

**MUO-E0105 Research
and Inspire 6 cr
Welcome!**

Programme

24.10. Inspiring//Change+Course Intro

31.10. Design-Driven Change

7.11. Long-Term Collective Change

14.11. Changing Values

21.11. Individual Change

28.11. Changing Worldviews

5.12. Presentations

Today, we will talk about worldviews, that is, the most comprehensive way of constructing what's going on and how the world is built. The world view of contemporary people is, of course, very different from the world views of, for example, people living in the 18th century, around the birth of Christ or pre-historic times.

We know very little about prehistoric people because we don't have any records, but I think it is fair to say that we don't have many more chances to understand how the 18th-century people understood the world they're living in because, for example, the structures of the society were based on deeply religious principles, whereas today, the Western world is, by and large, secular and grounded on capitalistic ideas about the sources of societal and cultural power.



Amongst the global changes our planet has seen, the series of Industrial Revolutions have driven dramatic changes in people's worldviews. One of the changes is, indeed, the transformation from spiritual and religious emphasis to secular capitalism - the same change that Stuart Walker discusses in his article (Walker 2013).

The Western worldview before the Industrial Revolution was grounded on the view that God had made people unequal because some people were created from finer dust than others and were, therefore, fit for ruling and controlling others. In Finnish, we speak of "Sääty-yhteiskunta", and in English, I think the term is "Estate society". Such a worldview is relatively peaceful and stable, at least in the sense that people do not have much motivation for social mobility because people were born in their estate and learned to behave according to what was seen as proper behaviour for that particular estate. If you were born to a family of farmers, you became a farmer or farmer's wife.

The First Industrial Revolution gradually changed the worldview because it became possible for some people to become industry investors, which became a relatively novel way of making income out of the work that the steam-powered machines and factory workers were doing. Gradually, wealth made investors powerful figures in society, and the old aristocracy began to lose power to the factory and capital owners, which made people, in general, question the traditional order of society. You could not continue arguing that the order of society and the destiny of an individual is designed by God when it was clear that anyone lucky enough to have the money to invest could begin climbing in the societal hierarchy.

Photo by Peter Herrmann on Unsplash



The change from the order designed by God to the order based on ownership and money caused people to design means for understanding the world. The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann argues that the device for understanding the world is "self-description" for which people did not have much need before the Industrial Revolution but which became increasingly important as the 20th century progressed.

Niklas Luhmann is a famous system theorist. His books include, for example, "Art as a Social System" (2000) and the massive "Social Systems" (1995), where he develops a theory about society as a system.

Luhmann is famous for demanding that complex entities, like society, should be talked about in a complex enough manner, meaning that when the issue is complex, it should not be diluted by talking with simplified metaphors and concepts, which is precisely what I will do: talk in a simple manner about very complex issues.

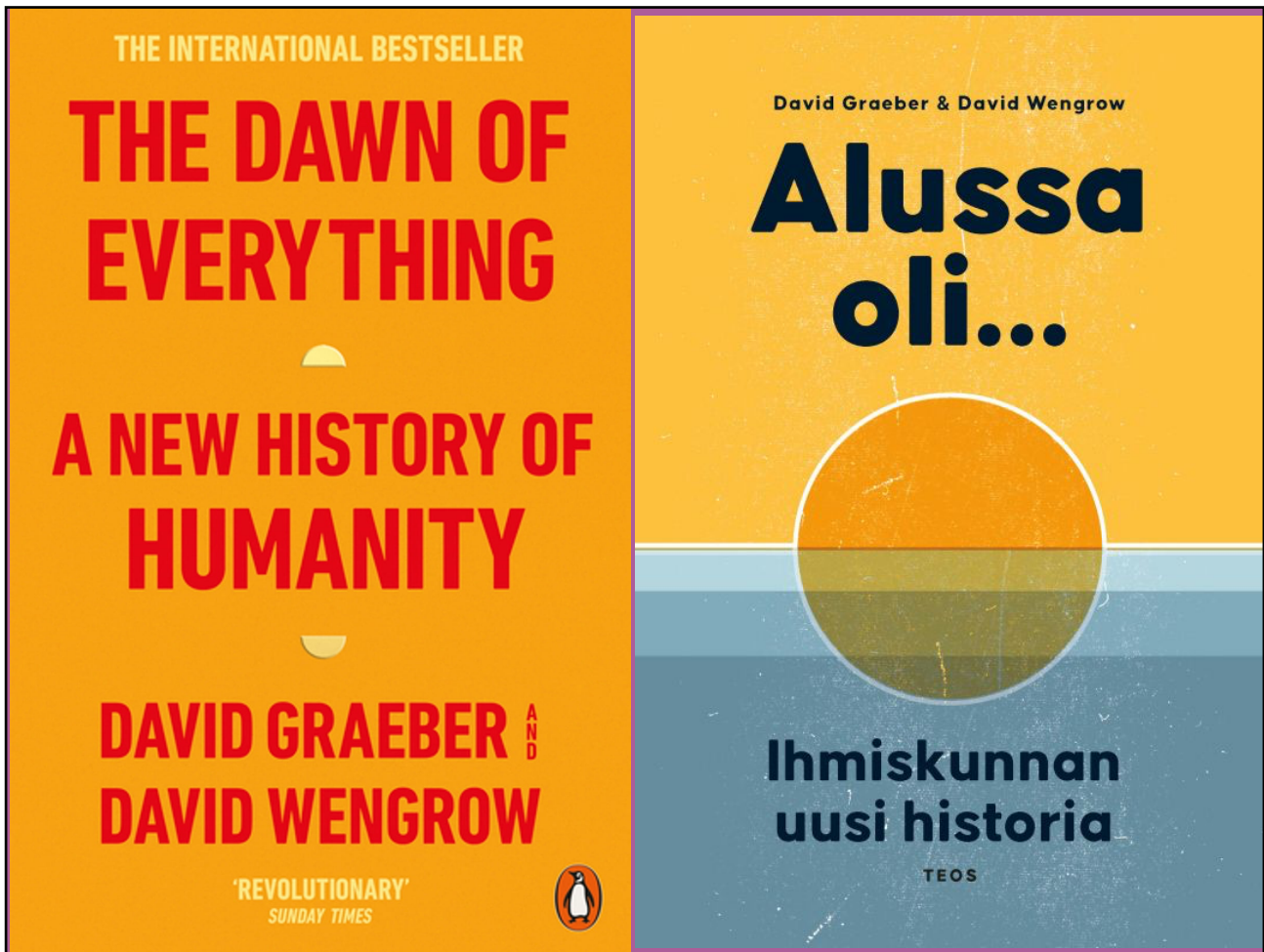
Complexity is at the heart of today's discussion because our topic is the "worldview". Complexity means, roughly, that a thing can be called complex when there are so many interrelated elements that it is impossible to calculate the outcome of their interactive behaviour. I cannot think of anything more complex than the world.

Yet, according to Luhmann, we humans are the kinds of creatures that like to understand and comprehend and, if possible, categorise because categorising gives structure to the world. Categorising lets us count probabilities and, therefore, orients us towards the future. We do not seem to be able just to let things be. We long for organisation and comprehension. From this follows, according to Luhmann, human insistence on creating so-called "self-descriptions", with which we describe the world and ourselves in the world and then act based on that description as if it is a true, accurate description of the reality, which it, of course, isn't and cannot be, because the world is always too complex to be described accurately.

At the heart of self-descriptions is the fact that they are always highly selective: Self-descriptions are selections of some things while others are not included in the self-description. Self-descriptions are always simplifications of what is infinitely complex, yet they are sufficiently vague so they cannot be formalised into a finished picture, which means that self-descriptions cannot be avoided: we cannot finish the picture, but we cannot avoid doing them either because we cannot avoid making observations, thinking and acting in the world. Luhmann writes: "The self-descriptions are unique kind of semantic performances. They cannot claim to be true like the descriptions done outside the system about the system, but the reason why this is so is not that they are pure ideologies. The reason is that they are self-descriptions, and self-descriptions form the conditions for their own possibilities."

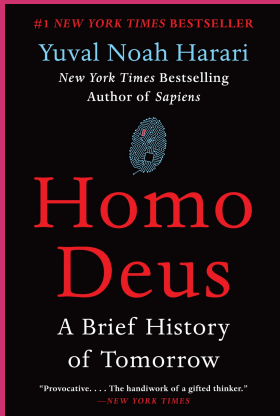
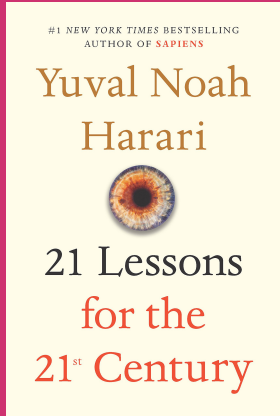
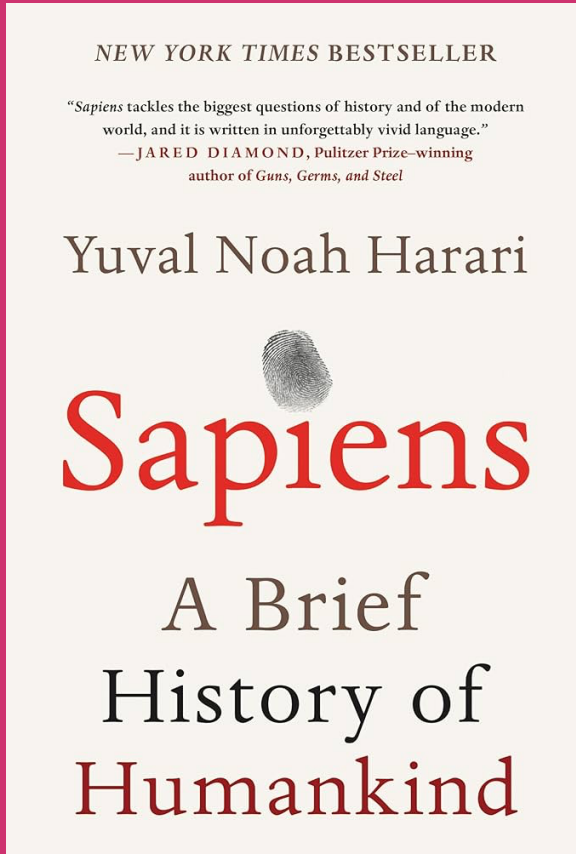
In other words, "The system uses simplified models of itself to direct its own actions." (Luhmann quoted in Kangas 2001)

Photo by Ivan Tsaregorodtsev on Unsplash

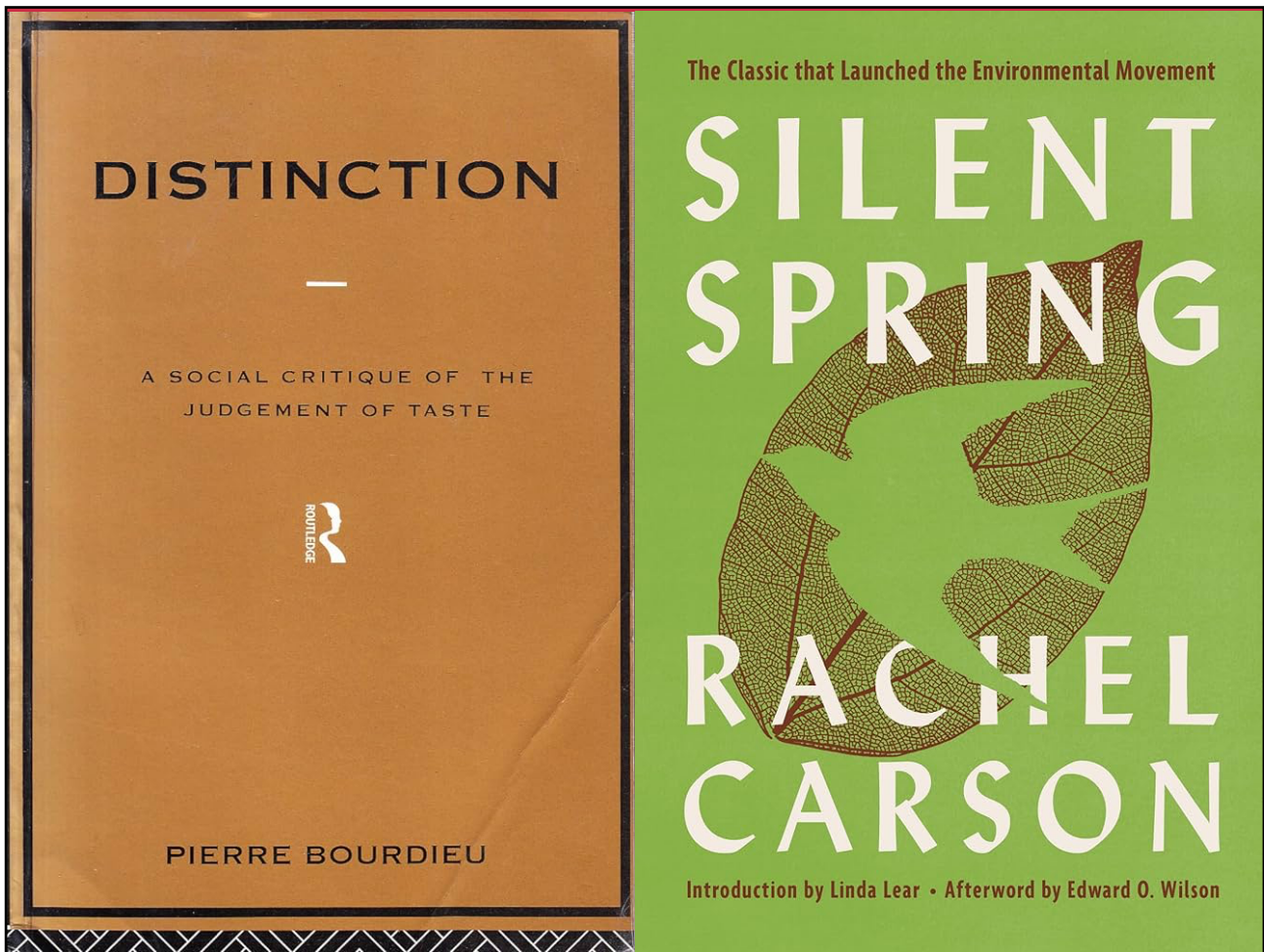


Interestingly enough, just a couple of years ago, *The Dawn of Everything* argued that it is, in fact, really amazing how the Western World has gotten stuck to its current Industrial Revolution-driven self-description of the world. The writers are anthropologists and do not use Luhmann's terminology, but the question fits well: why are we stuck in the current system when it is clear that it does not meet the needs of most living beings on the planet?

The evidence of pre-historic and non-Western political experimentations is quite robust, showing how societies worldwide have tested different ways of organising society and typically rejected all systems that come even close to the capitalist system the Western World is so fond of.



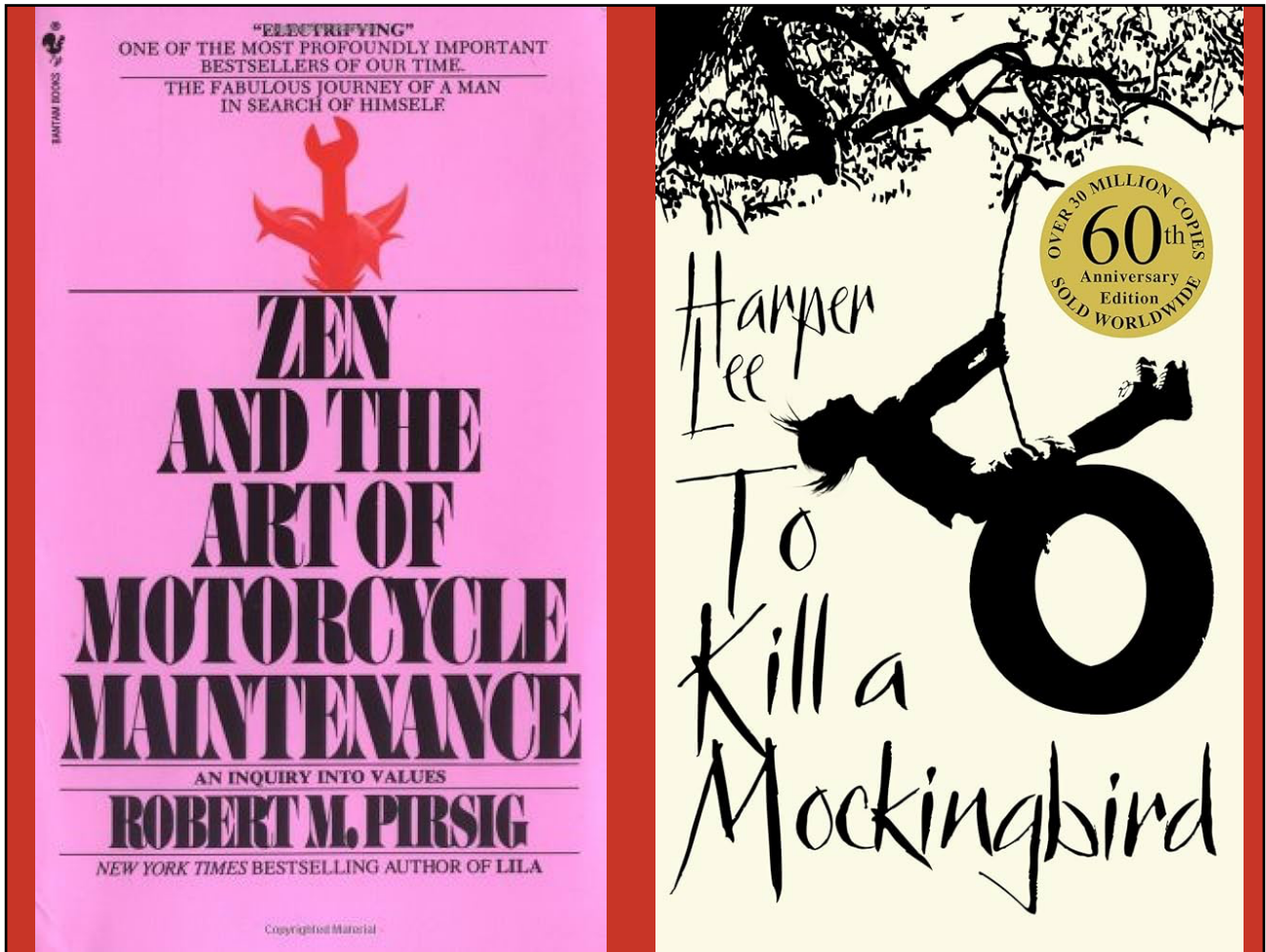
Harari's grand tour of the history of humankind is also a recent attempt to explain why we have changed the way we have. (Haven't read them)



Then, let's take examples of publications that have changed people's worldviews on specific topics.

Pierre Bourdieu's research on the principles driving consumption is most likely the most famous and influential publication on consumption, even though the study was completed in the mid-1960s. If you read even the introduction, you will notice how practically every newspaper article discussing consumption relies more or less on the results of this study. Bourdieu's primary argument is that people's consumption is driven by the societal fight over symbolic capital, that is, what is seen as valuable in society. From this follows, for example, ideas that people are buying stuff, learning things and choosing what they do to impress others.

Another book is *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson because it drew people's attention to the violence the industry was doing to nature. The spring is silent because all birds have died from the toxic waste the factories are pouring into the natural waters. This book caused quite drastic changes in waste management legislation and, in general, made people aware of the fragility of natural resources.



Finally, a couple of books that, it has been argued, made people change their views on how the society is working.

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance touches on several issues. Maybe the most influential part is the description of how the care for mental illness was cruel and inhuman and also how society cannot tolerate deviant behaviour.

To Kill a Mockingbird touches on the unfair treatment of people and the systemic racism prevalent in the 1960s USA, especially in the deep South where the narrative is located. The book is banned in several states in the USA because of the way people speak in the book, for example, using the N-word.



indifference

So, what kind of "simplified models" are we using to "direct the system's actions"?

Typically, sociologists who have tried to explain society come up with one lens through which society can be explained. Niklas Luhmann himself highlights communication: everything is about communication and consequent failures and successes in communication. Others have highlighted, for example, consumption, productivity, information, interaction, networks, and, for example, Pierre Bourdieu has argued that it's all about style.

All of these make sense if you study the original texts but do not, even together, form a complete, accurate picture of the world because it is impossible. The world is too complex, and any description of it would be incomplete and outdated at the moment of its creation.

But maybe the idea of self-description could be utilised without the imaginary pressure to be accurate, stemming from the need to categorise things and have them in order. Luhmann himself emphasises the role of indifference because we are and have to be ignorant and indifferent about most of the world. Maybe we should acknowledge the false sense of control and accept that indifference is a valid and expected part of our views of the world. Our being in the world and our relationship with the things in the world are typically and usually not very loaded. We simply do not care and do not even know about most of the things in the world. Maybe we will learn to relax and make friends with indifference and not insist that we are always fully informed and knowledgeable.

Photo by JOHN TOWNER on Unsplash



But being indifferent may be socially challenging because it seems that everything has to be induced with passion, or else it is meaningless. For example, people expect to find a job about which they are passionate even though studies show that the most content workers are those who are simply good at what they are doing, in positions that have nothing to do with passion or vision (Newport 2012). Social media is living on heated arguments over things that may not actually interest anyone in the discussion.

Photo by Manyu Varma on Unsplash. About the photo: Theyyam is a ritual form in Kerala, India. This particular Theyyam is one variation of 'Pottan Theyyam', a vivid, lively and colourful ritualistic performance which comes in the traditional art form of Theyyam. It is believed Pottan Theyyam is a manifestation of Shiva. 'Pottan Theyyam' is traditionally performed with a large fire, the embers of which 'Pottan Theyyam' will rest upon (with the people insisting/requesting him to get up). After the performance and customs, the locals may approach and speak with 'Pottan Theyyam' and receive his response and blessing. Location: Nileschwaram, India.



It might be that the self-description, the simplified model the system uses to direct its future actions, is slowly turning from a capitalist narrative that emphasises control and organisation to a more tolerant and relaxed self-description that accepts both indifference and diversity. The megatrend and threat of climate warming are, of course, decisive factors in forcing the system to modify its self-description. Many signs seem to hint in this direction, for example, in the design field, the recent and still emerging discussion on the more-than-human design and pluriverse view of the world. (Escobar 2018; Wakkary 2021) It is possible that in the future, the self-description does not assume that humankind is entitled to exploit the planet and its living beings or that ownership gives power over others.

**Move from one extreme
to another. From simple
to complex, from
practical to abstract,
from past to future**

Use metaphors and analogies to explain and concretise

**Play with stereotypes.
Challenge stereotypical
thinking**

Clarify the narrative to yourself with statements:
"This report is about...",
"This chapter is about...",
"The main message is...",
"Key takeaway is..."

About presentations

- Outline the plot you're developing in the "Text"
- Explain why the plot is structured that way

Time limit: 1-15 minutes

Format: open

Let's aim at learning rather than giving impressive presentations.



Tutoring on Thursday afternoon!

Photo by noelle on Unsplash

Literature

Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the pluriverse. Radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds.* Duke University Press.

Kangas, R. (2001). *Yhteiskunta. Tutkielma yhteiskunnasta, yhteiskunnan käsitteestä ja sosiologiasta.* Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto.

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Newport, C. (2012). *So good they can't ignore you. Why skills trump passion in the quest for work you love.* New York: Business Plus.

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