully validate and extend the establishment logic in their careers. They are lauded with scholarships, awards and promotions that reinforce the virtue of their belief, their ‘giftedness’. As John Ralston Saul reminds us, it is in the nature of all complex social and political systems to reward those who best perpetuate their logic. Where that logic is psychotic, based on self-interest, greed and short-termism, that is the psychology and behavior that will be most rewarded. In such a system, the rest of us – the majority – who do not demonstrate that behavior come to serve its needs through their service of perpetual, and ever-greater debt – if not through school, then through healthcare or access to food or housing. Once indebted, we find ourselves having to work for money that is manufactured in privatized mints and administered by governments, the apparatchiks of the global corporate system. As elite wealth and its associated power congeals – 85 billionaires now have the same wealth as 3.5 billion people – their power shows itself up as the only truly exponential factor, outside of microchip processors. In turn, thanks to the influence of money in politics around the world, we inexorably entrench the conditions of what we call this One Party Planet. In this way, the world system is organized according to neo-liberal logic of ‘trickle-up’ economics that serve an undemocratic, unaccountable elite at the expense of the majority.

The result of believing that the arrow of progress is righteous and unbending, especially in the face of stark evidence to the contrary, is that we become not only complacent but complicit in the inherent destructiveness of this brand of late-stage capitalism.

Take, as yet another example, the fact that for every dollar of wealth created, 93 cents goes to the top 1%. Unless this can be shown to be a gross and temporary aberration, it can only be
concluded that this manner of wealth creation directly, inextricably and exponentially also creates vast wealth inequality. Add to that the fact that every dollar of wealth created heats up our planet thanks to the fossil-fuel based energy requirements; that the world’s poor and middle class pay grossly more than their fair share of the world’s tax as rich elites and multinational corporations opt out of their social contract through the use of tax havens and accounting black magic; and that, through global trade deals like NAFTA and the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the underlying operating principles are, right now, being super-charged and replicated for a whole new generation, and the true and extreme rapaciousness of this system are painfully apparent.

They appeal to the logical and necessary instinct for anarchism in our youth (and other free thinkers): the desire to creatively self-organize, and they twist that into an elitist form of Libertarianism, where there is little or no room for governments or regulation. All the while they are training them to believe that the problems created by the market-fundamentalist system – climate change, mass poverty, rabid inequality – can be solved by the very same market mechanisms. As Peter Diamandis states, “In a world where the biggest problems on the planet are the biggest market opportunities, why wouldn’t you be focusing on them?”

We are told that chasing profit through technological incrementalism is somehow commensurate with solving the world’s problems. Distracted by ‘disruptive innovation,’ ‘conscious capitalism,’ ‘social enterprise,’ ‘impact investing’ and other deeply unpolticized blind alleys, we are told we can go on exactly as we are. We have become prisoners of our own construction, forgetting that the crisis we face as a civilization is as much a crisis of the economic system as it is an
“Those who were supposed to become the gatecrashers - the radicals, the misfits, the real innovators, like the brilliant Italian woman I met that day in Cape Town - have become the gatekeepers through a combination of alluring ideology, debilitating privilege and myopic amnesia.”

Forgetting, “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

If we connect the dots between the capitalist system and the crises that face us, if we think constellationally, a new set of solutions will emerge. They may include a re-localization of politics and the economy; the rediscovery of the Original Wisdom of Indigenous cultures around the world; putting limits on the power of corporations and taxes on the source of carbon use; a revival of barter and gift economies; the closing down of tax havens; an embrace of steady state economics; the provision of a citizen’s income to cover the basic necessities required for human dignity; and even the abolition of military spending. Digital technology will inevitably play a powerful facilitating role, but technology has always and only ever been a tool. In the absence of new principles – a new and wiser ideology - guiding the hands that use it, it can only change the pace, and not the direction, of travel.

The aim will be to create structures that allow the conscious evolution and ascension of our species, in symbiosis with Nature. As the great Indian mystic Sri Arobindo was fond of saying, we have to go from theoreticians of evolution to practitioners of evolution. We must all be gatecrashers now.

Put simply, the task of our generation is one of reconstruction. If we want to be true gatecrashers, we must move beyond the frustration of the ineptitude and psychopathy of the elites, corrupt politicians and robber barons that are lionized in our media and educational institutions. We must start by taking responsibility.

Those who were supposed to become the gatecrashers - the radicals, the misfits, the real innovators, like the brilliant Italian woman I met that day in Cape Town - have become the gatekeepers through a combination of alluring ideology, debilitating privilege and myopic amnesia. As Milan Kundera reminds us in the Book of Laughter and Forgetting, “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

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The Gatecrasher Manifesto
(Part 2)

This manifesto is written by /The Rules, a network of activists, writers, designers, coders and researchers focused on addressing the root causes of inequality and poverty.

We are the last generation. We are the first generation.

We refuse to retain the illusions of those who came before us.

Their truths are not our truths.

The architects of the present system may be clever, but they are not wise.

They believe that progress is ever more production and consumption. We know that this endless growth is a cancer, speeding up the destruction of our planet.

They believe that wealth is a sign of merit, of virtue. We know that this is a shallow and anemic understanding of what makes a life worthwhile.

They believe that Mother Earth is a commodity to be bought and sold for private gain. We know that we are part of a complex ecosystem that nurtures all life, and that life-sustaining commons cannot be possessed.

They believe that our debts are moral failings. We know that debts are designed to keep us docile and obedient, and to neutralize our will to resist.

They believe that individualism is the apex of human evolution. We know that it only alienates us from each other, leaving us isolated, depressed and anxious.

They tell us we live in an age of democracy. We know that our political systems have been captured by corporations and elites who worship private gain over the public good.

Alnoor Ladha
Founding Member
/The Rules

Alnoor Ladha is founding member of /The Rules, a global network of activists, writers, designers, coders and researchers focused on addressing the root causes of inequality and poverty. He is also a board member of Greenpeace International USA. He is based in Cape Town, South Africa.
We refuse to retain the illusions of those who came before us.

We will not be the gatekeepers of the status quo.

We strive to better ourselves for the good of all, rather than accumulate wealth at the expense of others.

We value human relationships, nurture our inner gifts, and embrace our unique spiritual journeys. We refuse to measure ourselves by what we earn and consume.

We honour the ingenuity of the human spirit and will not be enslaved by corporations and governments that pillage our collective wealth.

We reach for fairness and compassion between equals, and refuse to participate in a world order that depends on perpetual war and plunder.

We live to learn, love and thrive, together. We refuse to retain the illusions of those who came before us.

The current order has been created by a set of warped and violent stories. They are not our stories.

Individualism is a story.

Perpetual growth is a story.

Debt is a story.

The nation state is a story.

Capitalism itself is just a story.

We have better stories that articulate our true nature.

We have a story of unity.

We have a story of symbiosis with the planet and the principles that govern the natural world.

We have a story of an economy that serves our higher selves.

We have a story of life as a web of deep connections celebrating empathy, compassion, justice, and co-operation.

They will call us utopians: deluded and unrealistic. But they are deluded who believe we can continue on our present path.

We do not need permission to create the better world we know is possible.

Resistance to the current order is not an option. It is inevitable.

We all must be gatecrashers now.

“We value human relationships, nurture our inner gifts, and embrace our unique spiritual journeys. We refuse to measure ourselves by what we earn and consume.”
Q&A with Sara Shamsavari

Given the widely accepted role of curatorial gatekeeper’s within the art world how have you built your following and craft?

I have worked both on my own self-curating my exhibitions and with traditional curators/gatekeepers who’s vision and values are aligned to my own. I have also worked with other established artists who curate as well as collaborrating with artists working in the same and different mediums to myself. I began installing my own exhibitions on from an early age and this attracted traditional curators who invited me to be part of larger shows. I have exhibited in galleries, museums, political and public spaces as well as non traditional artistic spaces.

The motivation was really to share the work and as my work developed to also share a strong vision and purpose. The quality of the work, its purpose and its relevance to the society we are living in today with projects such as Britain Retold- A Portrait of London and most recently London Veil | Paris Veil| NYC Veil| are all contributing factors to the widespread press and media attention the work has received which helped to get these ideas in to public consciousness.

How do you perceive the idea of collaboration between creators as a counterbalance to traditional gatekeepers?

I think that artists who work in the same or different mediums have the potential to come together and make amazing things happen and now more than ever many artists are able to do this for themselves. I personally believe we need a balance between the two. I don’t like the idea of being wholly dependent on another person or establishment to push for my

Sara Shamsavari is a British artist of Iranian heritage whose vibrant and emotive images explore and reinterpret identity and address current social and cultural concerns. While each of photographic series’ has a distinct focus they all seek to encourage the ideals of non-judgement, equality, unity in diversity, collective responsibility.

Sara is described as “energetic and forceful...weighed with conviction” (The Guardian) with “the rare gift of capturing how the light strikes a face to illuminate hope” (Aesthetica), her work as

Sara Shamsavari
Artist
success at the same time whether it is a collaborator or a gatekeeper that I choose to work with I must be able to come in to the collaboration with genuine respect and openness to what the other party is bringing to the table and allow them to do their work.

These days when an artist/ works with an agents, gallery or other gatekeepers they often work collaboratively, both carrying the weight and responsibilities of what it takes to create a successful exhibition.

**What are the advantages/pitfalls of the collaboration process among creators i.e. gatecrashers?**

In an ideal world collaborations between artists should be inspiring, add new dimension and elevate the work of all involved to new audiences and levels of success helping each person involved reach their individual and collective goals. I have experienced the positive side in my collaborations with artists such as Tom Donald- a jazz improvisation virtuoso pianist who recently interpreted my series Beauty Untold- Portraits from the Street in to unique and unrepeatable set of improvisations. Also in my work with film maker James Maiki who I co-directed videos for the Shantrelle P. Lewis The Dandy Lion Project at ASSF and London Veil | Paris Veil| NYC Veil| videos.

The ingredients to me that make up a successful collaboration between two artists are for me, the same as those that make up a successful collaboration between artist and curator or artist and establishment or any other kind of partnership. Some of the things I consider to be essential are as follows:

The parties involved will share a mission, values and inspirations, although their approaches and ideas may be different, which can often be complimentary, they are on the same page. Those involved must share a genuine respect for each others work, motivations and position as without mutual appreciation and respect there is no foundation for trust. Once there is trust there can be open honest communication and if something isn’t working for one of the parties they should feel they are able to speak up. For me this last one is so important- the persons involved must be finishers, they must be the kind of people who are able to meet deadlines. In the creative industries we find a lot of people with great ideas who somehow aren’t able to see them through.

We once spoke about the concept of givers and takers as opposed to gatekeepers and gatecrashers, explain what that means to you?

The downside of ‘success’ can be the attraction of ‘gatecrashers’ or takers.

“unflinchingly honest portraits” (Brownbook UAE), “revealing a unique empathy with her subjects” (i-D).

Born in Tehran in the midst of the Iranian revolution, Sara overcame childhood cancer while she and her family fled persecution. Being raised in London from the age of two inspired her exploration of identity, while surviving both the revolution and illness engendered a profound desire to make a difference through art.

Sara was educated at Camberwell School of Art and Design with a BA (Hons) and the University of Westminster (Cert HE in Music) producing work in a range of mediums including music, painting, photography and film, choosing photography as the first of her professional endeavours for its ability to create an instant bond between the artist and the outside world.

Shamsavari’s work has exhibited internationally in galleries, museums and public spaces including the ICA, City Hall and The Royal Festival Hall (London), Espace Pierre Cardin (Paris).
as we once spoke about. Following the recent years where the work has enjoyed a lot of recognition both from the media and from respected ‘gatekeepers’ or givers. I am propositioned by many people to ‘collaborate’ but sadly it is clear that many of them see what they perceive as success without really understanding the work or respecting what it took to get there. They are blinded by the bright lights and rather than wanting to connect on the basis of shared values, mission and inspiration, they want to jump on board with you, in some way under the impression that the association will bring them success regardless of whether they have anything to offer, any ideas or can even explain why they want to work with you. These people seem to think that if they work with your networks or your contacts its will somehow bring them greater success than seeking out the professional that is right for their needs. The same people often do not treat your contacts with respect and certainly would never share their networks with you.

The sad part for me is this behaviour highlights a lack of respect for oneself that in our society is regarded as normal because so many people are chasing external validation to feel they have a purpose. The purpose must be there regardless of the external validation.

**Explain the role that trust plays in navigating your current reality as an artist?**

Trust is of utmost importance, you need to feel you can trust those whom you work and collaborate with but also that you can trust yourself to get out if it isn’t working and to bounce back if there has been some damage to you or your reputation in the process.

My positive and negative experiences of collaborating have been fantastic as they have sharpened my discernment. I believe that you should be selective and understand that even when you are that is no guarantee that the collaboration will work, however its still important to give people a chance and not just work with those you’ve known for a long time. I tend to work with a combination of people I’ve known for a long time and have a solid relationship with and new people with fresh perspectives and ideas.

**How do you balance your creative process, curatorial environment and quality to produce at a level that is fulfilling?**

I think it is a challenge and I am constantly working to raise the standards and create more work,
“It is important to understand that anyone could be a potential collaborator with whom you could collectively achieve your goals, creative, social and spiritual, material and recognition. I feel like the problem comes when peoples ambitions aren’t in line with their values.”

better work. Its important for me to keep my priorities in order in terms of the work I create as well as making sure there is a structure to share and expose the work.

If we assume the paradigm of gatekeepers and gatecrashers is somehow lacking, what would be a better structure to think of these issues? What are the values inherent with this system? Both terms can be regarded as too narrow since in this age anybody could potentially be a ‘gatekeeper’ at the same time it is easy to see how many people could be perceived as ‘gatecrashers’ regardless of their intentions.

I think it is important to understand that anyone could be a potential collaborator with whom you could collectively achieve your goals, creative, social and spiritual, material and recognition. I feel like the problem comes when peoples ambitions aren’t in line with their values. Its important to be really clear about what your goals are on every level and be honest. I also think it is important to trust ones instincts. In every collaboration all parties involved must be gaining something, growing developing or reaching new levels of their definition of success.

Here are some links:

- An article on a collaboration between myself and Tom Donald
  http://www.culturecompass.co.uk/beauty-without-words/
- A collaborative video with James Maiki for Shantelle P. Lewis The Dandy Lion Project https://vimeo.com/104768506
- A collaborative video with James Maiki for London Veil | Paris Veil| NYC Veil| (currently showing at the Royal Festival Hall) https://vimeo.com/120901832

I have included a list of current and forthcoming shows below:

- Britain Retold- a Portrait of London- is currently on view at Tricycle London, from Feb 19th-April 29th 2015
- The London Paris & New York Veil Series are on view at The Royal Festival Hall from March 1st-29th 2015.
- The Dandy Lion project is on View at MoCP Chicago from April 9th until July 2nd 2015
- Re: Significations in association with Black Portraitures is on view in Florence from the 28th May 2015
“To perceive the world differently, we must be willing to change our belief system, let the past slip away, expand our sense of now, and dissolve the fear in our minds.”

- William James

“D To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.”

- E. E. Cummings

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