Building Jetties to the Future: Thinking and Doing Social Work in a 'Moment of Danger.'

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This paper is a revised version of an invited keynote address presented at the Social Work Futures Conference, held virtually in 2021 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The call for papers for this forward-looking conference invited participants to consider two linked – if potentially conflictual – questions. First, what kind of 'social work' the world needs now. Second, what "social work futures" might entail.

In the paper that follows, I offer preliminary thoughts on the implications of these vitally important but inherently complex questions for social work as a field. The arguments I put forward rest on two interlocking propositions. First, that the profession clearly has a responsibility to actively engage the "fierce agony of now" (King, 1963): the pressing social and human challenges confronting communities and societies globally, many of which the pandemic both amplified and compounded, including poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, racial injustice, and health and mental health problems (Amadasun, 2021, Kwan et al., 2021). Second, that despite the pressures and obligations entailed in responding to the immediate impacts of the global crises such as the pandemic, social work must at the same time look ahead and consider where it might, or should, be positioned going forward.

Challenging questions underlie these apparently straightforward propositions. Can the profession be present-focused and forward looking, in ways that are mutually reinforcing and synergistic rather than mutually oppositional? And relatedly, can it more deliberately invest in future-oriented thinking and action when in general this has not been a focus of the field? Exploring these questions requires consideration of some of the tendencies and pressures tilting the profession to near term perspectives and responses, as well as those that increasingly demand a more deliberately futurist stance.

The rapid onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and related public health measures upended people's lives around the world, threatening health and wellbeing, transforming and destabilizing jobs, home lives, schooling, and the provision of services, and significantly deepening existing precarities (Sultana, 2021). Unsurprisingly, it also created significant pressures for quick responses and tangible solutions, politically, socially, and at the level of lived lives (Hulme et al., 2020). A pervasive language of urgency and crisis prevailed in wider discourse. Given the profound impact of the pandemic on societies in general, and human wellbeing in particular, the imperative to address immediate challenges was unavoidable. Efforts to do so led to a remarkable acceleration in techno-scientific and social innovation, from the development and deployment of vaccines and rapid antigen tests to global adoption of digital and web-based communication platforms as a primary medium of business, educational and social currency. At the same time, the scale and immediacy of pandemic-related challenges reinforced contemporary tendencies towards what Hartog (2020) and others

have termed 'presentism': a preoccupation with present priorities and demands, together with a sense of the future as difficult to envision.

From a social work perspective, the mandate to respond to the immediate human needs generated by the crisis conditions of the pandemic was unquestionable. In profound ways, the pandemic and its aftermath laid bare fault lines of poverty and wealth, marginality and privilege (Cole et al., 2020). Globally, people and communities were stretched and struggling, particularly those to whom social work is most accountable. Pressures to respond to immediate needs, as effectively as possible, were both palpable and inescapable. And at all levels, social workers globally rose to the challenge of meeting these demands with a remarkable degree of responsiveness, resilience, and creativity (Truell, 2020; Truell & Banks, 2021).

The profession's efforts to meet rapidly emerging needs were essential, and admirable. I am mindful, however, of Tom Grimwood's (2020) caution that in the context of 21st century neoliberalism, a sense of urgency already saturates the profession. Writing just before the onset of the pandemic, Grimwood argued that urgency has become an "*inherent* feature of social work" (p.1, italics in original): a "persuasive" rhetoric (p. 2) with significant implications for the contours of contemporary social work practice. Fueled in part by incessant and growing demands on services in concert with perennially inadequate resources, including time scarcity, this rhetoric of urgency shapes worker behaviors and gives power to problem-focused, technical, bureaucratic, efficiency-oriented organizational responses, while concomitantly delimiting opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and critique.

Furthermore, and to the point of this paper, Grimwood noted that a sense of urgency – particularly in the context of crisis - can "'cut short' thinking" (p. 3), foreclosing the ability to imagine possible alternatives to current practices, both in the present and looking ahead. Hulme et al. (2020) have made similar arguments about the implications of the discourse of crisis and risk that dominated responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, pointing out that a "rush to ameliorate" (p. 1) reinforces a reactive stance, privileges near-term techno-scientific solutions, and obscures underlying social and structural issues.

Compounding these tendencies towards presentism and short-termism, for many people the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly altered their sense of time. In a paper evocatively titled "ghostly pasts and postponed futures," Kattajo (2021) noted that during the pandemic "time seems to have slowed to a continuous present tense" (p. 1402). As governments and people waited for the pandemic to recede, for borders to reopen, for flows of goods and people to resume, in many ways the future was necessarily put on hold. In essence the world was caught, Kattajo suggested, between *kairos* (crisis and emergency), and *aion* (stasis), with resulting constraints on people's ability to engage in future-forward thinking.

It can be argued that in combination, these factors have exacerbated social work's longstanding, and unsurprising, inclination toward primarily responding pragmatically to what is in front of it in the present. Social work futurist Laura Nissen (2020) has pointed out that in general, social work as a field has engaged only episodically – and peripherally – in future-facing deliberations. Reflecting in part its intellectual roots in American pragmatism (Berringer, 2019) the profession has a deep investment in practical action: meeting people's immediate needs, building knowledge from "action in that time, in that place" (Hothersall, 2016, p. 42), and iteratively learning by doing.

We must be wary, however, of this gravitational pull toward prioritizing near-term, problem-focused, primarily reactive solutions over the longer view. Stepping back from the challenges right in front of the profession, it becomes clear that a more expansive perspective is in fact essential. Present-focused responses and interventions are both necessary and important and will always be central to social work's mandate and contribution. However, they are not in themselves sufficient. The entangled 'wicked problems' confronting global communities – such as climate change, poverty and inequality, political conflict, homelessness, and zoonotic diseases – are complex, contingent, and intransigent. As both the many twists and turns of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the escalating spate of unprecedented severe weather events make abundantly clear, global crises such as climate change and pandemics are inherently unbounded and open-ended: neither their trajectories nor their outcomes can fully be predicted. Nor is it possible to fully anticipate what the next global crisis might be, or when it will eventuate. There is broad consensus, however, that we live in a world of compounding risks and insecurities.

Increasingly, therefore, there is broad interdisciplinary agreement that issues such as pandemics, poverty, and climate change – and the emergent, unpredictable challenges associated with them – demand *both* immediate responses *and* forward-looking, transformational thinking and action, within and across disciplines, professions, and community stakeholders. Which in turn, poses some important questions for social work as a field:

1. How can – or should - social work position itself in relation to these entangled, inherently complex realities?

2. Can the profession balance imperatives for responsiveness in the present while at the same time re-envisioning its knowledge systems and practices, and its capacity for engaging emergent opportunities and challenges that cannot yet be fully envisioned?

In what follows, I briefly explore these questions through the lens of arguably the most profound global challenge of this era: climate change and the interlocking socio-environmental challenges contributing to and ensuing from it.

Envisioning Future Demands: The Exemplar of Social Work and Climate Change
Unlike the Covid-19 pandemic, which abruptly, brutally, and seemingly almost overnight "upended the world's operating instructions" (Pinner et al., 2020, p.1), the impacts of climate change have generally been gradual, cumulative, and broadly distributed. Until relatively recently, it has largely been a slow-moving crisis: "diffuse, variable and uncertain" (Hulme et al., 2020, p. 3), hard to get one's head around, and thus in many ways easy to set aside as not core business. It has been subject, in fact, to what Carney (2021) termed the "tragedy of the horizon": tendencies to think that dealing with it can be indefinitely put off, or deferred to others.

Social work has been particularly culpable in this regard. The profession has a long-expressed commitment to working at the person-environment interface (Kemp, 2011). Nonetheless, it has been curiously absent (Bulkeley, 2019) from interdisciplinary efforts to engage pro-actively with climate change and related environmental issues, even though it is increasingly clear that the profession's commitments, capacities, and deep knowledge of people in their local environmental contexts are sorely needed (Lemberg & Murphy, 2019). There are important signs of growing awareness and engagement in the field, including the US Grand

Challenge for Social Work, *Create social responses to a changing environment* (Kemp & Palinkas, 2015), the incorporation by the US Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) of environmental justice in the US educational policy standards (CSWE, 2015), a 2020 position statement on climate change and social work from the Canadian Association of Social Workers (Schibli, 2020), and global leadership advancing climate justice and ecosocial practice by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2022) and allied scholars (for example, Matthies & Närhi, 2016), Powers et al. 2021). Nonetheless, environmental challenges in general, and climate change in particular, continue to be largely peripheral to the main interests and efforts of the profession as a whole (Krings et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, the need for transformative thinking and action on climate change, on a global scale, is increasingly apparent. Sze (2020) has described the precarious environment we currently live in as a "moment of danger": a toxic and unstable brew of climate change, global inequality, active and escalating assaults on democratic institutions, racism, and intensifying social, political, economic, and environmental injustices. Similarly, Facer (2019), a leading futurist, pointed to a series of "civilization-disrupting shifts," including pervasive fragility (of the earth, of democracy, of prevailing social structures); the disproportional impact of these shifts on marginalized and disadvantaged populations; and the devastating and far-reaching effects of non-linear crises such as climate change and the pandemic, that ripple across a fundamentally interconnected global environment.

As climate disasters and extreme weather events escalate, and reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) become increasingly dire (IPCC, 2022), both expert and public discourse is beginning to shift from 'climate change' to the more urgent language of 'climate crisis' and 'climate emergency' (Ripple et al., 2021). Globally, there is likewise a growing sense that transformative climate action is essential, in both the immediate and the longer term.

Social work has been slow in coming to this realization. Nonetheless, the urgencies of our present moment – and the social fractures these have made visible - have created a window of opportunity for amplifying emerging pathways for transforming social work knowledge, practices, and capacities. Not only has the pandemic elevated awareness that transformative change is vital – that business as usual simply won't suffice – but we have been presented with 'proof of concept' that such change is in fact possible. The exigencies of the pandemic prompted an array of surprisingly nimble and innovative technological, social, and economic responses, both at the grassroots level in local communities and by systems and services that usually are significantly more rigid, rule bound, and slow to change. We have seen similarly flexible and creative responses within the profession, albeit at smaller scale, and within domains more conventionally the purview of social work (Truell, 2020; Ferguson et al., 2022). Findings of one recent study mirror those of others around the world: "Faced with need among their clients…social workers were able to learn and implement new technologies, adapt to increasing demands …and find ways to address gaps in service" (McCoyd et al., 2023, p. 85).

Undeniably, the pivots required of systems, services, and staff during the pandemic came at significant cost, both human and financial (Harrikari, 2023). Nor do we yet know their full implications. Nonetheless, they demonstrated that faced with meeting needs in a rapidly changing, high-stakes, uncertain, and fundamentally open-ended environment, policy makers, organizations, and managers – and workers – found the capacity to be more flexible, agile, and innovative than is typically the case. Indeed, the profession's responses during the

pandemic clearly demonstrated social work's adaptive and collaborative capacities, as well as the value of its contributions. Reflecting on these contributions, and related lessons for the field, Harrikari (2023) described social work's professional capital (its knowledge base, networks, and capacity for resource and human capital mobilization) as a "crucial collective archive" (p. 338), available to be tapped in the face of future challenges.

The challenge now, as Ferguson et al. (2021) have underscored, is to not lose sight of these capacities in the post-crisis environment, or to simply revert to business as usual. The personal and professional demands of the pandemic placed considerable strain on workers, leading to burnout, trauma, and high levels of worker turnover (Harrikari, 2023; McFadden et al., 2023). In social work organizations, the aftermath of the pandemic has seen persistently high levels of need for services in concert with increased fiscal pressures, related budget constraints, staff shortages, and the ongoing pressures of neoliberal managerialism and regulatory requirements (Harrikari, 2023, p. 236). The pull to the status quo ante thus remains strong.

Efforts to enhance the profession's capacity for and investment in future-forward thinking must acknowledge – and respond to – these realities, in tandem with acknowledging work already underway that lays the foundations for future-facing efforts. Nonetheless, the need for the profession to further develop an anticipatory stance toward future challenges, and related capacities in the social work workforce, should not be sidestepped. How, then, can the profession translate the learning from the pandemic into ways of being and doing that will serve it well going forward, given both current challenges and the strong likelihood of further global crises?

Building Jetties into the Future

To not only sustain the ability for courageous innovation that social workers and social service systems demonstrated during the pandemic (Harrikari et al., 2023), but harness it to the task of navigating the changes in systems and services that forthcoming uncertainties and upheavals will require, the profession must engage seriously with Facer's (2019) key question: How do we build sturdy "jetties into the future," given that we - and our students, and the communities we serve - are "moving into a new world for which we have no maps" (p. 46). Looking across writers, thinkers, and actors in the climate crisis space, the key outlines of a blueprint for crafting durable "jetties to the future" are beginning to emerge. Given the complexity of the issues involved, these focus centrally on multidimensional, multisectoral, boundary-spanning approaches, anchored in recognition that anticipatory, collaborative, and change-oriented ways of thinking and doing will be essential. Key elements include, among others:

Socio-ecological frameworks and responses: Increasingly, there is widespread and growing recognition that climate change, like the pandemic, is inescapably a social and human crisis as well as an environmental one and that techno-scientific responses and solutions – which tend to be what policymakers reach for, at least initially – are not in themselves sufficient. As Richard Horton, Editor of the Lancet, noted in a 2020 commentary, "The most important consequence of seeing COVID-19 as a syndemic is to underline its social origins" (2020, p. 874). Biomedical solutions, Horton asserted, are bound to fail unless they are implemented in tandem with policies and programs aimed at addressing social factors, including, importantly, underlying sociostructural disparities. Similar arguments are being made in relation to climate change (Frame & Cradock-Henry, 2022). Recognition of the social dimensions of climate change opens new opportunities for social work involvement: efforts to enhance climate

resilience at the community level as well as to respond effectively to the impacts of climate disasters necessarily require active engagement by the social and human sciences and allied professions. Similarly, the profession has much to contribute to developing, implementing, and evaluating 'joined up' social-ecological frameworks and interventions (Kemp & Palinkas, 2015; Hulme et al., 2020).

New/different partnerships: Defining climate change and global environmental problems in social as well as ecological terms leads, in turn, to recognition of the need for novel, indeed 'strange bedfellow' partnerships, across disciplines and professions, and with local communities and stakeholders (Rigg & Mason, 2018). Transdisciplinary partnerships typically involve multiple disciplines and stakeholders, working collaboratively across organizational and disciplinary boundaries to tackle complex socio-environmental issues, or 'wicked problems' (Nurius et al., 2017). Although transdisciplinary collaborations have conventionally been conceptualized as encompassing a range of academic disciplines (often those in fairly close proximity to one another), they are increasingly envisioned as necessarily also including not only a broadened array of disciplines and professions, but also community partners, local stakeholders, and (as sovereign entities) Indigenous peoples, with the aim of co-creating responses informed by and relevant to those most affected.

Pluralistic knowledges, flattened knowledge hierarchies, and transdisciplinary knowledge frameworks: Relatedly, there is broad agreement that efforts to address complex, entangled, open-ended, multidimensional – and inherently messy – socio-ecological problems require expansive knowledge frameworks (Hulme et al., 2020; Frame & Cradock-Henry, 2022) that allow for holistic, multi-dimensional understandings of the "entangled relations between natural, social and cultural worlds" (Lövbrand et al., 2015, p. 212). Many of these efforts focus on building frameworks that bridge multiple disciplinary perspectives (bringing research and theoretical perspectives from the social sciences and humanities together with those from environmental and other sciences, for example). However, climate change and environmental crises also make clear the importance of engaging local, contextual knowledges and "situated" epistemologies in effective responses (Lövbrand, 2015, p. 213), including, centrally, Indigenous knowledges, lifeways, and peoples (Billiot et al., 2019; Hernandez & Spencer, 2020; Latulippe & Klenk, 2020, Spencer et al., 2020).

Locally tailored and led solutions and action: Threaded across these domains is a growing interdisciplinary and applied commitment to "the local, in tandem with a re-engagement and re-emphasis on local and community agency and self-determination" (Lövbrand et al., 2015, p. 216). In part this reflects increasing recognition, as Singer et al. (2022) pointed out in relation to syndemics, that "context matters" (p. 5). Crises that at one level are widely if not globally experienced also have locally inflected drivers and characteristics, requiring locally and regionally tailored responses. There is also growing awareness that the knowledge, adaptability, resistance, and resilience of local communities and residents are key bulwarks in both mitigating climate change and responding to the impacts of climate related crises and disasters. Kemp and Palinkas (2015) thus underscore the importance of social work's actual and potential contributions to "collaborative capacity building to mobilize and strengthen place-based, community-level resilience, assets, and action, including active involvement in engaging community residents and stakeholders in proactive planning and participatory development" (p. 13).

Social justice and equity: Both the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change have laid bare the underlying fault lines and inequities in societies worldwide that place marginalized

populations at most risk of harm, such as poverty, racial and ethnic marginality, homelessness, and the multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities experienced by many low-income essential workers. These increasingly visible precarities underscore the critical importance of justice- and equity-oriented frameworks and interventions in climate action and add fuel to conversations already underway about the intersections among social justice, climate justice, environmental justice, environmental and institutional racism, and settler colonialism (Turhan, 2021; Potter et al., 2022). Here also, the social work profession has a great deal to contribute.

Implications for Future-Facing Social Work
Many of the domains above resonate and align with social work's mission, values, and core capacities. In contexts of upheaval, uncertainty, and risks to the welfare of all, but particularly those who are most marginalized and vulnerable, the profession's social, relational, and dialogic skills and knowledge, systemic orientation, strengths in collaborative practice, and understanding of people in context are highly relevant. Social work also brings to the table both a strong commitment to equity and social justice, and deep investment in engaging and amplifying the perspectives and priorities of those it serves. Indeed, as noted by Harrikari (2023), the profession has a deep archive of knowledge and skills to draw on in response to future challenges.

However, to engage effectively and with influence in the transdisciplinary spaces where forward-looking work on complex global challenges such as climate change frequently occurs, it is essential that social work both sees a place for itself at these tables, and actively presents itself as a discipline with the capacity to contribute to strengthening adaptive capacity as well as responding post-hoc to the impacts of environmental and other global crises (Kemp & Palinkas, 2015). To do so, we cannot rely only on social work's extant theoretical and practice frameworks and related bodies of research. Nor, I suggest, can the profession limit itself to alliances with its familiar partners in health and human services and allied disciplines. Rather, social work needs to reach well beyond its customary disciplinary partnerships, and to place the knowledge and skills it brings to the table into conversation – and at times argument – with unfamiliar (and perhaps uncomfortable) perspectives, knowledges, frameworks, and methods (Nurius et al., 2017). In the climate space, for example, this would entail engagement with fields as diverse as the environmental, climate and ecological sciences, the design professions, geography and urban planning, engineering and computer science, and the environmental humanities, as well as with local stakeholders and Indigenous communities – the kinds of multifaceted relationships and disciplinary alliances, in fact, that in many ways were typical of professional social work's early beginnings in the urban settlement houses (Kemp, 2011; Williams, 2019), but which are no longer as central to mainstream social work practice.

Currently, the profession's positioning reflects, I suggest, a largely disciplinary understanding of its role and contributions. This discipline-centric stance is maintained and reinforced by the profession's regulatory bodies, which in the interest of service users monitor and protect the boundaries and practice of the field. The strictures of accreditation processes, registration, and competency expectations create a professional milieu, particularly in educational settings, in which it can be difficult to innovate (Boersma, 2014). Allied professional fields, including population health (Frenk et al. 2010), and early childhood education (Gibson et al., 2022), face similar challenges, leading to calls for investments in envisioning "new ways of being a professional" (Gibson et al., 2022, p. 91). Such efforts need not dilute social work's professional identity and standards. Rather, they require reassessment of current emphases on

disciplinary boundaries, borders, and turf, and a willingness to focus instead on developing "T-shaped" social workers (Nurius et al., 2017) – practitioners with robust disciplinary knowledge and skills in tandem with multisectoral, boundary spanning, and anticipative capacities. Much of the responsibility for developing social workers with these capacities will fall on social work education. However social work's various professional and regulatory bodies also have important roles to play in making way for, encouraging, and supporting developments in the field aimed at strengthening the profession's future-oriented readiness.

Actively centering and engaging with the complexities and challenges of climate change and other contemporary grand challenges will require social work to actively cultivate – as a field, in our social work workforce, and in our students – the capacity for what Michelle Fine and Lois Weis have termed *critical bifocality* (Weis & Fine, 2012, see also Wilson et al., 2020). Weis and Fine define critical bifocality as, broadly, a willingness to "connect the dots across …presumed binaries" (pp. 174-175). Extrapolating from this conceptualization, critical bifocality encompasses the ability to hold and work with the tensions as well as opportunities that come with both/and thinking; to color outside the lines of established partnerships, practices, and indeed comfort zones; and to embrace and work productively within and across the disparate, complex, and unfolding. Capacities that reflect critical bifocality include (among others):

1. The ability to respond to current issues and needs *and* to anticipate and look ahead.

2. A clear sense of professional identity in tandem with openness to and engagement with a range of knowledges and knowledge holders, including diverse disciplinary partners, community stakeholders, and Indigenous peoples.

3. Recognition that going forward, social work practice must necessarily balance the 'search for certainty' (preferences for trusted and effective knowledge, reliable tools, expectable outcomes, and demonstrable skills and competencies) with the reality that the "new normal" is one of change, flux, uncertainty, turbulence, and emergence (Panagiotaros et al., 2022).

4. Understandings that social work's core 'competencies' must therefore expand to encompass both strong disciplinary and professional foundations, and capacities fundamental to future-facing transdisciplinary collaborations, including openness to diverse perspectives and methods and the capacity to think well in contexts of rapid change and indeterminacy (Nurius et al., 2017).

5. Frameworks and practices that are deeply relational (if not humanistic) but not human-centric (i.e., that do not privilege human exceptionalism or primarily Western understandings of human-earth relationships) (Bozalek & Pease, 2020).

6. Responses that are local/localized but not parochial, including recognition that local places, people, and issues are also "stretchy" – that in an increasingly globally networked, transnational world, 'here' is also 'there,' and that locally experienced challenges are related also to global factors and forces.

If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything it is that we have lost the luxury of relying primarily on customary approaches to social work practice, education, and research. Indisputably, the profession must think, teach, and practice for change. The challenges

coming with climate change and other complex social, health, environmental, and political issues demand the capacity for agility, flexibility, creativity, and for decision-making and action in conditions of uncertainty and with incomplete information: a stance that Neden et al. (2020) describe as "anticipative." We can no longer rely centrally on legacy learning environments and modalities (such as classroom-based, primarily discipline-centric teaching), or on our longstanding theoretical and practice frameworks, with their humanist, individualistic DNA and bracketing of knowledge and skills from disciplines and fields beyond our usual scope of engagement. As Williams (2019) notes, in relation to the multiple implications of emerging urbanisms and related social and environmental issues, it is time for forthright re-examination of social work's "role, remit and approach" (p. 268), and for "pragmatic identification of relevant skill sets, scale and points of leverage to underpin the needed paradigmatic shift in practice" (p. 268).

Much of the responsibility for equipping social workers with these capacities will fall to social work education, and investments in pedagogies and learning opportunities that support the development of transdisciplinary and anticipative capacities. Facer (2019) argued that the skills for navigating changing environments and addressing environmental injustices are best developed through opportunities for developing "praxis knowledge" (p. 5), which she defined as "the development of knowledge through action, through experimentation, through the interplay of thinking and doing" (p. 5). This approach maps closely onto pragmatist perspectives and frameworks that have been central to US social work from its earliest beginnings (Berridge, 2019), and which continue to resonate in contemporary practice. Similarly, the pedagogical strategies best suited for engaging in praxis, such as design thinking, transdisciplinary engagement, and place-based, question-driven learning and action, mirror practice approaches pioneered by early social workers in the urban settlement houses (Kemp, 2011; Williams, 2019). Importantly, critically-inflected, praxis-oriented, broadly participatory approaches to both learning and practice also provide opportunities for opening the field's established knowledges, frameworks, and methods to scrutiny, and for assessing – in dialogue and partnership with the people and communities we work with and with colleagues across a range of disciplines and professions – the extent to which they are 'fit for purpose' given emergent realities and challenges.

Conclusion
Writing about the COVID-19 pandemic, Arundhati Roy (2020) pointed out that "Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next." The core question Roy posed, however – and a central question animating the Social Work Futures conference – is whether humanity would choose to walk through this portal, "ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it" (Roy, 2020).

Will social work make the most of the liminal moment of the pandemic and its aftermath? Can the profession navigate the inevitable tensions and complexities entailed in engaging with and responding to the world we are in, while at the same time imagining and working towards a necessarily transformed sense of its future? Furthermore, can we find ways to re-imagine, invigorate, and expand our conceptual, methodological, and practice frameworks, and to position social work as a forward-looking discipline "of consequence" (Williams, 2019, p. 268) in an increasingly contingent, unstable, and unsustainable world? My take on this is that we not only can, but that in ways small as well as large, we must.

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