

— AN EMERGING HUMAN CAPACITY —



— RIA BAECK —

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# **Collective Presencing: an emerging human capacity**

**What becomes possible when we are truly  
present together**

**Ria Baeck**

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## Chapter list

Acknowledgements; Foreword; Introduction

Chapter 1. I and Myself: Being Present

Chapter 2. I and You: Authentic Relationship

Chapter 3. I and Us: Circle Practice

Chapter 4. I and Potential: Collective Wisdom

Chapter 5. Closing and Opening Anew: Paradigm Shift

Chapter 6. Taking the Leap: I-in-Now

Chapter 7. Generative Dialogue: We-in-Now

Chapter 8. Subtle Simplicity: We-in-Here

Chapter 9. Gathered: We-Now-Here and Potential

Bibliography

About the author

*We also have a separate page showing all headings and subheadings, if that helps to find a section of the book that you would like to see.*

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Simon, new friend. The miracle that came my way. Who put all the references in, made all the pictures the right size and tended to so many details. Who reminded me of taking the next, elegant, minimal step at the right time. On our way to another book?

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# Foreword

***Dedicated to Duri,  
who set me on this path.***

When the forms of an old culture are dying,  
the new culture is created by a few people  
who are not afraid to be insecure.

— Rudolf Bahro <sup>1</sup>

There is a story to be told, wherein many people take part, but it's not seen by many. A story about people gathering, for the sake of a purpose – sometimes unclear to their conscious minds – but with a willingness and an intention to be of service to something larger than their personal gain.

It is only the beginning of the story, only the first baby steps have been taken, but it is worth telling and worth reading, as it will ignite the imagination of others, near and far.

I came to see that I have to tell it, because I am the one noticing it. However, this story is not mine; it belongs to the commons, to the liminal space in between.

The story I want to tell has no real beginning and it has no happy end, because it is inherently an unfolding story and many more people will add chapters, re-work it, re-edit and re-use it. I will be happy to see this happen. It will show me – and others – that this is an evolving and living story.

## Notes

1: Rudolph Bahro: (*widely quoted*)

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## Introduction to the book



To write authentically *about any territory*, such as ‘art’, one has to *go there* – to take a dive into that gap, plunging toward the territory as deep and as far as one can let oneself go. To extend the metaphor, we have to dive for as long we can hold our breath – which is the suspension of making convenient interpretations for as long as it takes to touch bedrock. And then – and only then – are we qualified to report back. What was it like? How deep did you go? What did you discover? Did you touch the face of the Muse?

— Bonnitta Roy<sup>1</sup>

In this book you will find none of the gloom and doom scenarios that crowd so many books, articles and websites these days. I prefer to dispense with these and focus instead on what is possible. The quest narrated here centres on how we can rediscover the sense of wonderment in life and participate in the radiance and magnificence of all that is. Ourselves included. Our work included. Others included. Everything included.

These pages describe a body of work that has emerged from a practice of action research, not in a context of academia or Fortune 500 companies, but rather from small circles of women with a deep commitment to attend to Source. Accordingly, I can refer to no Big Names: it was just us. It wasn’t even *me* – although I am the one writing this book, because I was always the one most eager to understand what is behind and underneath our experiences. No, it is about the principles and the patterns of our collective inquiry.

The book started out as an article supplementing ‘Theory U’, as developed by Otto Scharmer,<sup>2</sup> because, inspiring as I found his framework, it didn’t seem able to accommodate what we had been living in our many women’s gatherings. The practice that we came to call Collective Presencing seems to tell us something about evolution itself, about a human capacity beginning to emerge, and about the new paradigm that we see and feel unfolding through us. The framework I found that best fit our experiences was Jean Gebser’s description of the mutation of consciousness,

written half way through the previous century.<sup>3</sup> The book at your fingertips seeks to articulate how we can live in the new Epoch that is dawning during our days.

What our collective experience adds to conventional understanding and knowledge chiefly concerns the inner, subtle and collective dimensions at play in our lives and work. Our wish is to balance the diverse and manifold ways of knowing, to invite them to co-create in the world. In stark contrast to ‘mainstream’ culture, we cultivate a practice of deep attention to discerning and embodying the individual’s unique contribution to life – another way of articulating Scharmer’s concept of ‘Open Will’. Another novelty will be to apply all this to teams, groups and circles – the collective as it shows up in daily life.

Unpacking our learning lead us to develop a framework illuminating the differences and distinctions between *Circles of Presence* and *Circles of Creation*. While the former will allow groups to achieve collective wisdom, the latter goes much further, embracing and integrating the inner, subtle and collective energetic realms where a group of people can enter a truly collective, generative space.

You don’t need to know anything about Theory U or Gebser’s framework to understand what is written here and to be able to apply it. More crucial is the practice of Circle work, in all its depth and humility.<sup>c</sup>

## An emerging human capacity

This human capacity is emerging neither as change *within* a level of context, nor even as a transformational change to a new and higher level and/or context. It is much more than that: it is a real turning point, a paradigm shift... a mutation in consciousness, as Gebser named it.

Bonnitta Roy emphasizes the difference between development and evolution. She stated (online, within the Magellan courses): “... machines can *develop* well beyond our capacities, because they can run an unlimited number of operations in unlimited time... but they cannot and will never be able to *evolve*. To evolve, someone will have to pull the plug, and install a new operating system, according to a new paradigm.”

She went on to ask: “Do we live as if the whole purpose of evolution is to get up to human? Or: Do we live as if human is one of the stages in a greater cosmic story? What we really believe out of these scenarios makes a big difference!”

When I speak of an emerging human capacity, I see it as part of an evolutionary jump, a sudden leap in human capacities. I’m not at all sure where this will lead – for humanity and all that is alive. I can only share my personal take on it, after many experiences and much pondering, including my own deep intuition and sensing.

As much as anything else, this book is an invitation to live consciously with and in evolution itself. To do this, we are forced to embrace more of who we are, where we came from and what we can be, both individually and collectively. Therefore we need new practices, new organizing patterns, new competencies, new language, and so on. In general, we need to discover, activate and embody a new human, collective capacity. A capacity that sees – and *embodies* – the world also in terms of organisms, ecosystems, energies, dynamic balance, relationships and emergence instead of only focusing on individuals, planning, organizations, problems, order and the like. This novel capacity invites us – again and again – to hold the tension of not-yet-knowing, while tuning into the questions that really, deeply matter.

This new capacity will help us to create in and from complexity – perhaps even chaos and collapse – and will call forth from us a new way of being and doing. Our main centre of gravity will shift from ‘I, being an individual human being’ to ‘human collectives aligned with life all around’. This new capacity shifts us into an identity that is of service to and through the collective – whatever that is and can become. We – the women and men whose journey is described here, and others besides – have been innovating and prototyping a new collective practice, articulating how the new paradigm could be lived. We are weaving a new story field, and this is one of the stories that resides there.

## How you can read this book

This book contains story, explanation and description, maps and models. You can skip one or the other form, but by taking them all together you will more easily see the texture and weave of this new tapestry. The stories are mostly snippets of experience excerpted from the project Women Moving the Edge (WMtE). The explanation sets more flesh on the bones, as an attempt to make our distinctions and patterns somehow comprehensible. Each chapter will close with a systematic overview. All the chapters, taken together, build up to two maps,<sup>4</sup> which are useful as guiding material.

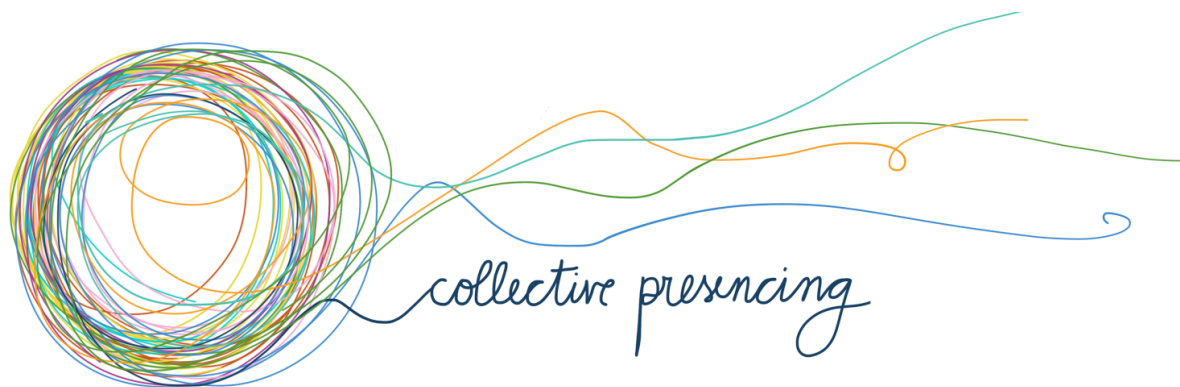
## Notes

1: Bonnitta Roy: *The Map, the Gap and the Territory*. ↓

2: Otto Scharmer: *Theory U*. ↓

3: Jean Gebser: *The Ever-Present Origin*. ↓

4: The Circle of Presence map and the Circle of Creation map.



# 1. I and Myself: Being Present

1.1 Beginning of the New Beginning

1.2 How Women Moving the Edge started

1.3 Subtle Sensing and the Body

1.4 Being present as a process

1.5 Preparing the first Women Moving the Edge gathering

1.6 Opening to my Authentic Self

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This is **Chapter 1**, named: **I and Myself**. Only later will the implication of the different chapter names become clear. To explain it here at this stage would be too onerous, so let your self be guided through the parts and the chapters, until we reach the point where the explanation has its rightful place.

## 1.1 Beginning of the New Beginning



### My lived action research

I didn't do a PhD when I was at university; I wasn't interested and I held the belief that I wasn't smart enough. In retrospect, though, I can see that for the last decade or so I have actually been living a big action research project. It turns out that I formulated my first research question in March 2004, right after a professional partnership came quite suddenly to an end and left me in a void.

Here is what I wrote (in those days, not yet being linked into any international networks, I still wrote in Dutch): "Writing a book? Is that it? It touches me somehow... stretching myself to connect everything with everything. OK, if a book needs to be written, then I will, and I will do the research with love and enthusiasm; but I don't want to worry about my finances, let that be organized without much effort." I subsequently forgot all about the question and this commitment, at least consciously, but from that day on, the heap of handwritten notes, printed papers and small articles on my desk kept piling higher and higher, and I knew something would need to happen with it.

I made a first attempt in May 2007. I tried to make sense of my notes and of the many experiences I had already had by then. I started an article entitled *A Story of Imagining the Future*, based on the draft chapter by Otto Scharmer *Twenty-Four Principles and Practices of Presencing for Leading Profound Change*,<sup>1</sup> the final version of which would be published in his book *Theory U*. I never finished that article. The final sections were just signposts and the last notes never made it to the keyboard. I looked around, on the internet and everywhere, to see who out there was writing or experimenting with the next level of intersubjective space. Nowhere could I find anything describing the potential I had experienced. That was when it started to dawn on me: I had to write this book myself!

Early in 2008, I shared with my friends: “I have to start writing – about all this knowing and wisdom. I have to do it in a way that integrates different styles. Not only a personal story or an academic research paper, but a fusion. I don’t know where all this is going, but I’m going to start anyway.”

After moving house in the autumn of 2008, I found myself with a lot of time on my hands. I spread out all my notes on the floor of my new living room so that I could see the whole. I managed to cluster some notes around themes, but the whole didn’t show itself! I would sit with it, stare at it, but my normal capacity to see patterns seemed to be failing me. The children who regularly visited my home kept telling me I should clean up the mess on the floor. Finally, after many weeks, possibly even months, feeling rather frustrated and following guidance from my mentor that “things weren’t ready yet”, I did just that.

Some months later, in March 2009, I was involved in hosting a gathering called Edge of Collective Sourcing, in a remote and beautiful area in Greece. Preparing for the gathering, the hosting circle decided to create a document reflecting our current understanding of what Collective Sourcing was about (more on this later). This became an article of a few pages that I copy-pasted the day before the gathering, to hand out to the participants. It marked another small step towards more writing. During the gathering, I was asked to return to this beautiful place later in the spring to take care of its animal residents – two dogs and a cat – while its human residents were travelling. This was tantamount to being offered two weeks of retreat time for free! I accepted with alacrity, recognizing that it was finally time to start the ‘real’ writing. This was when I made the first outline of this book, starting from that short article.

My first research question, back in 2004, had been: *What are the basic, universal, archetypal, human principles for living and working communities of the future? Not for the sake of community per se, but in order to create places where everyone and everything – including the Earth – can develop optimally, in order to bring about paradise on Earth?*

At that time, I also formulated a few other thoughts:

- Being radical and consistent in translating the concepts of Oneness, the participative universe, the enfoldment of the implicit order into day-to-day reality.
- A community of people as a complex adaptive system, on the edge of chaos: what does that mean?

All these questions came to find an answer in the practices and models you will find in this book.

The story of how this book finally came into being itself illustrates one of its main themes. We are – as I was – able to sense a potential that is *wanting* to come into manifestation. By offering that potential our attention, it can indeed become possible. Exactly how – and when – this happens will depend on a multiplicity of circumstances, not least of these being our ever more heightened and refined ability to align ourselves, within and without, ever wider, ever deeper.





## Integrating science, consciousness and sourcing

Words are sacred.  
If you get the right ones  
In the right order  
You can nudge the world a little.

Adapted from Tom Stoppard – The Real Thing: A Play

Over Christmas and New Year 2007, I was offered some retreat time in La Gomera. I wanted to use this opportunity to sink down into deeper space in myself than I had ever done before. I sat for many, many hours, by myself on the bench in the little garden with its orange, lemon and avocado trees, sensing and writing in my diary. One of the hurdles I had to overcome was how to blend two different energies within me.

I wrote:

This is not theoretical writing. I am used to writing ‘from the inside’, accessing my inner wisdom through writing, regarding important questions and issues. This means that my mind is not holding any ideas before the words flow out onto the paper. But here and now, I want to convey some of that inner wisdom to you, to others. So now there is knowing in my memory, and yet I still want the freshness of accessing new inner wisdom too. Can I stay in touch with the inner wisdom and still write a coherent piece, that makes sense to people who want to read it? It seems like mixing oil and water. Being a physically centred person, the integration first needs to happen in my body, in my own energetic system. Writing from inner knowing has no time lapse; I know what it is only once it is written down, not before. Writing from memory goes the other way round: first knowing, then writing. Difficult mix. But women are known for being good at multi-tasking, so there must be a way...



I did not yet know, at that time, that this blending was not just mine to do. As yet I had no inkling that I was at the outset of a long-term collective action research project that would unfold through many gatherings. These lived experiences were the first layer of the mesh that would weave together with individual and collective reflection on the question, all mixed in with moments of recognition and resonance in myself as I delved into the content of books and articles written by others.

Another diary fragment from the Gomera retreat read: “You need to find a new language that integrates science, consciousness and sourcing.” I might as well say this up front: the way I use the term ‘sourcing’ in this book has nothing whatsoever to do with the concept of ‘sourcing’ as it is used in the business world! My kind of Sourcing – meaning a lived experience of accessing information, a lived and embodied inner knowing – will be another important thread in this book. Through continuous reflection and ongoing collective inquiry over the years, some practices and patterns have revealed themselves to us, and these are offered here in stories, descriptions and maps.

During the cycle of gatherings in the container of Women Moving the Edge – which turned out to be a 5-year action research project – we experimented and learned a lot about dimensions of life which are either not much valued or simply not seen by mainstream Western society: the inner, the subtle and the collective. Our collective inquiry first required, then obliged us to articulate, to make distinctions, to describe – to find a language for the subtle differences between the different elements of the nebulous, intangible, inner and collective ways of knowing and sensing. It called on us to embody, integrate and seek the synergy of analysing, articulating and teaching with what came to us through inner knowing, subtle sensing and collective inquiry.

It is my hope that the description of the journey, the concepts and the maps, the language and practices you will find in these pages will invite you into a new way of being human – a wider lens onto a much broader vista of what we, the human tribe, could potentially be. This book is written as an unfolding story: not everything is revealed at the beginning, more is shared as you read further and subsequent steps build on earlier ones. More theoretical parts and models are included too, so that the whole of who you – and we – are can relate with the material provided. Maybe it will call you to something beyond...

## **Blending individual and collective knowing**

A central theme of this book is the unfolding capacity and competence that we see in what we here call ‘circles’. Circles can be teams or groups of any kind, bringing together people motivated by a shared inquiry. Because all the experiences in this action research have been collective ones, I have had to find a balance between writing the book myself, as a solitary activity, and incorporating the collective wisdom and knowledge generated throughout the journey.

To achieve this, I reread all the notes taken during the preparation of over 20 different gatherings: i.e. almost 200 conference calls, with a different configuration of people hosting each gathering. This wealth of input provided me with a lot of language, many quotes to put flesh on the bones of this book and its message. I also trawled through the many blog posts – again more than 100 – that I and other participants had written during and after the actual gatherings, as a way of weaving in the wisdom of the different collectives.

At one point, while the book was slowly taking shape, a small circle came together for regular conference calls to feed back ideas and comments as a way to enrich the content and clarify underlying patterns. This proved to be especially valuable, insofar as they afforded a more precise understanding of the different elements implied in real, generative creation. To ensure full congruence, in these calls we used our own practice – the deeper circle practice – so that the book and all that is related to its message should have the same integrity when it moves into the world.

This phase of the research – reading through these 350+ documents, all related to Women Moving the Edge and other such gatherings – took me a long time. It felt like dissecting a lived experience full of meaning and full of the wholeness of life, cutting it to pieces in order to make another kind of wholeness: an overview and patterns that would make sense for readers who had not shared the experience.

And still, reading this book is *not* the experience! It offers you a glimpse of what is possible, together with some guidelines, practices and maps in case you want to try it for yourself or use it to evolve in what you are already doing. Hosting or facilitating processes of this kind calls for mastery in different domains. The easiest way to achieve such mastery is to apprentice to the practice, to become a committed practitioner. This is a practice of both method and process, with more emphasis on the latter than we are used to, because we see their interconnection. That's why this learning works best through immersion in the lived experience, again and again. And then some more.



## Practice as embodied intention

It is important to understand that the Women Moving the Edge gatherings were always a *practice*. They were never a product that we could or would sell. At some moment, I became intrigued by the power of regular practice; be it the practice of hospitality in a B&B, the year long practice of karma yoga in an ashram, my own life practice of gardening and creating beauty and abundance... Practices of this kind really do something on an energetic level. Any visible impact is the tip of the iceberg.

Practices are embodied intentions – or they become so over time if they don't start out that way. They leave a deep energetic imprint on our selves and our surroundings; on places, on nature and on people. The gatherings were an invitation to more women to experience the practice of collective inquiry and collective sourcing. Many have found it of tremendous benefit in their lives. What we learned and developed together became the practice we now call Collective Presencing.

This book brings to the practice its missing half: the framework, the overview, the step-by-step breakdown, the distinctions, the theory. Together, the practice and the theory form a whole, in which each can inform and enhance the other. Together, in synergy, they belong to the new paradigm that is unfolding and taking shape, each day a bit more, throughout the world.

This book charts the parts and the capacities, and describes the experiences that point to the formation of sentient collectives (circles, groups, networks, organizations). We have noticed that (any) action is far better informed when natural rhythm and right timing are attended to, allowing the collective, generative process to unfold. In these pages

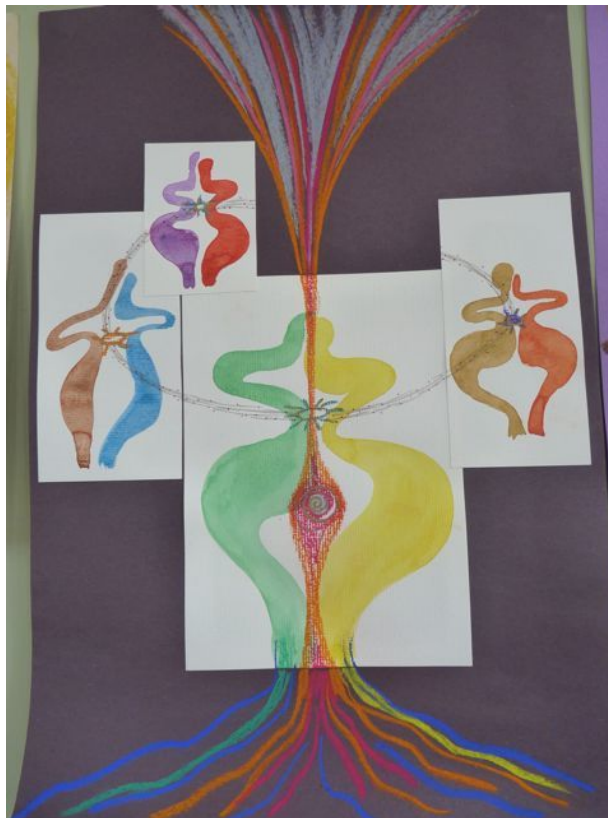
you will find practical advice that will make this collective practice more understandable and concrete, supporting its application – the practice itself – and pointing to what it makes possible in the world.

Today, we understand our practice as a collective inquiry into what it means to follow and manifest the new life force that is pulsing through the cosmos right now. The very fact that this practice is collective is part of the new, emergent pattern that is coming through.

## Notes

1: Otto Scharmer: *Twenty-Four Principles and Practices of Presencing for Leading Profound Change*. ↓

## 1.2 How Women Moving the Edge started



In the autumn of 2005, the late Finn Voldtofte sent out an email calling for volunteers to join a team to host a gathering called Moving the Edge of Collective Intelligence. I had first met Finn a few months before in Devon at the Kaleidoscope Café gathering – a retreat for practitioners of World Café and Art of Hosting, where we had experimented with what Finn called ‘listening to the middle’. I knew at once that I had to be there.

The way we worked was quite radical, in that we offered no structured, predefined programme. As the hosting team, we started the convening and hosting process through regular conference calls, the full notes of which were openly published on the internet. In that way, anyone considering participating in the gathering could follow the preparatory process and even comment and contribute beforehand.

The entire gathering, which took place in Denmark in March 2006, was a quest in search for this collective intelligence (or collective wisdom) that was bigger than the sum of the individuals. Finn called it The Magic in the Middle. We struggled and strained for a glimpse of this evasive magic. When the hosting team finally relinquished all attempts at facilitating a programme or design, we finally found ourselves inside this collective magic for about two hours! And indeed, it was magic! The true spirit of dialogue – as the ‘meaning flowing through’ the conversation (from its Greek root) – was palpable. Whatever anyone said fitted right into the flow of unfolding meaning. I knew and recognized this kind of meaning-flowing-through from experiences in my small women’s group in Flanders (Belgium), and some of the others could refer to similar experiences in other contexts. But most of the participants had no idea of where to go or how to get there.

Were we presumptuous to think that we could move the edge of consciousness itself? Was I arrogant to think that I could be of value to such a gathering and such an inquiry, and even to offer myself as part of the organizing and facilitation/hosting team? Maybe so, but I know that Moving the Edge of Collective Intelligence set me on a path. One inquiry lead to another, and to this day it hasn't stopped.

One of the participants in the Moving the Edge gathering was Judy Wallace, a lady from the Boston area who was working on a master's thesis on collective intelligence for her study in conscious evolution. She showed up at the gathering, knowing some of the people on the hosting team through her research work. She would become the co-initiator of Women Moving the Edge with me. This book could not have been written without our experiences in the thirteen gatherings between 2007 and 2012.

By the end of the year, Finn Voldtofte was dead, after a sudden illness and conscious dying process through which he hosted and inspired his friends, loved ones and colleagues. Finn was an important teacher to many of us and Women Moving the Edge and much of this book were born from seeds he planted.



## 1.3 Subtle Sensing and the Body



Synchronizing mind and body is not a concept or a random technique someone thought up for self-improvement. Rather, it is a basic principle of how to be a human being and how to use your sense perceptions, your mind and body together.

— Chogyam Trungpa<sup>1</sup>

### Experience: body sensations, reflections and subtle sensing

Experiencing is a thick, bodily-felt flow of situational events; it never has just one form or ‘propositional content’ which might be compared to words.

— Eugene Gendlin<sup>2</sup>

It was Julio Olalla who pointed out to me that, overall, in the West we lack distinctions for describing what is going on in our interior. Being trained as an emotional body-worker, I have spent many years in the ongoing practice of fine-tuning my inner senses, and many times I am perplexed at how little people feel or notice about what is going on inside them. Olalla posits that we need to challenge our deeply held assumptions: we are so attached to what we ‘know’ that we don’t want to give it up even when it doesn’t bring us the expected outcomes. When we expand our observation to include not only our thoughts and opinions but also our inner states and feelings, our whole perception of reality changes, resulting in different actions, feelings and interventions.

When we practice noticing our inner, subtle senses we eventually reach a point where we can experience everything that arises within us with equanimity and compassion – indeed, this becomes second nature. Held with compassion, the unknown parts of our self become less ugly, hostile or weird, and reveal their charms and hitherto unsuspected strengths. This in turn eventually enhances our capacity to sense what is happening in other people, and beyond.

Let me begin by sharing some of the assumptions that underpin my way of looking at things. Our lives are made up of our *experiences*. These include everything you can think of, everything that you have ever... well, experienced. Your experiences might be comparable to those of your sister or your colleague, but quite unlike those of someone of another gender or generation, let alone from another culture, climate or social class. In the manifest world, experiences can be narrowed down to what we experience through our senses, our physical sensations, since these can be shared, measured, recorded and replicated. This has always been the domain of our mainstream sciences.

But our daily experiences are by no means restricted to our bodily sensations. Alongside everything that can be measured and replicated, we also experience ideas and beliefs and, most of the time, a plethora of emotions and feelings too, whether conscious or not. This complex mesh of sensations, ideas, feelings and emotions is what I mean when I speak of experiences.

As humans, we also have the capacity to *reflect on our experiences* and to witness what is happening both inside and outside of us. This is the world of consciousness and awareness. It is our capacity to stand outside our experience and notice what is happening. This is mindfulness, witnessing; sometimes called a meta-capacity because it is like standing on the balcony and observing at a distance.

Not all our experiences are based on physical sensations, emotions or ideas, however. We have all had one or more experiences like this one... When I was almost eighteen, I went to enroll at the local university. I was best at, and most interested in, the sciences – maths, physics and chemistry. But out of the blue – I enrolled for psychology. I never uncovered any rationale or other cognitive explanation for this. Looking back over my life, after living more than half a century of it, it makes a lot of sense. At that moment, though, I experienced it, and was somehow aware of it, as ‘something’ – a subtle sensing – that was not conscious in my discursive mind. So where did it come from? Today, my answer would be that my soul was pointing me in a certain direction. Luckily, I was sensitive enough at the time to register it and act on it, although not at all consciously. This sensing, this *subtle perception* is not something you can measure, and therefore this inner knowing – to use another name for it – has not received much attention in our Western world. Psychology comes closest to it, indeed, but still...

Many people see this inner knowing or subtle perception as something that you either have or you don't. My conviction, and my experience, is that you can learn it, we can teach it; everybody has it and does it. In fact, throughout history – even in the history of science – and in so many different cultures, this way of knowing has been essential to the human endeavour. When paying more attention to the subtle in our selves – and in others and in our surroundings as well – these perceptions seem to become more palpable, even more understandable. We begin to recognize that they are omnipresent. We become more able to speak about this dimension of ourselves and the world, and to articulate what we are noticing. Like any other practice, when we bring our intention and attention to bear on it, we become better at it.

It is of course in and through the body that we register and identify our physical sensations, and that we are in relationship with what is all around us. But thinking and reflecting, on the one hand, and subtle sensing on the other, also only become possible *through the body* – because this is where you become conscious of them. Nonetheless, neither is happening *in* the physical body in the same way as our physical senses can be tracked; rather, both are beyond, or perhaps implied or enfolded. Instead, our physical *sensations* are happening *in the body*, through our five senses.

These days, there is increasing recognition that thoughts, intentions and beliefs can be seen as forms of energy that have a certain influence on the plane of matter. I see inner knowing or subtle sensing in the same way. We cannot register them with our five senses, but still they ‘do’ something! There isn't really that much difference between thoughts and subtle sensing in this regard, which makes it all the more curious that thoughts and ideas have been ascribed so much value over time, while subtle sensing has been seen as unreal and unreliable.

If you want to be able to deal with the greater complexity and uncertainty of life in today's world in a relaxed way, and enjoy a more emergent quality in your life, then you need to develop this capacity to sense the subtle dimensions of yourself, others and the environment. This subtle way of knowing allows you to notice shifts in energy, in vitality, in life force – like weak signals pointing into the future – before ever anything becomes visible or manifest, if indeed anything ever does. It hints at where life wants to flow.

The capacity for subtle sensing is dependent on the ability to be present and mindful in your experiences. By 'being present' we mean being *open to what is* in the moment, which is a doorway to being *open to what wants to happen* in the future. Basically this means being the master of your attention: being able to guide it and let it rest where you want it to be. This capacity is not usually part of the mainstream school curriculum, and so it is barely present in our Western culture in general. It can however be cultivated through many different practices, whenever people conceive the intention to do so.

## Subtle Intelligence

Collective Presencing, the human capacity described in this book, implies a lot of awareness. Building up that capacity is a process of alignment, both inner and outer. It is about integrating into our awareness more of the unconscious and unrecognized elements of life, in our selves, in others and all around. If we are to become aware of these so-called blind spots (you can't see what you can't see!), it behooves us to develop our subtle intelligence. Many would name this area of knowing 'intuition'. But that term is rather vague and too general, and so not adequate for our purpose here. We need more clarity in this domain of subtle intelligence, and so we must resist the temptation to simplify or generalize.

Scharmer, in his work on Presencing, says: "We need to learn from the future." Collective Presencing builds on that, but in order to "learn from the future" we need to be able to distinguish between actually sensing something from the future and wishful thinking and/or emotional projection. We will see that quite some emotional intelligence is needed to be able to discern what is what.

My own premise is that if we notice or perceive something – however vague or subtle it may be – we are also able to become conscious of that perception, right in this moment, provided we allow it time and space in which to unfold. We need only slow down and let our subtle sensing reach our consciousness; or perhaps it is the other way round: we can let our attention and awareness reach out to our subtle sensing. Or better still: let our subtle sensing and our awareness synchronize, or come into coherence. In this way even really novel thinking can emerge.

Philosopher Eugene Gendlin has named this kind of inner subtle sense the 'felt sense', and has developed a process for attending to it, called Focusing. This process guides your attention to the vague feeling, which itself knows quite exactly what words or expressions fit or fail to express its essence. Based on this Focusing practice, Gendlin developed a 20+ step methodology called 'Thinking at the edge', specifically for the purpose of achieving new, theoretical insights based on this felt sense. While we do not follow his defined steps, we do invite everyone to become aware of their felt sense and take the time and effort to (learn to) articulate it for the benefit of others.

Subtle sensing is not only a sensing into objects of substance, distinct and separate elements; it is also a sensing of connections, of atmosphere, of relationships, of that which is in between – some would call it energy. For our Western mind, this involves withdrawing somewhat from our default way of seeing, taking distance from objects, from matter, and instead looking with a broader view and softer focus, and noticing what is happening in the relationships and energy exchange.

Some people use the word *etheric sensing*, a form of perception based on sensing the energetics of people, places, animals, plants and so on. They see it as a resonance in the etheric levels, and therefore primarily related to life force. This is probably also the reason why people can more easily access or notice their subtle sensing when in nature. My explanation for this is that nature has no agenda, it *just is*. There is only the life force present; no thinking/ideas and none of the big emotions that humans tend to have, which might block the flow of life. In nature, the predominant presence is the subtle life force so that is what we resonate with.





## Embodiment

All experiences happen in real time and our bodies are always involved: pleasant and unpleasant experiences; small and big events; ordinary and exceptional things, even (day) dreaming or a sudden insight. None of this could have any effect on us if our bodies were not involved.

Expression is a big part of our embodiment. To express my perspective in this book, I must speak it or write it down – I could even try to dance or draw it. Regardless of the medium I choose, it will always involve my body in some way. Experience and expression are inextricably linked with our physical bodies. I repeat: experience and expression *always* involve our physical bodies. This ineluctable truth seems often to be forgotten in the mental discourse on so many topics. The process that we are – we are not a clearly defined thing but a process that is ongoing – happens in and through our bodies. It is our very physicality that makes all of our experiences, indeed our whole life, possible: the sensations, the emotions, the thoughts, the subtle feelings, the inner knowing. All of it.

To be human, to be alive, is to be in a physical body. It cannot be otherwise. That's essential – at the core. Somehow it must have some deep value for life itself. The body makes it possible to learn from experiences, because something has in-form-ed the matter of the body, and the learning has made an imprint. It seems that we are now in a time where we are invited to learn more from the subtle experiences we have too.

Our thinking, our body's intelligence, our inner knowing, our emotional intelligence... let's be clear that these aren't separate. They live in a constant dance of mutual influence: from the inner lived experience or from the so-called observer outside, they are one big flow. This constantly changing interplay actually constitutes the whole of who we are. It is only for the sake of clarity that we separate them out and make distinctions – the reason why science came

into being in the first place. But never forget that it is ‘for the sake of clarity’ and *not* because ‘it is’ like that. Don’t mistake the map for the territory!

Subtle sensing is a finely tuned noticing of bodily perceptions, it is a perception of energy flows streaming or blocking. It can take the form of an experience in your body, when you suddenly realize that you ‘know’, because it is something you can sense, you have *received* it in your whole body, thinking, feeling, sensing, all included. If you are not embodied – not present in your body – you will miss some or all of the ongoing subtle sensing about your self and your environment. It doesn’t mean you can’t have any subtle sensing. Many people who are good at sensing energies outside them, in the environment, aren’t good at sensing what is going on inside themselves.

Although there are many differences in people’s capacity to sense into the subtle, we can generalize that most people need some silence, some slowing down, some standing still to be able to perceive what is happening on this subtle level. If your attention is not focused on your subtle experience, then you are basically moving too fast (as is the norm in Western society) – and this is not a natural rhythm. In nature, there is a time for speeding up and a time for slowing down. Our culture, in the industrialized world, seems to be constantly in springtime energy, where fast growing happens with no time to harvest the fruits, let alone to be in the deep rest of winter, waiting for the next thing to be born.

We know from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) that different people have different preferences in the use of the physical senses in perceiving the world. They either habitually rely on visual cues, or auditory, or kinaesthetic (external touch and inner feel), taste or smell. The same is going on at the subtle level. Some people ‘see’ on the subtle level and are inspired or learn through imagining or holding a vision, others ‘hear’ some truth ringing or only dissonance, while others ‘know’ for sure that something is not aligned. It is good to know which kind of channel or subtle sensing has your preference, and not to fall into the common trap of believing that ‘seeing’ – as our culture is so visual – has more value or holds more truth than the other (subtle) senses.

Full embodiment, so needed to be flexible and in flow, can be inhibited or blocked as a result of past experiences (mostly in childhood). Your characteristic way of doing things, the frequently recurring themes in your life, the things that you hate or always fall in love with, are like stuck patterns that developed for the purpose of survival. In the present moment, though, they prevent you from being flexible in your response to what is happening in and around you. What many people don’t realize is that *not* expressing, holding back, withdrawing – when it is a habitual response – is also a survival pattern. It influences the body and its capacity to express freely.

In all these cases, the body blocks free expression and falls into a habit, not from a consciously made choice but as a ‘remnant’ of past experiences. Because there was too much pain for the body to process or for the mind to make meaning of, and no context or support to hold it all, the emotion and its spontaneous, bodily expression (like laughter, crying, anger, dancing, reaching out etc.) retreated underground, into what we call the unconscious, beyond the reach of our normal, everyday mind. Once these past experiences are brought back to the surface, restored to the world of current time-and-space, our understanding (mind) of who we are changes and expands, and the flexibility and breadth of our channels of expression (body) grow. Some painful experiences from early childhood (trauma) can be accessed and healed only through the body (in trauma healing where resonance and trust provide a safe context to do so), because no mind or memory had yet developed at the time when the painful event(s) took place. In such cases, working through the emotions, as in regular therapy, is not sufficient.

## The practice of sensing in daily life

As I had been trained in Emotional Bodywork and gone on to become a trainer myself, I had learned a lot about where I was blocked in my own expressions, and how to become free and flexible again. It was a huge clearing of the emotional baggage still stored in my body. As I drew ever closer to the world of subtle sensing – while trying to distance myself from all the new age hype around it – I made up some exercises that I did a lot, and still do. Paying it attention and constantly practicing, my capacity for subtle sensing grew enormously, especially in relation to the environment and the future.

One of these exercises was ‘*sensing my place*’. Entering a big room full of chairs, whether at a workshop, a conference or a restaurant, I would use my subtle senses to choose my chair. I tried not to think about it, or search for familiar faces, but go fully with an inner sense. Sometimes this led to fascinating encounters!

Another exercise is ‘*what is next?*’ I am a keen gardener, but I don’t plan my work. I go with whatever I have energy for. Of course, this is guided by what the seasons require, but it often happens that the one thing that my mind was sure I was going to do that day while I was still in bed, didn’t get done until the following weekend or even later, when my energy was finally aligned with just that task. I have learned to trust this so deeply that, for instance, after nearly 3 years in my current home, I gave up pushing myself to buy and plant fruit trees – normally something you do at the beginning of tending to a new property. Instead, I just trusted that there was a reason why my energy wasn’t taking me there. It finally dawned on me that this probably had to do with building up more compost in our heavy clay soil so that the saplings would have a better habitat to start in. Now that the trees are finally in and thriving, my suspicions have been confirmed.

This exercise of ‘*what is next?*’ is a good preparation for what we will later describe as ‘following your soul’s calling’. It is following your energy, but on a greater scale than a project like your garden. Now you start applying this subtle sensing to your professional life and your life as a whole! It becomes an exercise in ‘*what is mine to do?*’ and ‘*what is the minimal, elegant, next step?*’

All these little exercises – and you can invent your own – help us to be more embodied, more present with what is really there. All in all it helps us to be more in the flow and to sense whether we are in or out of alignment, both inner and outer.

Please read this piece of a blog post by Bonnitta Roy, where she points to the difference between reflection and being reflexive. What I meant in this piece is exactly the latter!

Being *reflexive* is not the same as being *reflective*. *Reflecting*, which is a much more common activity, means thinking about something that happened in the past, even if it happened in the near past. When we *reflect* on something, we have to rely on memory, which inherently relies on narrative constructs and mental models to *deliver up the memory of something into consciousness*. This is inherently a *creative act* that science has shown to be very unreliable representation of what actually happened. Being *reflexive*, on the other hand, is being aware of how one is actually experiencing the present moment as it unfolds. It means noticing where our energy wants to go, and where we resist or avoid going. It means being conscious of our bodily postures, and the subtle shifts in our mood. It means being fully involved in the participation, at the micro-cosmic level of the individual, while simultaneously participating with others. It means being able to hold into awareness how one is situated in the experience, and how this situatedness subtle shifts and morphs in response to the participation.

— Bonnitta Roy<sup>3</sup>

## Notes

1: Chogyam Trungpa: *Shambhala, the Sacred Path of the Warrior*. ↓

2: Eugene Gendlin: *Authenticity after Postmodernism*. ↓

3: Bonnitta Roy: *To trim the system, tame the mind*. ↓ (*Emphasis original*)

## 1.4 Being present as a process



Since this book is inviting you to explore the possibilities of Collective Presencing, it is easy to understand that first of all we need to strengthen our individual capacity to be present. For our purposes here, subtle sensing and embodiment lay the foundations on which we will build further capacities which I will describe throughout the rest of the book. What is important to understand at this stage is that the practice in daily life is not so much *a state* of being present. Rather, we are really talking about *an ongoing process* that becomes refined over time and is, seemingly, never ending.

### Being present as becoming present

The process of understanding what this book is really about began long before I ever had the faintest notion of writing it. It started in my small Flemish women's circle, called the FiveStar, a training ground for what would eventually lead to the project Women Moving the Edge. We were rather unconscious of the deeper purpose of our joint journey, but we had some guiding questions like: How do we do... (take your pick), so that it is done out of deep respect and love? How can I respond out of love even when I don't like what you said? How to show respect to others even when I am in a hurry? These questions could be applied to hundreds of different situations, and through collective searching and reflecting we found many answers. We also became wiser and more compassionate.

Reflecting on it later, I came to see that we learned an enormous amount about the process of *becoming* present. Here, I want to draw your attention to the process side of becoming present. In daily life the point is not so much about *being* present, but about how to *become* present (again) once we have lapsed back into our default mode of reacting. In other words, how do we widen our perception and become present to more of what is going on in life? For now, we will start with the common, every-day understanding of being present: being present to your own thoughts, emotions, sensations and becoming mindful of these. Later, we will expand this process to an ever-

widening scope, to include becoming present to relationships, then to groups, then to unmanifested potential. This is about becoming present to life in its totality, not in theory but right down to the bottom of real, messy, daily life.

I have noticed in my own experience that becoming present is not something you learn in an instant, nor is it a skill like riding a bike or swimming – once learned you can do it forever. Rather, it is an ongoing process of alignment that seems to go on and on, spreading out in all directions! First of all, this process shifts my understanding of myself as a thing, a ‘something’ with clearly defined boundaries, something that really is separate. Instead, I begin to see and experience myself as a process, an ongoing flow of experiences, in an ongoing exchange with whoever and whatever is around me. Well do I remember my Systemic Constellations teacher, Johannes Schmidt, repeating like a mantra in his workshops: “I am a process!” (and not a thing). This notion resonated with me and over time it wormed its way deep into my inner being. There is a lot of confusion about this ‘I’. Although we experience it as consistent throughout the long concatenation of moments that make up our lives, what seems to endure and stay the same is not a thing, nor does it have clear boundaries. Rather, it is a coherence found throughout the throng of our experiences, like a red thread that has great meaning to our selves.

I trust that by now it is clear that *being present* equates not with sitting still on a cushion – although the practice of meditation can be very helpful in learning to become more present – but with *a capacity to be flexible amidst all that arises*, including the capacity to sense the impulse or the movement of what comes next... Alignment with ‘what is’ gives us a power of action, of movement, which is different than ‘power over’ or control. Think of the Aikido master who uses the energy of his assailant to propel him away in the next move.

## The process of inner alignment: unfolding authenticity

Just as we discover that this ‘I’ is not a thing, so we learn that being present is not a state that, once reached, is forever attained. It is an ongoing process, a movement into ever greater balance and coherence, deeper and wider, inner and outer. Over time, we noticed that we can distinguish a process of inner alignment and a process of outer alignment. In this chapter we focus on the inner alignment – we will turn our attention to outer alignment later on. We see this competence of inner alignment as an unfolding process that leads to ever more authenticity. Authenticity is defined here as your unique way of acting and relating with your self and the world around you, without any residue of emotionally-charged preference or attachment. Authenticity can also be defined as the unique quality of a particular relationship, or the unique flavour of a group or team.

The ongoing process of deepening our authenticity in an *embodied* way also opens our selves up to the capacity of sourcing: receiving information from an inner well of knowing. When practiced with other people, equally present and authentic, it enhances our capacity for collective wisdom and generative action. More on all this later as the story unfolds.

My whole journey in reflecting about the experiences in our little women’s circle started with my enthusiastic discovery of the U-process. (At that time, the book by Otto Scharmer, *Theory U*,<sup>1</sup> had yet to be published). Failing to fit our experiences into his model got me to thinking more deeply and, step by step, I started developing my own framework. I am well aware that I have not reinvented the wheel; many of these steps, layers or movements are part of existing practices in the field of personal development, group dynamics, etc. The novelty of my approach lies in using this sequence of movements in ever widening spheres of life, building up a coherent framework that can be used to deal with the challenges of our time and the generation and creation of the new.

This process of inner alignment – part of the overall process of becoming present – is about *finding the resonance between all the faculties* of our self: thinking, experiencing, noticing, feeling and subtle sensing. Using the words of Scharmer, it is “an opening of our mind, our heart and our will”. In the practice of Collective Presencing, we give extra attention to the finer, subtler and more internal experiences, which are very much denied or overlooked in our mainstream society. To get to a deeper inner alignment, to become ever more present, we also need to be open to the subtle signals in our lives. These don’t normally thump on your door, unless you have already repressed a barrage of weaker signals and life presents you some kind of wall for you to smash into. The alignment of these layers in our



self is an ongoing invitation to eliminate our inflexibilities as we discover them; doing so makes us more unique and uniquely creative.



## Four movements in unfolding authenticity

If we look more closely at this process of inner alignment – becoming ever more present to the inner dimension of our experiences – we are able to articulate different steps, levels, layers or movements. In the messiness and complexity of life's unfolding, though, they don't come in nice, clear steps, one after the other. These steps can be distinguished from each other as we reflect on the process, but they are not separate in our daily actions and lives. On occasions, they might happen all at once, while at other times it seems to take ages to integrate one more.

What follows is a description of four levels, or movements in this process of inner alignment that I have found to be present in our daily experiences. You will meet these levels again throughout the book, applied to different contexts and scopes; the narrative will lead to two maps offering an overview of it all. Applied to different areas of life, these four layers always describe a process of deepening authenticity that reveals itself in a process unfolding over time.

The four movements are: *observing, accepting, honouring and living 'what is'*. Each calls forth into presence a deeper layer of respect, awareness and love, both for your self and in relationship with others and the wider context. Greater inner alignment always manifests as more authenticity and much greater flexibility of action and thought, greater response-ability. Inner alignment re-establishes relationship and embrace on the inside – either between the different, disowned parts of your self, between your inner self and the inner selves of others, between the different participants in a group or with the inner dimension of the future and the possibilities it holds.

All four movements of unfolding consist of two sub-movements, both of which are needed in this process. One can best be summarized as *focusing our attention*; for the other it is essential that we *open ourselves more*. We will see that the combination of these two movements, focusing and opening, can better describe the fullness of the experience than either one on its own.

### Observing what is – Open Mind

*Focus on:* here and now

*Open to:* full experience

The process of becoming present starts with *observing or witnessing what is* actually happening. This means observing without any judgement of what we are noticing. It means suspending any kind of judgement; a non-engagement, where we take some emotional distance from what is happening. This is the core of the now widely known mindfulness practices: to experience but not to judge, just observe and witness. No good or bad, just noticing what is.

Wanting or needing change – wherever that might be – always starts with acknowledging *what is*; which is, at the same time, acknowledging *what is not*. This action of observing and acknowledging is a big and deep movement of focused, but open attention. In our Western world, we are mostly very far from being in touch with *what is*. Most often our attention is absorbed in our thinking: the storage place of our ideas, our prejudices, our memories, our beliefs, our hopes, knowledge received from other sources, etc. Simply put, our default attention mode in the Western world resides in the mental space, oblivious to how many emotional and subtle perceptions are behind, underneath, below or next to what is going on in our minds. Our attention is rarely with the totality of what we are actually experiencing, right here and now.

The core purpose of mindfulness training is to coming to grips with the fact that we can guide and direct our attention. It doesn't need to be stuck in mental thoughts or in emotional upset; we can decide to place it elsewhere and not attach to what seems so intriguing – and true! People who practice meditation learn to master much of it, although some use it to dissociate from the body and so don't embody it (enough) in their day-to-day life. They sometimes lack the skill of witnessing the bodily side of the here and now.

We can learn to extend *observing what is* from myself to the other(s) and their internal, subtle reality; further out to their manifest or subtle contribution to the group's purpose and even beyond as we will see later. It is, all in all, an opening to the full experience on all levels of experience.

## **Accepting what is – Open Heart**

*Focus on:* widening

*Open to:* trusting subtle experience

Next comes the inner movement of *accepting what is*, really embracing what is, right here, before our eyes or inside us. *Accepting what is* is one small movement beyond observing and acknowledging. It is a widening of our identity, because accepting means integrating something we had left outside us before. It is an action of embracing more of who we are, widening our range of what we define as reality or what is possible. Accepting is a movement in the heart that follows once our minds have been opened and judgement has been suspended; although it can also be the other way round. The widening of our metaphorical boxes can go on and on. As far as I can tell from my own experience, there seems to be no end to it. Real acceptance is an opening of the heart space – an aspect of what we call love.

*Accepting what is* is being open to becoming more flexible in what we are able to and allow ourselves perceive. It takes account of the subtler layers of our experience. Sometimes we have to dig a little deeper in ourselves to be able to notice these layers, or need to come to a stand-still for a while. Oftentimes it is a movement of embracing what had previously been filtered out as meaningless or unimportant.

*Accepting what is*, is a movement of the heart. It is (re-)connecting with the true wholeness of our self, others, groups and the whole world in which we live and function. This re-connection is intrinsically healing, because it brings us back into connection with more of who we are. We move beyond the fragmentation and remove the blockages preventing life from really happening. *Accepting what is*, we start to feel more of the web of interconnectedness, and to experience more deeply our intimate implication in a greater whole that holds us.



## **Honouring what is – Open Heart**

*Focus on:* deepening

*Open to:* moving beyond

*Honouring what is* calls us to drop even deeper into the movement of our hearts. It goes further than accepting – not only do we accept, but we open up to respect what is. We understand in our hearts and minds what our experience means for the fullness (and mystery) of life and honour it in this way. If there is real acceptance in our hearts – of myself, of the other, of the group as a whole, of life in its fullness – then we are ready to honour it fully. *Honouring what is*, is a deep integration of our physical, mental and emotional layers. You could see it as a deepening of the accepting movement; not just in our minds, but also into the fullness of our hearts and our being. *Honouring what is* asks for an engagement or commitment: to show oneself fully, to learn to let the other be fully him or herself. It is an embodiment of the acceptance which shows through in our deeds.

*Honouring what is* requires us to engage more deeply in communication than is our usual habit. This deepening is a devotion to connecting with these deeper, more vulnerable layers of myself, and extending out to connect with the deeper layers of the other(s) and of the greater whole in which we work and/or live together. This devotion, this honouring, this bowing to what is brings us to a constantly unfolding authenticity in how we are relating.

If I acknowledge and accept that what I feel and think is only ‘my’ truth or ‘a’ perspective, and that what the other person thinks or feels is ‘his or her’ truth or just ‘another’ perspective on reality, and if I can accept both as really and equally valid in the face of the overall reality, then we are challenged to suspend our default frames of feeling, thinking, and willing. Our hearts are asked to expand and embrace more than before. If we can do that, we have more freedom at our disposal and something greater seems to be possible; we come closer to some collective sense or shared meaning.

## **Living what is – Open Will**



*Focus on:* sharing and expressing

*Open to:* living authenticity

The three former movements culminate naturally in *living and celebrating what is*. This means giving form and shape to the deeper inner alignment in our way of being and doing right here and now. It means sharing and expressing all layers of our experience: the physical, the mind, the emotions and the subtle experiences. One form of expression that we – in the western middle class – know very well, is speech. But talking, even when done respectfully and carefully, is just one aspect of life and cannot express all of it. Conversation alone does not constitute authentic living. Imagine being in an intimate partnership where our only form of engagement was talking...

The Open Will, as named by Otto Scharmer, points in the direction of ‘beyond our own, small will’. In the beginning it can feel like sharing and expressing beyond our comfort zone. Sharing what feels like the vulnerable stuff: the inner knowing, the little hunches that might or might not be valuable, that might be judged; offering my poem in a context that normally doesn’t invite this; bringing flowers to the office because I like them and they help me to be who I am. Fully participating with all we have and are is not our default way of behaving, and yet it is these different acts that truly show our unique ways of being. We have received these small (or great) gifts from nature, from birth; now it becomes a conscious choice to share and express them, bring them to the table where we sit. It is not through our own small will that we have created these unique gifts, rather, it is an act of surrender to recognise that life gave them to us and it is an act of choice to show and share them.

Wherever you look in the world: real communities eat together, they sing and they dance together, they share in rituals to mark important moments in life, they work together, they talk; in short, they create their own culture. Every group that wishes to come to its own authentic, collective wisdom will, gradually, create its own culture. In this *living what is*, where every individual participates fully through his or her own expression, what this group or community is about becomes visible to others, through what people do and don’t do.

## Notes

1: Otto Scharmer: *Theory U*. ↓

## 1.5 Preparing the first Women Moving the Edge gathering



In the hosting team of this Danish Moving the Edge gathering were a few women: one a dancer-performer by profession; Finn's wife Tina, and myself. We tried to bring in more of the 'body-stuff' (dancing, drawing, walking etc.) in the preparation upfront. I wrote even a little article 'Beyond Words: Body, Movement, Art, Nature' as one of the perspectives on Collective Intelligence. But in the gathering we didn't get any further than squeezing in some energizing dance after breaks and lunches. The circle was much more mental; with some resistance to the movement that was offered. But the longing was there and wouldn't go away.

Tina and I connected soon after the gathering wondering how a *Women* Moving the Edge would look like. In the first call she said: "My deep pain after Moving the Edge is related to not using my full potential. It is related to holding back because of fear. I'm just acknowledging it as fear, and not irritation or... the pain after Moving the Edge was like breaking in two. It has to do with – maybe – opening this whole question about women's liberation." We decided almost right away to invite Judy in, and due to circumstances Tina fell out of the loop over summer.

The women's liberation Tina mentioned here is not the same as the one we know from feminism, started in the sixties; but a liberation, and equal value, of the physical, emotional, subtle knowing with the mental knowing. It is the combination of all these ways of knowing that we would come to name the Wholeness of Knowing. In the two preparation days before the first Women Moving the Edge gathering, Judy first mentioned the concept and the importance of Wholeness of Knowing, including the body and all the energy in and around it. Later this concept would become crucial in our collective practice and would expand it even more.

## 1.6 Opening to my Authentic Self



Reflecting on the guiding questions we used in our little Flemish circle (How do we ... out of deep respect and love? How can I respond out of love even if I don't like what you said? How to show respect to others even when I am in a hurry?) I came to wonder: Why don't we ask these questions every day and in every situation, instead of only when we are in a circle or a workshop? Even more importantly: Why don't we live up to the answers that our hearts whisper silently all the time? Why is it more difficult to act on these answers about how to be present – especially when we work and live together – than to read about it or talk about it to our friends? There is a big difference. Everybody feels it. It is because we are *involved*, with our whole being. We cannot hide. We cannot be our so-called normal, conditioned self any longer. We have to change. The new paradigm in the world, the change in our organisations, more respect embodied in our relationships – all these demand the transformation of myself, of our selves. Nothing less will do.

This chapter describes how the four movements of *observing*, *accepting*, *honouring* and *living what is* apply to my relationship with myself. The next chapters will expand through the process of outer alignment, where we find a growing balance with the people and context around us. This process of alignment within – *I and myself* – will uncover the realms of subtle sensing and inner knowing inside your self. They have always been there, but haven't been in the spotlight. This subtle art of inner alignment gradually gives access to more authenticity, until you are able to shift from your default, conditioned and habitual way of being towards acting in authenticity and flexibility, wherever you are. Authenticity here implies the mind and body integrated, being and knowing in synergy in all kinds of ways. Becoming your own instrument, fine-tuning it and learning to hold your own melody.

You might wonder why we go to all the effort of uncovering this inner realm. In today's world, strong energetic, human containers (groups, teams, families, organisations) are needed to hold complexity, chaos and turmoil, to provide a sheltered space where individual members can share their stories and be vulnerable. For this to be possible, we need individuals who are strong containers in and by themselves. That means people who take full responsibility – in the sense of 'response-ability' – for their emotions, their body's energy fields, their thoughts, the power of their

own will; people who can contain themselves, who can witness all this at once, even when the emotional and energetic charge is very high. This is why this science and practice of inner alignment, of becoming present, is so crucial in these times. Through this practice we discover and hold our unique melody and keep singing harmoniously in the choir, even when a lot is happening all around.

Later we will see how individual, personal authenticity can evolve further, towards living your soul's calling. It has become clear to me that the increasing complexity of life will not lead to some kind of oneness, some level or form that fits all. Rather, it invites us to express more of our unique ways of being, to become 'an exemplar' as Bonnie (Bonnitta Roy) would say. As we each learn to do this, grounded in our own voice, then the practice of choral improvisation becomes possible – learning to sense and ride the shifting patterns emerging from the middle.

Referring to his focusing process from the felt-sense, Eugene Gendlin says: "This authenticity is defined not by its outcomes, but by its kind of process." This applies here in the same way. The process of inner alignment, applied to my personal self, has no final destination. It is not about finding my authentic self at some point in time and then I am done, the journey is over. No, we will see that the unraveling of our mental conditioning goes on and on; the unfolding of our unique ways of expressing our self never ends. We will approach levels of ever more refined energy, and we will become sensitive to the life force coursing through us.

On the surface, it looks as if we know a lot about 'I', the 'me' that I present in the world every day. Never before in history have we heard this little word 'I' with such frequency. But who is this 'I', really? How much am I aware of what is *really* going on inside me? Is my attention as grounded in my subtle senses, my physical sensations and my feelings, as it is in my thoughts, ideas and beliefs? How often do I realise only *after* the fact what it was that I was actually feeling or sensing? These questions are linked with what Otto Scharmer calls the 'blind spot of leadership'. Most disciplines of therapy, personal development, coaching and mentoring beckon us inwards with our attention, to witness the deeper layers of this entity we call 'I'. And it is always a dis-cover-y. What we uncover in this process is the fullness of who we really are. We embrace and integrate the more subtle meanings that are hidden within us, and step by step we come to inhabit our unique self, shedding the conditioning that has been there since childhood or that we borrowed from society. What remains is a self that is transparent, vulnerable, radiant and full of energy: our authentic self.

As Yasuhiko Kimura stated online: "Authenticity is etymologically and existentially linked to authorship and authority. To be authentic entails being the author of your own life based on your own inner authority, free and independent of external authority in the matter of thinking, knowing, and acting. Self-integrity and self-honesty are built into authenticity." I couldn't put it any better.

What follows is the description of the four movements – *observing*, *accepting*, *honouring* and *living what is* – that we described in general in [section 1.4](#), now applied to the process of becoming more present with and aligned within myself. In this process of inner alignment of *I and Myself*, we focus our attention on our inner being, our inner landscape and we prepare ourselves to open up to embrace and integrate all that we discover inside.

## **1. Observing what is – in myself: Opening to the full experience of my inner being**

Being open to the full experience of myself and *observing* and *acknowledging what is*, must include the physical level of my being; because that is – as a matter of fact – the ground of my self. I focus my attention on my internal experience: the physical sensations in different parts of my body, the feelings and emotions that arise with differing degrees of intensity, and the subtle sensations (that we described before) that are also there. Most Westerners are not used to giving attention to their bodies and the wealth of information that the body provides. I have had many clients over the years who would answer "nothing", when asked what was going on inside, in their bodies. To acknowledge the body is to notice its signals, and to take this bodily information seriously: using the information derived from seeing, feeling, hearing and intuiting as equally valid and complementary to the information provided by our thinking.



The physical body is, on the one hand, a storehouse of old memories and, on the other hand, a very good receptor of subtle signals from the fields around us – and of course much more. Therefore, we must first become good inner listeners, inner observers, to be able to discern what is old and comes from memory, and what is truly in relation with the here and now. The importance of body awareness for the grounding of wisdom cannot be overstated; it is in and through the body that we can check our level of being present.

The aim of the first part of this book is to arrive at collective wisdom. As in any team sport, the training and awareness of the body is not the ultimate purpose, but is in service of the team playing as a whole. In the end, it is in my body, as a container, that I can hold the energies of feeling, thinking, chaos, wisdom and so on. Only in this way can I really contribute to the collective wisdom of a group. If you want to expand your awareness in this field, it is both good and necessary to have a body-awareness training or practice – such as aikido or other martial arts, tai chi, yoga, dancing, any kind of meditation, walking or other practices that use the body as the point of entry.



## **2. Accepting what is – in myself: expanding my self-image and integrating my subtle inner experience**

We can summarise the movement of *accepting what is on the personal level* as the witnessing and suspending of our habitual ‘this is me’ and accepting that there is more to it. Most of our actions – and thinking – are literally reactions: repeating the same thoughts and actions. Otto Scharmer calls it ‘downloading’. Downloading happens not only in thinking, but equally in feeling, speaking and action. It applies, too, to our self-image. This doesn’t change easily. We hold onto a consistent self-image; we believe that we stay the same and we use this self-identity as something to rely on. The first step is to recognise that this is what we are doing: downloading, repeating old patterns. Only then can we open up to something new.

*Accepting what is in myself* means focusing our attention on widening our view on and of our selves, realising that we are more than the habitual form that we identify with. If I sit with my self for a while, and expand my observations inwards, I will notice that there are also other, more subtle signs in myself that don’t really fit with my habitual way of looking at myself. Maybe I got a hunch that something was going on with my friend, but I greeted her in my usual way, without really paying attention. Maybe I was more deeply hurt than I had first realised and shared with my partner. Maybe I intuited that there was something strange going on in that organisation, which could

have informed me better from the outset if only I had paid attention. Maybe a clear vision came to me in a team meeting, but I didn't dare to voice it.

*Accepting what is in myself* means taking all these subtle signals as just as valid – at least worth checking out and taking into account – as my normal, default ways of seeing my self. We then come to a point where we widen our idea about ourselves, first to admit, and later to integrate our unique way of sensing the subtle into the definition of who and how we are. We open our hearts for more of ourselves and in the same movement we have more acceptance of the unique contribution of every human being, and even beyond.

### **3. Honouring what is – in myself: Deepening my self image and connecting with my inner gifts**

*Honouring what is in myself* means not just accepting (“OK, it's true that I noticed that”), but also owning these so-called deeper sensing parts of myself, these deeper layers that I have mostly been hiding away. It's about achieving full congruence – or at least intending to – between what I share with others, my self image and my deepest experiences.

In our Western culture, our subtle sensing has for the most part been in the shadow; it has not been allowed to be (fully) present. For this reason it still holds a certain gem-like quality: because it has had to hide in the dark and has not been permitted to be visible it is loaded with a heavy emotional charge, which conceals the beauty of its essence. We will be amazed! By opening up to this subtle shadow we find a precious gift: our individual way of sensing, our very own contribution to understanding more of what is going on, our unique gift to collaboration and co-creation.

As mentioned before, we all have a preference – or a natural priority – as to which faculty our subtle sensing manifests through most. For myself, I am very kinaesthetic, so I sense lots of things right in my body, as an ache, as a certain pressure, as a sense of constraint in certain areas of my face, as a quality of deep opening in my lower belly. I'm very physical, very much here-and-now, and I want to walk the talk right away. And sometimes I just *know*, with a sense of total alignment between my head, my body and my subtle senses. This knowing has a certain quality of 'this is it', without any trace of a doubt. But I hardly ever 'see' things, or 'hear' information. I feel it, or I know it. For others it is different. The point, in *honouring what is*, is to be grateful for your own way of accessing subtle information and not to try to do like others, or to compare your unique way with theirs. I have a friend who took some years to understand and accept that her 'instant-knowing-just-like-that' was no less valuable than the clear and detailed images that could be perceived and described by others.

### **4. Living what is – in myself: Sharing and expressing my unique gifts**

After honouring my deeper self the only possible next step is *living and expressing myself, as I am, subtle sensing included*. I share my thoughts and emotions, I share the subtle clues I perceive, I share my wildest dreams and my deepest aspirations. Alongside sharing through language, I also show my unique form of creativity: my dance, my models, my poetry, my deep insights, my inner knowing, my sensing, my theory, my cooking, my disturbance, my flower arranging ... I am no longer stuck in downloading, I am free from any compulsion to conform to a certain type of identity. I am aware of my gifts to the world, I can now show up as an authentic person.

### Ode to a Cloud

Take time to watch a cloud  
Changing shape before your eyes,  
Holding its shape so lightly,  
Willing to die for love of the whole  
Who is this 'I' who holds its shape so tightly,  
Clinging to form as though it's all I know.  
Would we were like clouds  
Willing to be known only for a moment  
As 'That'  
— Wendy

## The experience of inner alignment

### *Quotes from conference call:*

When I am connected to my body then there is also a heart connection; and the mental is still there. Then I am being as a human in a more integrated place; a fine-tuned sensibility, a way to sense into, and being fully present. When I feel really aligned, all of that is there, including what I sense in my body; and often there is a vibration, which is very physical. Vibration, a kind of pulsing, that is the signal to me that I am there.

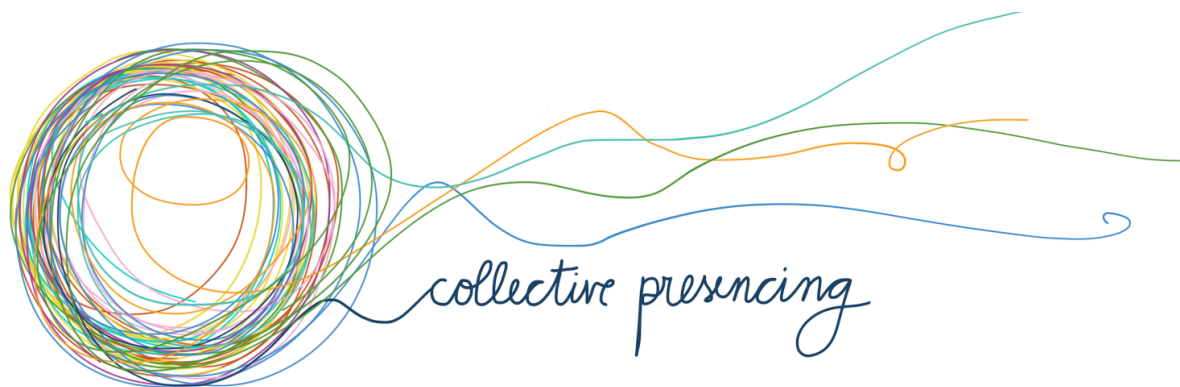
— Judy

Sitting in silence. I feel exactly what you feel. Plus I feel a lot of heart energy. Energy flowing through my body. Also feet and hands, I feel the ground that I sit on. I also feel the energy in my body. I am very open in my heart, very clear in my mind, through all situations. Feeling alive, sexy without seducing, very aware of the power of giving birth, giving life, creating life through my body.

— Eugenie

The ultimate purpose of this chapter *I and Myself* is to reveal what else is possible if we open ourselves more deeply and widely – for ourselves. It is a journey of many thresholds and little and big jumps into territory that sometimes seems frightening, because we go beyond our Western belief of what is right or true or valuable. We integrate more of our subtle and animal nature by acknowledging that we do sense a lot that in daily life is neither shared nor talked about. Still it is there, we all have the capacity to do it; we are hard-wired for this, and yet the capacity has not been used, let alone trained and practiced. The outcome is that we dis-cover our true self, digging it free from under the conditioning. The reward is being and feeling more alive and present throughout our whole life.

The next chapter moves from becoming present to *I and myself*, to becoming present to *I and relationships*. We are widening the scope of the field in which we can learn to grow our awareness and our presence. We will again use the same four sub-movements (*observing what is, accepting what is, honouring what is and living what is*) and gradually build a whole map ([section 4.7](#)) that will reveal what all this can lead to: building capacity for collective wisdom. Not just collective intelligence, but authentic collective wisdom; more on the difference between these concepts later. ([section 4.2](#))



## 2. I and You: Authentic Relationship

2.1 Mainstream and shadow

2.2 Poem: Companioning

2.3 Shadow and gift

2.4 Widening balance as a Process of Outer Alignment

2.5 Opening to Authentic Relationship



## 2.1 Mainstream and shadow



We were sitting at the table in my living room and Johannes – my teacher in Systemic Constellation Work – stood up and walked to a corner of the room. He was going to show me daylight consciousness. He pointed right in front of him and said “this is my goal and I shall go towards it.” Then he moved forward, eyes open and focused on the point he had just indicated. Next he showed me night consciousness. He returned to the corner, turned his back to me, covered his eyes with his hand and walked backwards, slowly but steady, sensing where to place each next step. This, he explained, is night consciousness: sensing where to go, without seeing where you are going or even knowing what is your real destination or purpose. You can’t believe how recognised I felt by this explanation! He had described exactly how I had been living my life during recent years. This whole scene unfolded as a possible response to a particular issue in my life that, as far as he could tell, I could deal with only through night consciousness. He related it to the feminine aspect, the moon, darkness, etc. There was nothing I could really ‘do’ about my issue. “When you look at somebody with day consciousness,” he said, “you see who you encounter. With the feminine, you approach them with your back, not with your eyes open.”

Years later, in a systemic constellation I had asked for, there was ‘something’ I had to face, before I could go on with my leadership work. I knew it related to Johannes’ comments. In that constellation I looked it in the eyes and welcomed it into my life. To this day I still don’t know what it was/is really about. Many times my body has a clue that something is going on, while my mind as yet knows nothing. Often when I go to training events or gatherings, I’m not clear in my mind about what I want to learn or why I am exactly going. I’m there because I sense I need to be there. I go there ‘with my eyes closed’; I go to learn something and to contribute to the inquiry. My analytical mind doesn’t know what, but my subtle intelligence knows more.

It took me a number of years to get to real clarity and inner balance regarding these differences. The daylight mode of consciousness is much more widespread, and if your natural preference works the other way and you have a preference for night consciousness, you can end up feeling excluded, ignored, shamed. It is important to recognise that different people have different ways of knowing, different perspectives on the whole that forms what we call

reality. One is not bad, the other is not good; they are just different and we can learn to respect them all, and maybe even understand them.

Regarding preferences and differences (in people born in the West) here are some quotes and stories from other authors:

## Figure and Ground

In his book *In Over Our Heads*,<sup>1</sup> Robert Kegan says:

I have been told that when American POWs from the Vietnam era were first released, nearly all performed the same two first acts after being flown to Wiesbaden, Germany; they took showers and called loved ones. But the men were far more likely to shower first and then to call loved ones. The women were more likely to call loved ones first and then to shower. The difference is not necessarily that the men are more selfish and care more about their own bodily comfort than about their loved ones. The men could well have felt what was most important to them was to talk to their loved ones, but they couldn't do what they most wanted until they had cleansed, or psychologically restored, a self that could even be reconnected to their loved ones. The difference is not between 'selfish' and 'altruistic' – both groups may have been doing first what they needed to do to restore the self, and both, in that sense, could be said to be 'selfish'. The difference is in how the self is made whole. For some, the self is restored by itself and is not until then capable or fit for precious connection. For others, the self is restored in and through connection.

Once again I would repeat that this is not a normative or hierarchic difference. It is a difference in fundamental 'orientation', or what I am here calling 'style'. [...] it is important to see that this is not a matter of dichotomy or polarity, as if people favor either separateness or connection, but one of figure and ground.

## Reason and Feeling

In his book *Radical Knowing*,<sup>2</sup> philosopher Christian de Quincey says (p.12): "As these women explained it to me, they felt most comfortable relating to the world through their *feelings*, whereas the men in their lives typically used *reason* as a basis for communication. Many of these women had spent years in relationships where they felt that their husband, boss, teacher, father, or brother had used the power of intellect to invalidate their feelings and in so doing, dominated them; these men and women were experiencing a clash of worldviews." And he adds: "It's not that one way of knowing is right or better than the other – we need both reason *and* feeling for getting on with the complicated business of living." (p.13)

And I fully agree when he states: "We should be careful not to generalize or to stereotype genders. Not all women use feeling as their primary mode of consciousness or communication. And, of course, women can be just as rational and intellectual as men. Similarly, not all men are unskilled in the 'arts' of feeling, either. Furthermore, feeling-based consciousness is not always so gentle or nurturing." (p.13) And he goes on to tell a story demonstrating this point.

## Justice and Care

Carol Gilligan, in her research and book *In a Different Voice*,<sup>3</sup> found that girls are not inferior in their personal or moral development. Rather, they are different to the 'normal' male standard. They develop in a way that focuses on connections among people (rather than separation) and with an ethic of care for those people (rather than an ethic of justice). She writes: "... the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract.

This *conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care* centres moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the *conception of morality as fairness* ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules.” (p.19 my italics)



## Different spiritual paths

Angela Fisher, interviewed by Hilary Hart in *The Unknown She: Eight Faces of an Emerging Consciousness*,<sup>4</sup> says: “Men’s journeys are of course towards themselves, but at the same time they seem to journey away from themselves, leaving their bodies behind. They master their instinctual nature – which is an expression of the body in the world – and transform these energies. Most of the practices given in all kinds of traditions are designed to assist this process. They are easy to recognize, emphasizing ascetic trials like fasting, physical endurance, and controlling sexuality. And we consider these as general spiritual practices, not recognizing that they might be inappropriate for women. Women often don’t need these practices, because they stay where they are; their connections within life, within the created world, provide the ground for their transformation. ....

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, a master in a certain Sufi path, writes in *The Return of the Feminine and the World Soul*:

For example, the masculine mind thinks linearly. It’s goal oriented – there’s a problem, we figure out how to solve it. Masculine consciousness is quite focused. The feminine consciousness, on the other hand, is relational. It looks around and it asks, is nature focused? Is a squirrel, say completely focused on being a squirrel? No. The squirrel makes a relationship to everything around it and in the midst of all those patterns of relationship it knows where the nut is, and it knows how to leap from branch to branch to get the nut. And feminine consciousness, by its very nature, works in the same way; it feels all these different patterns of relationship and how they work together.<sup>5</sup>

## Two types evolving

You might wonder why I write here about feminine and masculine, or even gender differences. Many of the practices and distinctions that I am going to make further down the road somehow have to do with these differences. My intention is not to point out differences between genders, but to show how some energies, patterns, or ways of knowing have taken centre stage in our society, while other energies or capacities have been more hidden or not (or less) developed.

One of the themes running through this book is the rediscovery of those qualities, energies, competences that do not receive enough attention or recognition in mainstream western society. The goal is to re-integrate and fuse them all in order to live life more fully and enjoy our full potential. Co-creating the new, or living in the generative space is only possible once we have fully integrated what is more mainstream with what is needed to complement it (what is in the shadow). That's all that is needed; not more. What is more in the shadow, what is more in our awareness? Let's bring it all centre stage: we need it all.

## Notes

1: Robert Kegan: *In Over Our Heads*. ↓ Chapter 6: Dealing with Difference.

2: Christian de Quincey: *Radical Knowing*. ↓

3: Carol Gilligan: *In a Different Voice*. ↓

4: Hilary Hart: *The Unknown She: Eight Faces of an Emerging Consciousness*. ↓

5: Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee: *The Return of the Feminine and the World Soul*. ↓ p.40.



## 2.2 Poem: Companioning



Companioning is about being present to another person's pain;  
it is not about taking away the pain.

Companioning is about going to the wilderness of the soul with another human being;  
it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.

Companioning is about honoring the spirit;  
it is not about focusing on the intellect.

Companioning is about listening with the heart;  
it is not about analyzing with the head.

Companioning is about bearing witness to the struggles of others;  
it is not about judging or directing these struggles.

Companioning is about walking alongside;  
it is not about leading.

Companioning means discovering the gifts of the sacred silence;  
it is not about filling up every moment with words.

Companioning is about being still;  
it is not about frantic movement forward.

Companioning is about respecting disorder and confusion;  
it is not about imposing order and logic.

Companioning is about learning from others;  
it is not about teaching them.

Companioning is about compassionate curiosity;  
it is not about expertise.

— Alan Wolfelt <sup>1</sup>

## Notes

1: Alan D. Wolfelt Ph.D.: *Tenets of Companioning the Bereaved*. ↓



## 2.3 Shadow and gift



Shadow does not exist by itself, it is cast, by a real physical body. ... Shadow is shaped by presence; presence comes *a priori* to our flaws and absences. To change the shape of ourselves is to change the shape of the shadow we cast. ... Shadow is a beautiful, inverse, confirmation of our incarnation. Shadow is intimated absence; almost a template of presence. It is a clue to the character of our appearance in the world. It is an intimation of the ultimate vulnerability, the dynamic of being found by others, not only through the physical body but by its passing acts; even its darkening effect on others; shadow makes a presence of absence, it is a clue to ourselves and to those we are with, even to the parts of ourselves not yet experienced, yet already perceived by others. Shadow is not good or bad, only inescapable.

— David Whyte<sup>1</sup>

Becoming present in and with our self, as described in the first chapter, really isn't that hard to do. It invites an embracing of the subtler sensing in ourselves, and the barriers to doing this turn out to be far from insurmountable – only somewhat countercultural here in the West. Expanding our awareness to the outside, to the proverbial other, we get into the area of relationship. We will see that becoming more present and aligned in this domain asks for something else, something that can be hard to accomplish – at least, so it seems.

In our little Flemish women's circle, we would spend a lot of time figuring out or cleaning up the relationships between us. After all, we were all psychotherapists, so that was what we were trained for and experienced in! Our purpose was very clear: we wanted to come to a point of continuously open awareness with no emotional attachment at all. But, oh boy... how difficult was that!? Was it not 'the other' who was unfriendly, inattentive or harsh? Was it

not ‘the other’ who was wrong and didn’t see things in the right way? Was it not ‘the other’ who hurt me? It was sometimes a long, tough ride to clear the space of our projections onto one another and return to a point of open heart and unconditional love. We spent hours and days on this work of untangling emotions, judgements and projections. Clearing the space of projections didn’t mean that we would always agree with what the others did or said, but – as Rumi said – there is a field beyond right-doing and wrong-doing and that was where we wanted to meet.

When we want to learn to become more present in relationship with others, we can’t skip the topic of shadow, which is, for many, related with the concept of ego. A deeper understanding – in the sense of a lived experience and real embodiment, not just a cognitive knowing – of this crucial piece of psychology would solve many conflicts in our daily lives, as well as on many larger scales, even globally. The expression ‘doing shadow work’ points to this being a process: simply put, it involves recognising hidden aspects of ourselves in order to re-integrate them into our sense of ourselves.

Here, too, we will apply the four movements of inner alignment: *observing, accepting, honouring and living what is* – only this time in connection with an outer alignment, like on a horizontal plane, with others.

## Ego isn’t bad. Neither is shadow.

In a lot of spiritual literature and personal development work, the ego is to blame and one should at all costs avoid acting from there. In some networks and communities, this is accepted as a core truth and one that is deeply ingrained in those subcultures – although people don’t have a clear, shared definition of exactly what an ego is and is not. Having practiced for decades as a psychologist and a professional psychotherapist, I have developed a more nuanced view on ego that goes beyond just judging or blaming it and seeking to eradicate it.

In this world of time and space – the realm where we actually live, and which is probably different than the realm our souls came from – we all need an ego in order to grow up. We need a vehicle, a structure that enables us to be here on Earth and in our society, to ground ourselves in and deal with the context in which we live. This structure is our unique way of dealing with the world around us; after all, ego means ‘I’ in Latin. So there is a healthy and necessary aspect in this kind of ego building; it allows us to deal with the physical and social world, it is *a healthy sense of self*. It is primarily a drive to do all sorts of things and to express who we uniquely are. I learned a long time ago that people who haven’t developed enough of this kind of grounding need ‘ego-strengthening therapy’. So we see ego as a sense of self, a locus of selfhood. In short, we can’t get rid of ego, nor should we. But... and...

In the journey of growing up, some parts of our selves get rigid and ossified. Patterns or habits are formed that were initially needed for our emotional and/or physical survival. They were formed long before we began consciously acting in the world, while we were babies, toddlers and small children. These habits become ingrained in how we think, in what we feel and in how we act. They account for a substantial part what people tend to call ‘personality’. Because they are charged with a great deal of unconscious emotional energy, these patterns are sealed or blocked. For our purposes here, I call them *habitual patterns*. Often, our sense of self – what we call our identity – is closely enmeshed with these patterns of behaviour. This explains the confusion between ‘ego as sense of self’ and ‘ego as habitual patterns’. Despite what it may look like it at first glance, these patterns are not what defines us; they are not our essence – far from it! They are *survival patterns*, and were needed for survival in our own unique context. Now that we are older, as adults we can learn to disentangle our identity from them. We are vastly more than these patterns of habit.

If you notice that you are not flexible in your ways of dealing with others and life in general, then you are – in the language of Scharmer – ‘downloading’. In my psychotherapeutic language, you are acting out of your habitual survival patterns. This is the shadow. It relates with Scharmer’s concept of the blind spot: not realising where your thoughts and actions originate from. The personal shadow is that part of us that was not allowed to live in the full light, not invited to be expressed and so, because nothing else was possible, it retreated into the shadows – what psychology calls the subconscious. Later in life, we are fully convinced that it is the other who carries this shadow, not us. *They* are angry, not me! *He* hurt me! *She* didn’t listen! The litany is endless. Our shadow parts are fully out of

sight of our own eyes and so we project them onto the other(s). Later in the book we will see that, beyond the personal shadow, there are also cultural shadows and even shadows at the level of humanity.

To do shadow work is to take the projection back. This means we need to re-integrate something back into our healthy sense of self. Most likely, we feel some shame or guilt around whatever it is, it is hidden somewhere deep down inside us, we are not even aware of it. The shame originally arose because our childish, spontaneous, lively expression was met with some kind of negative response: we might have been ridiculed, blamed, not seen in our needs, not allowed to express ourselves or punished for being who we were. Because the expression came and felt totally natural to us at that time, the only ‘explanation’ for this negative response we got as a baby, toddler or child, was that there was something wrong with us. Better to hide that part in the future! Thus is the shadow born. Habits are installed and become ever more ingrained over time.

As adults, we now need a high dose of inner sensitivity and courage even to begin recognising our shadow part(s). This is quite difficult because, as we said, it is completely hidden from our own eyes and there is a tendency to avoid it – at least the strong and painful emotions that are connected with it. After recognising and acknowledging it for our selves, the next step is to allow it out of the closet and to share it with others. When we can do that, what we see is nothing awful or shameful, simply a hurt child who only needs some care, some space and attention to be welcomed and recognised. That’s it. In this sharing and expression – that wasn’t possible in childhood through a lack of support – the re-integration of the shadow part is done and we become more whole. This re-integration process also has a huge influence on how we look at others: we become more humble, because we realise how blind we were to our own ‘stuff’; our hearts can stay open to them, and we can see them as fellow human beings with their own characteristics, wounding, patterns and gifts.

Leadership begins when we stop blaming others or making excuses. Leadership is not a role, it's an attitude.

— Peter Hawkins<sup>2</sup>

One dark winter evening, I was on the phone with Geert. We had seen each other a few times over the last months and I hoped a partner relationship was sprouting. “You always want to be the boss.” he said. I immediately felt a contraction in my stomach. “Oh, my god, here we have it again!” flashed through my mind. I knew it too well. Many times my women friends and a previous partner had tried to explain that, on many occasions, I would put myself outside of the mutual relationship and behave as if I knew better or didn’t have needs like others did. I knew there was ‘something’ in this, but I didn’t understand it at all. However, being trained as a psychotherapist, it had dawned on me: this is my shadow!

That’s what I shared with him, immediately and on the spot, and I asked if he was willing to describe to me – in full detail – what it was that I did and said that made him come to this conclusion. And he did. To this day I am grateful that he made the effort to explain it all to me. That evening it finally dawned on me how my shadow expressed itself in my life. Emotionally, it was very unpleasant and extremely intense: a real dark night of the soul. I curled up on the sofa under a blanket and saw the many, many instances in my life where I had indeed taken myself out of the equal relationship and – very hidden and secretly – saw myself as knowing better, being wiser, more developed, having more clarity and so on. In this way I distanced myself from my best friends, again and again. This behaviour was totally in contrast with the values I espoused and truly thought I lived by! It felt like watching a real horror film. Every scene called forth fresh tears and I wept from the bottom of my heart because of the unintended outcomes and the distance I myself had unwittingly created. After some hours I fell asleep on the sofa; I had finally come to grips with the feedback that friends and partners had been trying to give me for over 10 years.

When I dared to feel that far into my inner depths, I found that I always thought of myself as knowing better, as knowing more, as having more personal growth than others. Acknowledging this felt deeply painful. I had a mother who had always put her self above her own pain and needs. She had shown me a (Catholic) definition of love that looked as if it was ‘beyond selfishness’, but what I got was a mom who wasn’t really present, who hid her needs and her vulnerable parts, even when she was very sick and dying. Only when I was able to share this part of my childhood with my best friends, acknowledging and really accepting (not judging) the mistrust I had in others and the pain of my childhood, could I integrate my own needs into my sense of self. Through this episode, my secretly



held opinion of “I know better”, changed into a conscious knowing that “sometimes I know something that others don’t”. The gift of authentic leadership, now in a more humble form, became discernible in me. Welcoming our selves, our projections and our pain – instead of judging them or feeling guilty or ashamed – is of utmost importance when dealing with shadow material.



At the level of embodiment and emotional energy, in this process of reclaiming the parts of our selves that have been concealed in our subconscious we need to learn to hold a lot of emotion, much of it painful. Taking back our projections will always open up some blocked, unexpressed emotions from a long time ago. You are invited simply to accept these emotions and their expressions as yours; feel the pain and cry; feel the anger and shout; feel the sexual energy and dance; feel what you missed and share your needs. If we are not at ease with doing this, the shadow material will stay where it is – in the shadow – and will keep on pushing us into our habitual patterns of reaction. Again, this calls for ongoing practice: any kind of practice that trains our ability to hold energy and/or intensity will help us not to be taken off guard when these emotions seek their natural expression in the sharing with others.

Wherever and whenever you notice that you are inflexible and always react in the same way – when you are downloading – this is part of your repertoire of habitual patterns that you may want to change. Most likely it is your partner, your friend, your colleague or (your) children who will point out your shadow to you. Because, as we have said, we ourselves are blind to it. Most, if not all, people will at first defend this part of their habitual self by saying “this is how the world is” or “this is how I am” or “that’s not true!” It takes a big dose of self-awareness to suspend this defence, ask for more explanation and look deeply inside. It is worthwhile, however, because the gift is in the trauma. In other words: your shadow will reveal your unique contribution to life, the unique ways in which you are called to express who you truly are.

It is so easy to blame others – or circumstances – for what is not working well or for ‘causing’ your deep emotions. But unless we can act flexibly (having a broader repertoire of responses than just blaming or making excuses), we are basically stuck in our patterns and not present. When I say ‘flexible’, I really mean flexible: having a wide range of options to choose from: we can use humour, or we can play it the other way, or we can choose to not answer... above all, we don’t take it personally. Instead of having a single, habitual reaction, we have a range of responses, depending on the circumstances. There is always – and I do mean *always* – a way of opening yourself to other ways of dealing with any situation, even when it really, *really* looks as if you are right and the others are wrong; or when the circumstances really do seem to be the cause of your suffering. There are always more and different options for how you can act and respond – instead of reacting and downloading – that are healthier and cause less suffering to yourself and others.

From my experience in many groups and gatherings, I am surprised by how little most people understand this process of projection and the concept of shadow. They keep on blaming ‘others’ for their own emotions, or use them as excuses. Those ‘others’ can be a real multitude of actors: their partners, the system, the hierarchy, their friends, the facilitator, the teacher, their children, the design, the neighbours... We would be well advised to lend an open and attentive ear to the feedback coming from our closest friends and partners, look at it, and contemplate it... let it sink in, even ask for more specific and detailed examples. Look and listen for recurring patterns in the feedback you get from different people. They are all offering you something you can learn from and it will enhance the quality of the relationships in your life.

I want to state this very clearly: doing shadow work does not mean getting rid of something bad or wrong about you! Many people understand shadow as something that is to blame, but the truth is that this hidden aspect of your self actually holds an essential gift of who you are. In my dark night of the soul, the crucial point was not to get rid of the mistrust and bossiness towards others, but to integrate the more vulnerable, needy and equally human part in myself. In my story, the essence was not about eradicating my habitual pattern of creating this gap with others deep in myself; rather, it was about recognising and sharing my own needs and longings, and acknowledging my pain that my mom had always kept her vulnerable part away from conversation and communication with me. Shadow work is simply about integrating something in yourself that has been prevented from living fully in the light. The purpose of doing this work is to become more whole, and to be ready to express and share your full self with others and the world.

When you notice lingering shame or guilt around certain part(s) of your self, you are not looking at this part *as it is*. Instead of witnessing, observing or acknowledging, you are downloading and judging. It is good to realise that every human being – without exception (as far as I know) – has shadow parts. So there really is nothing special about yours, although it usually feels like that: I have a secret, ugly part that I have to hide, otherwise others won’t accept me. This is the childlike belief that persists, with no grounding in the reality of today. The point now is to accept these parts in yourself, by yourself. Then you are ready to share them and be open about them: that is the re-integration.

This aspect of becoming more aligned and present in all relationships is not easy. It asks for a deep commitment to consciousness, again and again, over and over, in all manner of situations. The hurt child will hold on to its survival pattern and is scared to drop it for fear of not belonging or not surviving! The commitment can be seen as a heroic journey. As Thomas Hübl said in an interview (with Sergio Baroni on YouTube): “We need to be a hero of our own consciousness.” Once you have realised that all your inflexibility and charged emotions are *yours* (including the so-called positive, highly-charged emotions like falling in love), there is a huge release! No more fighting, discussing,

blaming, hoping, trying to get something, holding back, expecting... All that liberated energy becomes fully available to create something, and is open to an ever-expanding vista of possibility and opportunity. The rigidity is gone, and others are seen in a new light: just as they are, as authentic human beings, nothing more and nothing less.

*Quote from blogpost:*

We speak of 'holding the shadow' and 'loving the dragons', but it became clear that to understand what this really is about, we have to sink deeper into 'the koan of the shadow'. The shadow is not what we think it is, the koan will help us see what it really is: because it is not dark and it is not a thing. It is like clouds casting a shadow, but the cloud isn't something to touch or to hold, you can just walk through it! Instead of the shadow there is an Intense Beauty! Can we live in the Direct Light, not putting anything between our selves and the Light? (May 2009)

*Quote from participant:*

Because if I don't acknowledge the ugly inside of me, if I don't acknowledge the destructive force, then there's a part of me that doesn't rise enough, you might say – that isn't awake enough. There's a wakefulness in recognising that there is an enemy. And this doesn't happen to be an outer enemy. And the thing to do with enemies is not to kill them. The thing to do with enemies is to transform them. So the transformative *outer* dynamic perhaps comes from a thousand tiny steps of *internal* transformative dynamic. And they're not the same.

— Marianne

## Response-ability

Shadow work is a deep and essential part in the process of inner and outer alignment that we are describing in this book. Before you can relate in an authentic way, you have to notice and deal with your own inflexibility and heal the unconscious parts of yourself that are related to that. I have noticed that a lot of people take the word 'authentic' to mean expressing your emotions with the implicit or explicit expectation that the other will or should change; they now have a free ticket to lay their emotional charge on others and to go beyond the polite social self. On the contrary, relating in an authentic way, as we construe it here, means that you take responsibility for your own emotions, without expecting the others to save you from them, to offer healing, or to change how they are or how they express themselves. In this way, you have created a response-ability in how you deal with your environment, and you are no longer dependent on how 'the other' is doing or not. Relating in an authentic way means that you can share your emotions as *yours*, in all their vulnerability, when and where appropriate.

In this response-ability, while one part entails staying out of your own shadow parts, it is just as important not to engage with the habitual patterns of others. In the end, of course, it comes down to the same thing and the same questions: can we deal with the others in another way? Are we sufficiently centred and flexible to come up with a novel take on how to deal with this experience?

Habitual patterns also exist in the form of 'always being nice', 'always taking care', 'always being challenged to defend or explain', or 'always taking too much responsibility', and hundreds of similar (more 'positive') patterns. If we are able to stay out of our survival patterns, and refrain from engaging with the patterns of the other, implicitly or explicitly we are inviting him or her to also come to a different place of engaging in the communication between us. If we are not triggered into our own form of downloading, we offer a space free of emotional charge where the other can quieten down and slowly start to understand that something new is going on.

Getting mired in the habitual patterns of others is what often sucks the life out of us. We get tired of the conversation, which always seems to go in the same direction. There is no real life in this downloading, it is just one more survival strategy engaging with yet another habitual pattern. It doesn't have the quality that can bring us to a deeper understanding of each other, let alone to a space of being fully alive and generating something novel together.



When you can hold your own and others' patterns as described here – without expressing your emotional charge and/or engaging with the emotional charge of others – the experience is similar to those good moments as a parent, when your child is angry and you can hold its emotion without reacting by answering back with an equal charge of anger. You don't take it personally. Not reacting in your habitual way, you are response-able.

The point of discernment is always: are you flexible in how you react? Can you do something else or answer in a different way? People who are always nice and polite need perhaps to learn to say: "Please Leave!" People who tend to react in an angry way need perhaps to learn to say: "Sorry." You can check with yourself: do you have a wider repertoire of ways of acting? If one way doesn't do the job in the relating, can you do something else? And something else again, and yet something else, without losing your own centre? Do you have different ways of engaging with the situation: humorous, emotional, rational, wacky? Can you offer a question that breaks some shared, unconscious assumptions? Can you do something totally unexpected that takes the conversation to a different level, until you find something that works in this moment, for this relationship?

## The gift is in the trauma

There is no coming to consciousness without pain. People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own soul. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but by making the darkness conscious.

— Carl Gustav Jung<sup>3</sup>

From my story, that night on the sofa, when my friend explained to me in detail how I would distance myself from him and seek to dominate, I learned a lot about leadership. Not the bossy kind of leadership that takes authority by some kind of force, but rather a leadership that establishes itself because it is recognised by others as helpful and wise.

I don't remember where I picked it up, or even if I invented it myself, but the expression 'the gift is in the trauma' holds so much value. I know for myself how recognising and integrating my wounded childhood feelings – my mother who kept her vulnerability far away from others, and from me – did away with my inner survival pattern of "I know better." As a toddler, I knew inside that something else was possible; that relationships and community could be different than how I experienced them with my mom and in her family at large. So, yes, I knew something! But of course, nobody asked me, so I kept it a secret inside for many, many years.



I can see, in hindsight, that my whole life has moved around this topic of leadership, assuming responsibility in different situations, many times initiating new groups and initiatives, while my own vulnerability stayed more or less remote from it all. Because our lives revolve around our deepest trauma, we have seen and approached it from many different angles, from every imaginable perspective, so that after some 20, 30 or 40 years we have become an expert on the topic! At least, if we manage to disengage, step-by-step, from the emotions of hurt that are entangled with it. Working through these emotions and bringing in some consciousness allows us to uncover the gift that is hidden in there. In [Chapter 5](#), where we will dive into our soul's calling, we will build on this unique flavour that each of us brings to life.

Sharing these deep feelings is what creates deep relationships. The quality of our vulnerability is first of all a gift to our own self, but it is also a gift in our relationship with the other(s). If this quality is present in a group's process, true friendship can arise and we will create a collective space where we are in flow, instead of being hindered by our habitual patterns of defending, blocking, withdrawing and the like. In this shared vulnerability, we open up more, something pours through the cracks of the no-longer-needed identity/personality, and then there is a wider space to embrace and radiate more of life itself.

## Notes

- 1: David Whyte: From the essay "Shadow", in the collection "Consolations:..." ↓ Fuller quote visible at <https://m.facebook.com/PoetDavidWhyte/posts/shadowdoes-not-exist-by-itself-it-is-cast-by-a-real-physical-body-we-may-say-a-p/1958457374180256/>
- 2: Peter Hawkins, quoting himself: *Necessary Leadership*. ↓
- 3: Carl Gustav Jung: *Alchemical Studies: Collected Works Vol.13*, ¶ 335, p.265.

## 2.4 Widening balance as a Process of Outer Alignment



In the first chapter we described the process of becoming ever more present to ourselves, in all our nuances and fullness. This unfolding authenticity as a process of inner alignment, is accompanied by another alignment that extends from our selves out to what is around us. Exploring this inner and outer territory, we are building a map, piece by piece, that describes alignment on both vertical (inner) and horizontal (outer) axes. Eventually this voyage of discovery will give us two maps, but for now we will content ourselves with starting the first one, the map for the *Circle of Presence*.

A *Circle of Presence* is any group that has as its purpose to learn, individually and collectively, to grow more present to its collective wisdom. This presumes a capacity in each member of the group to be present with oneself, with others, with the group, and also with the potential that is not yet realised. Awareness on all these levels helps build our capacity to attain authentic, collective wisdom in service of actions that are unique, authentic and balanced in the world. In the second half of the book, we will describe how this awareness and consciousness can be expanded even further, both inwards and outwards, through the practice of a *Circle of Creation*.

In the previous chapter ([section 1.6](#)) we distinguished and described different levels or layers in the movement of inner balance and the unfolding of authenticity: *observing, accepting, honouring and living what is*. As we now extend our awareness beyond ourselves to include the ‘other’, we find that these four verbs apply to this outward movement too. In our lived experience, of course, these layers are all co-arising, intertwined and interwoven. It is one thing to draw a map, but quite another to actually live in the territory! The map can help us now and then, but it is in the practice of daily life that we learn to embody both deeper authenticity and widening balance.

This process of outer alignment will result in an experience of balance, which extends to include the world around. We can differentiate several widening movements, from *I and Myself*, to *I and You*, through *I and Us*, to *I and Potential*. Again, these different domains are not areas with clear-cut boundaries; we simply separate them out in

order to gain some clarity. The overall development here is a growing awareness that whom and what we relate with is much more complex than we had ever imagined.

Seeing this complexity is becoming aware of omnipresent interrelatedness; a deeply embodied understanding that there is never one 'single thing', but always – and really always! – mutual relationship. There is an ongoing influence back and forth; I can't separate myself from my relationship with you, with the group I am in, or with the potential that we hold together. We are distinguishing them here in the interests of clarity, but in life this is just not possible. Of course, mainstream Western thought, rooted in the assumptions of an objective, scientific paradigm, has separated many 'things' out, only to recently arrive at the insight that life in general needs to be described in terms of complexity, chaos, networks and embeddedness in systems.

The movement of widening our balance can be seen as ever expanding waves of attention. First we must ease ourselves out of our rigid patterns and habitual boundaries ([Chapter 1: I and Myself](#)) before we can really connect with the other(s) (this chapter: *I and You*). This relational field needs to be mastered before I can live, love and respect on a group level ([Chapter 3: I and Us](#)). In turn, we need some practice on this group level before we can start to live – together – in real emergence ([Chapter 4: I and Potential](#)). Later we will see that authenticity and balance can extend deeper and wider, beyond the human beings we are with and out into the material world and into other realms, where authenticity becomes generative creativity and balance becomes coherence. But let's not jump ahead!

We can see this widening of balance, including ever more in the process, as trusting the invisible 'in-betweenness' of all that exists. This trust in the subtle experience of that which is neither visible nor tangible, but which nevertheless influences us, helps us to learn to be at ease with surrendering to new insights, seeing new patterns and coming to an authentic collective wisdom. If we remain grounded in the thing-ness of our selves and others, we miss out on the relationships, the interrelatedness and the myriad other information streams that are constantly at work in our relational field. It is a stretch for our Western mind to shift our attention from the objects we perceive to what is happening inside and between them, but like everything else, this can all be learned and trained.

## Balance as a process of widening awareness

As is our habit in the West, my personal process of awakening awareness started with myself, through the practice of meditation, emotional bodywork, different types of dance, circle work, and so on, all to learn about the deeper layers and possibilities in myself. This was all very much 'me'-focused, at least in the beginning. I cleared many blockages and became freer in my expression and the quality of my life improved. Then something intriguing happened.

A ten-year relationship had just come to an end, and with it a 3-year experiment in a kind of co-housing project. I had prepared myself well for the next autumn and had planned for some evening workshops and weekends in Emotional Bodywork, which I had already been offering for a few years as a therapist. My plan was to build up my practice and to let go of my unemployment benefit. Despite all this forward planning, not one of the courses I was offering had enough participants, and I had to cancel them all. Now what? Finding myself with a lot of time on my hands, and intuiting that the universe was trying to tell me something, I meditated and contemplated to sense into what I was supposed to do.

One afternoon, as I was lying on my sofa groping for clarity, it dawned on me that, while Emotional Bodywork was excellent work, it was no longer mine to do. So what then? A faint inner signal told me that there was something with women, with spirituality... not clear, not sure... and off I went into a deep memory of being burned at the stake! Such a deep embodied, embedded fear that if I truly dared to speak my truth, I would be burned at the stake! My god! I was not at all prepared for the emotional clearing I had done on the level of my personal life to have this as an outcome! A new chapter was opening, this time a more cultural and collective one, and again there was pain to acknowledge and transform. It didn't feel fair: was this the reward for all my hard work? I didn't like it!

While I am no 'true believer' in past lives, as I have seen such stories used in unhealthy ways, nevertheless I cannot dismiss this intriguing, intense and embodied experience. I prefer to think – as I have learned to do from other experiences – that once we have cleared ourselves of personal traumas, more collective and universal ones will



present themselves to us for healing. It is only through individuals taking on this job of expanded consciousness that cultural and age-old suppression can be brought to light and resolved.

This experience launched me into the process of coming together with women in circle, eventually culminating in the Flemish circle, and later the Women Moving the Edge project. Equally important, it taught me something about collective, energetic fields. It was clear to me that this was not solely a personal memory relating exclusively to myself and my story (regardless of whether past lives were involved). I had touched on a collective memory that was speaking through me, making me aware that 'I' was not an entity with a separate existence. I was more entangled in other systems and fields than I could ever have imagined.

In our little Flemish women's group, we naturally expanded towards bigger fields to embrace. As I have already mentioned, we spent a lot of time disentangling what was whose in the field of emotions, triggers and pain. But next came an awareness that the group as a whole was also something to attend to if we wanted to plumb the depths of our collective wisdom. I am referring here not to the classical concept known in social work and facilitation as 'group dynamics', but rather to what we might call the 'group field' – the inner and subtle awareness of the complexity that is any group.

As our inquiry deepened and we experimented with what was unfolding, we focused more on our subtle and collectively aligned wisdom, and how we could stay open and surrender to it, instead of sticking to pre-made plans and known procedures. We started to 'learn from the future', as Scharmer would call it. These days, I prefer to call it 'engaging with the present potential'. In our habitual linear thinking, we project the future as a straight line from the present. But the potential – or what Gendlin calls 'the implicit' – is right here, in every moment of the here-and-now.

I would like to offer a more detailed preview of what lies ahead in this process of widening balance, a process of aligning with what we see as outside of ourselves. We started out from '*I and Myself*', which was described in [the first chapter](#). Now we move out, allowing our awareness to embrace more of all we are related to and inter-related with.

## **I and You**

*Focus on:* the inner being of the other

*Open to:* connecting

We have all learned ways of dealing with a wide range of situations. We know how to shy away when needed, to get furious, to get what we want, etc. As we described in Shadow and Gift ([section 2.3](#)), these are our survival patterns, our habitual and unconscious ways of relating with others. My patterns differ from yours, sometimes they are opposite, but they all have one thing in common: we don't really relate with the other in the here and now. We tend to see others as enemies, as 'really' different, as ignorant, as stupid, as too this or too that.... alternatively, we don't even notice the differences and expect everyone to be just like us.

It's a big thing to really grasp the notion that 'everybody has her own truth', not just as a concept, but to really allow it to penetrate us until we embody in every instant as a lived reality. Whenever we are touched in a vulnerable spot, our defence mechanisms – our fight-or-flight survival patterns – automatically kick in and the value we want to live by ('respecting different views of reality', for example) flies straight out the window! Time and again, instead of going for another round of conflict or the mistrust that creeps in so easily, we need the courage and the consciousness to choose to open up to this other 'I' and seek a way of connecting that actually works to keep us in constructive relationship.

Once I can see through my own patterns and reveal the hidden parts of myself, it becomes much easier to see or assume these hidden places in the other and be open and respectful with them. After all this other person is just as human as I am, only with a different expression, a different colour and a different shape. *Observing what is* means just that: seeing the other as another human being whom we probably don't know at all. Every act of every other person contains a subtle, more hidden aspect that we are likely not aware of and don't even think about. Just as we can open to the full experience of ourselves, including our subtle senses, in the same way we can open to the inner,



subtle self of others. How does this other really feel? What is she aware of that might be quite foreign to me? How does the subtle self of the other express itself?



Once we can start to bend a curious gaze towards this diversity and recognise that we are, quite simply, different, truly authentic relationship becomes possible. Our habitual ways of reacting hide aspects of ourselves that have never been fully in the light; some of these are very beautiful, related to being fully alive, while others seem quite dreadful, but really that is just the outer layer. This is true not only of me, but of all the other people I engage with. These shadow aspects that the 'I' wants to hide are essential to our true authenticity. Within their shell they conceal a pearl of wisdom and great vision. Can we discern and recognise this in others? Can we relate directly with this deeper layer and leave the habitual patterns for what they are? Are we able to see the gift others bring to the table? Can we truly *accept and honour the other*?

In this process of widening our awareness to others, we begin to appreciate that our individuality is not clear cut and separate, and that we live in a world of intricate interrelatedness. As we hold both ourselves and the other in full focus at the same time, we become increasingly aware of ourselves as an embodied flow of experiences. Our idea of ourselves as a process of becoming expands into a relational mode of becoming. This process will be described in detail in next section 2.5.

## **I and Us**

*Focus on:* the group field, the inner collective

*Open to:* holding

Any collective, be it a team, a family, an organisation or a nation, is formed of a number of people, but it is much more than just the sum of those individuals. It is shaped by the relationships between all, by the mutual influences constantly ongoing, back and forth, at lightning speed. Just because these most often go unnoticed by the conscious mind does not mean they are not influencing what we say and do. The number of possible one-on-one relationships can be calculated by a simple formula ( $N \times (N-1) / 2$ ) and the result is always much higher than expected. And this sum does not yet take into account the small subgroups forming and influencing each other whenever the collective has more than 4 or 5 participants.

The English language does not (yet?) have a word to describe this web of relationships, this awareness of interrelatedness, these invisible and subtle dynamics at play beneath the surface. The best term seems to be ‘field’, as it evokes a spatial entity beyond the boundaries of myself, and beyond what is happening between me and one other person. Here, we use the notion ‘*group field*’ to denote the inner dimension that seems to be present in any kind of group, to which our Western world pays scant attention. We distinguish between ‘group field’ and the much more widely recognised ‘group dynamics’, which point mainly to common emotional patterns that occur in group settings. My point here is that, alongside these emotions, there are always subtle energies present that we can learn to detect, to trust, amplify and nurture.

Our Western individuality can find it a challenge to set aside our personal preferences and motivations, to intervene and contribute in sole service of the well-being of the group and its purpose. Doing so does not mean regressing to a childlike state of as yet undeveloped personal identity; nor less does it mean falling into a victim style of conforming to the implicit group norm. Rather, we are pointing here to the next stage in consciousness: from dependent, through in-dependent, to inter-dependent: I need all of you, and you all need the best from me. Only if I offer my full potential can the group achieve its highest possible results. In those moments when my area of knowledge, skill, passion or expertise is at play, I am the leader. In the next moment, you take the lead in another topic or for another task, and we all know and trust this. Leadership circulates throughout the group, not according to a pre-determined schedule, but because we are a leaderful group. Through each fully participating, by sharing the overall responsibility for manifesting the group’s purpose, we are all leaders. (further description in [Chapter 3](#))

## **I and Potential**

*Focus on:* emergence

*Open to:* surrendering

In previous versions of this matrix, I called this area ‘I and Evolution’, but I now think that it is more accurate to see it as the relation between myself and that which can become manifest, the potential that is present and waiting to be grasped and brought forth. In order for this to happen in a group setting, we need the capacity to be consciously present to all the previously described domains: what is going on in myself, in the other individuals, in the field, and where are we regarding the intention and purpose of the group – all at the same time. Through attending to all of this, we can begin to glimpse what is wanting to come to the surface and can start working with it.

There is a special kind of trust involved in this process of widening balance in the world. In highly complex situations, there is no one ‘right’ thing to say or do. How, then, to choose a certain action? The art is to stay centred and open, trusting that sooner or later the next nugget of potential will open and become accessible. Basically, it is about trusting that we are able to connect with unmanifest potential, consciously and intentionally.

In order to be able to listen to the future, to the unmanifest that is knocking on our door, we need a deep inner stillness. Stillness that is beyond being quiet or without noise; it is a centred state that is not engaged in any kind of habitual story. This inner centring allows us to become aware of the subtle energies that point to more potential and its possible manifestation. Accessing the collective wisdom that is held in any kind of group is a collective practice that requires adequate group silence. This means not only individuals refraining from speech, but also a group-connecting-in-silence reaching out – or opening up – to subtle, collective wisdom.

We focus here on the emergence of that really novel insight or idea that has never existed before, and that could only spring up in the midst of our collective witnessing and connection. It requires us to perceive all phenomena – everything that is happening in the room, within us, around us and in the wider field – without judging them with our habitual minds as not valid or not meaningful. It requires us to take them at face value; to acknowledge, accept, honour and live them.

Back in the days of our earliest experiments, we needed much training, courage and willingness to voice our own sparks of wisdom. Sharing your inner knowing, your unique perspective, your subtle impulse regarding the issue and the question at hand is key to achieving the unique collective wisdom of this particular group or team. But recognising the information held by others as wisdom is equally important. Emergence is a lot about ‘connecting the

dots', so if you fail to value your own dot, or disregard the dots that others have brought to the table, you won't see the patterns and the new meaning that is arising, and emergence will not win through.

## 2.5 Opening to Authentic Relationship



“If we take man as he is, we make him worse. But if we take him as what he could potentially be, then we make him capable of becoming what he can be.”

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe<sup>1</sup>

It is time to revisit the four movements – *noticing, accepting, honouring and living what is* – as our focus expands from ourselves to the others; the next step in the widening balance just described (section 2.4). Here, the authentic self that has integrated subtle sensing with all other forms of knowing comes into communication with other human beings. As we have seen, awareness of the process of projection and the ability to see and uncover shadow parts in ourselves is crucial to this step. The intention is for communication with the other(s) to be free from emotional charge, so that no pain is triggered back and forth, allowing us to relate easily and be with one another without projection and (excessive) protection. We become free to listen both to what is really present within us and in others and to what is emerging through us.

### 1. Noticing what is – in relationship: listen to the inner being of others

The core quality and practice in this first movement is **listening**: listening with attention, listening between and beyond the words, listening from inner silence. Most people alive in the Western world have not been taught to listen for deeper meaning, nor to hear the essence of what our interlocutor is seeking to convey. We have been trained in conversation-combat: discussion and debate. *Noticing what is in relationship* means listening to the other with full attention and observing the other beyond, behind and between the spoken words. In so doing, we are not listening closely to the specific words that are spoken, but rather seeking to fathom the meaning they hold for the speaker and sensing the subtle inner reality from whence the message springs. It is listening without thinking about a counter-



argument for winning the speaking-match. It is listening without prejudice. It is listening with the deep respect that everybody deserves and that we all hope for when we engage in a conversation.

I can highly recommend Bill Isaacs' book *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*,<sup>2</sup> especially the chapter on listening. Reading it helped me understand why listening matters so much. The book also expands on how you can learn to listen first to yourself and your own reactions, and to the thoughts running through your head. Learning to listen also means learning to discern between what is actually spoken and the interpretations we immediately attach to what we hear. There is so much to learn!

In our Flemish women's circle, as psychotherapists, coaches and trainers used to giving advice and 'helping', we had to teach one another just to listen, witness and be present to what the others were sharing. Starting out, what proved most difficult was listening without giving advice or trying to fix anything. These were the habitual patterns we had to overcome. Over time we learned to trust the deeper power of witnessing and realised that offering a clear, open mind for the full experience of the other and her communication created a relational dynamic that we had been oblivious to at the outset. Observing and acknowledging the other person and his message carries the flavour of our intertwining as fellow human beings. In this quality of listening, some aspects of this interrelatedness became apparent to us.

## 2. Accepting what is – in relationship: see the other's authentic self, integrate my shadow parts

Through deep listening, you come to see the other as another human being, with his or her own history, failures, unique qualities and specific viewpoints. Continued deep listening inevitably brings you to real acceptance. Many times different viewpoints and related projections on others are the stumbling blocks where projects fail or just drag along without lustre. *Accepting what is in relationship* means recognising your projections and judgements and integrating your own shadow parts. It goes one step beyond suspending your thoughts about others – setting your beliefs aside for a few moments – and implies an opening of the heart. It is an unconditional accepting of this other human being in front of you; not the cold, so-called objective: "I notice what you do/say", but a peering beneath the surface where the essential, authentic self of the other can be glimpsed.

To be able to see a person as a whole being, we must learn another central element in the practice of dialogue: respect. Respect is not a passive act. To respect someone is to look for the springs that feed the pool of their experience. The word comes from the Latin *respicere*, which means "to look again". Its most ancient roots means "to observe". It involves a sense of honouring or deferring to someone. Where once we saw one aspect of a person, we look again and realise how much of them we had missed. This second look can let us take in more fully the fact that here before me is a living, breathing being.

— William Isaacs<sup>3</sup>

It is not the other who causes my anger, sadness or frustration. These emotions and related ideas and opinions are mine. They might be triggered by the actions or words of the other, but they already existed in me before this actual moment; they spring from my (unconscious) memory, not from what is actually happening in the here and now. To open my heart for my own deeply held patterns (my shadow) is generally not an easy thing to do. It seems easier to blame others than to take full responsibility for my own feelings, viewpoints and actions. It is tempting to make the other responsible so I don't have to change.

The underlying mechanism that needs to be transcended here is **projection**. We see in the other something we don't like, perhaps even can't stand. If looked upon, this is a part of ourselves that has not yet been integrated, that we don't want to embrace as part of our own humanness. The first movement is to become aware of my projections (observe what is). The next is to decide to withdraw from the projection (suspend my own emotional reactions), and then finally to return to my own inner balance (own the unconscious parts of myself). This requires me to extend my awareness to the subtleties of what is going on between me and the other, and to refrain from sweeping seemingly



innocuous issues under the carpet. If these things are not named and shared, not brought into the light, they will grow in their own way and probably burst to the surface in a much uglier way. Honour these parts as they emerge from the shadows and the process will greatly contribute toward mutual understanding and trust.

This deep acceptance of our own downloading has major consequences in terms of how we put our feelings and ideas into words, how we talk with each other. The art lies in sharing our feelings without interpretation – particularly without making assumptions about the inner state of the other(s). *Accepting what is in relationship*, means sharing and naming the obvious, nothing more. I call this emotional maturity: this is my perspective, it is my pain. I hold it by and in myself and do not blame others for having caused it. Operating in this way allows us to settle deeper into compassion and love.

*Accepting what is in relationship* brings a deep realisation that the other is more than his or her habitual patterns, just as I am. A deeper layer is revealed that goes beyond the wounds, the shadows and the patterns of survival. We can contain the other gently, the way a wise village treats its 2-year-olds: it does not smack them, humiliate them, chastise them. It holds them respectfully and returns to the adult business. This is how we have to treat each other. It is as simple as that.

I can peer through the wounds into the deeper truth that dwells inside my partner, just as it dwells within myself. *Accepting what is in relationship* means paying attention to this deeper layer, this essential self of the other. It does not mean engaging with the wounding – that would need to happen in a therapeutic setting. Nevertheless, our attention can be placed on this deeper reality of the other whenever we need to in service of the overall process. The point is to connect on an essential level, where we are all human beings.

Another way to describe that quality is unconditional love – non-judgement. My interpretation of the conditions that allow a shift to take place is that you take something that's in you, and you put it out there.

It could be some kind of block in you, some kind of energy. You have lots of stuff around it – judgements, spins. You don't like it. But when it comes into the circle field, we witness it lovingly just as it is. The power of witnessing unconditionally does something. Suddenly, the situation is looked at and blessed, and maybe it's not as bad as you thought!

..... My belief is that your essential self is there, present with you. If you talk to me, and I start being judgemental of you, I can still engage with that essential part of you. That takes me out of my judgement of your personality. It works!

— Circle of Seven<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Honouring what is – in relationship: deepen my heart to common humanity

Honouring the other, even as she says something that ignites some anger or sadness in me, is a core awareness skill that we need to develop together. Our learning process has taught us that any disturbance between two people in a group needs to be voiced and named – though not in any aggressive or critical way, but as a neutral sharing without interpretation, applying the witnessing and listening described above. Keeping the interpersonal field between all members of a group clear is a very fundamental aspect of the group's evolution.

Learning to see the other as more than his or her personality; to see his or her essence, even when we are in conflict, feel irritated or frustrated by each other, can feel like a big commitment – too great a commitment, even. Actually doing this is quite different than engaging in discussion about it. The other is not wrong, is not to blame. Clearing the interpersonal field means assuming full responsibility as I share my own emotional charge. No projection. No blaming. It means leaving all responsibility for the emotional charge of others with them. No projection. No shaming.

It takes time for a group or team to practice and learn this – much longer, in my experience, than any of us would like or expect. The art is to be able to sink deeper into your own heart, where connection takes place at the level of our shared humanity, where you and the other are peers. It means seeking connection at that level even when it seems that the process is going nowhere, the others are way off track and the purpose of the inquiry looks far out of sight. It helps to remember that the process is in service of the group and its purpose, not just for the sake of emotional sharing as such.

It is particularly important to look out for a common but rarely recognised phenomenon that Bonnitta Roy calls “projection into conceptual space”. People can get triggered by what somebody else is saying or stating, without being conscious of the emotional component of their experience. This emotional charge then gets translated into conceptual thoughts and arguments. Thus commences the subtle or not-so-subtle conflict, discussion or debate; connection and awareness of our shared humanity are gone. No relationship can grow or be built in this space of boredom, which is just a repetition of old habitual patterns: downloading in its purest, most lifeless form.



Sometimes *honouring what is in relationship* requires us to address the issue that the other is blind to – just as my friend did for me – not in a blaming way, but from a deeply human connection: “I see you as a human being, just like me.” Naming the blind spots does way more than just eliminate the negative: as members of a team, naming with and for each other what is limiting or holding us back can be profoundly opening. In a *Circle of Presence*, naming the blind spots helps us to come to that place of vulnerability, which plays such an essential role in building trust. As we shall see, it helps people to show up in their full magnificence.

Engaging the heart connection in the relationship is crucial for accessing the subtle, collective field of awareness. Unless our hearts are connected in the deeper sensing, the portal to authentic collective wisdom and emergence cannot open. By now, it might be clear that this is an impersonal love that has no attachments, no judgements, no requirements or expectations. Unlike the default form of love in relationships, which usually either pushes or pulls, this unconditional love has a quality of holding and letting life unfold.

One commitment we've had is to keep the field clear in all our one-on-one relationships, even when we're not together. We work at it. I assume it's like being in a marriage. If you're really doing the relationship well, you work at it. Very few collectives commit to that. It's not that we're so interested in the personality level in the end. My perception is that working the personality level is a prerequisite. There's always a threshold to cross when we've misunderstood and misjudged one another. We could tell a lot of stories about things we've been through to return to true relationship. There's commitment at an essential level that's a big enabler for the collective field.

— Circle of Seven<sup>4</sup>

## 4. Living what is – in relationship: appreciate and invite diversity in any relationship or event

When you *live-what-is in yourself* and truly *honour-what-is in relationship*, you start to become aware of the truly vast diversity present in humanity and therefore also in any group or team. This diversity must be acknowledged without getting stuck at the stage in the process where we discover that “We are all the same, how nice!” To truly bring the diversity alive means inviting and accepting different ways of sharing and expressing.

In our Flemish women's circle, little by little each of us uncovered her own unique contribution to what we were about: one of us would propose a dance, another would invite the others into a constellation exercise, introduce herself with some writing or poetry, or initiate a little ceremony. It enabled us to get to know more of each others depths and to reveal ourselves more authentically. Later, I learned that diversity goes much, much deeper. Some people's gift is to surface disturbance, while others sit quietly and offer an essential reflection afterwards... I had, and still have, so much to learn about this diversity of gifts. Moreover, as we continue to practice sharing these modes of expression that are so rarely allowed to surface in our mainstream culture, we are given an unprecedented opportunity to experience unknown human richness inside ourselves too.

This practice of *living what is in relationship* sheds light on an aspect of that mysterious phenomenon that Otto Scharmer, in his Theory U, calls Open Will. Just as I have no part in choosing what my true and unique gift will be (rather, it is uncovered), neither do others. Just like me, they too are in a process of coming to grips with what is their authentic, essential expression in this life on earth. We are together on this journey of discovery, to gain a little more understanding of this greater Will that lives through us.

When we are able to understand and embody this dance of holding the other and myself in full awareness *at the same time*, we can begin to understand our own unfolding as a journey in relationships, removing us from the notion that we exist as separate beings. Once we reach this point, we viscerally recognise the way every encounter with someone who is different enriches us, and vice versa. This is when we fully appreciate others who hold different points of view or who express themselves in radically different ways.

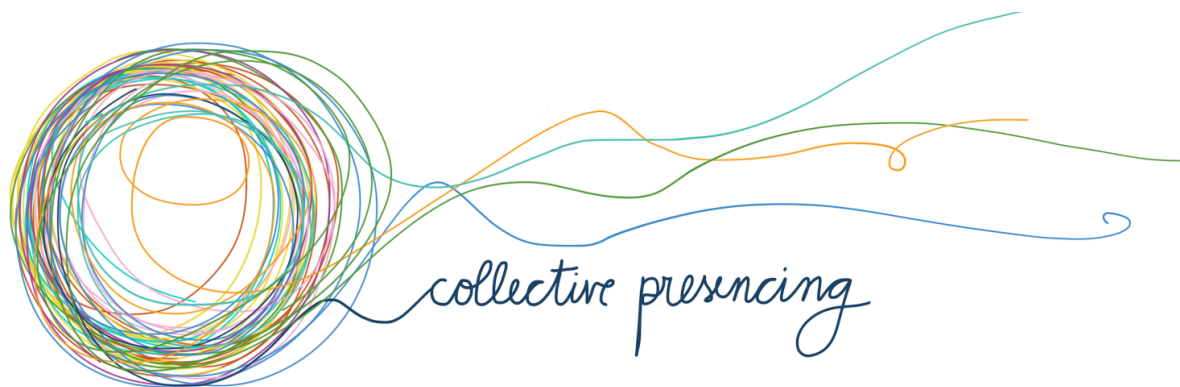
## Notes

1: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.

2: William Isaacs: *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. ↓

3: *ibid.*, p.110.

4a: 4b: Circle of Seven: *The Presence of the Circle Being* ↓



## 3. I and Us: Circle Practice

3.1 What is holding space?

3.2 A perspective on emergence

3.3 Basic Circle Practice

3.4 Women Moving the Edge – part 3

3.5 Opening to the Authentic Group

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The move from the *I and You* of the previous chapter to the *I and Us* dealt with in this one is easy to understand and to make. To remind us of the larger context: we are extending outward in the process of aligning, becoming increasingly aware of the complexity of life and the interrelatedness of all that is in it. In any group there are constantly multiple relationships unfolding, back and forth and in all directions, both visibly and invisibly. To realise the full potential of such a collective, and to access the collective wisdom available in the group, we need to acquire another skill: that of becoming aware of the inner dimension, the inner collective, the inner plane of a group – for lack of a better word, the group's field.

I would like to start by sharing another story, one which contributed greatly to my understanding of what might be possible in circles tended in this way.

### 3.1 What is holding space?



The unmanifest realm contains all that exists and all that could potentially exist. Elementary particles manifest from this place then vanish back into it. The whole of the physical world constantly vibrates in and out of the unmanifest realm.

— Brian Swimme<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 2007 I accompanied a dear friend in Denmark on what he called a writing retreat for himself. I expected that we would enjoy our habit of deep and inspiring conversations over breakfast and dinner together. He would then dive into his writing and I would be free to do my own thing: reading, exploring the neighbourhood and enjoying the beautiful nature. Soon, however, he announced that his writing practice would best be supported by fasting and that he would show up for neither breakfast nor dinner. I continued doing what I fancied, but missed the good conversational company and was wondering: What am I doing here? I still felt good about it, but why exactly was I there? I could read books and explore nature anywhere and at any time! Why here and now? After holding this question for a couple of days it dawned on me: I was holding space for my friend and his writing. I noticed a clear relief in my body when I realised this. After the five days, as we were driving home, I shared my insights with him and recognised what an intimate thing it is to offer to hold space for someone. It made me wonder...

A few weeks later in a phone conversation with another friend, I told him I was holding space for him and others as they engaged in large-scale strategic, systemic work in the world – not always easy. I explained to him that this strategic work within a huge bureaucracy was not mine to do, but that nonetheless I had something to do with it: I



was holding space for it. As I spoke these words, I was astonished to find tears welling up in my eyes. Articulating this inner knowing had stirred up some deep sadness.

For a long time I had been holding the question: What am I really doing when I hold space? I had noticed that many facilitators and hosts nodded their heads in recognition when we spoke of holding space. They/we seemed to understand what we meant by it, but I had never heard anybody explain it, nor could I find reference to it in books. The experiences recounted here made me aware of certain aspects of it, and I realised in that moment on the phone with my friend that this capacity of holding space needed languaging: words and distinctions to make it visible in the world. Another friend called it ‘grandmother’s work’, which was a nice metaphor but not a useful distinction.

The next important experience came in a training seminar, where an awkward situation revealed to me that holding space, for me as a woman, was not something I did in the cognitive sphere of the mind, but was essentially something that I accessed in and through my body. This realisation was very grounding for me, as if I had finally landed in my right spot. From the response of other female participants at that seminar, it transpired that this was not just my unique individual experience, but something that many women resonate with.

Nevertheless, the question remained, although now in a slightly different form: what am I actually doing when holding space, in and through my body? Some years earlier I had realised that I could sense what would happen next in a group process or systemic constellation, and that this was alien, weird or simply not possible for others. I also came to recognise that this sensing of what would happen next was quite different from the visions of the future experienced by others. My friend at the time was clearly years ahead in seeing what would become possible in the future, but he had no (trained) sensing organ for what might be the first next step in this unfolding, and so he was quite unable to discern where best to invest his energy, with much frustration as a result.

Having been in this years-long inquiry for myself, and looking back at our experiences in the gatherings of Women Moving the Edge, it dawned on me suddenly one day that we never spoke about ‘Spirit’, but would always use the word ‘Source’. It intrigued me as to why this was. Upon reflection, I discerned that Source – at least for me – points to the depths, to something deep inside, while Spirit seems to encompass something high above, with an eagle’s view... Hmmm... I began to draw on a sheet of paper to flesh out these insights.

Totally focused on my quest to understand this difference, I first apprehended that Source can be seen as ‘unmanifest matter’ – a potential that can materialise or not, depending on a host of circumstances. And so the answer to the question I had been holding for many months began to emerge. When I am holding space I connect through my body with the unmanifest potential of the person, group, place, project or gathering that is my focus. This was it! Holding space is shorthand for holding the energetic space in which the potential of people or groups or projects can unfold and enter the reality of time and space.

This holding space is only possible from a state of emptiness and a deep inner stillness. Without this, the potential cannot be embraced free from attachment. Of course we do not perceive this unmanifest potential through our physical senses; rather, it is an awareness of the subtler, energetic levels. We can learn to become aware of and choose to open our subtle senses to intentionally connect with this potential in service of that what wants to or can become manifest.

This intuition was later confirmed in a conversation with two dear friends about their joint project. I explained that they, as the callers or initiators of the project, would always be the ones who held the deepest and widest wellspring of possibilities. Even if they eventually expanded their core group, as they were thinking of doing, they would continue to be the callers. Other people could join and become very active in the project, and if they left the project would endure. However, if the initiators both withdrew their energy and attention, the whole project would die. In my understanding, and according to the little model that was emerging, the new collaborators were not holding the space as deeply; they were more about bringing the project alive. In further conversations, the three of us articulated that the ‘callers’ are holding the source-point of a project. (There will be more on the practice of being a caller in [Chapter 5](#)).

At a training seminar in the Art of Hosting,<sup>a</sup> the question presented it self to me: “If a small group were to sit in silence, what influence would that have on the collective?” As it happened, and somewhat unexpectedly, many

others were interested in this question. We spent what time we had together not 'talking about it', but practicing it directly. First there were 3 or 4 women, then 7 or 8 of us sitting in silence, with 10 minutes at the end to share our reflections and learning. I noticed at this particular seminar that people were invited to be in silence on many occasions. We were a big group, and some had to sit on cushions in an inner circle due to lack of space. I noticed that people would deliberately choose to sit near the centre in order to hold space for the rest. It seemed that a pattern was emerging and consciousness about it was growing.

Holding space and place for the unfolding of what is possible looks rather passive on the outside: you are essentially doing nothing on the visible plane. And yet this holding is active; it takes a certain presence, awareness and attention. You are giving care in both the physical and the energetic dimensions. The physical attention can be seen in the careful tending to the space and in the quality of the invitation to a gathering. The energetic attention is of course subtler by nature. Still, as people enter the room they feel that there is a connectedness and a depth in the space. They notice the difference, enjoy it and are sometimes even reluctant to leave.

Generally speaking, I realised, women have a natural tendency to hold space for people, places and projects. This reflects their capacity to literally hold space in their bodies for unborn babies, something they do unconditionally without knowing what this budding human being will look like or how its life will unfold. This capacity to hold a safe space in which the full potential can emerge seems to have been forgotten in the West, at least outside the domain of the family. In business, politics and organisational life, we (even those who do it naturally and automatically) are still unaware that this skill exists and is needed.



Some people seem to have this innate ability to hold. It is a fine quality of moving into a vibrational resonance with what is present and what is possible. It is not exclusively women who do this intuitively, but very many do and are happy when we articulate it and give it words. I have no mainstream 'scientific' way to verify this, but the fact that the female body has a womb – an empty space whose function is to hold and manifest potential – could explain why so many of us do it spontaneously.

Holding space is by no means always easy. In contexts of collective inquiry where there is potential conflict, where people are triggered into personal, emotional content, or caught up in giving advice or getting their point across – in short, wherever there is downloading – it can be hard to stay present to the potential. In such conditions, it can be a challenge to hold steady in that place of acceptance and support. At such times, someone needs to keep the energy and attention of the collective on both the intention of the inquiry and what can become possible through the

conversations. Bringing in a question that evokes the intention and/or the potential (although without expectations) can help to shift the conversation to a more generative space.

Holding space springs from a different quality of being than engaging in the conflict or debate. It can create a very different atmosphere, and at the same time it builds (on) our capacity to become present and aligned within. By tuning into and staying attentive to the intention and potential, we broadcast this frequency out from ourselves to others. In this way we invite other participants to inquire and speak from the same space, frequency or alignment. We offer each participant an opportunity to reach for their greatest potential in the here and now. Holding space is both holding the unmanifest potential and holding the tensions in the process of inquiry. Depending on your perspective, it is holding the space open for the best possible outcomes and the greatest possible participation, at the same time. It implies absolute trust in both the process and the people.

Harrison Owen, the inventor of Open Space Technology, says that holding space “dates back at least to the first shamans”. The practice and skill of holding space is not limited to gatherings, training seminars and workshops, although facilitators of such events are to some extent aware of this quality they can bring in. I have learned that holding space is also used in other contexts: dance, psychotherapy, spiritual groups, and so on. The Quakers have a ‘vibes watcher’ in their meetings. Holding space also applies to mundane situations we find ourselves in every day. Wherever we are, we can be present to what is possible, in a benignly detached way without emotional engagement, expectations or fixed plans. We are just holding the potential; holding the space for wherever we are and for whatever is emerging.

We know from the work of midwives and doulas that birth outcomes are improved when there is someone present during the birth process who is there to hold space for the woman giving birth, alongside the midwife, who is there for the baby. We are gradually coming to understand that this is equally true for teams and organisations. What if this quality, this tending of the energetic space, were acknowledged as important in any new endeavour? Surely it would improve the quality and outcome of any project. Later in the book, once all aspects of the Collective Presencing practice are laid out, we will build on this strategic aspect of this emerging human capacity.

In order to avoid any confusion arising around this new concept, and in the interests of creating clear distinctions, it is important also to specify what holding space is *not*. I remember a story of a woman who spent many years ‘holding her sister’ through many challenging situations. All those around her could see that this kind of holding was no longer the right thing for her to do. The space she was holding for her sister did not arise from a place of stillness and centredness; rather, she was stuck in a rut and could not respond in any other way. She was not able to say to her sister: “Do it!” or “Move on.” In her case, then, this holding space was not a capacity but a habitual pattern that she was unaware of and unable to relinquish. How sensitive is our understanding of what to hold and what not? Of when to hold and when to let go? Echoing earlier chapters: how flexible are we in our responses?

Holding space is always about keeping open the possibility for potential to manifest, be it in people, in seminars, meetings and events, in teams, in companies, and so on. Sometimes the holding is more passive, like an open hand: being present, supporting, giving attention. Sometimes it is more active, giving a clear signal or impulse: now do it yourself, give it a try. Always being like an open hand is too much of one flavour, and can let a situation stagnate without realising its potential. In this case, the holding gets blocked in a kind of waiting... waiting for the thing that we hope for, but that will never happen unless someone acts. Sometimes withdrawing the holding and support and trusting in the strength and resourcefulness that is present challenges the one being held to dig deeper into their actual power that was there all along.

In our Western culture, the expectation that the potential should manifest immediately blocks a natural unfolding. There is too much pressure to get things done, to take a step right now, even when it is not yet clear what the real purpose is or what action is aligned in time, space and context. Holding space needs to happen without any expectation of a specific outcome, reward or recognition; it is offering a space to unfold, and is not necessarily focused on tasks as such. Much of what good parents do is exactly this: sometimes supporting, sometimes challenging, but always open to the response and sensing what is aligned with the potential of this particular child.

This capacity to hold the whole and hold space for unmanifest potential has been attracting more attention in recent years, and is starting to surface more into awareness (in the West). Because it is part of learning how to consciously

and intentionally manifest, alongside actually practicing holding space, it is equally important to name and articulate this skill. It needs to be included as a foundation stone to enable every project that is set up to develop in a natural and organic way. We have noticed that once this invisible activity has been illuminated it is more easily seen and recognised by others who have never given it attention before.

## Notes

1: Brian Swimme: as reported by Becca Tarnas, *The Unmanifest Realm*, 2011. ↓

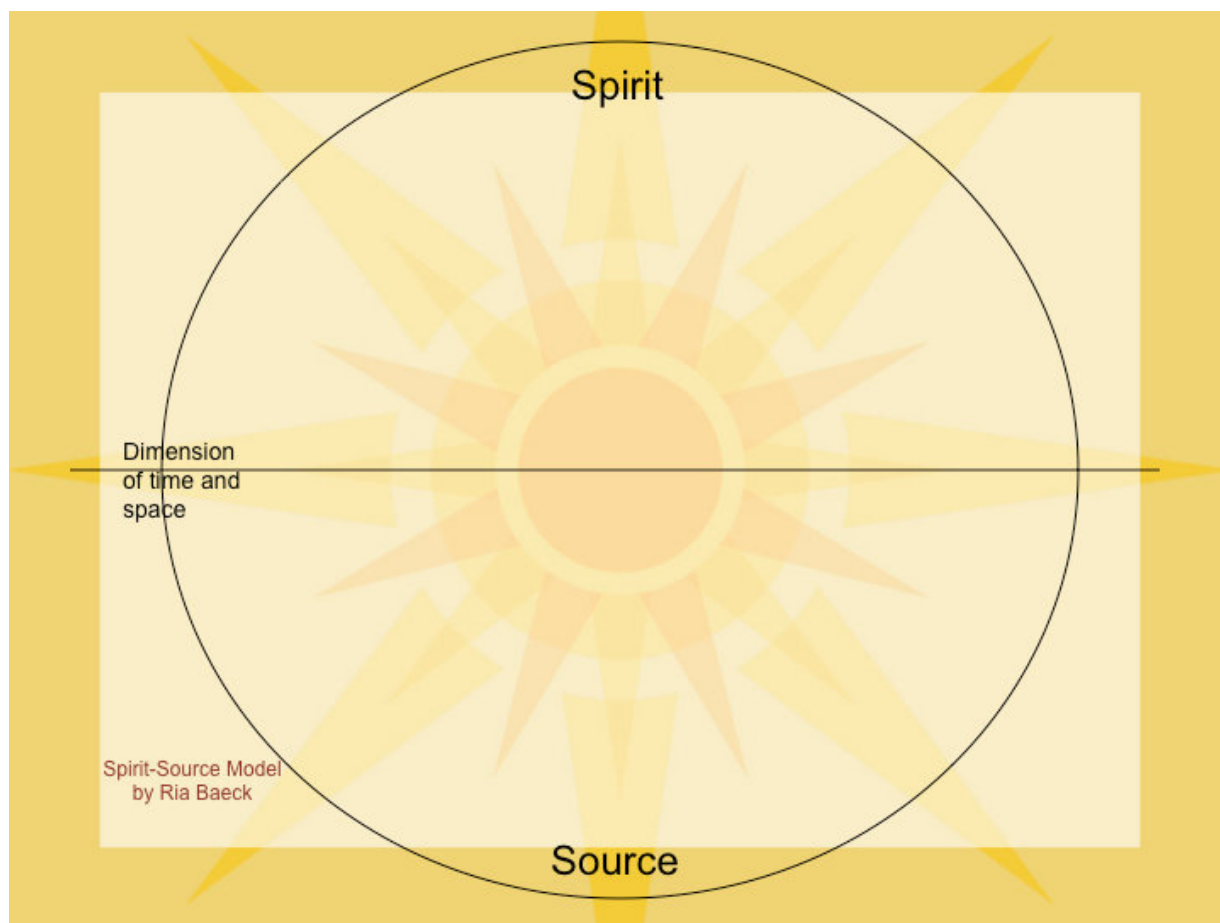
## 3.2 A perspective on emergence

The Spirit shall look out through Matter's gaze  
And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face  
And all the Earth becomes a single life.  
— Sri Aurobindo <sup>1</sup>

Now that my question about holding space had found a provisional answer, I embarked on a deeper quest to explore the big concepts 'spirit' and 'source'. Why was it that in our women's gathering we rarely ever talked about 'spirit', but spoke of 'source' instead? I delved deep within to uncover the core qualities and functions of both concepts as I understood them in my body and through my experience. This was no easy task, because so many concepts and ideas in our language are made to separate, while I was looking for synergy and interweaving. To get more clarity, rather than thinking and reading 'about it', I resorted to my more familiar tools like drawing and contemplation.

On a blank sheet of paper, I wrote the words 'Spirit' and 'Source'. I tend to see Spirit as somewhere high out there, while I experience Source as something deep within. So Spirit went at the top of the page and Source at the bottom. It is worth noticing my use of language here: I '*see*' Spirit 'out there' and I '*experience*' Source 'within'. While it was possible that this distinction was valid only for me, other people were also prepared to go along with it, so I let it stand as the basis for what followed.

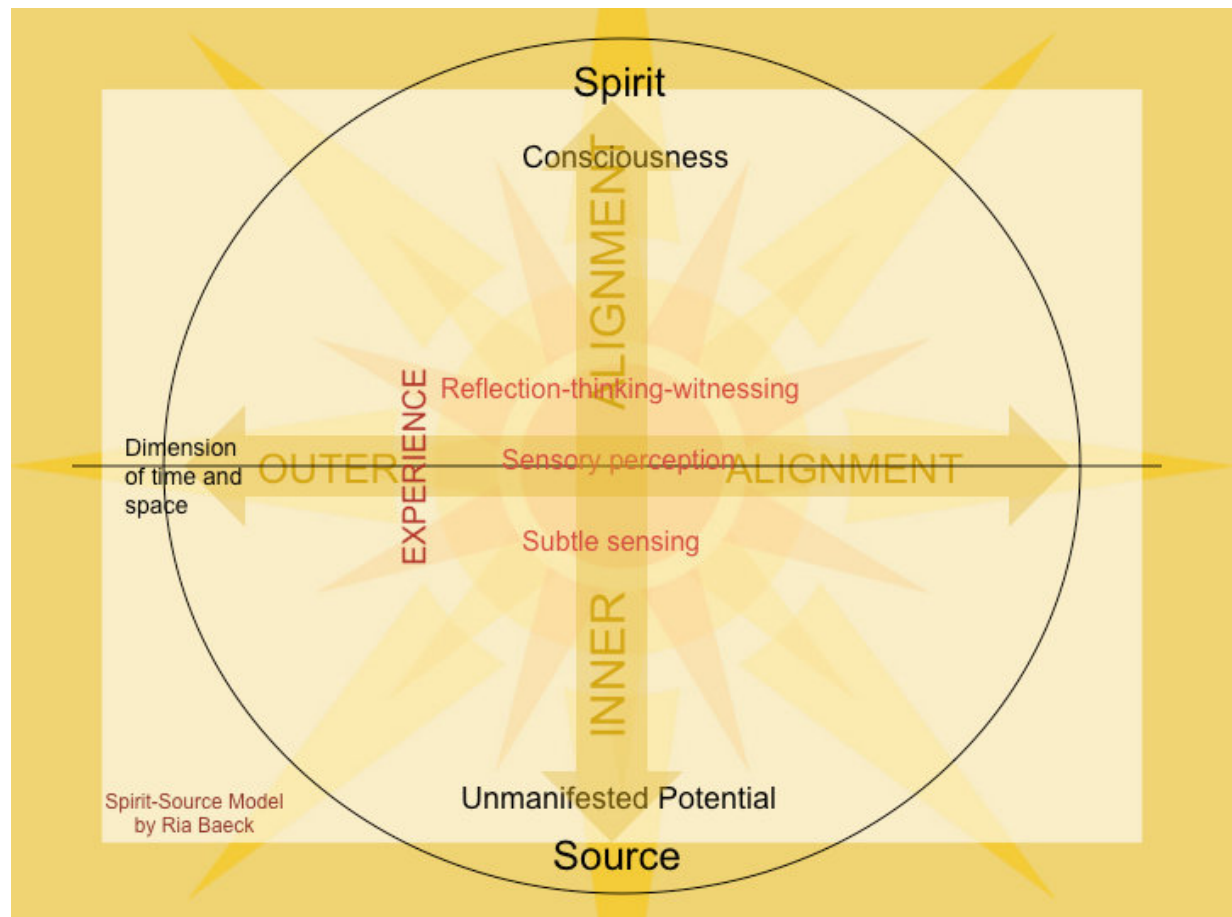




If Spirit lives at the top of the page and Source at the bottom, then the *real* world is in the middle. I use ‘real’ here in the sense of space and time: the manifest world that we see and know in its three or four dimensions. This is the world of our senses and experiences, the world of incarnation. Now, how was I to understand the interaction between these three: Spirit, Source and the manifest world?

My contemplation showed me the movement from the manifest world towards Spirit as a way of taking some distance from an experience, to witness, think and reflect about it; to gain more consciousness and awareness; also, the ability to capture the world and life with language, symbols and concepts. By contrast, the movement upwards from Source to the manifest world seems to originate in a huge space of potential, transiting through layers of ever denser energies, until the potential takes a form and manifests. In *Gaia’s Quatum Leap*, Marko Pogačnik<sup>2</sup> speaks of ‘source’ as life force “through which the fabric of creation is continually enlivened”. The reverse movement, sensing from the manifest world into Source, is the capacity to sense what is coming, what is possible and what has life in it. More specifically in terms of our practice here, it is sensing what is about to happen but not yet here. If we consider the latest scientific discoveries in quantum physics, my image might not remotely resemble how it works; nevertheless, it was enormously helpful to me in understanding a lot of situations.

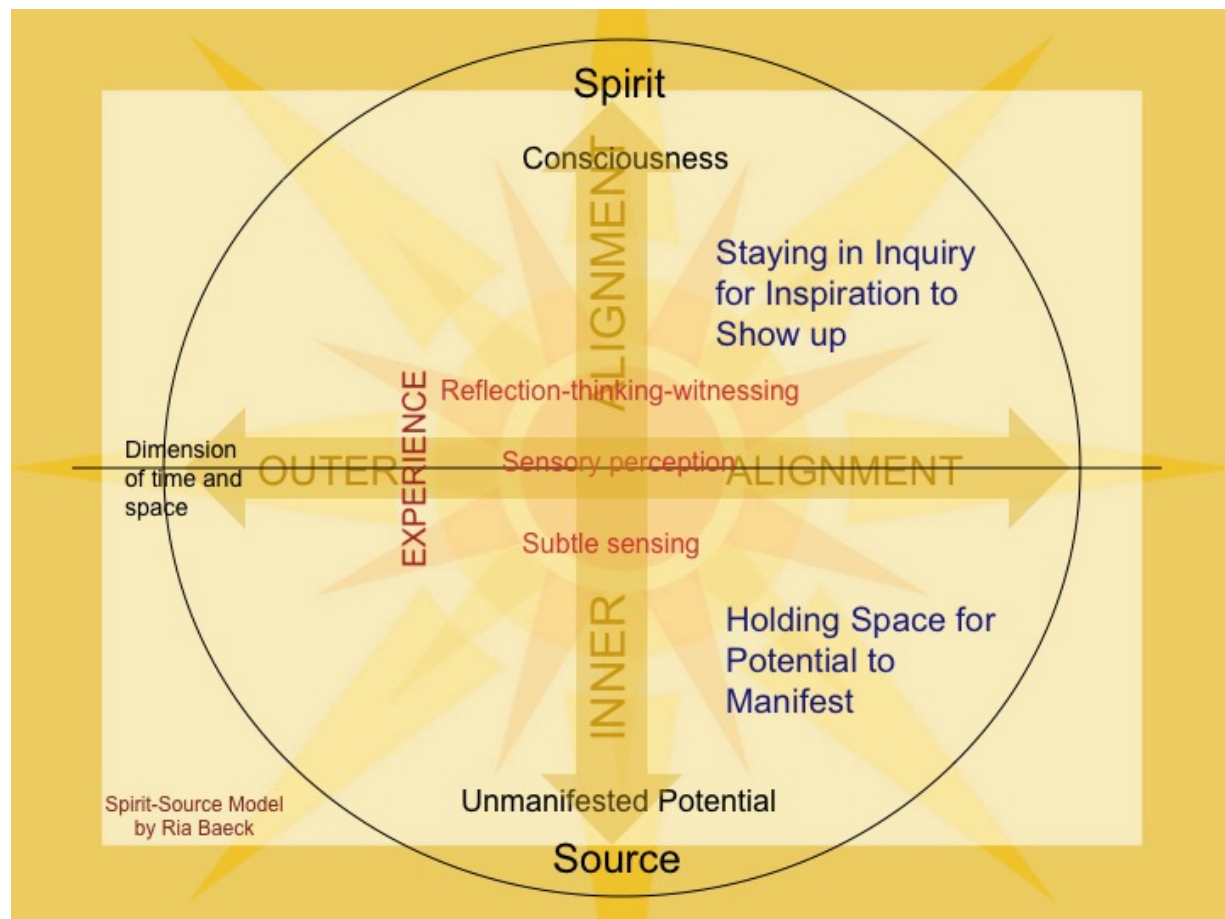
Returning to my paper, my next step was to draw a circle connecting Spirit and Source, because to me, somehow, they inhabit the same realm. Somewhere they are one; perhaps together they are ‘the One’, or perhaps they share the same origin. I can envision Spirit and Source as the first couple that came out of the One, whatever that is (which is beyond the scope of this book to define). The first polarity arose with this pair. Related pairs are: light and darkness, yin and yang, inward and outward, masculine and feminine, and so on. “The One is inclusive of unmanifest and manifest, the being and the non-being, the before and the after, all present now.” This quote comes not from a renowned guru or philosopher, but was a reflection by one of our participants in a Women Moving the Edge gathering, after representing ‘The One’ in a systemic constellation. (see more about this practice in [Chapter 8](#))



Before looking into this model, I want to state explicitly that it does not aspire to be an accurate representation of reality. Wiktionary says: “‘Model’ has many meanings, one of them is: A simplified representation used to explain the workings of a real world system or event.” I don’t claim to have found the truth with my model, although it continues to help me understand how emergence can come about, and what its essential elements are. You might find it helpful too.

## Emergence of Collective Wisdom

My next question was: When I am holding space for the highest potential, what is it for? What is the real purpose of holding space? Why would anyone do it? Slowly it dawned on me... Ah! I am holding the possibilities because I want them to manifest. It seems obvious in hindsight, but at the time I was thunderstruck. In essence, then, holding space provides a supporting energy or attention that bridges between Source and the real world: it is *Holding Space for a Potential to Manifest*. That is what parents do for their children, and it is what we do when we host conversations and change processes in groups. Equally, it should be a core competence in leadership teams dealing with complexity and uncertainty.



The next question to arise was: What is the counterpart on the side of Spirit? I wanted my model to be balanced; simple, beautiful and elegant like a good mathematical formula or excellent programming code. Not having any clear distinctions myself for this part of the model, I turned to a male friend for help. We concluded that the basic purpose of *Staying in Inquiry is: for Inspiration to Show up*.

In this way I saw how Source and Spirit work together in synergy to create new life. If we hold space so that potential can manifest, and if we keep the inquiry open for inspiration or innovation to show up, then these two interweave in co-creation and emergence will happen.

Emergence is the manifestation of something really new, the novel that never existed before. An example of emergence from science is what happens when hydrogen and oxygen atoms are combined; it makes water. The wetness of water is found in neither hydrogen nor oxygen, it emerges from the interaction of the two; it is an emergent property. The scientific concept of emergence is now finding its way into mainstream conversations, but is not always well understood. In the realm of collective intelligence and wisdom, we talk of emergence when connections have been made between different elements – like different insights from diverse participants – that lead to a totally new feature or insight. A potential that was not known or even possible before, has come into existence, and we notice an innovation in products and/or processes.

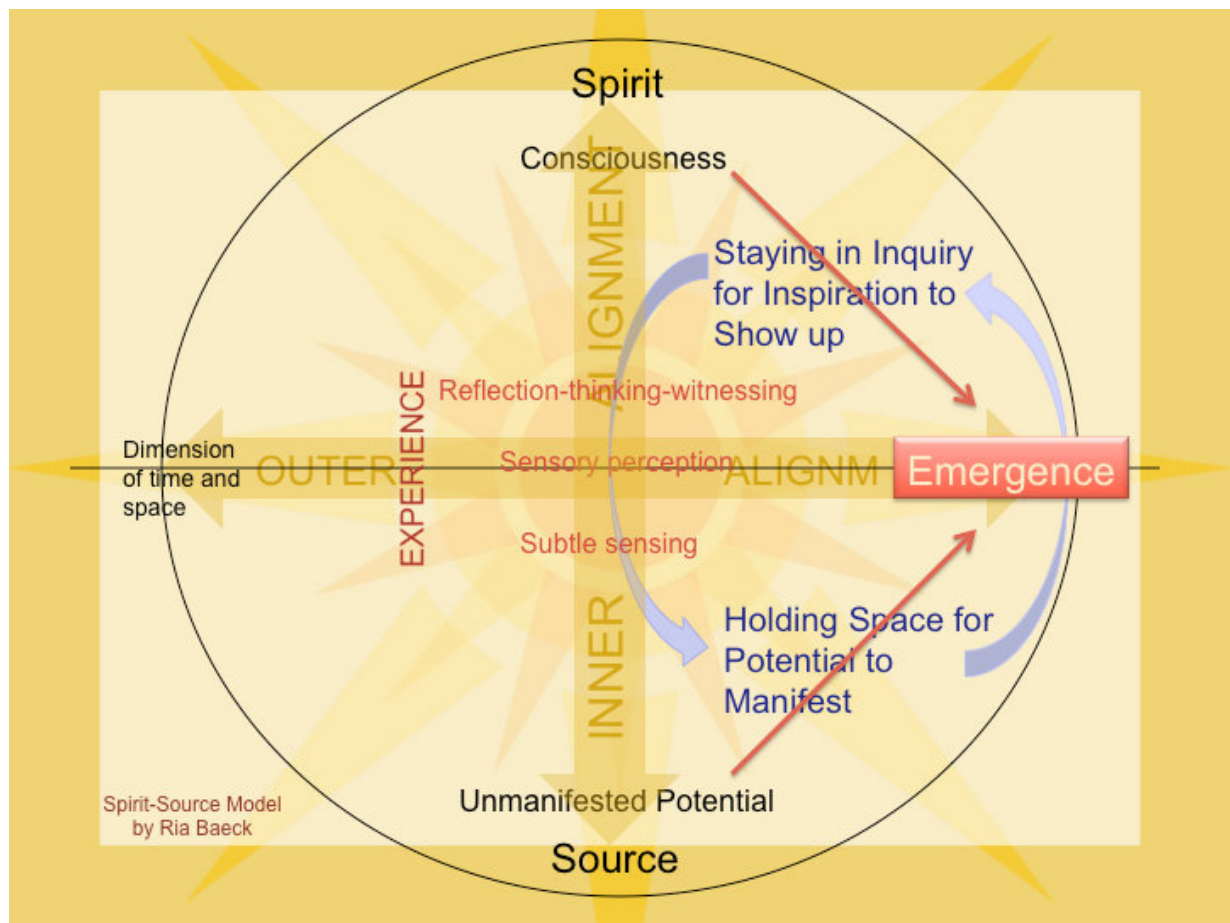
In real life, even in intentionally designed group situations, emergence seems too messy and chaotic for many people to feel comfortable with – there is not enough order or control, things are too unpredictable. Although what emerges actually is some form of order, it is not any kind of pre-determined – or even pre-existing – order but something that is too complex for us to grasp in the moment it is happening. It is not until after the event that we can discern patterns that have formed and become visible. Emergence does not spring from external structures or controlled order, rather, it can be facilitated (but not guaranteed) by creating a strong energetic container (holding space for potential to manifest) while staying focused on a core question that holds an intention or purpose. This is when new and unforeseen connections can arise from the chaos and emergence can come through. In some circles, this way of working is known as ‘walking the chaordic path’.<sup>3</sup> There is little that is tangible to hold on to: this holding space expresses itself only through a few guidelines or principles and is basically done in the intangible, subtle or energetic space.

Chris Corrigan, a Canadian colleague from the Art of Hosting network, says: “Emergence is what happens when everyone leaves from the party with something that nobody came with.” He points to one of the conditions in a group that makes emergence possible: the interweaving and cross-pollinating that happens when people enjoy being together and engaging with each other, like at a party. What emerges is what I call ‘collective wisdom’ – a wisdom that is not the sum of constituent elements, but a weaving and bringing together of the intelligence and wisdom present in the members of the group. While this is already a welcome outcome, the emergence of generative, collective action is something more, as we shall see in the second part of this book. It requires greater alignment, more deeply into ourselves and more widely out into our context.

If our purpose is truly to let collective wisdom have its way, this model of emergence can inform us in designing meetings and strategic change processes. In addition to having a clearly articulated purpose that is translated into cogent guiding questions, the processes we design must include and support the holding of the space. In essence we need formats and approaches that can illuminate the potential that is present in the room and bring it into expression. While the skills of deep listening and true dialogue are crucial, this model clearly shows that listening to all the diversity, allowing all the voices to be heard and holding the energetic space are not enough on their own. Of equal importance is the open inquiry around the purpose that calls our attention and guides us to innovation. (more on emergence in [Chapter 7](#))

## Ongoing spiral dance between Holding Space and Staying in Inquiry

Then you fall in love with questions ... not questions to be answered, questions that are guidance ...  
Wisdom is a love affair with questions; knowledge is a love affair with answers.  
— Julio Olalla<sup>4</sup>



There is an ongoing dynamic, coil-like, involving the level or depth of Sourcing and the level or depth/height of Consciousness (or Spirit). We can access the full depth of the potential in service of manifestation and generative action, only to the extent that we can articulate a clear and lofty intention or purpose. This explains the importance of finding powerful guiding question(s) and clearly naming the shared purpose. Just as the tallest tree has the deepest roots, the higher the consciousness from which our question is voiced, the deeper the level of sourcing it will invite and the deeper and subtler layers of information to which it will grant access. This field that grows wider through many cycles generates authentically new wisdom.

*Quote from participant:*

I know this feeling of having a deep sense of something that wants to happen and then your mind goes to work and fills it in. I've learned to just hold it. And when things don't align, to just see that my idea is not aligned, or not right timing yet, or whatever. At least in me, sometimes it is a lonely thing. I feel some loneliness in just holding the sourcing of it, knowing something wants to happen. And sometimes it takes years of just holding that potential.

— Ria

## Notes

1: Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri. A legend and a symbol.* ↓

2: Marko Pogačnik: *Gaia's Quantum Leap,* ↓ p.130.



3: *Art of Hosting – The Chaordic Path.* ↓

4: Julio Olalla: the subject of a short film, *Amo La Vida*, Newfield Network ↓

### 3.3 Basic Circle Practice



There is an invisible movement going on in the world. It's a movement that is manifest in a variety of forms and practices. These practices rest on the same underlying principle: to form a safe collective holding space in which the participants support one another in making sense of and advancing their life and work journeys. It's not actually new, for it's what the bond of real friendship has always offered.

— Otto Scharmer<sup>1</sup>

So far in my story and explanations I have mentioned my little Flemish women's circle and the Women Moving the Edge gatherings, but I have not described the form the actual meetings took. It may come as no surprise that we always worked 'in circle'. So familiar and ingrained has this practice become in my way of being that I almost forgot to mention it here. Nevertheless, basic circle practice is an essential skill if we want to generate truly novel insight and action.

If you wish to embark on the path towards the *Circle of Presence*, there are many ways to train in the area of personal growth, especially with a view to learning about *I and myself*, and *I and you*. When it comes to *I and us*, you can look into group dynamics, but most training in this field focuses on how to facilitate or train a group, as an outsider. Opportunities to learn how to be *in* a group are much harder to find. One of the better options is to train by immersion. This means becoming a participant in a circle of peers, a community of practice. Get yourself dirty in the practice and learn together along the way. It can be rewarding in many areas of life and work.

Both my Flemish women's circle and all the Women Moving the Edge gatherings used the circle as their main structure and methodology. As a way for people to come together, the circle has been around since the dawn of time. Many people thrive in a circle because it implicitly invites us to treat each other as equal human beings. Sitting in a circle invites an experience that is a world away from what happens when we meet around a square table, or in rows

of chairs with someone standing in front. The latter arrangements tend to bring in more hierarchy, planning, debate and discussion (from the Latin root *discutere*, which means: to chop into pieces). In the Art of Hosting global network,<sup>a</sup> we often introduce the circle as the mother of all social technologies. Lately, I have begun to notice an invitation to return to the circle in many different environments, especially for the purpose of learning the new skills we need in order to engage with the future awaiting us and the complexities currently facing us.

Sitting in a circle to have a conversation (from the Latin root *con-versare*, meaning to turn to one another) invites (more) equal relations in the group; it is an invitation to be a 'leader-full' group. Practicing conversation in this way over an extended period of time allows one to engage deeply with a group of people. It also offers an excellent training ground for the varied aspects of becoming present on all the levels described so far. It offers deep learning by immersion.

Circle practice, with its simple agreements and guidelines (described below), provides a safe space that invites trust, depth, intimacy and authenticity. When applied consistently and well, its guiding principles create a container of trust that strongly invites each participant to express their unique self and to welcome others in their authenticity in turn. As the shared experience evolves, this trust and safety grow, and participants begin to risk ever deeper authenticity, firstly within the boundaries of the circle and later in many other arenas of life and work.

Circle practice connects us deeply with our shared humanity, while simultaneously revealing how unique each one of us is. The witnessing quality of the circle invites each person to express more of who they are. We each realise that there is deeper potential in ourselves and in others as well.

Circle practice is not to be confused with a community culture of superficial saccharin sweetness ("we all love each other so much"). What we are talking about here is a method that has a clear purpose and focuses on a shared inquiry. The purpose of the circle is not to feel happy, but rather to learn together. It is a shared collective inquiry – although one can certainly become happy as a side effect! In a *Circle of Presence*, the focus is on how to become present – increasingly so and in ever more settings and situations – so that an emergent collective wisdom becomes available. In a *Circle of Creation*, described in part two of this book, the purpose is to extend the alignment in all directions and reach a space of shared creativity and generativity that adds more to life than what is already present.

## Description of basic circle practice

What follows is a description of the basic circle practice. It can be used by any group in a wide variety of situations, as long as the purpose is to share, to learn and to inquire together. To learn more about the practice, I recommend The Circle Way<sup>c</sup> initiated and originally stewarded by my dear friends and elders Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea. They have written a number of books that offer a wealth of depth and detail that I can't give you in these short pages. In part two of this book, we will build on this basic practice to deepen the conversation for the purposes of a *Circle of Creation*.

### Welcoming and framing

Every gathering benefits from starting well. Circle practice starts with a welcome and some kind of context setting that brings the purpose to the fore. Often the welcome is spoken by the person hosting the gathering, but it could be any person present who feels called to do so and simply volunteers. In our Flemish circle we would always gather at one of our homes, and after welcoming with tea and coffee we would move to a beautifully appointed room to hold our circle and our unfolding conversations. Sometimes we would start with some kind of ritual together, but attending to the beauty and conviviality of the meeting space already made it clear that this was a place of respect and trust where we were all welcome. In the Women Moving the Edge gatherings, which always lasted 3 or 4 days, the hosting team would arrive earlier in the day or the day before in order to prepare the space, both physically, by adding flowers, arranging the chairs, preparing a poster showing the guiding question and getting familiar with the surroundings, and energetically, by holding our collective intention for the gathering in awareness and allowing it to imbue the space where we would be gathering.

How we frame or contextualise a conversation is much more important than we generally realise. Each time we meet, we need to be very explicit about our intention in meeting, the methodology we will use and purpose of the circle. It is not wise to assume that such framing is superfluous and that everyone knows what we are about! While circle practice is very simple, framing the conversation at the outset helps to set clear boundaries for the container being offered (“This is how we do it”) and ensure that that we are all on the same page in this learning environment (“This is what the conversation is about, this is our intention and our guiding question”).

Sometimes a moment of shared silence can be invited at this stage, to allow participants to sink into the here and now of this circle, and leave behind whatever they were doing or thinking before.

## Introducing the circle practice

In as far as participants are not all familiar with working in circle, it is important to introduce the principles, the agreements and the main practices.

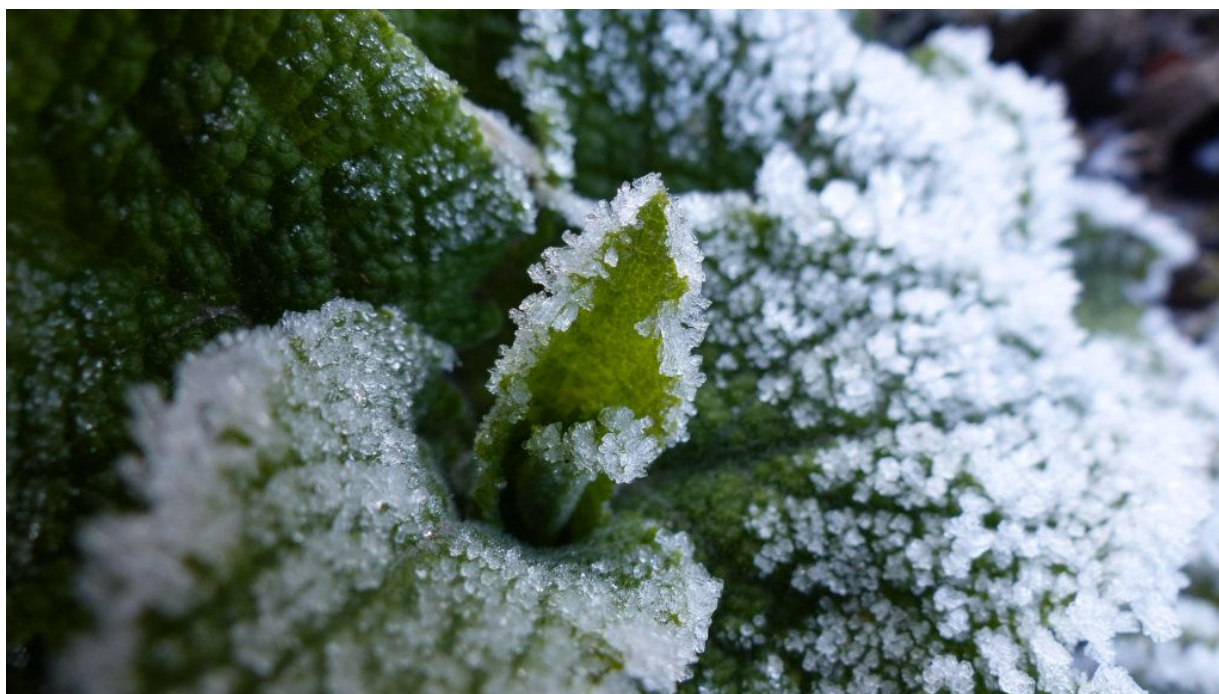
The *practices* are few and simple, but very impactful. First is to *speak with intention*. This means that when we speak we do not let our words meander aimlessly, but we choose what is relevant to the question or the shared topic. Second is to *listen with attention* or curiosity, giving our full attention to what is shared by others, trying to understand what they are conveying beyond the words spoken. This is empathic listening, where we are able to feel or recognise in ourselves what the others are expressing. The third and last practice is to *care for the well-being of the group*, specifically being conscious of the impact of what we say and how we say it.

The three *principles* are also very simple: first is that *leadership rotates*, in the form of the few different roles needed for a circle to work and to flourish (a host, a guardian and, perhaps, a note taker). Related with this, the group takes *shared responsibility* for how the circle unfolds and does its work. Lastly, have a *higher purpose* for the meeting. Hanging out with friends around a campfire might take the form of a circle and lead to meaningful conversations, but we wouldn’t call that circle practice.

These practices and principles are supported by four *agreements*:

1. What we say in circle is held in confidence.
2. Offer what you can and ask for what you need.
3. We listen with compassion and curiosity.
4. We agree to pause at a signal (often a bell or chime) to re-gather our thought or focus.

By articulating the practices, principles and agreements of the Circle, we are setting a container in which it is clear what people are expected to do and not do. This creates a safe space for sharing and discovery, and this is why it is so important to name it before the circle starts.



## **Check-in**

After the welcoming and framing, when we might hark back a little to what happened last time or what we had agreed to inquire into this time, we take the time for a ‘check-in’. In this context, checking in means sharing a little of what is going on in our inner and outer lives, both personal and professional. A check-in is an invitation to become fully present with yourself, as you drop more deeply into what is really at play in your life in the spaciousness of the sharing, and to become present with the others as you witness whatever is shared in the circle, and also with the inquiry at hand.

This slow-paced beginning is sometimes difficult for those of us who are well-versed in the Western patterns of speed, hurry, goals and let’s do it! And this is exactly why most people need a leisurely check-in to become present to what really is.

## **Talking piece and listening**

Commonly, during check-in a talking piece is used to help the group focus on the person who is in the process of sharing and to make sure that no one interrupts. The talking piece can be any object that makes sense in your specific context; often a stone is used. The agreement is that the person holding the talking piece is the one speaking or sharing, while the others are listening with attention. Sometimes the talking piece is called a ‘listening piece’, because that is equally true.

One way of working with a talking piece is to let it travel, from one person to the next, all around the circle. If, when the stone reaches you, you are not yet ready to speak, you simply pass it on to the next person. Once the talking piece has travelled the full circle, it will return to you, and you can then take it in your hand and share your story. Another way of working can be to place the talking piece in the middle of the circle and invite everyone to listen deeply for when it is their true time to share. Whoever feels ready can pick up the piece and, when they have spoken, return it to the centre for somebody else to take up. Proceeding in this way slows the conversation down; people need to become aware of their inner sensing regarding whether and when to share.

To many, working with a talking piece seems inefficient, as it can take a long time – perhaps longer than expected or planned for. Taking a longer view, however, working in this way is more than efficient, as it impacts on so many



levels: it builds trust and safety, it enhances listening and sharing, it provides a solid ground for further exploration of whatever difficult topics or questions people are bringing with them, and allows us to dive into our unconsciously-held shared assumptions.

For some people it can be a big thing to just listen without giving their advice, or chiming in, or questioning what the other just said. It confounds their habitual way of being in a conversation. Conversely, others are helped to speak up when the talking piece arrives in their hand – they are invited out of their habitual patterns of holding back and not sharing. The circle practices of ‘listening with attention’ (without interrupting) and ‘speaking with intention’ are an embodiment of true respect for the diversity of human beings. We are sorely in need of both this respect and this diversity: both need to be present if we are to be able to weave ourselves to a higher level of collective wisdom.

*Quote from participant:*

Using ‘a talking stick’ (or in our case, different talking pieces including stones) changes my relationship to the conversation from one of ‘needing to respond’ to one of ‘listening and silence’... it seems to hold an open space. It keeps my ‘ego’ in check. I’m less likely to ‘look for things to say’ or rush to insert myself by affirming commonality with the speaker or arguing from a place of contradiction or contrast. The usual superficial sociability drops away as soon as I’m slowed down and align with intention that is NOT about ‘me’.

— Les

I have used my talking stones, which I carry with me in a beautifully crafted wooden box, in many different places and in many different contexts. I usually introduce the practice as an invitation to speak from a deeper level. You don’t have to have ready-made ideas in your head before you start sharing; you can speak what comes naturally into words. Let the story unfold by itself as you speak. I invite all people to listen not just to the words spoken, but to the whole as all the different stories weave together. This is not just about politely listening and keeping quiet. It is a deeper listening that is invited, a call to become present.

## Conversation

The conversation that unfolds after the check-in will probably be guided by a prepared question or an introduction of some kind. In the early years of our Flemish circle we would dedicate the time remaining (after check-in) to the questions raised by all or some of us. They were of different kinds: they could be therapeutic, asking for professional support, a collective inquiry and so on. The Women Moving the Edge gatherings were always collective inquiries where the guiding question or theme was set in advance by the hosting team.

The group can decide for itself whether it is appropriate to continue using the talking piece. From experience I can say that if you want to invite deep reflection and build capacity for presence and emergence, you would be well advised to keep using it. It slows down the conversation, so that the subtle sensing can find its way into what is shared and into the emergent collective wisdom. On other occasions, there might be a need for more freely flowing conversation and no need for a talking piece.

During both the check-in and the unfolding conversation, there is a role for a guardian. This role can be taken up by anyone in the circle, and can be rotated over different gatherings. The main purpose of the guardian is to keep track of time and the overall energy of the group. He or she will give a sign or ring the bell when it is time for a break, or when we need to stretch. Anyone can ask the guardian to ring the bell when he feels a need for it. Also when stories or insights have been shared that need some time to digest, anyone in the circle can ask for the bell to be rung. After some time, the bell is rung again and the conversation can resume.

## Closing the circle

When working in circle, it is important to close the conversation properly. We give an opportunity for everyone to say a final word, to share the meaning this particular conversation had for them. An inviting question can be offered to guide this round of sharing. I notice how many times we drop this practice of closing, mostly due to so-called time constraints. When we don't give in to this pressure, it is very rewarding to learn how people are leaving the gathering and what they take away with them from the circle.



## Phases in the life of a circle

If you engage in the circle practice with the same group of people over an extended period of time, you will run into a lot of your habitual patterns (as we described in [Chapter 1](#) and [Chapter 2](#)). Confronting these patterns, acknowledging and reflecting on them, and trying out alternative behaviours and responses in order to change these habits is an essential part of any *Circle of Presence*.

In his book *The Different Drum*, Scott Peck<sup>2</sup> describes four stages that any kind of group goes through before they become what he calls a 'true community'. Within the safe container of the circle practice, people find a trustful and open space to share who they really are, what they most care about. Most people who experience circle for the first time have lacked this so sorely in their lives that they marvel at the occurrence, and find this to be the best group ever! They experience the joy of finding like-minded people, or so it seems. This is phase one – the pseudo community. The golden glow persists until – as if out of nowhere – diversity shows up in the group. Weren't we friends? Now I feel angry at you! We were on the same page, and now all of a sudden you have a different opinion?! Enter phase two: chaos. The members of the group are projecting on each other, personal shadow parts are not recognised. People try to fix the process, try to fix each other – or blame the process, or blame each other. And so it continues until finally folks understand that they can only change themselves and start looking within. So begins phase three: emptying.

In the language of Theory U, this is the point of opening the heart, realising that all the emotional charge that we project onto each other really belongs to us and we have to take responsibility for it ourselves. This requires going beyond right and wrong, or any other polarity that is present, and opening up to the reality of how different we all are. During the chaos phase, the talking piece can come to the rescue to keep projections within limits. Slowing the conversation down in this way gives people ample opportunity to reflect instead of instantly reacting to what was said, and letting some time pass before it is their turn to speak. In addition to the talking piece, we can invite all

participants in the inquiry to speak to and from the middle (of the circle), rather than addressing a specific individual. I advise, from long experience, never to allow people to break the rule of the talking piece (not speaking when you aren't holding it), if you agreed to use it at the outset. Introducing a talking piece is an act of power, and breaking the agreement on its use is an abuse of that power, especially as the host of the conversation.

This phase of emptying might look to many like a therapy group, but that is not its ultimate purpose. Reclaiming our projections is necessary if we are eventually to re-weave the strands of the group at a higher level of collective wisdom. The circle practice is a safe birthing place for the broken-off fragments of ourselves. Even when working in groups with victims and/or perpetrators of violence and torture, the sharing of stories in the safe container of a circle reconnects people with their family and their community – as I learned from the Tree of Life project in Zimbabwe. In reclaiming our projections we need the courage to connect with our deeply held and unconscious individual pain. But in opening the heart, first to ourselves, we are also connecting with the pain of the others as fellow human beings.

Otto Scharmer has a very helpful model of four different levels of conversation and listening.<sup>3</sup> During this phase of emptying, participants in the circle are learning to listen and speak empathically (his third level). They are now beyond the phase of being nice and socially/politically correct (first level), and beyond the phase of talking tough and preparing for the next move in the debate-battle (second level). In empathic listening, they learn to step out of their own beliefs and ideas into the shoes of the others. Doing so allows them to embrace our shared humanity beyond the boundaries and limiting beliefs we had before we entered the group. As Scott Peck calls the fourth phase, True Community has arisen.

## Notes

1: Otto Scharmer: *Theory U*. ↓ p.410.

2: Scott Peck: *The Different Drum*. ↓

3: Otto Scharmer: *Theory U*. ↓ p.295.

### 3.4 Women Moving the Edge – part 3



When preparing the first Women Moving the Edge gathering, we relied on the template that Finn Voldtofte had distilled from the first Moving the Edge gathering, which included full exposure of the preparation conversations on the Internet, using circle practice to bring the design to its next level and inviting participants early on to fully step up to offering their unique contribution. Being in the hosting team to facilitate this experimental gathering, I was supported by my substantial experience from my women's circle in Belgium and the principles and practices of the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter.<sup>a</sup>

Searching through my files, it turns out that we had 20 conference calls before our first gathering, which took place just a year after the original Moving the Edge. As we would later come to recognise, as the hosting team we talked a lot about the pattern of holding back – as Tina had mentioned – and we wondered whether this was just us, or if we were seeing something like a feminine collective survival pattern. This theme of holding back was a major one in that first gathering.

We also pondered together what would be the right format for women to gather. Would being in a circle enhance women's tendency to seek harmony? Would we then become stuck? Just waiting for emergence to happen didn't appeal to us. We realised already at that point that there is no real freedom without some boundaries. We would need some direction, leadership, guidance or purpose (or maybe a question). Later this would become another core pattern in preparing the gatherings: to collectively seek and sense into the guiding question for the next encounter. So central is this pattern of **having a guiding question** that we now take it as essential for any collective inquiry, alongside the use of circle practice.

At a certain point (September 2006), we decided to assume a leadership role and, rather than convening a circle of friends, offer a gathering, hosted and facilitated by us. "We will guide the process in a way that women can come forward with their own leadership. We will create a container – the walls – and invite the women into that space; the balance between the masculine (some structure or container) and the feminine (openness – emergence)." (notes from

the call of 21 September 2006). In that same call we decided not to rush or push ourselves, cancelling the original dates and postponing the gathering by two months. This marked the emergence of another pattern – **discerning right timing** – that would become core to our practice as our experiences unfolded and we learned to understand what was becoming manifest.



### 3.5 Opening to the Authentic Group



It is only wholesome when  
in the mirror of the Human Soul  
the whole community takes shape  
and in the community  
lives the strength of the individual soul.  
— Rudolf Steiner <sup>1</sup>

You will probably have recognised that we are now moving to a new location on the map of the *Circle of Presence*, into the widening field of complexity and interrelatedness. I have named this area of experience *I and Us*, as it is a logical expansion from *I and Myself* and *I and You*. It is important to realise, though, that it is only logical if we assume that ‘I’ is at the centre of things, which, of course, it is not – although it is a fairly common starting point in Western mainstream society, and consequently also how I started my journey of growing consciousness and awareness. This is the only reason why I start with ‘I’ and expand from there. Reality isn’t really like that, as we shall see as we journey further.

As we saw in our exploration of *I and You*, a lot is happening unconsciously between us, under the surface, in our relating. It suffices to multiply all that unconscious activity by the number of participants to get a feeling of what is at play in a group of people. In addition to leaving behind our judgements of and projections on each other, *opening to the inner dimension of the collective* also requires us to become conscious of the deeply ingrained, common assumptions and mental models we collectively hold. Because they dwell mostly implicitly in our shared field, they stay underground and are not talked about. These shared assumptions play a powerful role in shaping our common reality and are a core component in our feelings of belonging. Nevertheless, assumptions and mental models also act

as invisible boundaries that limit our capacity to see and understand. If a group can take the step of becoming aware of its limitations, a new way of thinking, acting and creating will emerge.

In the domain of *I and Us* we will discover many dynamics at play in groups, circles and teams; even families can be examined through this lens. It goes without saying that we shall not be able to name all of these dynamics, but we will articulate some important aspects that allow circles to grow in their capacity to attain shared, collective wisdom. The capacity to hold space for each other and for the group as a whole, as explained in [section 3.1](#) is quite essential here, as is the reverse capacity: to be held by the group.

What is at play in *I and Us* is more than being good team players. There is a subtle group field that is neither about entity nor process, neither about me nor all of the others; neither about the group's purpose nor the process of achieving it. It is neither particle nor wave. It is all of this: a subtle, structuring field beneath the visible reality, a complex mesh comprising all our potentials, a web of invisible strands that holds a collective potential that has never yet seen the light of day.

As in the previous domains, here too we will apply the four movements of inner alignment to the field of *I and Us*.

## **1. Noticing what is – in the group: notice the group's field and discover common assumptions**

Most of what I have described regarding the unfolding of an authentic self (*I and Myself*) and an authentic relationship (*I and You*) is well known in the sphere of training and circles concerned with personal growth. As we focus on *I and Us* we expand our attention to include what is happening in the group at large. This territory is known to most good trainers and facilitators, but often not consciously. As we develop towards collective, shared and rotating leadership and collective wisdom, we are all required to learn this skill and competence, not just so-called leaders.

*Noticing what is in the group* builds on the capacity to be present to myself and in relationship with the other(s), expanding now to perceive the wider group's field. It might start with noticing when you feel some kind of disturbance or awkwardness in the overall field. At such moments, you could offer some questions in the circle as a way of checking whether your sensing is shared or on track, and to help all participants notice what is happening: What is going on between us? What is at play at a deeper level in the group now?

*Noticing what is in the group* is more than just sensing moments of disturbance. It is also crucial to become aware of shared assumptions and beliefs. These are invisible when we participate in a group where we feel we belong. To begin to observe them you need to step back and take some distance. This is really not easy, and very few people have been trained to do this. I first became aware of the power of shared assumptions through the work of Edgar Schein.<sup>2</sup> When it was introduced to our little women's group many years ago, it made a huge impression on me. Schein offers three levels at which to reflect on an organisation's (or group's) culture: the first level concerns observable 'facts', what can be measured and recognised by outsiders; the second level relates to values – the ones that insiders speak about; the third level concerns these assumptions, which are unconscious and implicit – not spoken of, but always about the essentials.

I can still feel the mental stretch it took me to take it in and really start thinking about which specific assumptions we might be implicitly sharing. It is always a good idea to invite outsiders to help you in this regard, but over time, with practice, you can get a sense of the limiting beliefs and how they are at play in the group. Particularly, when all members of the group feel that there is no flow and no balance in the conversation, it can be helpful to raise some questions that inquire into these shared beliefs. It is not easy to give good examples of such shared assumptions, because they are different in every group. Suffice it to think about a total stranger from a different culture visiting your group. What beliefs would he or she have to adhere to in order to belong? What if you could offer some questions that can open this field of shared assumptions so that all participants could examine them more easily?

## 2. Accepting what is – in the group: widen my view on the group's field and see others' full potential

*Accepting what is in the group* invites us to broaden our own personal perspective, as we now know that *accepting what is* is about opening the heart. Our own personal identities and intentions are now positioned in this larger field – as they have always been, but now we make the conscious effort to keep this relationship constantly in our awareness. This calls for a process of tuning in with the inner dimension of the collective we are part of. It is an inner movement of awareness – an inward, widening embrace, finding balance in a broader field of awareness. The group's field is – of course – not visible. It exists in the subtle realms and can be perceived through our subtle senses. As we open our hearts and minds to this wider field we step more deeply into interconnectedness and complexity. This experience cannot be grasped by the mind only, we need another set of senses to find a point of balance in all this.

Now that I am aware of this group's field, I can understand at a deeper level why it is so important that I bring in my full potential. Once we acknowledge and open ourselves to the group's field, we get a sense of contributing our own unique gifts, our own unique form of leadership, in service of the collective wisdom. At the same time, as we sense into the collective field, we start to see the unique contributions others are making. If there is such a thing as a group's field, then it follows that there can be no such thing as 'wrong' members or participants in that field. In addition to simply observing and acknowledging this fact, comes the inner movement of accepting everyone and seeing that each individual feeds a thread into the collective weave. Sometimes participants are not aware of what they bring to the group, and the others might need to articulate what they see a person's contribution as being. Sometimes people, used to leadership positions, have to come to terms with the fact that their role is limited – one among many – and that each individual has a role to play in service of the whole.

From the experience of our women's gatherings, I can state with confidence that there are many more tasks, gifts, areas of work and attention than just the 'normal', traditional forms of leadership. Here I am thinking of the more 'hidden' forms of leadership: cleaning and tending the environment, bringing in beauty, providing nourishing food, initiating celebrations and rituals, organising trips, holding space and potential, send out reminders for the next gathering, making a harvest or artefact of what has happened before, and so on. All these contributions are needed, and all support the group's outcome.





### 3. Honouring what is – in the group: hold space and be held by the group's field

Section 3.1 unpacked the concept of holding space in some detail. In a nutshell, holding space is about being aware of a potential that is present in the group but that has not yet manifested. This unmanifest potential is in you, in the other participants and in the group as a whole.

*Honouring what is in I and us* builds on the acceptance that we all have unique gifts and more potential than we realise at first glance. If I truly honour that each person fully participates and contributes their unique gifts to the group's field, my trust in the group as a whole deepens and I can fully relax. Now I can open to the group as the here-and-now community that takes care of me. I can trust and follow the ideas and suggestions of others in areas of life or work that are not where my strengths or preferences lie.

To engage fully in the group, *honouring what is in I and us* also means being conscious of my own needs, big and small, voicing them and acting on them. This, too, is an act of leadership and a contribution to the whole. If you need to move your body to recentre yourself after a long conversation, just do it. Or propose it to the group as a collective exercise, because your need might be shared by others. But even if nobody else joins you, it is your responsibility to be present – not out of egotism, but in service of the group.

*Honouring what is in I and us* has an important receptive side to it: the ability to be held by the group. In my research, this aspect almost went unnoticed, first and foremost because I am myself a strong woman – at least that is what my personality believes! It failed to show up on my radar at first because my personal survival strategy is to 'do it on my own', to be strong and not to show my needs (remember the example I got from my mom). But then I began to recognise it in many, many others – and this is still ongoing. Because the gatherings of Women Moving the Edge attracted rather strong, developed women – after all, we invited participants to be on the edge! – many shared an implicit assumption that we need to be able to handle it all by ourselves. Our needs and emotions were to be kept

out of the circle conversations. In this regard, we lost sight of the interrelatedness of the personal and the collective. As stated in one of our gatherings: “I need you all, and you all need my vulnerability too.”

In his conversation with the Circle of Seven,<sup>3</sup> Otto Scharmer articulates it very well: “Ken Wilber makes the distinction between I, we, and it. It strikes me that what you describe is yet another perspective: the second person plural, that is, unconditional witnessing by a collective. What I heard you describe is how unconditional witnessing by a collective works in terms of a nonjudgemental stance and in terms of the open heart. That places the attention toward what’s becoming – what’s coming into being. It’s the evolving self, not what’s already there.” Sharing our needs, expressing our vulnerability does not mean eliciting an avalanche of advice or calling for rescue. This act of sharing invites the embodied experience of being held by the group. Being witnessed in this way is enough in itself: I feel met as who I really am and I can move beyond any helplessness that might have been part of my story. The quality of attention offered in this witnessing teaches us to look at ourselves, too, without judgement. Even if we goofed, we need feel no shame and can just take it as a learning experience. It is through the collective work in the circle that we are able to show up with ever less ego-as-habitual-pattern.

Although it might seem contradictory that we cannot experience the full holding of the group until we have learned to participate fully from our unique, authentic place (*I and Myself*), that is not so. This kind of holding comes from a different level (‘trans’) than the holding that is needed by the baby or child (‘pre’). It is a deeper connection with mutual interdependence as the next stage in development, beyond dependence and independence. Sharing our needs, showing our vulnerability, trusting this group right here and right now, can feel like taking a risk – at least to our habitual survival patterns, by that part of us that was hurt so long ago. The Circle of Seven confirms: “There often has to be a risk in order for the collective to show up. The risk can be one person’s, two people’s, or all of ours, but there has to be some kind of risk or vulnerability for crossing the threshold that you’re talking about. I felt the whole space shift. Because you took a risk, it shifted the space for all of us. Maybe there are a lot of different thresholds.”

*Honouring what is in the group’s field* is more than trusting the members of your team; this is what the above quote points to. I well remember a situation in the very first Moving the Edge gathering. Most of us were searching for what to say and do in order to reach this Magic in the Middle. Faced with so much uncertainty, most participants fell back into downloading – their default way of thinking and acting. So we heard many different proposals of what we could or should do, but none gelled to the level of actual action. None engaged the whole group. After some hours of talking, somebody got up and went over to the trolley laden with tea, coffee and Danish pastries. Everybody got up and followed, without anybody having made the suggestion, or the group having reached consensus. The break just happened. The group’s field had taken care of all of us and we listened to the emergence that unfolded and of which we were part.

## **4. Living what is – in the group: full participation in the (subtle) group field**

After some time in an ongoing circle, we begin to see clearly the special and unique flavour of this specific group. When everybody brings in his or her unique contribution, we get a splendid blend of qualities, a cornucopia of different ingredients that can lead to a totally new stew. In such groups, there is no boss, simply people who take on certain necessary roles. These are minimal and can rotate if the group so decides. Everybody participates fully, takes responsibility when needed or when his or her competencies, skills or gifts are called for.

On one occasion, our Flemish women’s group was together for a four-day retreat. We were learning to rely on what was unfolding instead of planning it all ahead by the hour. On our final morning, we all got up at different times and didn’t come together until almost noon. It turned out that all of us had actually wanted to start earlier, but none of us had spoken up. We had each seen the activities of the others and interpreted them incorrectly. We had all been waiting – our habitual response of being separated – instead of making our wishes and sensing clear. That was a big lesson!

If we are ever to behave as an authentic collective, each of us needs to learn to check our assumptions with the others and bring in all the available information – otherwise we are holding back, not recognising that what we, individually, have to offer might be crucial for the life of the group as a whole. Checking assumptions is often



needed to restore trust and flow, when the connection and awareness of our interrelatedness has dropped out. This is a deeply systemic insight: if you hold back, the whole system is holding back. If you are not fully, consciously present, then the whole system cannot be fully, consciously present. We are all completely immersed, wanted, needed... Embodying this systemic view on life means that we are *always* invited to participate fully: sharing our unique gifts, contributing our subtle intelligence as well as our mental capacities.

In addition to speaking, there are a multitude of ways in which a group will express its unique character. This point is worth dwelling on: in Western society we are so used to 'the talking culture' that we no longer recognise that it is just that: 'a culture' – and therefore something we can create differently if we want to. The unique culture of a group expresses itself in many different ways: how things are done, where we meet, whether we break bread together, time spent on having fun or informal talk, and so on. The different kinds of expression can be examined very intentionally and just as intentionally changed to best fit this group or organisation. Then we see the birth of an Authentic Group – *the living of what is*.

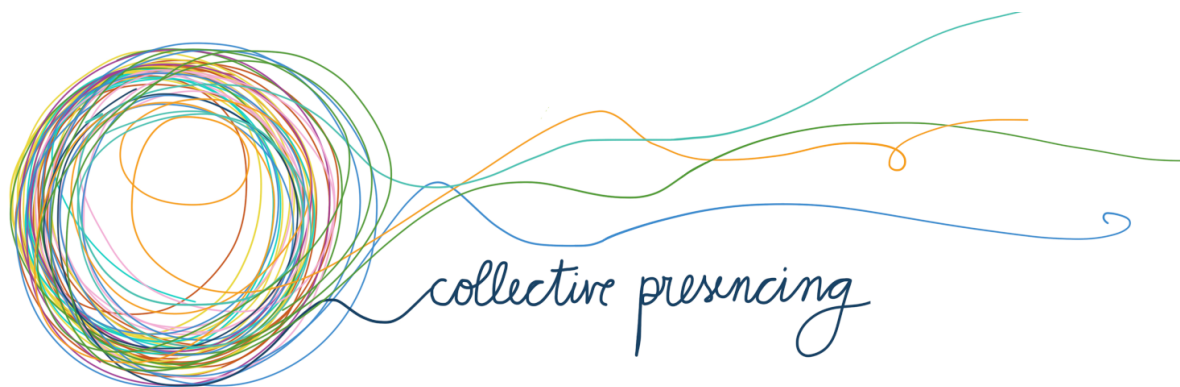
The energetic awareness (the 'holding') of the group, its members and its intentions does not cease when we leave the face-to-face meetings. If the group has an intention to meet again, the holding continues. This holding means keeping the lines of connection present in your awareness. The Circle of Seven articulates it this way: "We sustain the intention and the energy of that person's intention by the practice of holding during the time that we're apart, after the circle breaks up. This is a practice of continuing to hold the field that I think we're not fully aware of. It's been developing since we began the circle."

In my little women's group we did a lot of rituals during which we connected all the levels of our being: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual. We took the time to invent and create these rituals together and we all experienced them as extremely important. In retrospect, I can see our rituals honoured the different phases in the group's process, although this was not planned as such. We were sensitive to how life unfolded in and as our circle, and we experimented with what we sensed was right to do at different times. This collective subtle sensing, honouring and living the life of the group is a crucial capacity for the times we are living in.

In the next chapter, we build further on this subtle sensing, but now in relation to the potential of what is present. In the movement of ever-growing awareness of complexity and interrelatedness, we will shift our focus to emergence, opening to surrender to what the subtle field of potential is showing us.

## Notes

- 1: Rudolf Steiner: The Motto of Social Ethics, quoted by the Anthroposophical Society in Canada. ↓ Original German: „Heilsam ist nur, wenn im Spiegel der Menschenseele sich bildet die ganze Gemeinschaft und in der Gemeinschaft lebet der Einzelseele Kraft.“
- 2: Edgar H. Schein: *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. ↓
- 3: Circle of Seven: *The Presence of the Circle Being* ↓



## 4. I and Potential: Collective Wisdom

4.1 Development, Evolution and Participation

4.2 Circle of Presence – building capacity for Authentic Collective Wisdom

4.3 Poem: A Warrior Has No Safety Net

4.4 What is Sourcing?

4.5 What if we are gathering for the world?

4.6 Opening to Authentic Collective Wisdom

4.7 The Circle of Presence map

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This chapter started out called '*I and Evolution*', then became '*I and Future*'; 'Evolution' and 'future' are such all-encompassing concepts, though, that they just aren't specific enough to serve in concrete situations. However, as I gradually gained clarity about what we were really inquiring into and relating with, I came to see that we are expanding our awareness not from 'here' to 'there', in a straight line from the present to the future, but rather from what is already manifest to what is *possible*. That which is possible, the potential, is present right now. It might not be visible or tangible to our gross sensory organs, but it is nonetheless perceptible to our subtle sensing. If we, as a

group or team, were able to integrate this subtle knowing with all the other means of knowing at our disposal, we would be astounded by the wisdom we collectively hold.

## 4.1 Development, Evolution and Participation



History has not reached a stagnant end, nor is it triumphantly marching towards the radiant future. It is being catapulted into an unknown adventure.

— Edgar Morin<sup>1</sup>

Our world is getting bigger, complexity is increasing, chaos is spreading. Nowhere are quick, easy answers to be found, nor can we rely on the past. What is asked from us to deal with all this? Or is ‘dealing with’ the wrong verb here, implying that something bad or difficult is happening to us, imposed from outside? Perhaps it is more appropriate to speak of ‘engaging with’ or ‘participating in’. It seems that we humans are being gently – or not so gently – nudged, asked to grow: to embrace more, increase our collective capacity to navigate complexity, access deeper places of inner ground, grow our roots down deeper than we have done so far, embrace more of our environment, open up to emerging novelty, learn from nature and listen to the future... the possibilities are endless.

Are we learning *from* nature and *from* the future?

Or are we engaging *with* nature and *with* potential?

Or are we participating *in* nature and *in* potential?

Or are we participating *as* nature and *as* potential?

The subtle differences between these four sentences contain worlds of difference. As we move through the chapters of this book, we are leaving behind the separation and fragmentation that still dominate mainstream Western thinking and speaking. As this action research has unfolded, it has sunk in ever deeper that separation – between humans, between subject and object, between ideas, between human and non-human – is simply not how reality is.

Of course, there is continual influence back and forth, but not in any linear, causal way. Which is not to say that what came before has nothing to do with what comes after. What is perceptible at the level of subtle energy does bear some relation to what becomes manifest (or not). The intention that we set has some influence on how things turn out. But it is only in retrospect that we can see which chain of events led to the outcome we got.

The two major parts at the heart of this book, *Circle of Presence* and *Circle of Creation*, depict an ever-expanding movement of integration and association, inside and outside, across two dimensions (on the map, not in reality!). We have seen how the vertical axis represents our inner alignment, where body, mind, spirit and soul move into ever greater resonance and alignment with one another. The horizontal axis spreads out around us in all directions, as we connect with others, our neighbours and our so-called enemies; where we are conscious of our environment and act accordingly; where we can feel connected with the moon and the stars; where we know that the health of our physical body depends on so many different bacteria. It is the line of interconnectedness, and it leads to balance and harmony with wider circles all around us.

But life cannot be grasped as two dimensions and little boxes depicting next steps, like in these maps. Life didn't start as an 'I' and then moved outwards from there – quite the opposite, most likely. The I-identity takes time to establish itself, but then assumes dominance as the core or essence of what life is about. In reality, 'I' is just a node – albeit a unique one – in a whole ecology. My model and description only starts there with 'I' because I grew up in the West, not because it is the most real or has more importance or validity. The 'I' is just a starting point in this whole web called life.

I have always seen change within the framework of development. That might be the influence of my background as a psychologist, and later grounded in Wilhelm Reich's basic theory of Character Structure, which was the backbone of the psychotherapy training I did in the 90's. Later my theory of change integrated living systems theory, where systems are always seen as 'complex adaptive systems'. I used to prefer the notion of 'complex *evolving* systems', as I had never seen a system return to a prior status quo after the so-called disruption had ended. There was a time when I was taken by the concept of 'intentional' or 'conscious' evolution, but I later learned that there is a danger in seeing evolution as a step-by-step linear journey. That would be tantamount to conflating evolution with our linear ideas of 'progress', with lower and higher, more and less evolved people, cultures, animals and so on. Now I have settled on 'complex dynamic systems', where the notion of a back-and-forth dynamic is more inherent.



There are no fixed points in people, nature, or systems – nowhere. There is always some form of unfolding, something that is different than before, for better or for worse, depending on our perspective. We have many names



for it: development, evolution, transformation, change. There seems to be a never-ending vista of possibilities, a fathomless ocean of potential, wherever we look, all the way up and all the way down, and in all directions around us. How do we engage with this potential? Are we aware of it when we talk about development or evolution? What if engaging with this potential is what it means to participate in life? To participate *as* life?

In this connection, it is helpful to train our minds and bodies to perceive systems and systemic dynamics. Because we are ourselves complex systems, we are always part of complex dynamic systems – indeed we constantly live embedded in a multitude of them. Change in one part of the system will influence many levels and many other nodes at the same time. And yet I still see a danger in the way ‘systems thinking’ often shows up in the world, with its neat diagrams showing feedback loops back and forth, without fully appreciating that we, who are looking at it, are all also part of it, in it – that it truly matters how we participate in it, how we participate *as* it.

As I see things now (and who knows how I will see it by the time this book is published) we are not participating *in* something, as if we could step in and out of it like a swimming pool. Rather, we participate *as* nature, *as* life. Whether we believe we are participating fully or not, it is still life happening – life doesn’t really care. And yet there is always more potential that can be manifested, sooner or later – although maybe not now. Somehow it is about how we let life happen *in and through* us, instead of somehow blocking it. This is not a passive ‘let life take over’ attitude, but an active letting go of our habitual patterns in order to engage with and in the ongoing unfolding of our individual and collective potential.

Engaging *as* the future or *as* potential means we cannot plan our goals and push on until we have attained them. Engaging with what is possible means sensing what wants to be born, questing for what has the most life energy, sensing which seed is ready to sprout. We can cultivate this inner knowing of what is to unfold. It might be clear, then, that the future is not in some way already written and ‘decided’, just waiting for us to uncover it. To engage with the future is to understand that we are participating *in* it, embodying our part in its potential. The very act of bringing our attention to what is unfolding, listening deeply for the novelties that are revealing themselves, is a creative force that will influence what is coming into manifestation – but not in any linear way. We can then understand ourselves as co-creators in this synergy with all of what is in and around us.

## Notes

- 1: Edgar Morin: as quoted by Gilbert Rist in *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*. ↓  
Original French: « L’histoire n’est ni en son terminus stagnant ni triomphalement en marche vers l’avenir radieux. Elle est catapultée dans une aventure inconnue » *La terre, astre errant*. Le Monde, 14/02/1990.

## 4.2 Circle of Presence – building capacity for Authentic Collective Wisdom



I have used the concept *Circle of Presence* several times already, so it is time to clarify exactly what I mean by it. A *Circle of Presence* is:

- any group or team (around 4 to 12 people)
- that comes together regularly over a longer period of time
- using circle practice as the core methodology
- for the purpose of becoming ever more present (in the four areas: myself, the others, the group and potential)
- in order to attain collective wisdom around a certain topic or question.

Scharmer<sup>1</sup> writes of this as one of the principles in the U-process: “create circles in which you hold one another in the highest future intention”.

In a *Circle of Presence*, the process is walked step by step, using circle practice to gradually build a strong container that can hold anger, joy and grief, but also reflection, new insights, analysis and a lot of cognitive understanding. This container is built of love and commitment, and that makes it is strong, vulnerable, flexible and resilient. This capacity of a *Circle of Presence* is not built all at once. It unfolds over time, through different layers and phases (see *I and Us*). We need practice to expand our capacity to embrace ever more in our awareness, and deepen our skill in opening ourselves to receiving ever more. These layers, phases and inner movements are all entwined, interconnected and interdependent.

In addition to the personal flexibility and grounding needed (*I and Myself*), we are called to develop new human capacities on the collective level: strong group fields that can hold and contain the powerful energies called for to

deal with high levels of complexity, with chaos and sudden changes in the environment. The collective potential that a group can manifest is directly proportional to the amount of available, free energy that is not stuck in any kind of downloading. In groups with a lot of passion about their issue or purpose, there is generally more at stake for participants, so emotions can get very charged and situations get stuck easily. Therefore, groups with a compelling vision or great passion will do themselves a big favour by investing time in building strong, yet flexible and resilient containers that can hold the fire of emotions, which they can then use to forge new collective wisdom.

This so-called energetic container can be seen as the body/mind structure of a group, a concept I borrow from LaChapelle.<sup>2</sup> Learning and practicing clearing and healing this body/mind/soul structure on a group level, so it can be available and open for its potential, is a whole new domain. When my body, mind and soul are aligned I feel joyful, wise and relaxed. We need the same thing for groups: a transparent, aligned group field that does not lose any energy in stuck patterns or habits, but that has all its attention and energy free for the emergence of its collective wisdom.

We are in sore need of more authentic collective wisdom – wisdom that springs from integrating body-based inner knowing with the cognitive capacity of our minds; a knowing that arises from the synergy of our shared capacity and potential. We all need a circle(s), because we are, by definition, as blind to our own unconscious parts as we are to our true gifts, and more importantly because we each hold a piece of the puzzle that only together will offer a deeper understanding and a way forward for our shared question or issue.

## Collective intelligence and collective wisdom

I use the term collective *wisdom* intentionally, as I see it as different from collective intelligence. Even the true meaning of collective intelligence is not an intelligence that is additive, as in ‘two know more than one’. George Pór speaks of ‘a connected intelligence’; an intelligence that combines and makes us more ‘co-intelligent’. Yet there is still something missing in this definition, when any kind of terrorist group can – and probably does – use this kind of collective intelligence.

I see wisdom as intelligence linked with love, or intelligence that is life-affirming, realising that we are embedded in a wider context – of other people, other cultures, other creatures – and acting from that awareness. Again, it is not a ‘one plus one makes two’ operation, but an emergent wisdom that arises when we put our individual gifts and knowing together in a vibrant mix. Then we become a group or team that is ‘co-wise’.

Wisdom in this regard is quite different from knowledge. I once heard Julio Olalla make a clear distinction between knowledge and wisdom, defining knowledge as knowing the answers, and wisdom as asking the questions. There is a lot of value in that definition, and later (section 7.1) I will have more to say on the topic of finding inspiring guiding questions.

## Learning and healing

To some it might seem that any group process that makes room for emotions and personal stories is a therapy group. This is not true. The purpose of a *Circle of Presence* is not healing in itself, but learning to become present on ever wider and deeper levels in order to be co-wise on the issue at hand. Any healing that happens is incidental. In a therapy group, the process is guided by a therapist, who is (hopefully) expert in such matters. In a *Circle of Presence* there need be no expert on emotional dynamics – although sometimes that can be helpful. It suffices to be a curious, empathic and respectful human being to make it work. The process builds and deepens mutual trust, respect and love over time – all in order to make available the wisdom related to the shared purpose, and not just for the sake of being together.

All steps, all movements along the way in this journey are needed for both healing and learning, simultaneously. Everyone will support and help, and receive in reciprocity. The learning happens as people travel together on the

journey. Each one of the distinctive movements outlined so far has a part to play in clearing away what is separating us from *what is*: phenomena as they are, without any interpretation. We simply cannot move from our conditioned habits in a group to the experience of collective wisdom in one step. It takes learning, practice, commitment, compassion, and a lot of love. All our conditioned feeling, thinking, doing has separated us and divided us. It has veiled the interrelatedness and complexity. As LaChapelle states: “A considerable portion of any group’s energy is devoted to the remediation of these various veils.”<sup>2</sup> If we want collective wisdom to emerge, each member needs to come to this ever deepening inner experience of wholeness or interconnectivity. Conceptual knowing alone will not be enough.

Being a *Circle of Presence* is at a far remove from sitting together and enjoying each other’s company – although that is important too. It is about growing, individually and collectively, in leadership capacity. It is about thinking and acting in quite diverse ways. It is about a collective inquiry into a topic that is of interest to all. Accordingly, every step in this process is crucial, every move is important. Becoming a group that shares deep mutual respect and love – whilst pursuing its purpose – is not easily accomplished, because we so quickly slip back into our habitual patterns.



## Friendship

Bill Torbert<sup>3</sup> talks about ‘friendship as a developmental force’, building on the notion that friends mostly share similar values and related ways of thinking and reasoning. Participants in a *Circle of Presence* tend to see each other as friends after some time, because of the shared intention to become as present as possible, through and in the circle (practice), and because any sharing and reflection opens out onto human bonding, a level where we are all equal in being humans. The deep trust that evolves from there can be quite exceptional for some participants, hence the tendency to become friends.

This friendship is also more than being a bunch of ‘good old friends’. Participants in the kind of circles we are concerned with here also share a certain recognition and resonance, a deep trust in the unfolding of our future story. There is a shared inner knowing that we are in a time of deep transition on the planet and we all want to learn to be present in service of this. The resonance is about being on a learning journey and constantly reflecting on where our actions and thoughts originate. This makes for open minds and wide open hearts. Whenever I sense and see this



resonance it reassures me and nurtures my soul. I suspect that when our souls come into deeper resonance, unexpected and wondrous things can happen.

## Balance

*Collective Presencing* places much more emphasis on the *yin* side of individual and collective unfolding than is our habit. We focus more on the practical, holding and enabling energies: compassionate action born of love in every moment. And I do mean ‘in every moment’ – not only in meditation or for the duration of a workshop, but in *every moment of our lives*. Including work. Including when we do the dishes together, when we need to make an urgent appointment, when we are in a hurry or confronted with a conflict of interest. This energy is like the mother holding the child in the field of her love. She creates and maintains the conditions in which the child can grow. When that field is rather open and cleared, the child flourishes and the mother knows what to do. A *Circle of Presence*, over time and with commitment to its purpose, becomes this holding space, the container in which collective wisdom can be born and grow in service of the intention, purpose or inquiry that the group is gathered around.

The *Circle of Presence* is about building a collective container – and everything it takes to get there, both individually and together – so that Authentic Collective Wisdom can emerge around a shared topic; a collective wisdom that will be totally unique to this particular group. Related to the work of Scharmer, this can be seen as the inner dimension of the left side of the U-curve. Later on we will look at the steps and elements of the inner dimension entailed in becoming a *Circle of Creation*, which is more related to the movement up the right side the U-curve, transitioning into manifestation. In a way, I am seeking here to articulate the inner, subtle and then collective dimensions encountered when moving through the U process.

## Notes

1: Otto Scharmer: *Theory U*. ↓ p.410-411.

2a: 2b: David LaChapelle: *Theory and Practice for the Generation of Group Wisdom*. ↓

3: Bill Torbert: *Website* ↓



### 4.3 Poem: A Warrior Has No Safety Net



I walk on the precarious edge  
of the new and the old,  
wanting to shed  
the locks and lies of a mechanical world,  
eager to dive into the smooth cool water of abundant life.

I am young,  
I am a woman,  
I live in a land where I can choose.

There are disco lights  
and magnetic forces  
pulling me into The Tunnel—  
The Tunnel where everyone goes.

Almost everyone.

It vacuums up mall shoppers  
and telemarketers,  
executives and bartenders.  
It promises clean sheets and Mickey Mouse vacations,  
automatic garage doors  
and cell phone communications.  
If you choose The Tunnel  
you will never have to be cold  
or hungry or alone.  
There are pills to erase headaches  
and drinks to drown heart aches.

There are movies to make you laugh  
and cars to move you fast.

If you don't like your face,  
surgery will change its shape.  
There is no need for God  
The Tunnel will keep you safe.

But if you stop believing,  
oh! If you stop believing ...  
The Tunnel will disintegrate  
and leave you swimming in a septic tank.

My choice is clear.  
I am stepping slowly  
into the open quiet land beyond.

There are no roads, no maps, no guides.  
There is no insurance coverage, no training school.  
Edible vegetation is sparse.

Rain trickles down my back  
as I fumble with reeds to make a hat.  
Through the mist  
I catch a thread of song  
and I rise to see a band of barefoot sisters  
approach with open arms.

With nothing more than faith and grace,  
our dance has just begun.



— Kirstin George<sup>1</sup>



## Notes

1: Quoted in: Danny Arguette: *Nourishing the Teacher Inquiries* ↓ Also, read by Joanna Macy ↓

## 4.4 What is Sourcing?



Experience does not occur in the clothing of verbal phrases. It involves clashes of emotion, and unspoken revelation of the nature of things. Revelation is the primary characterisation of the process of knowing... Revelation is the enlargement of clarity. It is not a deduction...

— Alfred North Whitehead <sup>1</sup>

In our little Flemish women's circle, we spent much time on the level of the emotions, peeling away the layers of the onion to reach an open mind, open heart and open will. Over time we noticed that, as we became better at clearing the interpersonal field between us and keeping it open for longer periods, other domains became accessible. Our initial intention had been to look into the relationship between women, femininity and spirituality. Through experience and with much trial and error, this intention opened into a growing awareness of interrelatedness and complexity.

Inspired by the prospect of building and sustaining a container to hold the fire of difficult conversations, as described by William Isaacs,<sup>2</sup> we started experimenting with a collective contemplation exercise. At the time, we called it 'collective meditation', but really it was more of a contemplation, because we would place a question or a topic as the focus of our attention and listen for new insights. In the awareness of our shared, energetic container we would use our subtle sensing to catch fragments of answers, information or insights that might emerge. In the beginning this sometimes felt threatening to our identities, as 'weird' ideas or images would come up. But it was very exciting and it awoke in me a resolve to dive deeper and understand better exactly what was going on.

We learned, step by step, to rely more on the information coming from the subtle levels and integrate it with our more habitual ways of knowing. To begin with, we didn't always share the information we each received personally, for fear of being thought stupid or weird, only to find out later that it truly was a missing piece of the whole.

This collective contemplation started somewhat like a meditation, in silence. Unlike typical group meditation, though, we were all fully aware of being together in a shared silence with a shared purpose. In the silence we held our mutual connection and interrelatedness in our awareness, together with the question we had put in the middle. At first, the silence served to bring us into the present moment, as in regular meditation. In that silence, there seemed to be “only energy and no words”. But we discovered that we could speak from that connected, deeper subtle space. It felt as if the words were spoken ‘through us’, without any prior processing by the mind, arising instead straight *from, in and as* the experience. As in Whitehead’s quote: the speaking was a revelation, it offered a clarity of insight that was not yet present in our memory banks.

We are so habituated to using language and speech to exchange in conceptual space that we hardly ever speak from direct experience – except in those rare instances when we hurt ourselves and say ‘ouch!’ as an expression of pain, or when our delight in a favorite dish brings forth an ‘mmmm!’ We noticed that there was something to discover when speaking was directly linked with insights arising from inner knowing. It is an expression emanating directly from a subtle gut feeling instead of sharing thoughts and concepts; words seem to issue through the mouth from a deep source, not from the mind. Sound can have a healing quality, and what I am pointing to here is speech, communication still imbued with that kind of quality, whilst using words to articulate new insights.

Language has become a separate human realm and/or a map of reality and there is a destructive and manipulative potential to it – words can deny, words can control. Most of all, the essence of the experience and the inherent relationships in it are lost. Labels and concepts blind us, distorting our perception of reality and the way we interact with it. We sacrifice immediacy, intimacy and vulnerability. Speaking ‘about it’ removes us from the experience itself. Speaking ‘words that come through’ is more energetic and vibrational; it leaves us with a primary experience rather than taking us off into the realms of abstract cognition and intellect.

The sharing of personal stories also has that quality of immediacy and intimacy. We all feel touched when sharing is genuine and open. The story and its related feelings can be understood by the heart without needing to be processed through concepts and labels. Such direct communication holds a healing quality – for the speaker through the sharing and for the receiver through listening and witnessing. As we continue in this immediate sharing, it becomes possible for our words to come from ever deeper layers, for us to say things we never imagined before, as this way of being together opens up our experience into new realms of being.

We came to call this experience of immediate shared insight ‘*sourcing*’ – as if speaking from source, from that place of infinite potential that is always present but that we tend to forget in our habitual way of living and thinking. We invite participants in the circle to speak to and from the middle so as to increase the likelihood of speaking from that subtle place, rather than sharing concepts or addressing what someone said before. One feature of sourcing is that it is free from conceptualisation. Words spring directly from experiential awareness in the moment. Following one’s own words as they appear and refraining from attributing any kind of meaning to them allows us to go further and deeper on this path of discovery.

Sourcing can only happen when one is in both inner and outer alignment at the same time (Bonnitta Roy calls this internal congruence and inter-subjective coherence). Sourcing is sensing into the subtle realms; it is about perceiving subtle, energetic levels of reality where the boundaries of the normal fall away. We are able to sense and distinguish what will come next, just as we can lick a finger and hold it up in the air to feel where the breeze is coming from. The here-and-now moment is always entangled with its inherent potential, with what can become manifest next. This is not the same as ‘knowing’ the future, as it is not yet formed. But there seems to be a field of possibility or potential, and we are able to sense into it.

It is not easy to source instead of thinking, in the sense of juggling with preformed thoughts, memories and concepts – an activity which is so deeply ingrained in our minds and habits. We tend to think first, then speak, or simply repeat something we have said before. In the practice of sourcing, we are invited to speak directly from the (subtle) experience, instructing the mind to notice the experience without processing it in conceptual space. So we work with our present phenomenological experience – what is happening Now – and stay as close to it as we possibly can, whilst observing it and articulating it to the best of our ability.



This can feel awkward, like going against the grain, but – as in every aspect of life – practice helps! Over time I have noticed that my capacity to easily and accurately discern whether something feels ‘right’ or ‘aligned’ has grown. It can be about very small, even mundane things. But suddenly I ‘know’ it, with a certainty that encompasses my heart, my body and my mind. These are not solutions that come through a thought process. They have the quality of revelation, without being in any way out of the ordinary: it is just that I now know what to do, when or whether to write that email, what to reply, what to decide. In the past, I would have needed much more time and contemplation to reach that space of inner and outer alignment.

So, yes, practice helps. We can develop this inner knowing, this sense of coherence and knowing-all-at-once that is an embodied experience. We can practice sensing the potential that is surfacing into manifestation. The first few times I experienced such insights, I remember finding it so strange that I felt some trepidation about sharing them, judging them weird and new-agey. Since then, it has becoming a familiar habit that is an integral part of how I relate with the world and with life in general.

*Quote from participant:*

I’ve been in a great space the last week. Next to no internal dialogue – quiet, at rest, an in-body experience. Really being cocooned, safe in my body, life, work, cosmos, and belonging. Finding this week I just have to show up, being empty and listen. Then something speaks through me and I can shut up again. It’s an intense experience and hasn’t faded away at all.

— Helen

## The Experience of Sourcing

Here follows a description of the different phases we have identified that can help in learning how to shift our habit from thinking through the head to sourcing through our whole being.

### Crossing the threshold

For the habitual ways of being of the default Western mind, it can feel quite scary to start to rely on sourcing in many different areas of life – even though the intention is not to replace cognitive knowing, because that is included. It can often feel like being on the edge of a deep precipice – we might pitch into the void! And yet many of us feel a compulsion, a strong pull to go there. Something seems to be calling us, and when we follow the call, it feels good!

*From my notebook, April 2009, Greece:*

If I release myself  
into nature,  
into life,  
into the Earth system,  
totally,  
then my mind releases itself into it also.  
Not the witness,  
but the mind.  
Then I can be in wonder with everything that is.  
Then what comes up is not ‘mine’, but is Life itself.

*Quotes from participants:*

I struggle with how much of me, the ego self, should be present. And yet I know it is to be the self, beyond ego, who engages. Somehow I am not free yet, not free enough to be there without ego attachment to the outcome. And letting go, moving beyond the edge, the leap into the unknown brings so much uncertainty, so much fear; it is beyond any trust I can find within me. ... Something in me knows this holds unlimited potential and yet I cannot seem to make the leap.

— Judy

And yet I know that beyond the ego self is the Self, the one who has no fear, no past or future, no need for anything, except to be in fullness, in now, and to emerge. No need for comfort as there is no fear.

— Judy

In this space of shared experiment and practice, there is only one rule or principle to follow: everything that is shared is ‘the right thing’. I put this in inverted commas here, as there can be no right or wrong in these matters, just the act of trying and seeing where it leads. Unavoidably, your ego-as-habitual-pattern will hit the wall of doubt and uncertainty: Am I going to say the wrong thing? Will it sound stupid? Will others think I’m weird? At those moments, it is good to remember the rule: everything you share is OK and good enough to try.

At the same time, stay as aware as you can of where you are speaking from: am I downloading the same old thing? Is there some subtle judgement? Am I speaking ‘about’ something? Am I sharing a personal story? Am I sensing a potential, trying to name a new pattern? If we feel the pull to speak more from source, to articulate the potential we are perceiving, it doesn’t matter what we are sharing because we have to keep on trying. Some agreements and shared practices can help us to reach this next level: the use of a talking piece, the principle that everything that is shared is OK... and just keep on practicing.

## Longing

*Quote from participant:*

After once touching into speaking from the middle, I would forever want to return there, to that incredible and liberating power of knowing. To that little-worn groove in consciousness, that is now a bit more familiar. The possibilities are so vast. The opportunity to shift consciousness even in a small way is so attractive energetically. It is as if consciousness is calling, magnetising me and us to answer, to listen, to sense into, to be present, to co-sense, and to co-presence. Once knowing this experience it becomes a capacity that must be utilised, that must be put into service.

— Judy

## Surrender and trust

Many times women describe the feeling of the sourcing experience as being like giving birth. There is something that needs to be expressed, birthed or manifested, although there is no point of reference to steer by and the outcome cannot be anticipated beforehand. Some describe it as “something from somewhere else came through me”. It is an active surrendering to the intangible: trusting the impulse to speak, trusting that the words will come, trusting the colour to pick, trusting the image to follow... trusting something that is not first formed in your conscious conceptual mind, because you know through your subtle awareness that something wants to be expressed. I imagine that this is what every artist has to learn; this is what life is asking from all of us.

Surrendering to these subtle impulses calls for us to commit to courage and honesty; the courage to give up control and let go of the known path, and the honesty to give form and expression to the impulse sensed from within. This is in no way a conscious choice made beforehand about what to say or do. Rather, it is an experience of inner

compulsion; an impulse from life itself, not from any habitual pattern. It is not uncommon to feel yourself quaking, to feel resistance and yet know you are going to do it any way. The experience holds the paradox of being aware of some particular consequences of your choice whilst at the same time feeling you have no choice. There is a strong invitation not to hold back, because life is asking me to do just this. Nothing more and nothing less. If I am true to my deepest self, this is something I cannot *not* do. It is a deep commitment to the whole of life. This is living in the energy of the archetypal Fool of the tarot deck: it looks as if stepping forward will lead to death, and yet *not* stepping forward will lead just as surely to another form of death. It is all or nothing. You can't do it just a little bit, just as you can't be a little bit pregnant...

In the experience of our circles, I would often invite women to continue speaking after they had put down the talking piece. My subtle sensing told me that they had stopped talking when the ideas in their mind were exhausted, but before the real sourcing had begun. They thought everything had been said and wanted to stop their contribution right at the moment when I sensed the sourcing could start. They were so close! In reality, they had come to the end of what was already formed in their minds before they started sharing, and then stopped. I would silently hand them back the talking piece and they would sit with it for a while, then begin to articulate stories and impressions from a deeper place of as-yet-unformed insight.

There is a clearly perceptible difference between the urge coming from our ego-as-habitual-patterns and the impulse coming from source. We all recognise the moments when stuff just wants to fly out of the mouth. This is habitual ego material with an emotional charge behind it, and this charge is often difficult to stop and reflect upon. By contrast, articulating from an impulse arising from the alignment of body, feeling and mind, is quite different. This impulse too can have a certain energetic force to it, but it comes from the subtle realms and, because there is an inner silence present at the same time, we can easily choose *not* to share it, thereby maintaining our flexibility. Of course, when the tendency of our ego-as-habit is to hold back, the very expression of this subtle urge is in itself a novel behaviour. The simple practice of noticing what is going on in our bodies – emotions, feelings, subtle sensing – is extremely valuable here: stay in the body, keep sensing and speak when moved, but otherwise keep quiet.

*Quote from participants:*

One learning for me was: for the first time I trusted myself. I trusted that my ability to discern or decide to speak or to ask was OK. The little mind game was there for a split second, but then I could go on. It was a big awakening to trust my inner knowing.

— Judy

What is calling me is a relatively new appreciation of the unseen forces that are ours to discover and work with. Until the past few years my training and life had made me almost wholly dismissive of anything that wasn't available for analysis. My left-brain is well developed, and I am enthusiastic about linking its abilities to the intuitive and spiritual sides of myself. Moving the edge means taking a leap beyond the conventional wisdom. It means going beyond my own sense of limitation; though I want to remain humble in my assessments. It means stepping off of solid ground and trusting that I will land in a safe place.

— Nancy

## Recognising alignment

For sourcing to happen through you, you need to stay tuned to your body, to be open to all your senses, the subtle ones included. More specifically you need to be open to receive: some kind of impression, an elusive knowing, a certainty, a weak signal, whatever might come through. You need to reach a point where you trust your senses as much as you trust your thinking. I repeat: *as much* as your thinking! Your subtle sensing is crucial, because this is how you discern whether or not you are aligned, both within and without.

This is why sourcing feels so different than coming from a more 'normal' conceptual space of ideas, thoughts and suggestions – all from memory, from what has happened before. I cannot describe it better than one of the participants of the Women Moving the Edge gathering of spring 2009:

I have a strong felt sense of when I am on the edge. I have a somatic experience of where the awareness comes from. In these moments I experience myself as fully contributing, fully of service and the small self disappears or when present shows up in such stark contrast to the moment, that it hardly makes sense. I feel vibrations and much energy flowing through me, but completely and utterly grounded. My deepest desire is to grow into this being a truly embodied state, where I spend much more of my time.

— Cari

One great benefit of alignment – alongside the fact that no internal dialogue is ongoing, the mind is quiet and the body at rest – is that it is an *in-body* experience. You feel safe in your body, in your life, in your work, in the cosmos; you have an overall feeling of belonging to life itself. All you have to do is to show up, be centred and present and listen, within and without. Should something want to express itself through you, then you follow that impulse and give it some form. It's a subtle yet intense inner experience that becomes more recognisable with practice. When we are aligned and balanced, and focus our intention on a certain question or issue, we can picture ourselves as an empty channel or tube. This channel seems to act as an attractor for relevant information to come in.

*Quote from participant:*

Ideas, like tiny tendrils of smoke, are fed into your awareness. You are learning to recognise them for what they are, to give them space and articulate them, act on them. This attracts more. You have now amplified your listening by joining circles of other listeners. The focus of your listening attracts threads of potential that resonate with your intent. It is important for you to understand that when you listen for 'what wants to happen', you can hear only the whispers or echos of your own deeper intent.

— Helen

The alignment and coherence I am describing here relate to the three perennial virtues of Truth, Beauty and Goodness. Ever growing attunement – in all directions – brings us closer to truth or wisdom, creates more beauty and is experienced as good for all and everything. There is a sureness we feel in the body as we reach deeper into these virtues. We all recognise clarity, presence, beauty when we encounter them... they bring us to a place of inner stillness and awe. So, too, can we learn to recognise this energy when we are sharing it together. Somehow it is palpable and we know it.

## Enjoying emergence

As much as our ego-as-habitual-pattern might be afraid of sourcing, there is another part in us that will rejoice in the feeling of being on that edge, at least after some practice. Over time there is a greater sense of comfort in this new space. To be on the edge – the edge of not-yet-knowing how to proceed or what to say – is also to live in anticipation of what is going to emerge. It is exciting, creative, joyful – a vibrant feeling! To me, it reminds me of when I was a child, knowing that something pleasant was going to happen. It has not happened yet ... but the surprise will show up at any moment! I guess this is the feeling of really being alive – and more even than that, it is being at home in life as it unfolds, ourselves included. The energy says "Lets do it!", like children deciding to embark on an adventure beyond what is normally permitted by their parents, to end up with an experience that everyone enjoys.



## Sourcing and similar concepts

At the beginning we live most of the time in the physical world. Then the subtle world becomes equally real. So does the unformed. In the end the unformed actually becomes our home.

— Thomas Hübl

Of course this capacity we call sourcing is not something we have invented. Other, similar concepts come pretty close to what we mean by it. I have tried to clarify the differences between sourcing and concepts like ‘intuition’, ‘felt sense’, ‘inspiration’, ‘imagination’ and ‘presencing’. They all say something about the capacity and process of reaching with your attention into the energetic, subtle levels of reality. In one way or another, they all imply that there are forms of knowing, insight or revelation that originate not from the conceptual mind but from somewhere else. All these forms of knowing can be part of sourcing, depending on the intention and other elements.

**Intuition** is a word more commonly used to express that we know something before it happens or without anyone having told us; we just know, without the proof of ‘objective’ reality. In a way, it is tapping into the subtle layers of reality, be it something as yet unmanifest or, perhaps, something that was previously unconscious. There is no strict distinction between these two, when we use the word intuition. Sometimes intuition might be sourcing, sometimes it is not. What is the same in both is a direct, immediate apprehension of something, through a multi-sensory awareness in combination with intellect. Sourcing is very much an action, a directing of the attention to what is coming into being; it is a verb, a process. It is not a capacity that you either have or you don’t; it can be trained and practiced.

**Felt sense** is a term coined by Eugene Gendlin. He explains:



A felt sense is not a mental experience but a physical one. Physical. A bodily awareness of a situation or person or event. An internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time – encompasses it and communicates it to you all at once rather than detail by detail. Think of it as a taste, if you like, or a great musical chord that makes you feel a powerful impact, a big round unclear feeling. A felt sense doesn't come to you in the form of thoughts or words or other separate units, but as a single (though often puzzling and very complex) bodily feeling.<sup>3</sup>

He developed the process known as 'Focusing' to unravel the felt sense in people and get to its clear meaning. A description by David Rome: "When we first notice a felt sense, it does not have a specific 'aboutness' yet. It is non-conceptual. But as we use the Focusing process to be with and listen to the felt sense, it may come into clearer focus (hence the name Focusing) and it may 'open' in a way that gives us fresh understanding of our situation. At that point – which cannot be rushed – we can begin to try out concepts on it, begin to inquire what it might be 'about.' But the felt sense itself is always primary, not the conceptualisation, and the practice of Focusing involves repeatedly letting go of conceptual activity and returning to the body sense."<sup>4</sup>

If you want to learn more about the clues your body offers, getting acquainted with Focusing is highly recommended. It is guaranteed to enhance your subtle sensing capacity. Gendlin also developed a process called Thinking at the Edge, which builds on the felt sense and Focusing, with the aim of building a conceptual model out of your felt sense.

The difference between Focusing and sourcing is, in my definition, that sourcing is a felt sense about an unmanifest potential: it taps into layers of energy that have not yet come into physical manifestation. Like Focusing, it is a verb and an activity, but sourcing guides your attention to the unmanifest layers of reality, it is getting a felt sense of the future through the potential present in this moment. This is not about 'any' future – because many people have an intuition about what is going to happen, for example, to a relative, or that someone is going to call them on the phone. No, sourcing relates to possibilities that have not existed before, potentials that arise between the question that is central to the inquiry and the deepest source.

Sourcing is different to how **channeling** works for some people. While sourcing, you are very present to the here and now. If you are not aware of what you said, or if you channel information that has no bearing on you personally, then I would not call that sourcing. Sourcing is bringing your attention to the unmanifest that is calling to take form and then speaking and expressing from that place. It is building a conscious partnership with this potential and the future. It is not 'channeling some information' and then going back to your 'normal' life. Sourcing is a life-changing activity, because it will gradually lead you to live closer to your own potential and integrate more of this deeper knowing. In the terms of Otto Scharmer, sourcing is being in a generative conversation with life; in the terms of Jean Gebser, it is living more from Origin.

*Quote from participant:*

With sourcing I am putting words on... I'm trying to find words – and they are mine – that fit with what I am sensing. There is something that I'm sensing and then I fit words to it. The articulation of the words came first, my mind was following the words. ... sourcing is something that comes through and I have to put the sentence together as it emerges and it feels like it won't make any sense until it comes out of my mouth. Sourcing feels like it is being formed as it is coming through. I use the word channeling... as this felt like it was already there. In channeling I have a sense that something is speaking to me, instead of me sensing into it.

— Helen

Sourcing might be very similar to **inspiration**, in the way artists understand it. The painter facing the white canvas or the writer confronting the blank page also have a felt sense of what they want to bring into manifestation – without yet knowing what it will look like. They link up with a future form, and need their ideas and concepts to get out of the way so that the artistic process can happen. Their trained artistic skills can then be put in service of the

emerging form. The way we use sourcing here is to guide us to new wisdom and novel insights, to applications that will help us in the emerging world, that will help us to see the opportunities for the future instead fixating on all the problems and decay.

Sourcing embraces more than **imagination**. I know quite a few people who take the vision formed in their mind's eye as real, and are unable to sense whether that vision is yet ready to surface into manifestation. They might get a sense of future possibilities, but they are too removed from the here-and-now to sense what is the first step to take towards it, leaving them frustrated with themselves and with others, because their vision is not taking form. Sourcing is connecting with the energetic field of something coming into manifestation. It is sensing 'what wants to happen', not what I or we dream of.

Lisette made the distinction clear: "In sourcing I use my whole body, including the first and second chakra – sensing how it feels there. With intuitive vision I look from the third eye (sixth chakra): clear seeing." We can see and we can dream in a way that is not related to insight; but the combination of seeing the bigger picture and connecting with this inner knowing is quite powerful. When we source, there is a deep, aligned knowing and words will find their way if we trust and allow it to happen. Most likely those words will ring true also for the others present. We are often surprised at what we have said and the reaction it causes in the group.

In relation to **presencing**, sourcing is what we do when we reach the bottom of the U in a more direct sense. We have dealt with the voices of judgement, fear and cynicism and we can reach with our awareness to the deepest point. Part of the contribution this book makes to the field of Theory U and similar approaches is to show how sourcing can happen simultaneously in many people, how we can go 'through the eye of the needle' at the bottom of the U as a *collective*, to get direct access to a wider field of possibilities. As distinct from the whole sequence described in the principles in the book Theory U, it is more like what Scharmer describes here as the third possibility: "The U process can be applied to practical situations in three different ways: as process, as a set of field principles, and by operating from the presence of source." The latter he describes as "... as connecting to and operating from the presence of your deepest source, that is, from the bottom of the U. At this level, even the scaffolding of the principles falls away. The connection to this source level is articulated in the three root principles: intentional grounding, relational grounding and authentic grounding. I call them root principles because they relate to and support the other 21 remaining principles like the root system of a tree relates to the visible parts of a tree. They establish a foundation to evoke the presence of a social field – an intentional grounding that serves the whole; a relational grounding that connects to the collective body of the social field; and an authentic grounding that connect you to your essential self as a vehicle for the emerging future."<sup>5</sup>

These three grounding principles are related to the Inner Alignment (authentic grounding) and Outer Alignment (relational grounding) explained in the previous chapters. The intentional grounding relates to the guiding question that is in service of the whole and where the sourcing is applied.

## Some more inspiration...

In his ongoing inquiry into the foundations of reality, Bohm (1980, 1993, 1994, 2003) came to see what he called "unbroken wholeness" as the fundamental reality. He describes "thought as a system" in a way that shows it functioning by limiting, or measuring this unbroken wholeness, correlating with the epistemological field. Bohm used this frame to point to what he referred to as insight, or that which comes from outside or beyond the system of thought, in our framework the ontological dimension. The "event" of insight, coming from the ontological dimension, impacts the system of thought, or epistemological field, in a manner that fundamentally "re-hardwires" it, leading to greater coherence with reality.

— Jonathan Reams<sup>6</sup>

Their way of seeing had to become whole for the wholeness that is ever-present to reveal itself in the normal and natural; for the place of grace, that 'secret place' is 'where we have always been', in the normal and the natural. We just need a new way of peering into the normal and the natural. We need a new kind of view... we are suggesting that the experience of wholeness arises through the *view from wholeness*.

— Jonathan Reams<sup>7</sup>

Bohm (1980) says that: There is in this mechanical process no inherent reason why the thoughts that arise should be relevant or fitting to the actual situation that evokes them. The perception of whether or not any particular thoughts are relevant requires the operation of an energy that is not mechanical, an energy we shall call *intelligence*. This latter is able to perceive a new order or a new structure, that is not just a modification of what is already known or present in memory. For example, one may be working on a puzzling problem for a long time. Suddenly, in a flash of understanding, one may see the irrelevance of one's whole way of thinking about the problem, along with a different approach in which all the elements fit in a new order and in a new structure. Clearly, such a flash is essentially *an act of perception*, rather than a process of thought, . . . though later it may be expressed in thought.

— Jonathan Reams<sup>8</sup>

This "*act of perception*" is distinguished from the system of thought, indicating a kind of intelligent perception in which "the brain and nervous system respond directly to an order in the universal and unknown flux that cannot be reduced to anything that could be defined in terms of knowable structures".

— Jonathan Reams<sup>9</sup>

"Primary knowing" arises by means of "interconnected wholes, rather than isolated contingent parts and by means of timeless, direct, presentation" rather than through stored "re-presentation." "Such knowing is open rather than determinate, and a sense of unconditional value, rather than conditional usefulness, is an inherent part of the act of knowing itself," said Rosch. Acting from such awareness is "spontaneous, rather than the result of decision making," and it is "compassionate... since it is based on wholes larger than the self."

As [Eleanor] Rosch told Otto [Scharmer], all these attributes – timeless, direct, spontaneous, open, unconditional value, and compassionate – go together as one thing. That one thing is what some in Tibetan Buddhism call "the natural state" and what Taoism calls "the Source".

— Jeremy Smyth<sup>10</sup>

Gebser says "... contemplation is the mode of mystic perception, ..."

— Jean Gebser<sup>11</sup>

Gendlin speaks about 'natural knowing', about 'natural understanding':

At first it brings one's attention, not to new clarities, but rather to something muddy, a murky body-state – a felt sense. It may seem as if it were something private, merely an inner feeling-tone. But the subjective side is not private. When explication comes, it shows that a felt sense is all about the world.

He talks about 'dipping into' a Felt Sense and then 'explicating' it.

Explicating changes it, and leads to renewed dipping and another change-step, and another, to more and more new experience.

Our bodies imply every next bit of our further living. An action can explicate this implicit further living, and can carry it forward.

— Eugene Gendlin <sup>12</sup>

George Leonard coined the term Focused Surrender while working on *The Silent Pulse*. He noted that every episode of grace or ‘perfect rhythm’ described in the book involved the unlikely marriage of trying and not trying, of zeroing-in and letting go. It appeared that both focused intentionality and the surrender of ego were necessary for experiencing existence at such a fundamental level and creating what often appeared miraculous....

There’s no question but that ego has great power, but it also has limitations. If we entertain the notion that the universe somehow already contains all information, all possibilities, and that each of us is a context of the universe from a particular point of view, then we might say that to create a sharply focused, vivid image of what we are seeking serves to ‘tune’ our being to that precise possibility. But that’s not enough. The striving, the ego still gets in the way. When we surrender, relinquishing the ego with its limitations, we open the way for grace, news from the universe, a direct connection with the divine...

— George Leonard, Michael Murphy <sup>13</sup>

## Notes

1: Alfred North Whitehead: *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*. (1929)

2: William Isaacs: *Dialogue*. ↓

3: Eugene Gendlin: *Focusing*. ↓

4: David Rome: *Searching for the Truth that Is Far Below the Search*. ↓

5: Otto Scharmer: *Theory U*, ↓ p.436.

6: Jonathan Reams: *Wholeness Lost/Wholeness Regained: A Process Model View* ↓ p.4.

7: Ibid, p.9.

8: Ibid, p.51.

9: Ibid, p.53.

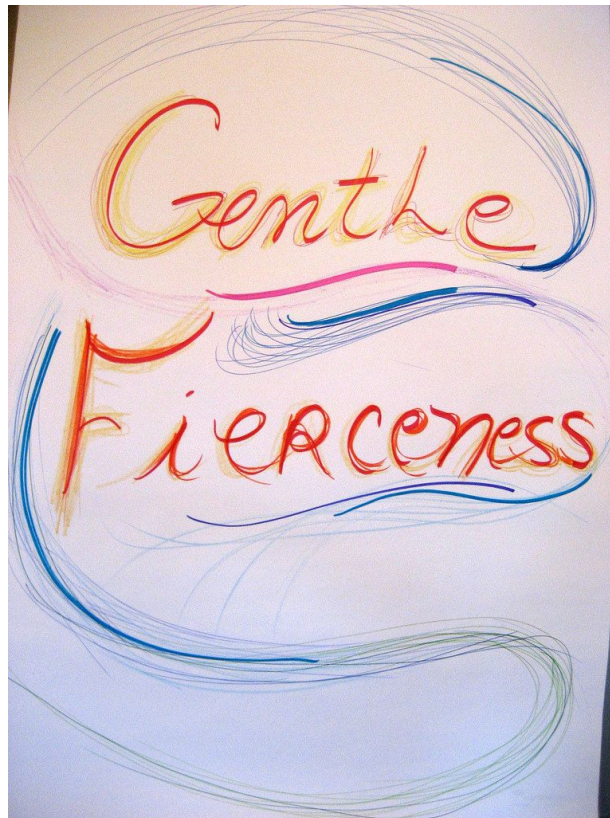
10: Jeremy Smyth: *Analytic Knowing v. Primary Knowing*. ↓

11: Jean Gebser: *The Ever-Present Origin* ↓ p.24.

12: Eugene Gendlin: *Crossing and Dipping* ↓

13: George Leonard, Michael Murphy: *The Life We Are Given* ↓

## 4.5 What if we are gathering for the world?



### Women Moving the Edge Part 4

Our guiding questions were many in that first gathering in Belgium, most of them related to the topic of Women and Leadership. Not in the sense of businesswomen taking (more) leadership, but we wanted to inquire into a new and wider interpretation of this concept. We wanted to integrate more the elements of support, care, grounding etc. Soon enough it dawned on us that we were doing something bigger, something beyond an inquiry into this nicely stated topic. The questions came up: “What if we are gathering for the world? Not just for ourselves? And from a design perspective: how to help this bigger unfolding?” After all, the invitation stated we were about ‘moving the edge of consciousness’. But how would that translate into action, day-to-day life, projects, etc?

We had high hopes for what could emerge in the space between us. Still it was quite a challenge to create something collective; while starting with individual participants who didn’t know each other beforehand. How to move into the space collectively? Finn had talked about the magic in the middle: it needed all of us before it could be there.

Both being trainers and consultants, Judy and myself had hopes for the forming of a community and paid work that could come out of the network of participants in the gathering or some projects afterwards. It didn’t happen the way we envisioned it. We realized later – as we would encounter similar expectations in others in the next gatherings – that whenever these expectations were driven by our patterns of anxiety or other ego-stuff, it wouldn’t work; these



collective gatherings were not intended to support any personal motivation! They were in service of a bigger evolutionary unfolding.

There's one more piece that has to do with our framing of how you recreate the world. The world is recreated through this practice. Change happens through this practice, but it's change that isn't manipulated. It is change that is evoked from the inside out.

— Circle of Seven <sup>1</sup>

## Notes

1: Circle of Seven: *The Presence of the Circle Being* ↓

## 4.6 Opening to Authentic Collective Wisdom



Silence is not a blank. It is a possibility about to be born.

— after Deepak Chopra <sup>1</sup>

This chapter ends, like the previous ones, with a piece of the *Circle of Presence* map and a deeper dive into the column called *I and Potential*.

A potential is something that can become manifest (or not), but that has not yet taken form. Focusing our attention on this possibility means sensing what has some *present energy* intimating that it can come into manifestation quickly and easily. What is waiting to be born? Which seed is about to germinate?

The ability to sense immanent manifestation potential builds on the capacity to be consciously present in all the previous domains: being present to what is going on inside myself, inside the others in the group, within the group's field (regarding its intention and purpose) – all at the same time. Thanks to this careful extending of our attention, we are able to recognise what is ready to come to the surface and we can build on this sensing when taking our next steps.

There is a special kind of trust involved in this process, as we extend our balance out into the world. In complex situations, it is not straightforward to know what best to say or do – for sure there is no right or wrong in such situations. The key is to stay centred and open, trusting that sooner or later the next shard of insight will crystallise and become accessible. In short, this means trusting that you are able to connect with the subtle in a conscious way. Otto Scharmer refers to this in his Circle of Seven conversation: “The second condition is clearing the horizontal space by unconditional love. When I interviewed Peter Senge a couple of years ago, he talked about love in terms of “showing up and being present.” That was his definition of love. Showing up and being present. Fully present with.

And the third condition maybe has to do with having the trust that the presence, or whatever you name it, is going to show up and do the work.”

As we explore *I and Potential*, we focus our attention on the emergence of new and collectively shared meaning and deeper patterns, looking out for the truly novel insight that has not existed before, that springs up only at the centre of our joint effort and attention. It is through witnessing all input and all perspectives, connecting and cross-fertilising, weaving back and forth, that collective knowing-as-experience can emerge. This practice asks us to perceive all phenomena – everything that is happening in the room, within and around us and in the wider field – *as they are*. It requires us to refrain from sifting through these phenomena, judging them with our habitual mind as not valid or meaningful and discarding them; when we do this we miss the weak signals.

We need a deep inner stillness to be able to listen to the subtle that is knocking on the door. Most often it is soft and has a poetic quality. It appears to us in images and dreams. It speaks in the uneasiness of our hearts, is present as an undercurrent in our stories and becomes evident in signs from nature.

How can we let go into something that is emerging? As we focus our attention on something new that might show up, the inner movement is one of deep surrender. What comes through will have an unknown and fresh quality and will most likely be quite different than anything we might have had in mind. Proceeding in this way gives a very different twist to change processes. It is no longer we who decide what the future will look like. Rather, we are sensing what wants to develop once we set the initial parameters, namely our conscious intention through a guiding question and our shared attention through the circle practice.

Once you have attained a dedicated field like this that is sustained over time, you can experience the effect of sustained collective attention on things. Trust springs from trustworthy action that you experience repeatedly, time and again. This trust develops from the consistent lived experience of how life, or the field, works on things that have been held in this way. We have many stories to tell about how this has worked. Now we laugh about it. We are no longer so tempted to manipulate. We are no longer seeking to fix things.

..... My view is that people can do this on purpose. If they practice doing it and get good at it as a group, if they can sustain it for long enough to see results, they can influence the outer world.  
— Circle of Seven<sup>2</sup>

Most people do not yet have much (if any) experience of reaching novel wisdom in a group in this way, and yet somehow we can imagine what it must be like. It seems possible to get there, all we need is practice.

## 1. Noticing what is – in *I and Potential*: listen from a connected stillness

What does it mean to focus on the here and now, to be open to the full experience of potential? What kind of observation does it take?

Above all, *noticing what is, in relation to potential* calls for truly deep listening. Deeper than being sensitive to what is happening in the group, we are listening for hints or intimations of what is *not present yet*. By definition, such signs are subtle, not existent in the manifest realm. Indeed, this is the art not of actively listening for something specific, but of listening from the stillness inside yourself. Once you are there, you reach out to connect, in the same field of stillness, with the others who are in the shared inquiry with you.

In this connected stillness, we open ourselves up to a subtle collective shared space. Fascinatingly, when this space is present, it is palpable. It has a kind of consistency to it, as if the air between us has some substance. At the same time, we open the common field of our shared attention to receive what wants to be known. In other words, there is an active aspect to this movement, as we seek and find this inner experience of deep silence, and intentionally reach out to connect with the others in this realm of stillness. There is also a passive aspect, that resides in the receiving: we acknowledge that we can hear, see, sketch, know things from the subtle realm – even when we do not yet see or

understand their relation to anything that could materialise as a novel insight or new collective wisdom. What we receive can be a subtle feeling or an image of the energetic blueprint, waiting for us to see it, co-create and manifest it.

## 2. Accepting what is – in I and Potential: perceive the phenomena in the subtle field of potential

Acknowledging that we can somehow communicate with ‘that-which-is-not-yet’ stretches not only my own, default vision but also our shared vision. In general, our vision is constructed of former experiences, memories and gleaned knowledge, then projected along a linear trajectory into the future. In other words, our visions are projections of the past into the future. *Accepting what is in I and potential* means acknowledging a different source of knowledge that is not memory, and accepting that other things are possible besides what we have experienced so far.

*Accepting what is in I and potential* is the gateway into synchronicity. Synchronicity can be seen as small, or not-so-small, signs – proofs, even – of the validity of this kind of subtle or inner knowing. Working with synchronicity means accepting such signs and signals as valid information. We need some kind of training to perceive these phenomena without immediately categorising them as invalid, not functional or not useful, instead validating them as meaningful to the tasks at hand or the focus question in our midst. As LaChapelle says so beautifully: “Humbly recognise the presence of wisdom...”

In this connection, I am *not* talking about some naïve belief that everything, every situation (including the bad ones) has (to have) a meaning. The phenomena I am pointing to here are born out of the deeper silence, the shared field of stillness. There is no place here for an egoic need for meaning. Rather, we focus on what emerges, with no active search for ‘the’ meaning. It is an active receiving and perceiving of whatever is present in the conversation, in and around us, even outside this group and the space we are in.

The quality of witnessing or holding that we’re talking about here is personal identification with source in the circle. Something like: the eyes through which you see, the heart through which you feel, the ears with which you listen are not personal.

What I’m picturing right now is that, when something starts to happen, when something is coming to focus in the room, then I feel that the circle knows how to back into the power of the field.

So there is very little projection onto the situation. There is little intent other than opening to what life wants to have happen right then. There’s sensitivity without manipulation. A spirit of blessing. And a deep trust in the quality of that presence.

— Circle of Seven<sup>2</sup>

An important skill in this regard, as a member of a *Circle of Presence*, has to do with timing. This means becoming so aware of the group’s field that you know when is the right moment to bring in your own contribution in service of the group and in support of this field. After some time, you might even start to sense who needs next to bring in their gift into the circle. You can then invite them in if they do not sense it themselves. This is an ongoing process of learning and there are few rules or practices to offer. When all participants are attending to this, however, you can feel the flow in the conversation, in the meeting, throughout the whole day. Even suggestions for a change in agenda are welcomed and easily agreed on, because everyone can sense that they fit in the collective process.

## 3. Honouring what is – in I and Potential: open to the courage to share my impulses

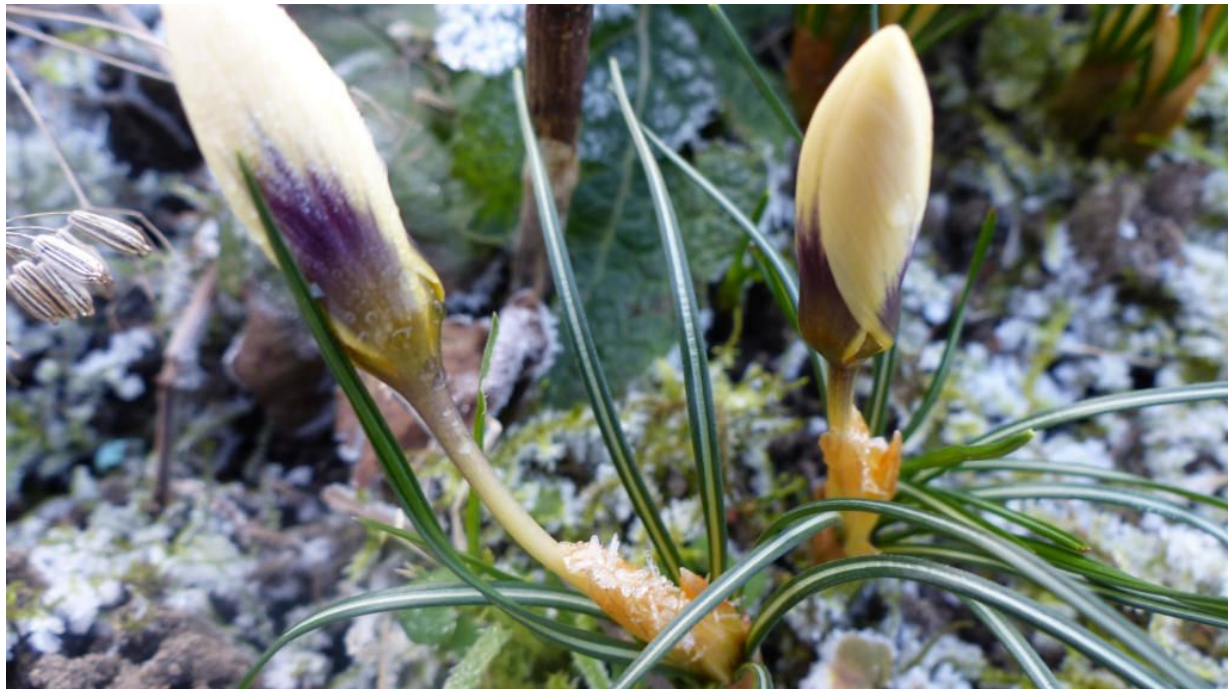


Phenomena are not only ‘out there’. In the shared stillness, images, stories and impulses come to the surface in our inner landscapes. We need to learn to see these as part of the collective wisdom. *Honouring what is in I and potential* means recognising that I do receive parts of the collective wisdom and, on a deeper level, realising that I am always connected with it. This corresponds to the phase of ‘letting come’ described by Scharmer in the U-process. These impulses come from our Authentic Self, free of emotional attachments. But they also come from and through our unique collective field of attention.

Back in the days of our earliest experiments, we needed a lot of practice and a great deal of courage and willingness to voice our own sparks of wisdom, which might have been prompted by a personal memory, an old fairy tale or a recent scientific theory. Sharing our inner knowing, our unique perspective, our subtle impulses regarding the issue and the question at hand is central to reaching Authentic Collective Wisdom: if one of us holds back, we will miss one piece of the puzzle. This is often hard enough to do for ourselves, let alone recognising the stories and information shared by others as wisdom too. Nevertheless, this is just as important.

The emergence of collective wisdom has a lot to do with ‘connecting the dots’. If you do not value your own dot, or if you disregard the dots that others have brought to the table, you will not see the patterns nor stumble upon some new meaning, and so emergence will not happen. All the words, images and information from the deeper and inner levels are available to everyone. They are accessible to us as we sit together in this meditative state of shared stillness at the same time as we focus on the question in the middle.

All this is not to say that *all* impulses shared in the circle have equal value or relevance for the shared purpose. We all have to learn to discern where our impulses are coming from and we can only learn this by doing it, by trying it out. But as we focus on emergence, we dare not reject any piece of the puzzle before we have a shared understanding of what is coming through. We must hold all the pieces in our view, without judgement, until something finally clicks and we all know we have reached something truly innovative.



#### **4. Living what is – in I and Potential: act on new insights**

As recounted in an earlier chapter, I reworked William Isaacs’ concept of a container into what we came to call the ‘container meditation’, which was actually a collective contemplation. Out of the collective stillness, alignment and balance that arose in the shared silence, we would focus on a question or issue that was important to us at that time.



We learned to give voice to the wisdom we would receive in this way. Indeed, truths would surface that had a deep personal and transformative meaning for all of us.

Later, we used this method to seek very practical guidance in our lives. With practice, seeking and receiving information in this way becomes very easy. While answers might present themselves if you learn to listen, actually acting on the received information presents another challenge. Sometimes it calls for major or minor decisions that don't necessarily fit our default schedules. *Really* honouring the information we receive opens us up to the courage to live by it: firstly to voice it in this circle, later to act on it, including in other situations and in the wider world.

Connecting with information received inside, without prior processing by the analytical and cognitive faculties of the mind, requires a strong belief and trust in a greater field of wisdom. In reality, though, there is no field 'out there' – we are part of life, and wisdom and innovation are part of it also. I used to see this as a reciprocal movement: noticing that there is real wisdom to be gained though this practice will amplify our trust in this way of seeking knowledge and information. However, the connection is really deeper and more interwoven than a simple back and forth reciprocity. Truly, this is a co-creation.

The container we have built together, by going through all the stages and expanding to embrace all the domains, is now ready to receive the fullness of our collective wisdom, and we are ready to act on it. All of a sudden, we now see the puzzle we have been trying to solve, and it resembles nothing we had ever imagined. We never know what it will look like when we start, but there comes a point when we all see it and know it. In the metaphor of the puzzle, what is crucial is seeing and recognising the connections and patterns. Patterns are of a different order than the items of information we first gathered. The patterns are what will bring everyone to a new level of understanding. From this deepened, embodied collective insight, the first steps of action become obvious without effort and can easily be put into practice.

Once you and your group or team get used to this way of working, you will wonder how you could ever have survived on a diet of strict planning, discussion or debate. The quality of listening and sensing, together with a sharply defined and conscious intention, make for a relaxed atmosphere that still brings us into action. It can be recognised from the outside that the action you come up with is not merely a repetition of the old, but is truly innovative. That is reward enough in itself for adopting this new practice.

## Notes

1: This quote is in keeping with the words of Deepak Chopra, but no source has been traced.

2a: 2b: Circle of Seven: *The Presence of the Circle Being* ↓

## 4.7 The Circle of Presence map

The previous chapters have described the building blocks of a map offering an overview of all the levels and domains that come into play in becoming and being a *Circle of Presence* – a group that, through the practices described, has achieved access to its authentic and unique collective wisdom. In this section, we will explore more deeply the dynamics implicit in this map.

### Circle of Presence Map

<b>Circle of Presence</b> <b>Building capacity for Authentic Collective Wisdom in service of wise action</b>		<b>Process of Outer Alignment: Widening Balance</b> <b>Growing Awareness of Complexity and Interrelatedness</b>			
		<b>I and Myself</b>	<b>I and You</b>	<b>I and Us</b>	<b>I and Potential</b>
		<i>Focus on:</i> my inner being  <i>Open to:</i> opening	<i>Focus on:</i> the inner being of the other  <i>Open to:</i> connecting	<i>Focus on:</i> the group's field, the inner collective  <i>Open to:</i> holding	<i>Focus on:</i> emergence  <i>Open to:</i> surrendering
<b>Process of Inner Alignment: Unfolding Authenticity</b>	<b>Notice what is – Open Mind</b> <i>Focus on:</i> here and now <i>Open to:</i> full experience	Open to the full experience of my inner being	Listen to the inner being of others	Notice the group's field and uncover shared assumptions	Listen from a connected stillness
	<b>Accept what is – Open Heart</b> <i>Focus on:</i> widening <i>Open to:</i> trusting the subtle experience	Widen my self-image and integrate my subtle inner experiences	See the other's authentic self – integrate my shadow parts	Widen my view on the group's field and see others' full potential	Perceive the phenomena in the subtle field of potential
	<b>Honour what is – Open Heart</b> <i>Focus on:</i> deepening <i>Open to:</i> moving beyond	Deepen my self-image and connect with my inner gifts	Deepen my heart to common humanity	Understanding holding space and being held by the group's field	Open to the courage to share my subtle impulses – Sourcing
	<b>Live what is – Open Will</b> <i>Focus on:</i> sharing and expressing <i>Open to:</i> living authentically	Share and express my unique gifts  Opening up to <b>authentic self</b>	Appreciate and invite diversity in any relationship  Opening up to <b>authentic relationship</b>	Full participation in the group's field  Opening up to this <b>authentic group</b>	See new insights and act on them  Opening up to <b>authentic collective wisdom</b>

## Unfolding process along two dimensions

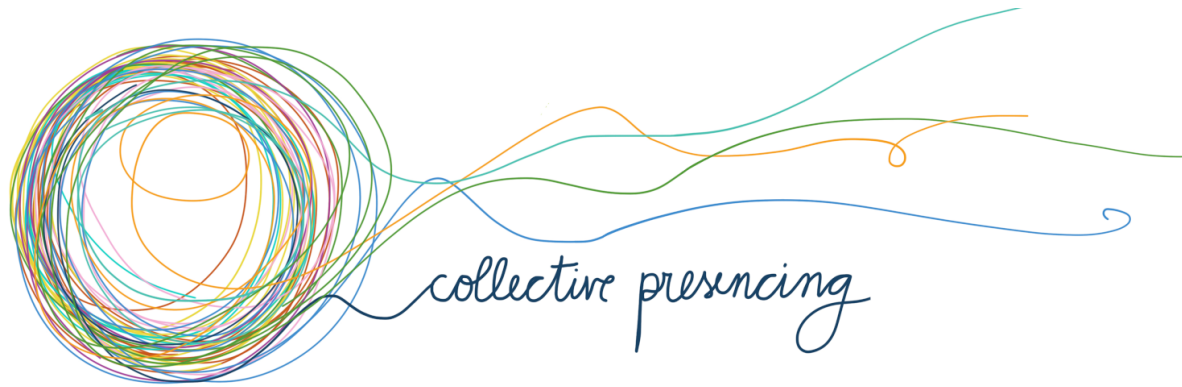
Building this container for authentic collective wisdom together can be described in terms of a process unfolding along two dimensions.

The vertical dimension – *unfolding authenticity* – invites us to become aware of and grounded in what is real and to clear away what prevents us from being fully present. This is the unfolding of our own shared and collective authenticity. This process of inner alignment brings us into ever deeper connection with authenticity freed from limiting conditioning. This process can also be described as a movement of unfolding resonance between our mental,

emotional, physical and subtle bodies. Step by step we can reintegrate our shadow parts – in emotion, thought and action; as we journey, we are cultivating our inner leadership. We become able to experience moments of stillness within ourselves, and can experience ourselves as a kind of channel that can resonate with what is present. Through or as this channel, it is easier to relate to the subtle realms, to spirit and source.

The horizontal dimension – *widening balance* – is a parallel process whereby we learn to open ourselves and connect with an ever-expanding reality, extending from I myself out to the other(s) and beyond that to the future potential of this group. This widening balance is about being aware of greater complexity and interconnectedness, experiencing a growing connection with more and more of what is outside of you. As we reach out to others in the circle, and beyond that into the space and the environment we are in, and beyond that to the other beings on the planet (human, animal, vegetable and mineral), we can sense our way into and ever more expansive outer alignment. At moments we can have a deep experience of balance and harmony. This is the level of outer alignment we seek.

These two dimensions of unfolding authenticity and widening balance – the inner and outer alignment – expand and entwine. One way of visualising this is as two upward spirals intertwining and supporting each other. More accurate still would be an image of tendrils of smoke, all intermingling and co-creating a unified image. I distinguish between the processes of inner and outer alignment for the sake of clarity and ease of understanding only. These two movements are happening at the same time; they are fully entangled as aspects of the same thing. A step in one domain will make it easier to advance in another domain also. As a rule of thumb to follow, the further we develop through this map, the more ease and beauty we will experience. Prototyping and innovation will be natural outcomes of the process.



## 5. Closing and Opening Anew: Paradigm Shift

5.1 Conscious closure

5.2 A human capacity as beyond paradoxes

5.3 No brand, no organisation – WMtE part 5



## 5.1 Conscious closure



Here we were again, gathered in our little women's circle of four. It was always great to catch up on each other's life and work stories, share books and information and whip up a tasty potluck lunch with the dishes we had each brought. This time, though, something felt different for me. As I drove up to the house where we were to meet, I wondered what would be next, where we were heading. It was always uplifting and rewarding to be together and our gatherings had been of immense value to me, but were they still? Was our circle still serving my and our evolution? Were we still learning or, sweet as it was, had we settled into a rut?

I shared my thoughts in the circle: either it was time to end our shared journey of many years, or we had to dive deeper to sense afresh the next phase of our collective purpose. I spoke rather reluctantly – it was almost unthinkable that we might not gather again, as we had done for so many years. Nevertheless, my proposal struck a chord with the others, and we decided not to make a new appointment unless one of us sent out a new invitation. We parted feeling somewhat disoriented, but calm and quiet.

That was the end of our shared journey; no new invitation was ever sent. We never came together again in the same way. The group had served its purpose, perhaps reaching the end of its potential. This experience was a lesson for me in conscious closure (a term I learned later from Vanessa Reid). If you stay tuned to the subtle levels and future potential, you too will perceive when something is over, with no need for struggle. Done.

The new form, with a different purpose and potential, came into being with the Women Moving the Edge gatherings. In my little Flemish women's group, we had learned along the way what it means to be fully present. Now the road opened to another purpose and another potential: how to be truly co-creative and generative. This was a different journey altogether.

It is a big shift.

A different paradigm.

A great transition.

In so many ways,

at so many levels.

## 5.2 A human capacity as beyond paradoxes



Our tendency to conceptualize our own mental activities in terms of subject-object relations and of the inner-outer dimension has been noted, as has the evident ease with which we project these notions inward and outward to explain all manner of creation and change, stability and intractability. We have an ancient heritage of thought about essence and appearance, form and matter, about the necessary as universal and the contingent as variable. These ideas are so interwoven and so deeply entrenched in our intellectual tradition that it is difficult to think in other terms. Attempts to find alternative ways end up being complicated and obscure, thus only contributing to the conceptual inertia they are challenging.

— Susan Oyama<sup>1</sup>

Mutations have always appeared when the prevailing consciousness structure proved to be no longer adequate for mastering the world. This was the case in the last historically accessible mutation which occurred around 500 BC and led from the mythical to the mental structure. The psychistic, deficient mythical climate of that time presented a threat, and the sudden onset of the mental structure brought about a decisive transformation. In our day the rationalistic, deficient mental structure presents an equal threat, and the breakthrough into the integral will also bring about a new and decisive mutation.

— Jean Gebser<sup>2</sup>

At the moment of mutation, a previously latent aspect of the world is not just set free; its release reveals for a few decades a more intense radiance of origin.

— Jean Gebser<sup>3</sup>

The original articulation of the purpose of our gatherings, ‘moving the edge of collective intelligence’ was adequate at the outset of our journey of exploration. Over the years, however, the term ‘collective intelligence’ has been used to describe many things by different people, and none of those truly corresponded to our shared experiences. Accordingly, we toyed with terms like ‘collective wisdom’ (including the heart in our intelligence) and ‘collective leadership’ (stressing the aspect of shared leadership), but none of these really fit either. It took some years before we settled on the term ‘collective presencing’, building on the name given to the work pioneered by Otto Scharmer, with the difference that our work gave much greater attention to the specific dimensions of the inner, the subtle and the collective.

It is no longer a secret that a paradigm shift is ongoing in our world today. The mutation described by Jean Gebser (see quotes) is much more profound than most people imagine. It is not simply a next step in our development, which will call for some training – as challenging as that may be. Rather, it is a radically new way of perceiving life and reality in general, which influences the totality of our thinking, feeling and behaving, grounded in a different place than we are used to. Firstly, this movement transcends paradoxes, dichotomies and dialectical thinking. In the West, we tend to understand polarity as dualities, opposites or antinomies whereas the Asiatic view tends to experience it as complementaries, correspondences and interdependence. We are now heading towards an embrace of these ‘opposites’ or ‘paradoxes’, integrating them into a totally new view and – just as important – into corresponding new practices.

The current chapter serves as a transition from a *Circle of Presence* to a *Circle of Creation*, the term we have coined to denote the collective entity that practices collective presencing at its fullest potential. There is a world of difference between learning to be present in a circle of people (the practice in a *Circle of Presence*, with all that it entails in terms of clarity on emotional issues and the like) and becoming truly co-creative and generative in and with life itself. The difference is not superficial – indeed, there is a chasm to cross: to transition from a *Circle of Presence* to a *Circle of Creation* is to make the very paradigm shift that is currently embroiling humanity at this time. Here we look at some of the facets of that shift, and seek to offer a glimpse of what life could look like on the other side. Taken together, the practices that reflect this shift suggest the emergence of this human capacity: a collective and shared sensing, ‘insighting’ and generating capacity. I speak here not of a new, unified ‘We’, or ‘we-field’ where our egos love to belong, but of a unification-in-diversity (term from Bonnitta Roy) of being human and being alive on this earth.

I hope that by offering some distinctions and being as precise as possible about the differences, I can shed more light on what is and becomes possible. By sharing the bigger picture, I envision that people will be able to recognise the next step they want to take, that they will now be able to integrate what had previously been beyond their view. Just as reading books and interviews by Otto Scharmer and many others, and attending numerous Art of Hosting training sessions allowed me to garner the practices and language for what I was – and we were – experiencing, so I now wish to contribute to this field of knowledge and practice.

## The dawning of Integral Consciousness

As predicted mid-way through the last century by Jean Gebser, integral consciousness is emerging in humanity at this time. In his fascinating book *The Ever-Present Origin*, he offers many definitions of integral consciousness, calling it an *a-perspectival* consciousness structure, “a consciousness of the whole, an integral consciousness encompassing all time and embracing both man’s distant past and his approaching future as a living present.” With the dawning of this consciousness, the artificial structures and boundaries of dualistic thought become transparent, allowing us to ‘see’ beyond them and invite life to present itself to us more directly, putting us on the path that leads out of the maps and into the territory.

This kind of integral consciousness affords us fresh insights into our world, illuminating some of the collective shadows that threaten to draw global civilisation into a spiral of destruction. We see that, as a result of the hyper-rational, dualistic worldview that shapes the dominant culture in today’s Western world, every aspect of our society is founded on dichotomies that split the world into mutually exclusive parts, which we then organise our lives around as if they were real. We see this reflected everywhere we look: in spiritual and religious traditions founded on the

split between light and dark, good and evil; in scientific and professional disciplines sundered from each other by classifications which have ossified into nigh-on unbreachable barriers; in architecture and lifestyles that seek to protect human society from incursions by (wild) nature, and so on.

Dialectical thinking (currently considered to be the most advanced form of our cognitive and intellectual capacity) sees reality as a tension between thesis and antithesis, to be resolved by means of a synthesis. This conceptual reasoning has a major pitfall: the synthesis takes us each time to a higher level of abstraction, moving us away from the experiences of life itself. The synthesis then becomes a new thesis, reaction to which creates a new antithesis, requiring further abstraction to reconcile the tension in a fresh synthesis. Many centuries in this mental paradigm have done more than enshrine the idea of 'progress' as our highest social ideal. So mired are we in dialectical thinking that we now even see evolutionary change in these terms.

The dissolution of artificial boundaries that accompanies the emergence of integral consciousness opens out into a space so different that we scarcely have the words to describe it – indeed, we begin to recognise just how short language falls in conveying the richness of the phenomenological flux that is our ongoing experience. So-called opposites such as 'inside/outside', 'self/other', 'personal/impersonal', 'body/mind', 'society/nature', 'us/them', 'global/local', 'singular/plural', 'figure/ground', 'before/after' lose their meaning as such – and since such polarities bear no more relevance, the very concept of 'perspective' drops away. This brings a whole different meaning to the aphorism "We see the world not as it is, but as we are." As I/we step into this 'a-perspectival' space, the world is transformed, and so is my/our experience of it. I/we step out of the mental map and into the territory of life itself. The shift is fractal: the pattern repeats at every level of scale, from the personal to the global, inner, outer, visible, invisible, singular, plural, past, present, future.

Through the practices of a *Circle of Presence*, as described in the previous chapters, we come to realise that our understanding and thinking need to align with our body and our subtle, animal senses – and then we practice life accordingly. Living in the territory, unconditioned by old maps and models, novel knowing arises from direct experience, and the entangled body/mind is re-membered as the creative faculty through which new realities arise.

The full potential of collective presencing, as it is enacted in the *Circle of Creation*, widens and deepens the embodiment of this new paradigm, presaging a transformation in every aspect of our experience:

- Being a unique and individuated individual becomes the condition that offers the requisite diversity needed for a totally present and generative group space.
- Time and space are interwoven more deeply, more seamlessly into our overall experience in novel and subtle ways.
- Being alive is being present to the pulse of what is unfolding now (instead of a repetition of past habits).





Where dialectical reasoning creates new mental syntheses from pairings of opposites, we are now able to perceive the actuality and phenomenology of life as it unfolds. Instead of understanding the world in terms of static structure, we now – also – see dynamic processes everywhere: the dichotomies of dualistic thought morph into the generative orders underlying the continual becoming of all that is. Even time is liberated from its unidirectional progression from the past to the future, revealing the seamless and eternal dance of the fruit and the seed, whereby the potentials of the future generate the actualities of the present at the same time as the actualities of the present realise the potentials of the future.

The potential implications of such a paradigmatic shift for both the individual and the collective are mind-boggling. One defining characteristic that could help to apprehend the new paradigm might be named as ‘interpenetration’ and/or ‘interweaving’. The concept of partnership (meaning relationship between equals) is considered ‘state-of-the-art’ practice in participatory and sustainability circles; one thinks of partnership between people – stakeholders, businesses, public-private-civil society, men and women, universities and businesses, and so on. In the new paradigm, partnership is to be understood as a mutual influence that goes in all directions and through all dimensions; actually directions and dimensions fall away entirely. We extend beyond partnership with humans only and into reciprocal relationship with everything that exists, however we wish to parse that out: co-creating with nature, with place, with the social field, with the subtle realms, with the field of potential... all the while realising that boundaries exist as membranes of connection and that influence and learning can go all the way up and down, in and out, through the individual and the collective.

Another characteristic of the new paradigm could be articulated as a focus on and an openness to potential and generative actions; seeing and experiencing all of life as a process. The narrative of today’s mainstream society is one of problems and solutions, where the present is a problem and the cause is (in) the past. It shows us a world of turbulence and complexity that we must somehow navigate and seek to guide to our human ends. The new paradigm offers a much wider and deeper view, seeing the opportunities implicit in the present, building on what came before, choosing to focus on what else is possible and opening to what is emerging. This calls us to be fully present to *all* that is – perceived difficulties and strangers included – allowing it all to participate in the arising of the novel. There is a constant opening up in many directions and to many dimensions, from a present sense of aliveness in *‘this is*

*what is*’, to the possible next unfoldings immanent in every moment-of-now. Our attention and intention are focused on the ever-present process of enacting more of our (human and other) potential.

Here are some examples of how life unfolds in the new paradigm, what it might be like – and what it entails – to live there.

## **Beyond Us and Them – by circles of expanding diversity**

One difference between a *Circle of Presence* and a *Circle of Creation* is the wider meaning of diversity of who and what we invite in. Inviting in more diversity runs counter to the unifying trend we see unfolding in the current paradigm: a pattern of inexorable cultural hegemony whereby the dominant culture (let’s call it neo-liberal capitalism) forces more and more people and cultures to capitulate to its values – which of course represent only a tiny fraction of the sum total of human experience. In the cultural conflicts simmering and exploding by turns all over the planet, we see the truth that cultures are incommensurable: they cannot be judged relative to each other or reduced to common denominators. The loss of diversity that would result from the imposition of a monolithic human culture would preclude any further ability to evolve!

In the practice of a *Circle of Creation*, the meaning of diversity changes, and that with which we can claim kinship and partnership expands beyond culture, gender, even species. We can begin to embrace and express more of our nature than just what we have come to think of as ‘human’ – much of which we have actually inherited from our animal nature: the capacity to play and bond, our energetic sense of place and space, our instinctive inner knowing about timing and rhythm, a natural synergy of nurturing and leadership and so much more. This is the diversity we must weave ourselves back into if we wish to navigate the complexity of our world with ease and grace.

When we invite diversity into our shared inquiry, this diversity is not restricted to the different views, ethnicities, ages and backgrounds of the people we have called in. To become a *Circle of Creation* we need not only to be fully present (with thinking, feeling, sensing and reflecting), but also to see the invitation inherent when so-called ‘disturbance’ shows up and so-called ‘strangers’ enter the room. We can learn how to embrace difference through empathic conversation, but we need to take our conversational skills one step further and learn to engage in deep, generative dialogue. Ultimately we need to practice, again and again, how to speak and live generatively – all the time, with all the people around us, and with everything else that exists.

Being fully present in a co-creative endeavour is in itself an expression of love. In cultivating the capacity to be in co-creation with many different people, rather than seeking to be just with like-minded souls, we discover an astonishing truth: *you don’t need to like everyone, but you can love them all!* Beyond sympathy and even empathy there is a sense of love that is accessible and that is the only thing that counts in journeys of joint creation. We speak here of unconditional love, not entrained by the attachment we usually associate with that emotion. The love at play here is not the energy of missing someone, or preferring one place, person or situation over another – I see it as the connective and energetic fabric that encompasses all that is in life and alive – even beyond the boundaries we associate with death. This kind of love seeks to be of service and flows through us, not from us.

## **Beyond Knowing and Feeling – through collective inquiry and sourcing**

As we learn to experience ourselves as embedded in the continuous process of creation rather than separate from it, and as we step away from our mental models and into direct relationship with what is and what is unfolding, we open up to a *wholeness of knowing* that weaves mental and conceptual clarity with subtle sensing and, above all, with the implicit, tacit understanding – our felt sense – that comes to us through the body before we can access it with the intellect. All practices of embodiment allow us to more fully and strongly experience that all-at-once knowing that embraces information coming from our inner states and feelings as well as our thinking and noticing from the living world around us.

Whereas we start to practice this wholeness of knowing in a *Circle of Presence*, in the *Circle of Creation* we expand it into a *continuous collective inquiry*. When we see life as an unfolding of potential into an ongoing flow of actual

events and experiences, it is natural to stay in inquiry about what is the next thing that becomes possible. In our circles of diversity – and in life as a whole – we are continually and unquenchably curious about what is next. It is simply how we consciously, intentionally and voluntarily live our human evolution. To remain in constant collective sensing, inquiry and reflection is to stay connected to this eternal unfolding. We learn by experiencing, immersed in the fullness of life, and immediately reflecting on our learning so that we can apply it to the next step and iteration.

It is important to recognise and to remember that we remain in this collective inquiry throughout the whole process of whatever it is we are inventing. It is like a design process which does not end when the first prototype has taken shape. The inquiry continues and deepens from one prototype to the next. Too often, we see a group of people going deep into an inquiry process, finding a new perspective, idea or solution, only to fall right back into business-as-usual to bring the innovation to manifestation, all the while forgetting that implementation and scaling are also steps in the process that need innovation and novel application.

Because our inquiry is collective, we help each other experience, recognise and name both the process and its elements as these unfold – never forgetting the role of language as a descriptor of our experience, an evoker of experience in others, not a true depiction of reality. As we invite ever more diversity of experience and expertise into our circle, we find ourselves constantly in shifting roles – sometimes master, sometimes journeyman, sometimes apprentice – as all practice the skills present in the collective, at whatever level of mastery, acknowledging that there is always more to learn, more to refine, more to understand.

Guided by an inspiring question, one which challenges our assumptions and invites us to novel thinking, our inquiry is not closed until some novel understanding – a sudden, *collective ‘now we know’* – has been reached. This communion in novel attention has a specific flavour to it, a kind of shared stillness that coincides with a shared felt sense: decisions are not taken, rather, they emerge by themselves as a collective knowing what to do. This will be hard to recognise for someone who has not yet experienced it, but once you have, you long for this *magic in the middle* to happen again. In searching for the emergent, we can get only a coherent, collective sense of the one next, minimal step that is aligned and resonant with the whole, and that becomes possible only when we use all our faculties of knowing, together.

## **Beyond Humans and Nature – by unique contribution to life**

Integrating humanity and nature in ourselves goes beyond being ‘sustainable’ or ‘living within the limits’. As much as this is needed, it does not *weave us humans back into nature*, nor reconcile us with the animal nature we have inherited from our evolutionary antecedents. Co-evolving, in this context, means that we know our place as humans in a world that is more-than-human and more-than-visible, recognising and accepting that we influence it and are influenced by it. Again it is the interweaving that we need to become aware of. Fully accepting to belong in the commonwealth of life on Earth means that we experience nature’s life systems – animals, trees, places etc. – as being imbued with psycho-activity as well as physicality; with subject status as well as object status. And this, in turn, means that we encounter the living, more-than-human world in a reciprocal way, embracing the poetic and intensely intimate and personal responses that spring from our engagement with a psycho-active universe.<sup>4</sup>

The future that our hearts tell us is possible – the future that is not a mere continuation of the past – comes from heeding *your own soul’s calling* and how that calling responds to the call of life. A living and active relationship with that call brings each of us to live our own unique expression as our best – and only possible authentic – contribution to the whole of which we are an inalienable part. While the individual personality, shaped as it is by individual programming, is indeed unique, arising as it does out of personal history, it actually cloaks the deepest, truest self more than it expresses it. Once we learn to live from our deeper core, responding from that place to the call of life, the personal becomes impersonal – all the while remaining utterly unique. In fact, the more unique you get, the greater your contribution to the whole. In the new paradigm, being of service – as an individual woven into different human and more-than-human collectives – seems to be what life is about. Beyond the tensions of ‘me’ and ‘we’, serving the whole brings fulfillment beyond imagining.

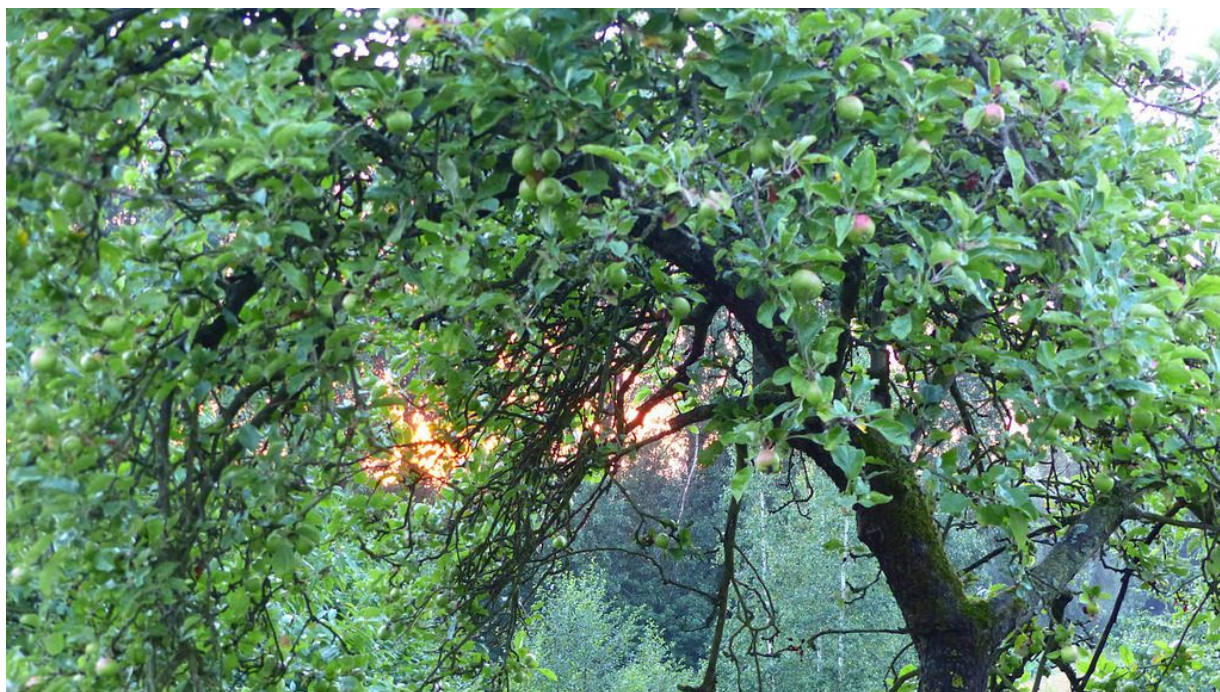


I think the difference is that, when I hear colleagues talk about this in other settings, there isn't necessarily the dimension or intention of serving life. It's more about serving the team, serving the organization, or serving whatever goals or outcomes are important. So for me, this other dimension makes the circle work differently.

— Circle of Seven<sup>5</sup>

Might this not be a feature of more integrated people and groups that we can measure our actions by how much we are *serving and generating more life*, including our own unique gift that we bring?

Weaving ourselves back into nature also means coming to terms with and fully 're-membering' *our animal nature*. So much of what the *Circle of Creation* is about – the embodiment, subtle sensing, intuitive right timing, natural rhythm; being an intrinsic part of a tribe or a collective; collectively knowing what is next to do – belongs to our deepest nature and is in no way unique to us as humans. It is part of our heredity from our ancestors in the animal realm. Throughout evolution, humans have shaped the Earth and the Earth and all living creatures have shaped us. This is just as true today and will be no different in the future. The more conscious we are of how we all – humans, animals and Earth alike – belong to life itself, and how we can co-create the next form together, the more beauty and delight there will be – and part of our unique role is to revel in the feeling of it.



## **Beyond Masculine and Feminine – by creating and generating more of life**

The capacity to generate, inherent in the new paradigm, can be seen as a natural interplay or synergy of the masculine and feminine archetypes. Each and every one of the facets described above constantly interweaves with and interpenetrates the others. Masculine and feminine are sometimes used as a fixed polarity, where the one has specific qualities which the other has not. However, in order to support and reflect life, which is *constantly becoming, creating, generating*, the synergy of all masculine and feminine energies and capacities needs to be deeply embodied within each of us.

In the mammalian world, we can see a natural co-existence of leadership – in the sense of taking a stand and clear action – and nurturing qualities. In the Western world these qualities have been assigned or linked to different genders. For some reason, at some point in time, the main feature to develop and evolve became individuation,

whereby human beings have become more aware and conscious. This process has supported the development of our capacity to reflect and conceptualise and our agentic behaviour. We seem now to have reached a point where we are becoming conscious that this capacity and behaviour is out of balance with the relational qualities that we also have and are now desperately in need of. Real creation – creation that serves life – is possible only when we inhabit the whole scale of qualities and energies. The state of our world today is in need of the insights and knowing that can be brought to the table by this new balancing and deeper integration.

Probably because they have received less attention and accordingly lower value, the qualities and skills related to the nurturing side of being human are less well articulated in our daily lexicon. These have to do with, for example, inner ways of knowing and subtle sensing, the value and importance of community, the practice of ‘organic’ organizing and more. There is a shared belief – quite unconscious for most people – that these values, these ways of knowing and living are somehow less valid and significant than those related with leadership and agency.

If we wish to achieve a deeper integration and synergy of all our capacities, we need to find the language and the distinctions to precisely and clearly articulate our nurturing aspects. Sensing the subtle layers of reality, knowing what is going on in the inner dimensions of a situation provides essential information when addressing any complex question. It is time to offer this wisdom in a gentle and precise way.

I could wish there were a single word to describe the growing capacity to generate – by which I mean ‘creation through discovery and discovery through creation’, again the interweaving: we cannot tease them apart. As we lean together in collective inquiry into the realm of unmanifest potential, as we fall *in love with the possible future*, that which we ‘dis-cover’ gets created. Our collective inner knowing confirms that what we create is in some way already here: the future potential and possibilities are present, ready and available to be engaged.

Beyond the collective wisdom that can arise from a *Circle of Presence*, a *Circle of Creation* spawns the possibility to generate more of life’s potential; both in the sense of re-generating – replenishing what we have taken and reconstituting what we have damaged – and in the sense of creating something novel that has never existed before.

## Notes

1: Susan Oyama: *The Ontogeny of Information* ↓

2: Jean Gebser: *The Ever Present Origin*. ↓ p.294.

3: Ibid. ↓ p.295.

4: Freya Mathews: *On Desiring Nature*. ↓

5: Circle of Seven: *The Presence of the Circle Being* ↓



## 5.3 No brand, no organisation – WMtE part 5



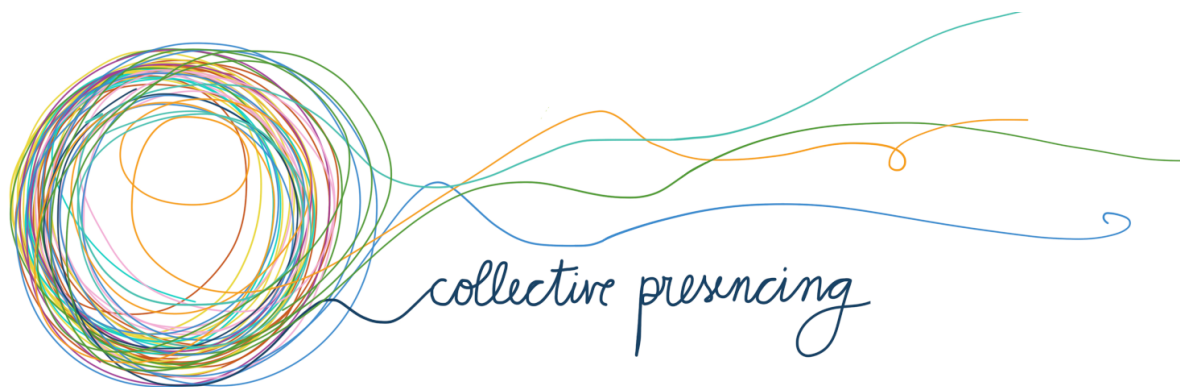
We were sitting in Judy's car, driving through the beautiful New England landscape, returning home after our sixth gathering of Women Moving the Edge at the Essex Conference Center and wondering what would be next. Neither of us had a sense of calling a next gathering. Then what? Both of us, as co-initiators, had alternately called the previous gatherings in our local areas. It kept us travelling between Europe and the US, enabling different women from both continents to participate.

We had already learned to rely on sensing, on inner impulses aligned with signs from outside – and not on planning. This was an emergent process that could not be constrained by a timeline, not even by our personal preferences. There was no sense in repeating or scaling up. As Helen had put it: "... the scaling up thing... going from small to big... there is a danger in this 'spreading best practices business', because you are losing out on the experimentation. It is all about experimenting with the practice in relationship with the local context. It relates with the energy of experimenting, staying in inquiry, sensing from source, rather than moving something from one space to another."

This was an organic, unfolding process and we were riding the wave: a continuous process of sensing and acting, sensing and acting... over and over. Christopher Alexander, describing how buildings acquire a timeless quality of beauty over hundreds of years, calls this the "moving and stopping that creates wholeness". Dave Snowden, discussing how to deal with complex situations, names it: probe, sense and act. According to Snowden, what comes out of this iterative process is not *best* practice, or even *good* practice, but *emergent* practice, something altogether new and unique.

So, faithful to our practice, we refrained from planning and waited. It was not long before other women and places started to call us to hold a next gathering. We tried to stay in the not-knowing-yet and moved from one edge to the next. We had no desire to make something happen, learning to trust the flow on ever deeper levels. And this practice brought us to new discoveries of exactly that: how to ride the wave as a collective. We were ready to move from being present to generating something new.

One further small challenge remained. Seeing our visibility grow, with specific inputs into some global initiatives, we needed to sense our role and place in that bigger field. There was some temptation to fall into the widespread pattern of *naming or claiming* Women Moving the Edge – as a kind of brand – in some collaborative initiatives, but our central purpose was clear: to remain in the inquiry to move the edge of consciousness. So no brand and no organisation.



## 6. Taking the Leap: I-in-Now

6.1 Intro – Taking the leap

6.2 From Authentic Self to Soul's Calling

6.3 The Process of Subtle Inner Alignment: Unfolding Generative Capacity

6.4 Enjoying an emergent life

6.5 Opening to I-in-Now

6.6 Away from linear thinking – WMtE part 6

## 6.1 Intro – Taking the leap



Cosmogogenesis is organized by communion. To be is to be related, for relationship is the essence of existence. In the very first instant when the primitive particles rushed forth, every one of them was connected to every other one in the entire universe. At no time in the future existence of the universe would they ever arrive at a point of disconnection. Alienation for a particle is a theoretical impossibility. For galaxies too, relationships are the fact of existence. Nothing is itself without everything else. ... The universe evolves into beings that are different from each other, and that organize themselves. But in addition to this, the universe advances into community – into a differentiated web of relationships among sentient centers of creativity.

— Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry <sup>1</sup>

You hear a lot of talk about how quantum mechanics says that everything is all interconnected. Well, that's not quite right. It's more than that; it's deeper. It's that those connections, your connections to all the things around you, literally define who you are, and that's the profound weirdness of quantum mechanics.

— Aaron O'Connell <sup>2</sup>

## Welcome to the New Paradigm

Welcome to the final part of this book – the last 4 chapters. Welcome to the new paradigm – an integral paradigm that is quite unlike what we are used to: it is not even about fields; it is not even co-creative, because creation is always ‘co-’ in some sense. It is generative in all directions, but are there still directions and dimensions? This is all the way up and all the way down, but is there still up and down? Welcome to the soup of life!

In this soup, we can still make distinctions, but boundaries and all that is ‘thing-like’ are no longer the focus. Our ‘boxes’ keep expanding in all directions, until there is precious little stability or structure left to the box. Reality and life are understood as something like Indra’s Net, with every mote of reality reflected in every other. Even the metaphor of soup falls short, because in a dynamic process we don’t get the unity of a blended soup. Rather, what is real and alive is a multiplicity and an infinite number of unique dishes, with a combination of flavours we have never encountered before.

It is hard to describe a dynamic and alive process in words, especially in a language like English that organises standard sentence construction along subject-verb-object lines, as if the connection back from the object through the verb to the subject didn’t exist, and as if all other influences – like the context and history of this subject-verb-object – is of no relevance. The best linguistic signposts or heuristics illuminating the essence of this new paradigm have been words like ‘interpenetration’ and ‘interweaving’, ‘potential’, ‘dynamic process’, ‘love’, ‘creation’ and ‘generative’. Notwithstanding all these considerations, I will still offer another map, complete with classical boxes, to describe both the possibilities and the pitfalls we can encounter in this journey to becoming a *Circle of Creation*. Need I repeat that the map is not the territory? We make distinctions not because these different parts can or do exist on their own, but only to be able to focus our attention on one part of this constantly unfolding dynamic process.

Unlike the boxes in the *Circle of Presence* map, (which pointed to levels or movements in awareness) the vectors in the map of the *Circle of Creation* can best be seen as bridges or interfaces between the manifest and the invisible or the subtle. I like to think of them as wormholes, although I don’t have the credentials to assert whether the scientific definition might fit or not. This interpenetration of the subtle and manifest goes much deeper than ‘having a relation to’ or even a reciprocal influencing; it is more like different coloured tendrils of smoke mingling and blending together in swirls and waves, constantly changing into new forms. It is important to remember that this interpenetration and interweaving is always already happening. When we start consciously to practice participating in the potential present in the current moment – in and as life itself – it seems we become more deeply immersed in life and can close some of the gaps that are still part of our mainstream culture and world view.

Perceiving the subtle clues and energies that the world offers us – whether these reside within or alongside the physical realm – requires deep listening and receptivity. As a *Circle of Presence* we have become well versed in sensing those subtle signs. We have learned to open our arms and full bodies to this realm that is so much more extensive than we had ever imagined. Sensing into the subtle realms can become a very conscious action and intention. It must be informed by the subtle seed planted in our receptivity and openness.

We have noticed over time that people easily fall back into business-as-usual after having seen some new meaning (at the bottom of the U in Otto Scharmer’s terms, or after some participatory processes). As soon as we move into any kind of specific articulation or activity in order to make something happen, the practice of presence and authenticity tends to be forgotten. We see this happening all the time: the pace of conversation accelerates, the timeline is planned, a structure is placed on what needs to happen, the leaders decide... all of it! Our conditioned Western mind seems to rejoice in the return to known territory, where it can apply what it already ‘knows’ and what it thinks is really true.

What if, instead, we were to sustain our practice of being present and authentic as we move ‘up the U’, or as we start to sense how this newly shared collective meaning might translate in terms of organisation, structure, hierarchy, evaluation? When someone has the presence to call everyone back to presence and grounding, it is possible to have a collective sense of the next date, to innovate structures and workflows, to live the paradigm to its fullest.

The ultimate purpose of a *Circle of Creation* is to build collective capacity for generative action. By ‘generative’ I mean both generating something novel and also ‘re-generative’, the capacity to heal and take the broken or hurt into a process whereby we can create more aliveness together. The capacity to be open to everything that is present in this



moment makes it possible to generate a subsequent moment that holds less obstruction to that aliveness and can flow with life in general.



Generative action of this kind can sometimes manifest in an instant, as it moves in resonance with the subtle. Ideally, there should be no movement, no action – even if it is only the minimal next step – until an overall coherence is present. Just as someone with perfect pitch can distinguish whether two notes are exactly the same, so there is a need for us to develop our capacity to sense the ‘pitch’ of coherence, when the physical is aligned with the subtle. When this alignment is present, the action is not really ‘decided’ or ‘taken’, but will happen as if of its own accord.

One substantial difference between a *Circle of Presence* and a *Circle of Creation* is that classic group dynamics are no longer part of the picture. There is thus no longer any need for a trainer or facilitator to guide these processes. Instead of being focused on what others in the circle say and do (or not), attention is fully grounded in the ongoing collective inquiry and the shared field of awareness. Facilitation – or hosting – merely supports the conditions for emergence. We learn to see and to be constantly aware of the ‘interaffecting’, to use a word from Gendlin, and the interrelated moving. Like hosting a constellation, there is no linearity and we go with what the phenomena show us.

### **Orienting to the map for the *Circle of Creation***

The first column of the map builds on the work done in *I and Myself* and *I and You*. Having deeply integrated your subtle perception and most of your shadow parts, your path has not come to an end. Rather, you will notice a calling from deep within – your life’s or soul’s calling. It is an invitation to integrate work, passion and life, to align everything into a unique and joyful existence that is more emergent than planned (*I-in-Now*).

What becomes possible when we are all following our life’s purpose and we feel attracted, invited, nudged and drawn to come together in a collective inquiry? What emerges when we pool all our resources, knowledge, expertise and presence in service of something greater? It seems to us that participatory collectives arise in relation to a possibility whose time has come. It is as if a confluence of potential gives rise to a subtle thickening in the fabric of the cosmos which functions as a strange attractor around which a collective can form. The purpose of such gatherings is neither conceptual nor prompted by any sense of urgency. Rather, information relating to purpose is gleaned from the subtle, much in the same way that animals in a herd sense when they need to come together to weather some external danger.

From the collective sense of purpose of *We-in-Now*, we expand out as in the previous map, to embrace also the context in which we find ourselves; the collective of humans enters a conscious relationship with the greater whole. Context is to be understood here not just as the environment or physical space, but all that is included in subtle place and time. This transcends just humans as co-creators, to include our brethren the animals and the living realm of nature, natural rhythm and right timing, the unique powers of a place or space and more. It is surrendering to collective inspiration and collective ‘insighting’, a lived experience of the body, mind, heart and will of life itself. (*We-in-Here*)

Finally (in the map, not in the experience) the collective engages with a potential that is present but not yet manifest – a full participative interpenetration and interweaving of all realms of existence and all beings (*We-Now-Here-and-Potential*). All separation has fallen away. We are equally in awe of what is and in love with what is possible next. The notion of ‘experience’ is absolutely key here: this generative action is an embodied, multi-sensory phenomenon where joy, beauty, curiosity and amazement at life are the benchmarks.

*Quote from participant:*

I feel my own awareness so different than it was this time last year. There is so much more relationship that I am aware of; so many subtle levels, inside myself and also with others, and with nature and the earth, and the invisible beings that are all around us. I’m now learning to keep them also in my awareness, as well as my physicality. It is extraordinary – like a sunbeam that shines on the little pieces of dust that you normally don’t see. And learning to be at ease with that is the first step, in preparation for something that we just can’t see yet.

— Helen

## **Taking the leap**

Setting the scene: One evening in May 2009, the core group of Women Moving the Edge is having a Skype call, linking the US (Boston), Belgium and the Netherlands; five of us are present on the call. We are debriefing the sixth gathering, which ended a few days ago. I am ready to take a leap of faith. What follows is an edited transcript of that call.

*Ria: I now see trapeze artists in the circus tent, they release their grip on one trapeze bar and fly through the air to grab the other ... leaving behind the security of the old system – be it money or whatever kind of structure – and living on the edge in a lot of not knowing, but where you feel very alive and vibrant – this kind of lovemaking with some new form that is not really manifest yet. You can't touch it or hold it, but it comes alive in the relationship with it, in the lovemaking.*

*For me, it's about being fully alive, participating in life, a life that is totally connected with earth – and not confusing the earth with 'the world' that's going on.*

*For me that is a very clear picture in my mind. We are so used to living in the 'world' – which is very much built on concepts and ideas translated into stuff and structures. But this 'world' is not connected with earth and life – or the sacredness of earth and life (of course it's connected in some way, because it's here and manifest)... I don't want to be new-agey about it, more like being real about it. Very real!*

*Lisette: When you were speaking about 'the world', sometimes I am aware that most conversations are not about what they seem to be about. What we are doing, so busy in the world, is not what it's about at all – even in this conversation. The whole Women Moving is about opening ourselves up as energetic vessels to a new form. It's quite funny – everything that seems to be going on in the world – it's NOT about that!*

*Ria: This seems like the solution to the riddle: OPENING OURSELVES UP AS ENERGETIC VESSELS TO A NEW FORM. I want to write that in big capitals in my notebook!*

*Helen: So what does that mean for us?*

*Ria: What it means to me, as a very concrete consequence, is that I will give more attention to the new form that's arising – that means that I will trust more that the universe will provide me with money whenever I need it and go more fully into writing my book rather than first making sure I have enough money and then, if there is time left over... I will more fully make that leap.*

*Lisette: I usually do this in private, but when Ria took the leap – my immediate impulse is to give you an amount of money.*

*Helen: I had the same impulse. It is done sister!*

*Ria: It feels so much like lovemaking. God!! Thank you!!*

*....*

*Ria: It was like in (tantric) lovemaking, where you can have plateaus, building up the energy, going higher and higher, finer and finer. When Lisette made her offer, it felt like an energy entered my body. I didn't do anything for it. Very much like lovemaking energy! That's the perfect description – going up my spine. I'm sitting here smiling all over the place...*





Nicanor Perlas has a model about *leap learning*,<sup>3</sup> based on *The Hero's Journey* of Joseph Campbell.<sup>4</sup> He talks about the call, the question that moves you; your life's question as the framework for your experiences. If you say 'No' to this call, something deep in your psyche dies, because there is no real separation between yourself and this deep question. Nevertheless, to be open to the call is disturbing to your identity. Building on this individual challenge, he asks us: "Are we going to accept the call, as a human species?" What is the challenge for our collective identity? Nicanor speaks of *the leap*, because there is a discontinuity between the known past and the future that is possible. That future can only come from the call, your soul's calling. While this may feel pretty threatening to our day-to-day identity, many of us do feel called, hear our souls whispering and act accordingly, sometimes against all odds. A real living and active relationship with this call is a powerful entry point to a new sense of being in the world.

One of the practices of the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter is the Art of Calling.<sup>5</sup> The practice of this art embraces both the feeling of being called and the act of inviting others into this call. Many of us who have been on the path of ever deepening authenticity (*Circle of Presence*) feel at a certain point that we need to do something that hasn't been done before. This can take a lot of different forms: opening a conversation about an issue that was never mentioned before, starting a project without knowing where the money will come from to complete it, convening people in ways and combinations that have never happened before, quitting a regular job and daring to follow the heart's desires...

Answering the call means being absolutely personal, fully authentic and using your highest potential. Paradoxically, the experience seems to tip so that the personal becomes impersonal, while remaining truly unique. During the years when I was actively involved in the path of 5 Rhythms dance, I had many experiences where, after many hours of practice, it was not 'me' who was dancing, but I had come to a point of surrender to the inherent movement in my body that resonated with the music. I had 'become the dance'. The dance was happening through me, my body was a receptive empty vessel in service of what was coming through. Nevertheless, this dance was still very personal and unique: when it is coming through my bones and muscles – my solidified memory and unique combination of genes and circumstances – it looks quite different than when it's coming through someone else's, and both are uniquely beautiful. An Iranian dancing friend calls this the paradox of *minimal interference and maximal engagement*. It is

deeply unique and authentic, very personal, and at the same time it has a free-flowing energy that makes it impersonal.

## Notes

- 1: Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry: *The Universe Story*. ↓
- 2: Aaron O’Connell: *Making sense of a visible quantum object*. (TED talk.) ↓
- 3: Nicanor Perlas: *Shaping Globalization* ↓
- 4: Joseph Campbell: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. ↓
- 5: Art of Calling: there was a video about this: “Teaching the Art of Calling by Phil Cass”, but we cannot find it at present.



## 6.2 From Authentic Self to Soul's Calling



But what all stories talk about, stories always begin with some sort of seeming calamity, and a need to gather spirit amongst people. But spirit isn't the same thing as soul. It's slightly different. What will be interesting over the next decade or so as this movement grows and others, is to see what happens when the spirit moves from the fiery speech that gets people working, into the deeper, slower, more reflective business of soul. But it is out of that, it is out of the combination of soul and spirit you'll get a true mythos, you'll get something that will just hit people on the deepest level.

— Martin Shaw<sup>1</sup>

It is both a step-by-step process and a leap, this journey that starts with discovering ourselves – freeing ourselves from all kinds of habits and beliefs in the process of becoming authentic in our actions – and continues until we reach the point where we are following our life's calling to the fullest. At that point, all aspects of life become fully integrated into a single canvas, where there will tend to be far fewer boundaries demarcating the boundary between professional and private life. Learning to be authentic with ever less downloading (*I and Myself*) leads, almost inevitably, to a deeper sense of both my uniqueness and my ordinariness, because in the end these two are the same.

We can have the highest degree of authentic self-esteem just by being completely ordinary and average. Then we say to ourselves as to our beloved: That you are, is enough. What you are is a gift. How you are is a delight. Who you are is a 'a mystery'.

— Yasuhiko Genku Kimura<sup>2</sup>

To describe this way of living, I like to use the notion of *soul's calling* because it points to an energy that is uniquely personal that also links us with some greater force that goes beyond our daily life and our normal (Western)

understanding. Introducing the concept of soul might be a spiritual or religious bridge too far for some, but I find no other concept that speaks so well to the capacity, potential and depth of experience. Some people call it ‘life’s calling’, which to me is the same. Conversations, even in business settings, shift to quite a different level when the question is raised whether the company’s soul is dead or alive; or when employees admit that their souls are dying in the system they are in. In those moments, we are beyond speaking about profits or low morale: we are tending to the heart of the matter.

Your soul’s calling might have been shining through from childhood or it may show up only later in life, but at some point you feel the pull of a calling that is so deep and compelling that you just have to pay attention. As you align your choices with that calling, other pieces of your life fall into place. It can feel like a vibrational shift, an alignment where every part of who you are, the very essence of your being, comes into a sense of wholeness – wholeness in the sense not of unity, but of a unique coherence, with many colours, forms and unique combinations.

The soul can be seen as a huge potential that is present in you for the simple purpose of being expressed and unfolded over the span of your life. If you look back on your life so far and notice what connects all your experiences, you might get a sense of what this potential is about. Every acorn has the potential to become an oak tree. How the tree actually grows – in what kinds of weather and soil – also depends on environmental factors, of course. We all hold unmanifest potential that gains more form and expression over time; the better you listen within, the clearer it becomes. The movement of inner alignment, starting with integrating more of your subtle senses, does not end with sharing and expressing your unique gifts here or there in a given context. Rather, your authenticity continues to deepen until your entire being and every moment and arena of your life feel like one coherent whole.

The kinds of questions that can speak to your soul’s calling are:

- What is genuinely you?
- What makes you feel really alive?
- What is deeply exciting and satisfying to you?
- What is it that you cannot *not* do?
- What’s the possibility you came here to create?

What is it that I can uniquely do that the world of tomorrow needs?

— Peter Hawkins<sup>3</sup>

Ask not what you should do, but ask what the world wants to do through you.

— Eckhard Tolle

When speaking of soul, Bonnitta Roy uses the term ‘*soul print*’, which really captures the essence. While ‘soul’ seems more like something with substance, ‘a thing’ (this might be my Catholic upbringing!), ‘soul print’ suggests a potential, a kind of rough design or fuzzy template. Soul print refers to the uniqueness with which each of us is born, springing from a deep inner foundation. Even twins have different soul prints, as we see different individuals unfolding throughout life. Our soul print is our unique link to source, to the origin of life, to the most fundamental immanent aspect of reality; a source that transcends the personal and individual. Our soul print can also be seen as an impulse from the causal realm.

I see many young people searching for their unique characteristic, the one feature that lets them shine, radiate and be uniquely who they are. It might take a substantial portion of your life before you finally begin to grasp what it is about – at least that’s how it has been for me. In hindsight I have been able to discover the red thread that was woven through the many phases of my life and that led to the point in time where I could take the leap to following my soul, instead of complying to ideas and concepts – from parents, from school, from mainstream culture – about what life should look like. This work requires some deep inner listening to reveal your unique contribution in amongst all this

cultural, gender, family and other conditioning. And as I said before (*I and You*), your unique gift is related to your deepest trauma. In this lifelong journey to become your calling, you will be pushed and pulled in the direction of what that trauma is about. That is where you will find your unique treasure. With every layer of conditioning you peel away and shed, you are able to see more subtle layers of life and reality, your self included. You have now become intimate with your soul print.

The soul print hails from the world of the eternal, beyond or near the frontier between life and death. It is related with the origin whence all life springs. Scharmer's concept of *Open Will* can be understood as living from soul – your own unique expression of life itself. It is no longer your small individual will, linked with ego-as-habit, that is guiding your life. Instead you surrender to something greater – 'God's will', my (Catholic) mother would have called it. But God's will is to be understood not as conforming to the rules of the church, but as a higher will that brings your personal life uniquely into service to the whole of life.

The soul indicates an extension of being, one that vibrates beyond time and space.

— Marko Pogačnik<sup>4</sup>

The Dutch language has a great word, still full of meaning, that translates in English as 'obvious' or 'self-evident'; *vanzelfsprekend* translates literally as 'from-self-speaking'. When searching for your soul's calling, it is well to be reminded that what you seek is not some heroic feature, but something that is so obvious, so 'speaking-from-self', that you might not have noticed it at first. You might think that everybody has that particular capacity, and assume that everybody can do this thing that you can do. That is not the case at all. Your soul print has a unique expression, a passion that is yours alone to bring to manifestation in the world. We westerners are so conditioned to the notion of hard work that discovering our soul's calling feels like a gift of freedom to do just what we like from now on... Yes, that is how life is supposed to be! Living your soul's calling generates more energy and excitement, although many tasks along the way might be new and challenging. I could never have imagined that doing action research in the field of collective consciousness and then writing about it was something I was supposed to do! I like it, I love it, and it is sometimes hard work and needs a great deal of perseverance. There are days when I wonder: What work am I willing to suffer for today? Still it calls me – a calling from life that I cannot deny if I am to be true to myself; it is life's creativity that is nudging me to open myself for this expression and this creation.

*Quote from participant:*

The most intimate story for me of these last weeks is how I felt just more ordinary than before in a gathering; not the one who is good at hosting, or good at harvesting, or who is... bla bla bla – but just... me. As if I've fallen deeper into who I am, who I always was. And that's not a contradiction, or some kind of paradox. The more ordinary I feel, the closer I come to my soul – I guess.

— Ria

The obvious and 'from-self-speaking' translates into elegant simplicity, which is a property of life. It seems that life expresses itself infinitely, in countless ever more complex yet elegant forms; it takes shape in and through each one of us – and everything else that exists. This elegance and simplicity is intimately related with beauty and awe – not the beauty of high (conceptual) art but that found in the simple things, in the ordinary and the mundane.

## Practicing full participation in life

*To participate*, means to enjoy movement and reciprocity within the generative ground of our universalized becoming and the foregrounding of our being. *To participate* means to act and to be acted upon, to affect and effect, to mediate both spatial and temporal extension in infinite directions and dimensions. *To participate* means to be ‘in the soup’; not somehow above, beneath, behind the action, through the veil of transcendence, assumption of objectivity or inference of subjectivity. *To participate* means to lose track of cause and effect, agent and object, knower and known, actor and script. *To participate* requires a pre-conceptual or post-dialectical orientation to reality as “a movement, a happening, a transformation... as events that are constantly transformed.” (Oliver, 1989) *To participate* means, as Whitehead would have it, to be in a *relationship of feeling* among a society of all other entities, human and nonhuman, biotic and a-biotic, within a nexus of shared history.

— Bonnitta Roy<sup>5</sup> (*emphasis added*)

We participate in life all the time, whether we are aware of it or not, because we are just that: alive. Even when we are more or less repeating the dynamics of the past, acting out our habits and unconscious shared assumptions, we are still participating in life – but this mode of participation is reduced to mere survival pretty much bereft of creativity. When I talk of ‘practicing full participation’, I’m pointing to the possibility of being fully aware that life is happening through me, us and all that is around us, *all the time*... life isn’t happening elsewhere than in and through us. We are all (part of) it. There is a very important distinction to make here: I am talking about participating *in life itself*, not participating in ‘the world’ – the conceptual realm with its financial systems, hierarchies, nation states and suchlike, that we have implicitly and unconsciously agreed to call ‘the world’. I am talking about being ‘in the soup’.

If we are to enjoy and be life and manifest its unfolding – what this *Circle of Creation* is about – we are each required to participate fully and contribute our best unique self wherever we are – *everywhere* we are: at work, at home, with friends, in the neighbourhood, in gatherings, on holiday, meeting strangers on the street, online, with the flowers in the meadow, the trees in the forest, the ducks on the pond, the timing of events, the pain of war, the openness in a baby’s eyes... it is big and it is small, it is simple and extraordinary...

Peeling away our habits, shedding our downloading, brings us to more authenticity (*I and Myself*) and eventually leaves us rather empty. This emptiness is not a dearth of content, but an absence of the rigid patterns that guide life into known forms. This emptiness gives space for a wide, aware, energetic container in which more (forms) of life can be received consciously, where the boundaries between me and the rest of life melt away. In many ways we become intimate with more aspects of life. The personal and developmental work we have been doing serves not only our own individual life and happiness, but is also in service of the greater whole and of life itself. In this openness and emptiness, our unique calling can come to the surface and further unfold, as all the while we marvel at the complexity, the subtlety and the play of synchronicity – the extraordinary way life engages with us to lead us through our own development towards a space where we can fully participate in that living whole.

Full participation in this context means surrender. Surrender to the higher, to the deeper, to the innermost... whichever term suits you. It implies unswerving commitment to the truth that comes from living the reality of one’s ever-unfolding soul’s path, which is also the commitment to living awake, moment by moment, to the minutiae of daily life. It means living totally open, letting everything in, feeling, sensing, knowing and being transformed, breath by breath, by that which comes to our senses. As one friend said: minimal interference and maximum engagement – surrendering in full participation. When we live like this, there is nothing we need to keep up or hold on to. Participating fully, we experience change as a result of our participation in the unfolding of life, and life is different because we participate in it.

This degree of participation has a distinct flavour of wholeness and energetic flow. Whenever we fall back into the fragmented, controlled, ‘mainstream’ way of being, we long to reconnect with ourselves and with life in its totality. It can bring grief and sadness when we find that we have drifted off while we weren’t paying attention, that we have failed to attend to the quality of our aliveness. This longing can be powerful, and will show up again and again if we deny it: “it wants the whole of us”.<sup>6</sup> It doesn’t settle for less than being fully alive and listening to what we know “deep in the darkness, inside ourselves”.<sup>6</sup>





Having shed most of our conditioning, opening to more authenticity is being like an empty tube that is actively opening and receiving. It is like being a well-tuned instrument that can receive a note, although it is not the flute itself that makes the music, rather it is played by the winds of life. One of the 10 points offered by Otto Scharmer to keep in mind when practicing presencing is: “operate as an instrument, becoming the pure vessel with the ego set aside”. Being well-tuned means that the instrument is clean and balanced, its unique tone emanating from the individual blend of ideas, passions and history. Well-tuned also assumes an inner resonant vibration that enables us to come into resonance with the Earth and life itself, translated in the local context of our lives.

If I am coherent in mind, heart and will, if I am like that tube resonating with the subtle intelligences of the world, then isn't it love that is coming through? Isn't it love that is pouring out? Isn't it life generating a new form through (co-)creation?

The deepening of the Authentic Self (*I and Myself*) that happens in the movement towards a *Circle of Creation* affects the totality of your life and work. The *I-in-now* – to borrow Scharmer's concept – is extending in space and time, becoming a leitmotif in all that you do. ‘What you are doing’ might not seem straightforward to others, but the patchwork that is the life you have created is just right for you. You could not leave out a single strand, because then your life would be less whole. Your life, your work and your passion are now a coherent whole for your Self, and your Self, as it is in constant change, can be seen as a dynamic multiplicity. You are now living in emergent time, all the time; you are constantly living from or as your soul print ‘in the soup’ of life.

*Quote from participant:*

What struck me most forcibly: all I have to take care of is my connection with my authentic and deeper self! All I have to take care of is my openness; my feeling of being safe in this cosmos. All I have to do is be who I was born to be. And do what is given to me to do. Sometimes I have to step up and say: I can do this; other times other people ask me to do something.

— Helen

## The last tricks of ego



## Too small or too big

Sooner or later we start to see what our soul's calling is about. It is a good feeling because it is so close to who we are in essence, deep down inside. It feels so natural. But we have to remain vigilant to ensure that ego-as-habit doesn't creep back in. This can go in one of two directions: either we have the idea that we are not big enough to undertake this task or project, or we fall into hubris, thinking we are so important with this unique contribution or insight. In my case, the trap came when I realised that the patterns that I had seen sprouting from our collective work were in reality a different way of looking at what was possible, that what was forming was actually an emerging human capacity. As I searched everywhere to read more about this without ever find the book or the article that would confirm my hunch, my frustration grew with those authors I expected to know more about this. When I finally realised that it was *my* job to write this book, it seemed like a huge tension between the gigantic task facing me and the small ego I held inside. My ego-as-habit said that I, a small Flemish girl, could not write a book that could contribute something on the level of famous, international authors. Over time, I had to realise that if the seed of the book is in me, then I am the only one who can write it. I had to accept and honour that this is what I am called to do. It is what it is, without big or small attachments to it. My anxiety comes from thinking that the task is too big... and then getting anxious about it. But as soon as I start doing 'my thing' – and not 'the big task' – then I'm fine. When we are internally aligned and coherent, we act naturally, by intuition, without falling into either of the two extremes I just described. If you are able to live in resonance with your soul's calling, then you know where to go, why you need to be there, what to say, what to do.

The line is very fine between the inner knowing of what is yours to do and making it too big or too small. At one point in the process of the different Women Moving the Edge gatherings, we got international recognition for what we were doing. It would have been easy to be swept away by that. Being Flemish, and a gardener at heart, I realised that it was much more important to keep our feet on the ground and not to get inflated ideas about what we were doing or the insights we had gathered. Some people whose ego-as-habit is about taking up a lot of space, have to come to terms with the fact that their role in a collective endeavour will necessarily be limited. The point is to be aligned with your inner gift, speak it and share it, in a way that has no (emotional) charge. All too often, the help that is offered is ultimately more an opportunity for the giver to feel good about herself, and not about improving the lot of the receiver, who maybe does not even need what is being given. Often, our urges to save the world, our efforts of trying too hard to move the world forward, spring from an emotionally charged reaction. They do not express the joy and energy of building an irresistible bandwagon that the world wants to jump on. If we are aligned, we simply take the next step we sense needs to be taken. That step might be important, even huge and crucial, but still it is no big deal.

*Quote from participant:*

We are not saving the world, we are not being important. We do what is natural as participants in life  
— Helen

To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you into something else is the greatest accomplishment.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

It should be apparent that there is a deep relation between the ego traps of engaging with the soul's calling and the shadow and gift described in [section 2.1](#). At this point in the journey, as we move ever more into wholeness, jettisoning the more obvious layers of conditioning, we will unavoidably touch our deeper personal unconscious layers that are asking for recognition and integration, to free up the energy that is blocked there. We can encounter very deep unconscious patterns and emotions that come from a preverbal state, which are not always easy to grasp and integrate. Among other things, I have seen deep anxiety that life will not provide enough support, and paralysing fear about the intensity of living life to the fullest. Such states can all be easily linked back to early experiences in life, even birth and the time in the womb. The good news is that these early traumas, too, can be healed, just like any

other conditioning, and will then reveal the deeper gifts of the person who suffered them. A personal practice including physical embodiment can work wonders in this regard, while professional help can sometimes be needed to shed light on what is really going on in our unconscious depths, to understand the steps towards healing and to put it in the right framework.

## Projections onto ‘the system’

Many people on the path of personal development sooner or later encounter the dynamic of projection and the concept of shadow. There is a small community in Germany that has a rule that I like: “If something bothers you for more than 3 minutes, it is yours and you should look at it.” Strangely, for many people this principle doesn’t seem to count for emotions and judgements triggered by society, the financial system, the agro-industry and the like. A friend of mine was in a burn-out period and one of the limiting beliefs that kept her stuck was that she couldn’t do what she needed to do because ‘the system’ didn’t let her. The system in this case being the structure of a huge governmental bureaucracy that she is working in. Being a very respectful, heartfelt and conscious person she would now and then, most unexpectedly, point quite aggressively to the system at large. Of course, this organisation does all kind of things that are not sustainable, not respectful – or sometimes even harmful and toxic – to so many aspects of life; but do not let the system get in the way of your intimacy with life itself. Even if you work (and live) ‘in’ a system, the system is not ‘a thing’. Indeed, that system is part of you in some ways, and in the end it is about you and life, either ‘in’ the system or ‘out’ of it, as you choose and as you are called. Even huge bureaucracies came into being because they served a need and because this was the best way people could organise at that time. They might have gone too far in their ability to maintain – and control – widespread services to a lot of people, but they are human made and still prone to change.

In such circumstances, *acknowledging what is* – even when this is painful to see and affects a lot of people – can appear cold-hearted, but it is part of being able to stay in touch with your inner centre, your soul’s calling and life itself in the midst of chaos and huge change. My personal reference point in checking what I do is to ask myself: would the world be a better place if everyone lived as I do? I do believe that if more of us could stay centred in the face of the ‘bad stuff’ and the chaos in the world, and still pursue our soul’s calling, there would be more joy, fun, beauty and even shared meaning in the world. Some might be called to ignite action and protest – there is also a place of honour for them – but many protesters are fuelled by judgements and blaming ‘the others’ and remain unaware of their own power and potential that comes with being alive.



## Conceptual shadow

This is a tricky one – especially for scholars, academics and people who like to talk and invent models, theories and concepts. It took me a long time to identify the dynamic of the conceptual shadow – it was Bonnie Roy who finally articulated and explained it to me. As I have already said, in our journey to become more whole and embrace more of life, we will encounter pieces of our life that were not so nice and that left deep scars, resulting in strong unconscious habits that rule our way of being and acting in the world. Many people in the Western world have ‘chosen’ the habit of retreating into conceptual space – with some distance from the actual facts – to try to understand or grasp it all when emotions were too overwhelming and there was no support to deal with the situation. This habit, like all ego-habits, is so prevalent and ingrained in the Western world that it is hard for the ego-as-self to become aware of it – it is a resort for so many of us!

Having conversations with such people can be highly rewarding in the conceptual (meta-)space and great ideas and visions can be born. The problem arises when the ground is missing to actually apply the insights, embody them or make them happen. Unconsciously, these people have hit a block in themselves which they neither recognise nor understand, so they add more fuel to the mental fire rather than turning inward to connect with the pain in the sphere of relationship and intimacy, and learn to balance the conceptual with experiences of becoming, participating, connecting etc.

Here, too, the gift is in the trauma, and what is in the shadow asks to be integrated and not condemned. The capacity to think clearly, to make distinctions and use concepts and models is highly valuable and needs to be present alongside the more subtle ways of knowing – for *everyone*. It is difficult to integrate the subtle ways of knowing when this habit (of escaping into concepts) keeps moving you away from it. A real co-creation between these different ways of knowing is then not possible. A journey towards full embodiment is needed to capture the subtle shifts in inner energy and apprehend the felt sense; but it is just as important to be able to articulate these so they become available to others. It is the synergy between subtle sensing and cognitive capacity that will allow us to more fully participate in life, with body, mind and soul. Remember that the self is always in a process of becoming, always on the journey of arising to the surface. Any kind of shadow is just one element in this whole work of art.

## Taking the leap

Courage is the ability to cultivate a relationship with the unknown; to create a form of friendship with what lies around the corner over the horizon – with those things that have not yet fully come into being.

— David Whyte<sup>7</sup>

At this stage there isn’t much left to say: you either take the leap or you don’t. It’s that simple in the end. There might be a long journey before you actually jump, during which you ponder all manner of fears and anxieties about whether or not you will survive; or perhaps you think you should be working or living somewhere else while your soul’s calling is simply to stay put and apply all your wisdom right here where you are.

The leap always feels like leaving the safety of stable ground – at least the old familiar patterns are known, even if they are painful or destructive. It feels frightening to surrender to trust in life and to signs from a wider arena than the one that supposedly gave you security. How can there be grounding, balance and coherence while living on one’s edge in a lot of not-knowing-yet? You don’t know where your soul’s path will take you or what you will have to step up to. Perhaps you don’t know where money will come from in the coming month. Perhaps you can’t possibly imagine what kind of challenge lies ahead for your business. But one thing is sure: you will feel alive and vibrant, you will feel in the right place at the right time and you will enjoy life! Your neighbour might still be complaining, a family member might still suddenly die, and wars will most certainly continue – all this is still happening – but life in general takes on more the flavour of lovemaking... where we are always curious about what comes next, where we find great joy and satisfaction in small and simple movements and where there is awe in the minute details and beauty in the ordinary.

When you continue to integrate subtle sensing in your life and keep practicing *acknowledging what is*, you will reach a point where you are no longer able to stomach being out of alignment with your soul's purpose and you will begin to *live what is*. Settling for anything less becomes toxic. Although you might find yourself living without financial security, I and others who have taken the plunge have found that when you are in alignment or resonance, things somehow fall into place and work out. We seem to be on the edge of a really different way of behaving and living, and so we have to learn to act in new ways. By daring to follow our life's calling we are opening ourselves up as energetic vessels to a new form that is emerging.

In taking the leap, we say good bye to the identity we constructed to fit so nicely in that box we lived in before, to replace it with uniqueness and intimacy. Our lives become a patchwork that might not make much sense to others, but shows our unique colours, that we no longer seek to hide or gloss over. Instead of clinging to our different roles, identities or social personae, we can ground in our uniqueness and capacity to be intimate with all that is around us, living flexibly and creatively with what life and circumstances bring us.

Do everything with a mind that lets go.  
Do not expect any praise or reward.  
If you let go a little,  
you will have a little peace.  
If you let go a lot,  
you will have a lot of peace.  
If you let go completely,  
you will know complete peace and freedom.  
Your struggles with the world will have come to an end.  
— attributed to Ajahn Chah<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

1: Martin Shaw: *Interview with Transition Culture*. ↓

2: Yasuhiko Genku Kimura: via Facebook, 2012.

3: Peter Hawkins: *Coaching, Mentoring And Organizational Consultancy*. ↓

4: Marko Pogačnik: *Gaia's Quantum Leap*, ↓ p.61.

5: Bonnitta Roy: *Post-Dialectical Excerpts*. ↓

6: Eugene Pustoshkin: Facebook.

7: David Whyte: quoted in several places, presumably from: *Midlife and the Great Unknown: Finding Courage and Clarity Through Poetry*.

8: Ajahn Chah: widely reproduced, but no original source found.



## 6.3 The Process of Subtle Inner Alignment: Unfolding Generative Capacity



In the map of the *Circle of Presence* (section 4.7), the vertical axis relates to a process of inner alignment or unfolding authenticity, during which we learn to become present, freeing ourselves from layer upon layer of conditioning and mainstream ways of behaving and thinking. This process of becoming present and opening ever more to the subtle layers of reality is a never-ending journey with no final destination.

Once we are able to be present – at least most of the time – in the areas set out in the first part of this book, we continue to move towards ever more subtle awareness, particularly in those areas of life that we previously assumed to be pretty much static and fixed. I have found it fascinating to discover just how much fixation and rigidity we can release around *how* we know what we know and *what* we are able to know. From our shared experience we can confirm that it is possible to reach an immediate, embodied knowing as a collective; not as pieces of a puzzle that come together to show the full picture, but in a way that generates new knowing – a picture that never existed before.

Seen from another perspective, we can say we are able to close ever more of the gaps that seem to exist in our mainstream (Western) way of thinking and acting: gaps between body, mind and soul; between me and us; between us and them; between nature and humanity; between now, the past and the future. It is still a stretch for me to really, deeply understand and accept that time and space are really *in us*, rather than us walking through (linear or spacial) time and space. What I experience of natural rhythm and right timing are in any case pointing me in that direction. Who would have thought I could think differently about time? It seemed like such a ‘real thing’!

This capacity to notice ever more subtle layers in our experience brings us ever closer to the core process of knowing inside ourselves. Knowing does not just happen in our heads, but starts deep inside us, in unconscious realms of the brain, heart and body, moving through layers of affect and emotion, to finally result in knowing something (the act of



cognition). The more we have cleansed our inner layers of personal and collective conditioning, the closer we get to a clear and immediate knowing that is aligned both within and without.

## The process of subtle inner alignment: unfolding generative capacity

The concept of generative capacity is quite new to me. Nevertheless, in the ongoing process of living life more consciously, it seems to me that there is something beyond learning to become authentic, in the sense of shedding our conditioned thinking, feeling and doing. Life and consciousness don't stop there. The purpose of life is not to be authentic and present, but to be – truly – alive! To participate, to be 'in the soup'. The *subtle* inner alignment described here is a movement to close all the gaps, to be seamlessly co-existent with the flow of life. This alignment builds on the presence and mindfulness described in the first part of this book, and moves it deeper and wider into the core of being alive as a human being – as humanity – on Earth. Being fully alive has a generative quality: the embodiment of the ongoing ability to arise afresh as life in every moment, instead of just repeating what went before. Creating is more than remembering, it is not adding a fresh coat of metaphorical paint. It points to a vibrant quality of absolute, naked awareness: in awe at the simple facts of life and in love with what comes next in its unfolding.

A dictionary defines 'generative' as: relating to the ability to create or reproduce. Generative in the sense of 'the ability to create' means to bring into existence, as God created the universe. We, too, create our reality moment by moment, and we either repeat what went before or we are able to add something new to it.

Parents would not say they had generated a child, nor would they say they had created one. Rather, they made love and, consciously or not, had the potential to welcome a child into this world. What if we were to look at life and manifestation in this way? What if we deeply understood that, if we want the next thing we create to be alive and vibrant, adding to the thrivability of all, it will come into existence through our being in love with what is possible, however big or small. It is being in love all around, all the way up and all the way down: in love with ourselves, with whatever this particular group or gathering is about, with 'the problem we are tackling', with this place and space we are in, with this moment in time and everything that is arising in it... How different it would be than staring blindly at so many of the current complex problems present in the world!

## Four movements in unfolding generative capacity

Just as we discerned and described four layers in the process of unfolding authenticity (*Circle of Presence*), we will now seek to identify similar distinctions in the process of unfolding generative capacity (*Circle of Creation*). These distinctions are important because they allow us to discern the fine gradations in these new capacities, so we can check if we have acquired them all, if we have forgotten or overlooked one. It goes without saying that there are no steps, no squares, no levels, no boxes in the reality of the soup we are in; we merely make these distinctions to enhance our awareness of it all.

### Observing what is – Open Mind

*Focus on:* here and now

*Open to:* full life experience

In the *Circle of Presence* (see the map in [section 4.7](#)) you were invited to observe the subtle and inner dimensions of your self, of each other, of the group. I touched briefly on the possibility of sourcing, sharing and expressing subtle inner knowing. Now, in the *Circle of Creation*, I invite you to expand your observation wider and deeper into the subtle dimensions of life at large, which turns out to be much bigger than 'the world' we think we inhabit. It seems to hold much deeper meaning than anything we were taught in school and family. Life seems to be more... alive! Much more alive than anything our Western culture recognises as true, as worth pursuing or as bringing happiness.

If we open our minds, hearts and bodies beyond our inner emotional landscape, we discover ‘the river below the river’: a thread that seems to weave through our lives, nudging and drawing us in directions where our true gifts will be fully available to others and all around. Similarly, groups of diverse and seemingly random people often seem to be called together to act upon a potential that they had not consciously realised was attracting them. Our conditioning might judge or question who is part of the conversation, but we learn to trust that a rich diversity of participation makes for a rich outcome!

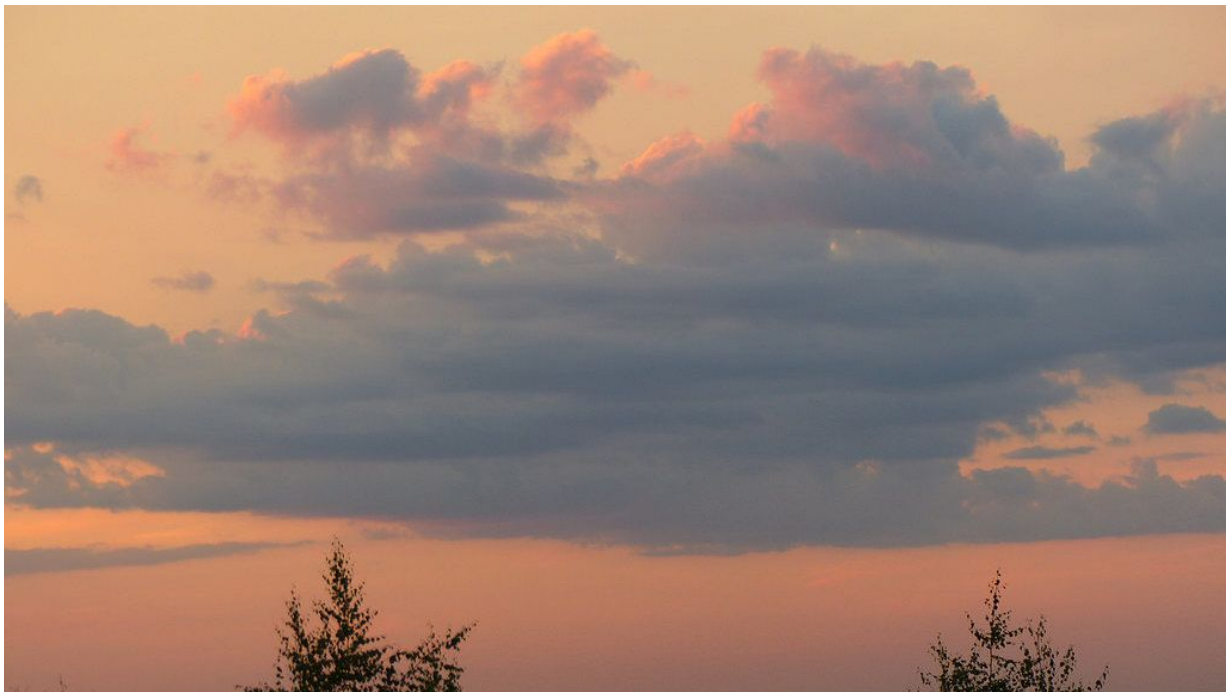
If we continue to pay attention to subtle signals, we notice that we can be more or less in tune with nature and our surroundings, and even with time. We might not always understand the synchronicities we see happening, but at the very least these open us up to the realisation that the gap between us and nature is non-existent, and that the boundaries we have placed between ourselves and life are much more porous than we imagined.

## **Accepting what is – Open Heart**

*Focus on:* widening

*Open to:* trusting subtle experience

When our minds open for more interweaving and interpenetration (although these words don’t do full justice to the essence of the experience) we can *accept more of what is*, including all these more or less subtle signals that life bestows on us if we are open enough to notice them. ‘Accepting’ here means trusting these subtle experiences, accepting them in our hearts, mind and bodies. Trusting that this person will contribute something essential, or is here for a reason that I might not be aware of; trusting that what comes to me from my soul’s calling is exactly what I need to speak or do in this collaboration; trusting that synchronicities are valuable signs. This kind of acceptance is sometimes also called ‘radical trust’, because what we trust goes beyond concepts and ideas that we know from the past, to embrace a trust that there is a deeper potential in everyone, in everything and in the process of unfolding. *Accepting what is in life* means actively relating with these subtle layers, inviting these dimensions to the party of daily life.



## **Honouring what is – Open Heart**

*Focus on:* deepening  
*Open to:* moving beyond

*Honouring what is* in this vast subtle realm calls us to open our hearts for the fullness of life itself – including all its horror, ugliness and potential. We do not turn away from what is difficult or hurtful, but witness it all with an open heart. This can indeed be painful at times, but we can bear it because we trust there is more to life than what our eyes can see at this moment, and because we can hold the pain in the collective and not just on our own.

*Honouring what is* means living life to the fullest in the understanding that life is in us, and in everything around us. It means transcending the boundaries of big systems (like the financial and economic system), cultures, nations and the like – boundaries that have no existence in reality, existing only to the extent we believe in them. In the reality of life itself, national boundaries are – in essence – nothing more than lines on a map. Seeing the unreality of so many aspects of our world does not mean that we do not see and acknowledge the pain held in cultural groups, gender groups and other minorities. These stories of war, suffering and pain can and need to be witnessed if we are to be able to meet as human beings and create participatory insights together.

Honouring the interweaving with the subtle context also means closing the gap with nature and whatever is there to notice in subtle place and time. We *honour what is* by living a natural rhythm, acknowledging that there is a right timing for everything, and refraining from trying to push or pull reality into an action plan or a strategic timeline. Borrowing one of the principles of self-organisation as it is expressed in Open Space Technology: whatever is happening is the only thing that could have! It is the feedback loop of life in action and we are well advised to take this information into our awareness and let it guide us into more of life.

This noticing and reflecting, constantly learning about what it means to be alive and creating more organisations, businesses, networks that are alive, brings us into a constant and closer relationship with the essence of life. When we live like this, we no longer repeat the patterns instilled in us by our parents or our culture – unless we want to – but we are in an ongoing action research inquiry into what it means to be (more) alive.

## **Living what is – Open Will**

*Focus on:* sharing and expressing  
*Open to:* living a generative life

Here too, there is one more layer, one movement deeper that brings us to *living what is* in this world that is now so much vaster and more subtle than we had ever conceived, and we are now so much more intimate with it all. In other words, we have landed in the realm of Open Will, where I enjoy an emergent and utterly unique life, that somehow seems to have always already been there for me to uncover. And yet, if I do not live it to the fullest, it does not exist in reality and will forever remain only a possibility that was never lived and manifested.

In the collective, where every person and all the rest of life participates, we arrive at novel insights and we act on them – here and now – interweaving with the subtle context, the subtle place and time, allowing the next, minimal elegant step to take form. We are now fully in awe of what is, both with the ordinary stuff of life and with whatever potential is ready to move through the veil into manifestation. This is what it means to be in love with life!

*Quote from participant:*

Yesterday out of desperation with the bad weather, I went to the gym. I was on the elliptical; it is like running in mid-air. I was going at a good pace, reaching optimal heart rate, etc. After about a half hour I moved into a state of an incredible sense of embodying alignment. I felt as if every part of me, every cell of this body that I inhabit as a human, every cell of my being, was in alignment, in perfect synchronisation. I noticed this, I was in the flow. I really began to look at what was going on. As I continued to move, I closed my eyes to sense more deeply. It was as if my human form, emotions, mind, soul, every part of me was aligned with all that is, the Earth, and the vast cosmic space-time we inhabit. I realised that as I closed my eyes, I can go to that deep place. This is the potential we hold, to be totally aligned, and yet always evolving. We hold that potential of being all that is.

— Judy

## 6.4 Enjoying an emergent life



### Commitment

To be committed means we are willing to make a promise with no expectation of return; a promise void of barter and not conditional on another's action. In the absence of this, we are constantly in the position of reacting to the choices of others. The cost of constantly reacting to the choices of others is increased cynicism and helplessness. The ultimate cost of cynicism and helplessness is we resort to the use of force. In this way the barter mentality that dominates our cultures helps create a proliferation of force. The use of force is the essence of the past we are trying to transform.

Commitment, the antithesis of entitlement and barter, is to choose a path independent of reward. It is a choice made in the absence of reciprocity. This is the essence of power.

— Peter Block<sup>1</sup>

Here we are. We have made the leap, jumped into the river of our deeper calling. We are in a space of Open Will, where sometimes what we feel called to do makes little sense in the culture that surrounds us, but we will try to do it anyway. Other people might not understand what it is we do, as we create a unique offering to the world and to life, as a unique person – a 'coherent and dynamic multiplicity' (a concept borrowed from Trish Nowland via Facebook).

There is joy and contentment in the simple everyday pleasures of life; doing practical things and meeting people with pleasure and warmth, almost devoid of any mental content. Being at ease with the mundane tasks of life in all their simplicity provides an unexpected opening into more presence and generative capacity. I empty the busy mind



so typical of the denizens of Western society, creating space for a silence that lets me listen to life. What comes through is what I am truly curious about and what I deeply long for.

## Go where the juice is – The practice of living from soul

In creativity, origin is present.

— Jean Gebser<sup>2</sup>

Living from soul is in essence only expanding the notion of becoming present, as described in the *Circle of Presence*, to every moment and every area of your life. It includes fine-tuning where you need to be going – or not. Many projects and events are interesting and could be somehow related with your life's purpose. The clue is to carefully calibrate your sensing so that you only engage where you really need to be and can truly learn or contribute.

Even in daily life, you can practice orienting yourself much more directly, sensing moment by moment: what am I called to do next? Is going to the birthday party of a dear friend really the right thing to do? Do I feel energised by the prospect? Or should I stay true to my energy level and appetite and work in the garden instead? We all need time to slow down and listen within to be able to make these fine discernments. What has juice for you most likely includes being more creative than is usual in our programmed mainstream lives. What is your natural way of being? Do you even know? What does it mean to be in your own flow, connected with your own energy and spontaneous impulses? When I talk of impulses in this context, I don't mean impulses that come from our habits (in my case that includes snacking on too many cookies and chocolate). Most often what blocks us from following these authentic, spontaneous movements is fear, doubt and habit.

For some time I held the question: "How do I stay out of the way so that life can happen through me?" One of the clues is: go where the juice is! Don't let a lack of imagination hold you back, but keep on sensing what is life-affirming and what isn't. Keep your senses open to where you are energising (or saving) the old system and where you are creating the new, in whatever way, big or small.

Through this practice, you come to a very different relationship with your own volition, as if you were now somehow coupled on to a different locomotive. Your will is no longer fuelled by your personal (habitual) wants in the same way as before. Rather, you just want to spend your time being and doing what you were born to be and do! If we attend carefully to our inner impulses and subtle energy levels, we can listen ourselves into disclosure, as our deepest being begins to peek out from under our ego entanglements, our judgements and frustrations, our wanting-to-do-it-right.

This is my understanding of the notion 'non-dual'; not a non-duality where we merge or become submerged in an amorphous whole, but being so utterly absorbed in embodied, creative expression that all gaps have fallen away. There is no sense of clock time and you are just happy with what you are doing. You are immersed in what is now arising in your unique being, with the playful energy of a child moving effortlessly from one activity to the next. Young children always go where the juice is for them, and we are now invited to remember that energy and reintegrate it into our adult lives.

In a way, we just become naturally who we are. That might seem pretty ordinary and nothing special, but it is unique! It becomes possible to be present *with life*, and not just *with the world*. The voice of our 'monkey mind' is no longer constantly prattling, so the natural self can be heard. This process seems to be easier to detect when we are in an easeful setting or a natural environment, and our identity or personality has subsided to a low profile. The challenge is staying as close as possible to this natural self, even when we are in an environment that pushes us in another direction. After a while, we stop wanting to go there because it doesn't have enough life in it.

## Live in not-knowing-yet

To live an emergent life is to be guided by your inner knowing and sensing, and by life's feedback in response to what you have done. Understanding this feedback is not always easy, as there can be many ways to explain or understand an event. Which interpretation to choose? Which is 'right'? Sometimes we just don't know, no matter how deeply we try to listen. At such times, we have to live for a while in a state of not-knowing-yet; we try a next step and notice what it brings. Staying in the not-knowing-yet in a conversation is difficult enough (more on that later), taking it on as part of your day-to-day life is something altogether different!

*Excerpt from personal diary:*

Here I find myself, at the bottom of the U, letting go... and oh, the ego wants so badly an image, an idea or a project but no, nothing comes. So this is the experience, not because it takes you by surprise, but because you decided to live in this way... nothing to hold on to... sometimes it feels like a deep and big black hole, an emptiness... oh my God!

When there is no clarity, perhaps you have to wait a little longer. There are times when we have the merest hunch about the next, tiny step; at others our inner sensing might know exactly what the next step should be. There are yet others when we just try it out, we probe and reflect afterwards on the feedback we got from the system, from life. Lived in this way, life becomes more like a dance, following the energy of what is really going on. The point is to see life as a journey into the unknown, an ongoing unfolding without a destination or a fixed plan with a certain outcome. In short: we learn how to become a participant in life, instead of being in control.

At the moment of taking the leap, there is often a clarity of new insights and ways of being, seeing and taking action. Most people find it very difficult to bring this clarity back into everyday life, however. After the illumination, we tend to fall back into our habits. How, then, to integrate the new insight into daily life in a coherent way? If we listen to our call, we go through many trials, which we can see as purification or rehearsals to be able to respond to the call. Remaining in this state of not-knowing-yet in an environment where everyone is continually asking you when things will be done (When will your book be ready? Is the renovation of your house finished? What have you decided?) is not possible on your own. You need a firm collective ground that holds you and can provide you with the strength and courage to stay with it. Having some friends or a circle, and having practices that support you to live this new consciousness is of utmost importance.

## Don't believe in money

For many, taking the step into actually living an emergent life means quitting the 'one job' that brings a predictable sum of money into the bank account every month. This brings us face to face, straight away, with the hurdle of financial security – and with it, security in general. For many people, this is the ultimate reason why (they think) they cannot follow what life is telling them to do. During several Women Moving the Edge gatherings, the money system (how it is organised) and its related capitalist culture (the values that go with it) were part of our inquiry. We learned a lot about it and I would like to share some of that here.

Life has more in store for us than just 'a job'. Everyone has a call from deep within – be it in a job or in self-employment or something altogether different. The soul's call is alluring when we start to pay attention. In principle we all have the power to choose whether to answer Yes or No. To be at peace with saying Yes to what our soul holds in store for us, we need to expand our story beyond the mainstream narrative around security, finances and how the current economic system works. The current core assumption seems to run something like this: "I need to make sure that I make enough money for my survival and my living." Note the emphasis on 'I' and 'my'! I have learned that this loop – I and money and survival, back to I – is much too small; too small for the soul and too small for the soup of life and the multitude of networks and influences we live in. If we take the leap and trust more in life, resources – not always in the form of money – can show up from different sources. The loop expands to include all kind of types

and sources of support. I see more and more people whose professional lives resemble a patchwork, with different kinds of paid work mixed in with unpaid projects and resources coming in from different, even unplanned sources.

Money has become our mainstream illusion of safety, next to trust in big organisations and in ‘the system’ as a whole. However, as many people all over the world have already discovered since the start of the current financial crisis, things can change quite quickly and dramatically. In the West, the capitalist system is deeply ingrained in our culture, so that we believe that this is really how it is and it cannot be changed. Many years ago, I found out for myself that I could not think outside the box when it came to money, although I could do so with many other topics. I had to read a book (*The Future of Money* by Bernard Lietaer) to truly realise that our financial and economic system is built on concepts and ideas with a certain intention in mind, and not on what is real, in terms of life-affirming or life-generating goods and services. If we were to change the design of these systems we could and would create very different results.



At one of our gatherings, all of this was packed into a single sentence: “Don’t believe in money!” As this line wove itself through our conversation, it became clear that the problem is not money itself, but the myriad unconscious assumptions that are intricately intertwined with it: security, survival, identity, the list is long. After reading Lietaer’s book, I became more determined than ever not to let a perceived scarcity of money (which is nothing more than a feature of its design) come between me and my life, between me and what I sense is mine to do when listening to my inner call. This has meant trusting (or trusting more than before) in all the networks and resources around me, and ultimately in the very mystery of life. It boils down to an interweaving of my individual, unique life with what is unfolding throughout the rest of life, in evolution, in the universe in general. The ways in which life will support my needs will emerge from this mystery of full participation and ‘being in the soup’, not only from my organising and planning.

Since the moment when the link was broken between money creation and real gold, the financial system has morphed into a ‘conceptualisation of money’, where there is no longer any link with tangible goods and real wealth. This conceptualisation – called derivatives and many other obscure names for complicated fabrications – is a feature of a complex society, and it might even be a harbinger of its impending collapse. The monetary system is a man-made construct, a bubble that will probably burst sooner or later.

Many people find it difficult to talk about money, whether it is setting a price for a service provided, or stating an amount that you want to offer or give. Is this not a mirror of the bigger system? Because the economic and financial system seems so complex, so enormous and overwhelming, we would rather just not think about it, withdraw or hold

back, or try to solve it all on our own. From early on in our series of gatherings, we sought to unravel this difficulty. We began to see how the combination of unconscious capitalist culture and (catholic) religion induced us not to talk about money – at least not openly. There is uneasiness, even taboo, when we step outside of the tacit contract of ‘paying-as-transaction-and-then-we’re-done’ and seek to enter instead into a conversation and a ‘relationship-that-includes-talking-about-money’. We are just not used to it, and all manner of murky entangled topics creep (unconsciously) into the scene.

Moving from ‘financial transactions’ to ‘relational exchange’ requires a radical shift. And what might happen if we were to put the unfolding of our soul’s calling (and its related competences and capacities) in the middle of the exchange – not even what we have done or offered, but how we are serving life with our true authentic gifts as they surface bit by bit? When we change the conversation in this way, and begin to exchange thus in a wider web of relationships, interdependencies and intimacy, then something magic starts to happen. I see true wealth as an abundance of life force; that seems a far better definition than “wealth equals money”. In these new terms, what is meaningful to exchange seems to be our true gifts, and not coins or bits of paper or electronic numbers. What if everybody were to follow their deepest passion? Wouldn’t the outcome be that Earth, and all life on and around her, would thrive?

In addition to the many other gaps (or polarities, or contradictions) we already construct, we tend to make many gaps when money is involved: a gap between those who have more money and those who have less, a gap between what is paid for and what we actually love to do – the list is seemingly endless. One of the core principles of circle practice is “offer what you can and ask for what you need”. This practice regularly runs into difficulties when what you offer or need is money. Something holds us back from restoring money to its rightful place in the circle of life, along with everything else. There is a deep-seated assumption of separation when it comes to money. How to close this gap? How to weave ourselves back into the mutual exchange of life, money included? A simple illustration of how resources flow can be seen in how flowers give their nectar to the bees and the bees carry the pollen to other flowers, thereby creating more life in an interwoven web of interrelating. When we weave ourselves back into the seamlessness of natural life, we can attract a sufficiency of what we need; it might be money and it might be other things money can or can’t buy.

After many conversations with organising teams and people in business, the clue to creating seamless ease and flow seems to be maximum flexibility around money. I understand this to mean being able to trust when there is less money, and being perfectly able to be happy with a simple life, but being equally able to charge business-rate fees for your work when the context you are in calls for that. Being flexible means being ‘respons-able’ in all kind of situations regarding prices, fees, offerings, gifts and so on. When we can do this, all the various elements related with money in our culture are disentangled from the sums in your bank account: security for later, survival, wealth, identity, savings etc. If we can achieve this, we can live with money in full freedom.





## Feeling called, being a caller

In a self-organising network, nothing happens unless someone steps up, opens a conversation and makes something happen. Our world might not (yet) be a self-organising network, but if we relate with life and the planet, instead of with the world, then we are always already in one! One example of a natural and organic globally structured self-organising network without any hint of formal organisation is the Art of Hosting network.<sup>a</sup> From years of observing this network in action, we have come to understand the power and necessity of being a caller to make this work. There seems to be a specific leadership role in calling something into being, be it a new organisation, a novel way of working or the realisation of some new potential.

A caller is someone who feels something needs to be done, who makes the first move and invites others in. Being a caller does not mean doing it all on your own. A caller is not the leader in the classical sense. Rather, he or she probably has the shortest line to the soul of the organisation or the heart of the possibility. In the beginning, when things don't yet have any shape or form, the caller is essential. If the caller steps out at the beginning of the process, the whole thing will collapse. We could say that the caller holds, on an energetic level, the full potential of what can become possible.

Sometimes we see a few people or a small group stepping up as the caller for a certain project. Together they hold what can become possible over time. Being the caller does not mean that you know it all from the start – rather the opposite! The calling comes from a deep listening, both inside and outside in the world. Then, at a certain point people feel they have to do something, they have to speak up, they have to initiate. They take a first step in a journey that is always into the unknown. There can be long periods of not knowing, because in the messiness of life we are not in control and cannot plan multiple steps ahead. When you are the caller, however, there are certain things you can and need to do: you set the frame, the vision, the values, the quality, the guidelines. While you cannot know exactly how it will go and what it will look like, nevertheless, you hold the walls and the foundations – the potential of the whole project. How the details will unfold over time depends on so much more: the interweaving with other people, synchronicities on all kind of levels; we get some clues, meet the right people, hear about the right book and then magic can happen.

In one person's words, being a caller is like "a breakthrough in being responsible and getting for myself that there isn't anyone else (any more). It's no one else's fault if we are not doing things the way I want." I myself complained



for a long time that I was always the one that initiated new projects and wanted for once to join a project that someone else had started – until it finally dawned on me that initiating novel projects was what I had to do, that this was my contribution to the whole. That was the end of my complaining, when I finally surrendered to this greater Open Will. On the one hand, it feels great; on the other hand it can be intimidating: “Oh shit, I’m leading this!” If I am an acorn I cannot resist growing like an oak, and there is no use complaining that I am not a daisy in the meadow. It is here that Scharmer’s ‘voice of fear’ shows up in its many different forms: fear around scale, around empowerment, around taking leadership, around... (fill in your own). More and more people across the world are realising that they can step up and that nobody else (not politicians, not business leaders or any one else) is going to do it for them. The key seems to lie in forming a new relationship with our soul’s purpose and stepping into our fullness, naked and courageously intimate with life. Because, just like all life, my highest self is participatory.

As was spoken in one of our Women Moving the Edge gatherings: What if following your passion/bliss/joy/pleasure were the way, and creating the new world were a by-product? Life is happening anyway, whether we participate fully or not.

## Open Will

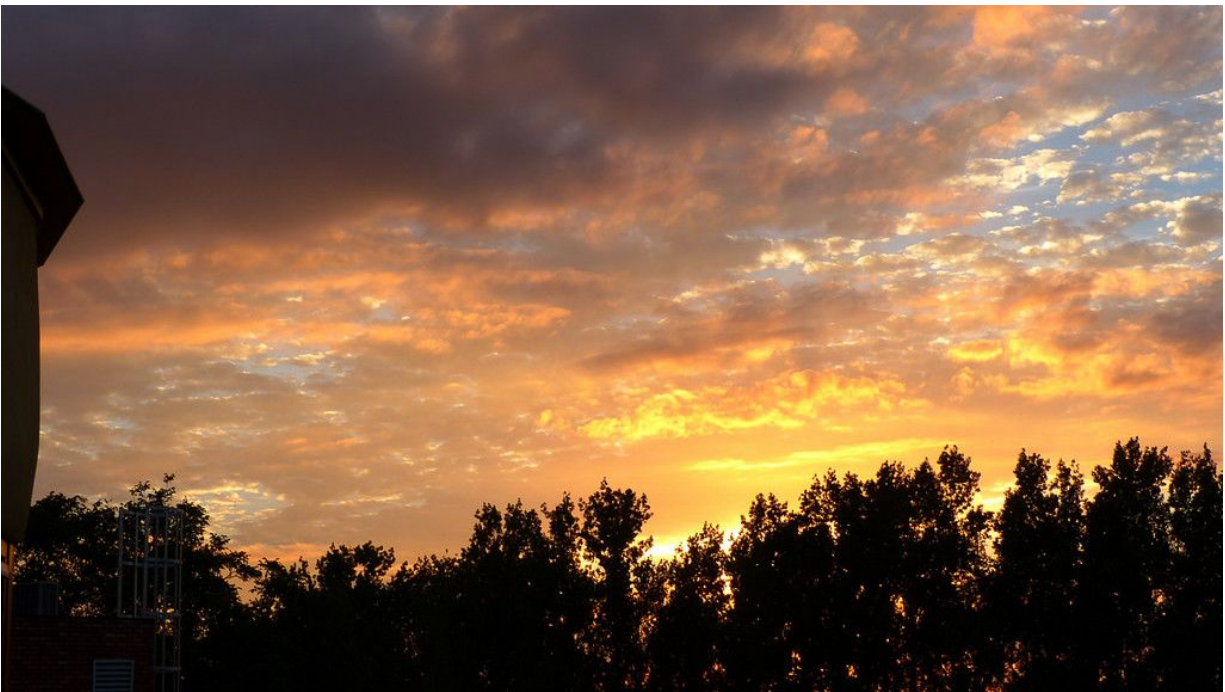
Wisdom consists in doing the next thing you have to do, doing it with your whole heart, and finding delight in doing it.

— Meister Eckhart<sup>3</sup>

It might be obvious by now that living an emergent life in resonance with your deeper calling is an act of what Otto Scharmer calls ‘open will’. In other terms, we could say you have landed in the stream of evolution and, in full awareness of that, you surrender to it. If we engage in life in this way, our normal kind of decision-making apparatus simply no longer applies. The ‘Getting Things Done’ approach is not geared to this kind of generative living. I have to let go: surrender my calling, my life path, my will, and relinquish everything to life. That means leaning into the mystery, as you would lean into a wind tunnel, trusting you won’t fall on your face.

Living in Open Will, you allow yourself to be guided by those unique inner prompts, calls and synchronicities. You no longer worry about having some kind of over-arching strategy or label for your role. You go with the promptings of your gut and all the other feedback from life. Sometimes you say yes to something and later you have to pull out because the inner message has changed. Life wants us to be well, so if what you are doing feels heavy in any way, then it goes out the door. This doesn’t mean that anything can come and go on a whim, because often your soul is insistent and requires quite some long-haul persistence. You learn to be present to the call moment by moment.

There seems to be a paradox in letting go of our habits and known strategies, letting go of our free will only to then surrender ‘to being used’ by something else! That is exactly what Open Will is about. The good news is that life only wants you to be you, your ordinary self, in your own unique way. This simplifies your life in some way, because all that remains is what really matters.



## **I need you because of us**

Following this path, you inevitably reach a point where you need other people who also live from this place of inner inspiration – not just for encouragement and support, but also in order to realise (even) more of your potential. I well remember the moment when I realised that I could no longer evolve on my own. In this practice of participating fully in life, I need others with whom to share and express more of what I am able to see and do. I need a collective (a group, a team – whatever you call it) to be able to go deeper into myself, to become more of who I am; not in the personality-habit sense, but in order to shed ever deeper layers of those habits and reveal more of what is latent in me. We need each other – I need you, because of us.

In a morning meditation, Les realised: “... how being in this circle calls me to be no more and no less than fully present. ‘It is not up to me...’ meaning: ‘I don’t have to do this by myself, I’m part of the collective’, and ‘it is totally up to me....’ meaning: when I’m not present (and coming from a known story), the full resonance potential of the group doesn’t manifest.”

In our Women Moving the Edge gatherings we often repeated one of the agreements of circle practice: “Ask for what you need, and offer what you can.” This is a splendid agreement that can help make every group into a leaderful one; everyone is invited to take responsibility for their own needs and passions and to offer their stories and gifts in service of the whole. Over time, though, we realised that there is more beyond this paradox of need and offer. As one woman put it: “No person alone can follow their own soul’s calling.” If we are on the level of soul, my need seems to be an offer, or at least an invitation to others. “I need you” then becomes an expression of interdependency, and the whole thing flips: the gift of my need becomes an invitation to others to be or become more fully who they are. The gift of need as invitation – my Western-trained personality is still trying to come to grips with this.

*Quote from participant:*

When this idea about need was present at Women Moving the Edge, it wasn't about 'neediness' at all. It was about needing and inviting the other to be fully who they are, at the deepest and widest level; for that person to be appreciated and wanted for being that. It was about authentic interrelationship and interconnectedness in a way that we don't often relate. For a soul to be needed as a soul is a huge opening.

— Judy

In the Art of Hosting network we have a frequently-quoted saying: "It is kind to ask for help. The one who cannot ask for help, cannot be trusted." This saying comes from the Nuuchah-nulth tribe of first nation people on the Pacific West Coast (Canada/Vancouver Island). The word that covers all of this is 'Aphei'. These people hunted whales with harpoons, so it was clear that if a tribe member took on a task that was bigger than they could manage on their own, they endangered not only themselves but everyone else on the hunt. While the saying speaks about the importance of relationship in community, it is equally true for all of life. We need to stand together. This is what we need, this is what we can offer: to stand together in our soul's calling, because it cannot be done on our own. We are so much more together than alone. There is beauty when we recognise, acknowledge and articulate the ways in which we need each other.

*Quote from participant:*

I have had this image recently of there being a Helen-shaped-(w)hole in the cosmos. My job now is to unwarp myself. My conditioning, upbringing, education, survival strategies have warped me away from my authentic original shape. Until I can massage myself back, re-find my authentic original shape, I am not quite fitting in the cosmos. That whole feeling of there being a Helen-shaped hole as a place where I slot, where I fit seamlessly, and where I belong, is not a solitary place. There are others in proximity, in closeness. When we come close together, it is easier for each of us to step into who we really are, nothing more, nothing less. We cover more bases. It's the diversity we have together. We only exist in this interconnected whole. This whole is evolving together, that is why I cannot evolve on my own. I am really sensing the limits of our language here. It doesn't speak this language of interconnectedness; subject-verb-object never speaks of the reciprocity.

— Helen

In [Chapter 7](#) we will explore in depth the power and practice of witnessing, seeing each other as we really are – the soul who recognises another soul, because a full integration of our soul's calling requires the recognition (through others) of oneself as "exemplary of our authenticity" (words from Bonnitta Roy).

I need you, because of us.  
I need you, because of the web of life.  
Can we live as the Earth?  
  
What if the need of the planet, of Earth,  
is an invitation to all of us to become who we really are?  
to reach our full potential?  
— excerpt from blog

## Notes

1: Peter Block: *Civic Engagement and the Restoration of Community* ↓

2: Jean Gebser: *The Ever-Present Origin* ↓ p.313.

3: Meister Eckhart: (*widely quoted*)

## 6.5 Opening to I-in-Now



### Following:

You are being drawn forward through a strong attraction. Follow the inevitable course of events. Yield to the path set out in front of you, the path of least resistance.

Be guided by the way things are moving. You are involved in a series of events that are firmly connected. This can open up a new time. It will bring fundamental success, profit and insight. It is not a mistake. The call has come. Let go of what is past. A new focus is emerging. Dim your discriminating power so old habits can dissolve.

The whole world must follow the times and the seasons. You are following a righteous idea inherent in the time.

— I Ching <sup>1</sup>

## Observe what is in I-in-Now

Observe the threads in your life as you look back into your past, notice the signs life gives you, register the invitations coming your way – open your self to more than what mainstream society has told you to expect and to do. *Observe what is in I-in-Now* is about listening deeply for what is yours to do. Holding this question for some time, using it as a regular practice, cultivates your senses to become more receptive to signs in this direction. The point is simply to observe, without making too big a deal of it, because then you would be trying too hard!

I notice that many people also need to observe and discern what is *not* theirs to do. We live in interesting and inspiring times, with many innovative projects and gatherings on offer. It therefore behooves us to listen deeply to



where our contribution is really called for and in what form. It is an act of subtle discernment in yourself to know what is yours to do and what not. Most people need some new practices to be able to do this.

## Accept what is in I-in-Now

Once you connect with your calling at this profound level, there can no longer be any question whether it can be done or not. If you question and refuse the call, you step away from being present to it, and into a place of trying, doubting and guessing.

As you practice accepting what is in *I-in-Now*, you will most likely notice some resistance or grandiosity in your personality. Simply observe it and let it go. *Accept what is* and participate fully in life, as the unique person you are, with your unique gift – trusting the subtle signs and inner knowing more than ever before.

We cannot escape the deepest need of our Soul!  
— Johannes Schmidt <sup>2</sup>

## Honour what is in I-in-Now

If you truly honour your unique gift, you will recognise at the core of your being that, somehow, this gift is a contribution to the whole. You can see yourself as a unique human being who has power in the greater scheme of things. Not power ‘over’ the financial, social, economic and industrial systems, since you are unlikely to be in a position with that kind of hierarchical power. Nevertheless, there is power, in the sense of influence in the web of life, in doing what you are good at and what you are meant to be doing. Deepening the movement of ever greater generative capacity in yourself also means opening that capacity to wider and bigger systems, and stopping blaming and judging them. Don’t forget we are all immersed together in this curious and fascinating endeavour of creating the new and the novel, while nobody knows how or whether things will turn out OK.

As you honour your calling, you will discover that you know inside what to do next. You might not see the end or the ultimate goal – most likely not – but life seems to guide you, offer hints and support from unknown or unexpected sources. Honouring also means working with your inner knowing or guidance in combination with the little nudges and hints coming from ‘outside’... you are bound in this web of life, you are part of the soup... and it feels vibrant to participate fully in it!

## Live what is in I-in-Now

Over time you will notice that the gaps between your life, your passion and your work will disappear. Your whole life is now an expression of your uniqueness; all inner differences and paradoxes have now been resolved in a sort of mutual implication of opposites, consciously embracing the different parts in our selves.

The concept of self, rather than implying a unity, in this way is perhaps better described as a coherent multiplicity.  
— Trish Nowland <sup>3</sup>

## Notes

1: I Ching: 17: *Following*. ↓

2: Johannes Schmidt: during a training called *Deep Change*.

3: Trish Nowland: via Facebook.

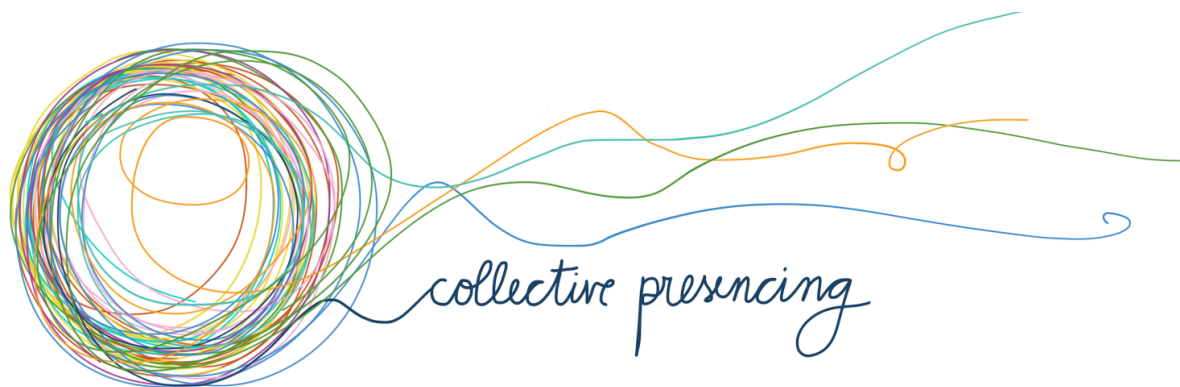
## 6.6 Away from linear thinking – WMtE part 6



I somehow had a vision that the Women Moving the Edge gatherings would go on in time – maybe for ever? – and that the gatherings would be held and organised, in the longer term, not only by Judy and me, and that over time there might be local circles that could hold it. It would do away with the need for me to travel to the US and Judy to Europe. Within that vision we started thinking about apprenticeship for some women who felt they would like to learn how to hold these gatherings. Soon enough this vision collapsed as the two women applying for that role stepped back and we were back on our own. We had to learn the hard way that this was not a linear path, and we had to follow the meanderings of life and its unfolding.

We came to see this experience as another instance of linear thinking creeping back in. We didn't yet see very clearly how this practice of continuous collective inquiry and sensing could lead to manifest action in the world. The prototyping and crystallising that Scharmer was talking about at that time (around 2008) didn't seem enough. In many of the instances we saw around us it looked as if, once the group had gained its new insight, it would step out of the sensing and start 'doing' it – *in the old way*.

Instead of succumbing to this temptation, we kept on sensing, wondering: what is emergent creation? What does it feel like? What does it look like? In the step from the fourth gathering to the fifth, we realised that we had shifted our prime attention from 'staying in individual alignment' toward 'collective alignment' – and then into action. It occurred to us that we were moving out of the bottom of the U, and up its right side. Judy said: "I think it is a hard one to be with. How are we with staying in our energy and this more action orientation?"



## 7. Generative Dialogue: We-in-Now

7.1 Collective Calling

7.2 The Simple Practice and Power of Witnessing

7.3 Deeper Circle Practice

7.4 Collective Sourcing

7.5 Holding Not-Knowing-Yet

7.6 Opening to We-in-Now

7.7 More a river than a thing – WMtE part7

## 7.1 Collective Calling



If the whole presences within its parts, then a part is a place for the presencing of the whole. ... a part is special and not accidental, since it must be such as to let the whole come into presence. This sociality of the part is particularly important because it shows us the way to the whole. It clearly indicates that the way to the whole is into and through the parts. It is not to be encountered by stepping back to an overview, for it is not over and above the parts, as if it were some superior all-encompassing entity. The whole is to be encountered by stepping right into the parts. This is how we enter into the nesting of the whole, and thus move into the whole as we pass through the parts.

— Henri Bortoft<sup>1</sup>

### The Circle of Seven

What follows are snippets of Otto Scharmer's conversation with the women of the Circle of Seven in 2003. This was part of the *Dialog on Leadership* research conducted by Scharmer. This particular one disappeared from the original list of interviews, but is still online.<sup>2</sup>



“What if there was a function that needed to be fulfilled at that time, rather than a destiny for certain people to be together? And it landed on us. It could have been other people. As though life were seeking out an open, eager group that could work this one out, probably as part of what is needed now in the evolutionary pattern of the world community.”

“We began listening for what we were actually supposed to do every time we were together. In every moment, the dedication was to sensitivity, perception, accuracy of expression, and actual fulfillment of the never-ending unfolding of next steps. We used whatever came to us – invitations to meet people, hunches about where we needed to meet together on the Earth, extemporaneous ceremonies that presented themselves to us, arising crises in our families, books that fell into our laps – as the material we metabolised together. That became the whole point of the exercise.

“It was like paying attention to what the ‘partner’ in the Great Field was inviting us into next. We used the name, the Great Partner. It wasn’t primarily about personal ‘initiation’. We were being initiated by invitation from the Partner, as a collective. I’ll never forget when I first understood that. Paying attention, then, became the discipline – collective attention not only to what we imagined we were about, but to what was really being asked of us together.”

“The fact is that every combination of people will have their own blueprint or possibility. One group can’t copy the signature of another group, just as an individual can’t become someone else and fulfill who he or she uniquely is.”

“Deep circle work is still a primary baseline of experience of finer dimensions, other frequencies, and a realm or source that is as real to me as this physical world. But it’s not my only teacher. It was a teacher and still is a teacher. I hold it as a primary vehicle for what I came here to do, because I believe that this circle cares for the world in a way that has a critical influence. There’s no proving that one way or another, but I know it’s true. That’s a really, really big thing for me. It’s part of that function that fell on us.”

I was so happy to find this interview and read these words, because they articulated some of the experience we were exploring. They affirmed that we were not crazy, not wandering down a road that had no meaning! Here was Otto Scharmer interviewing the ladies who formed this circle as part of his worldwide interview process to sense into what was ahead in the world of leadership. I loved it so much that I wrote them an email expressing my wonder and excitement. As life has it, I happened to meet two of them on several occasions over the next years.

## Collective callings

What indeed, if – as the women of the Circle of Seven suggest in the first quote – there were different potentials, possibilities, existing in life on this Earth that needed more than one fully unique person to be present at the same time, in order to access a collective inner wisdom? I am not speculating here about whether there actually are such things as collective soul-prints – basically that doesn’t matter. However, I do see very many complex issues and problems that call for deep co-creation between different unique human beings who can access their inner knowing and put it to use in service of a larger whole through collective inquiry. Once you have learned to speak and live from your own unique soul’s calling, you can start to apply the practice in a collective context. Collectively, you are then able to reach out, through your own soul, to the collective soul level – at least this is easier and clearer when your own soul is available to do so. This also works the other way around: practicing collective presencing will enhance your clarity about your own soul’s calling.

From our own experience during the years of the Women Moving the Edge inquiry, we noticed that we were in service of ‘something’ – a potential, a possibility – that wanted to come into manifestation through us. Although it was a loose project, with different participants at the different gatherings and sometimes more than 6 months between gatherings, there was nevertheless a deep coherence that evolved through us, through our collective and full participation. I will write more about this later, but from our experience we can state that the *potential that is now accessible in this time of upheaval and renewal can only manifest through collectives of fully present human beings.*

If we are not aware, if we fail to pick up the signal pointing to the existence of something else that is possible, then that particular potential might remain a lost opportunity.

Art philosopher Etienne Souriau speaks about *instauration* (in French: ‘l’oeuvre à faire’) referring to the way an artist is ‘invited’ or ‘called’ by the material to make the artwork. Instauration asks the question: why am I here on Earth? This relates to the individual soul’s calling. But what if there were something like collective instauration? ‘Faire exister la vérité – ici!’ Bringing the truth into being – here! Obviously, for very complex situations the truth cannot be seen by one person alone; we are in need of many eyes and inner sensing organs to see more perspectives on the truth, more of the whole.

## The practice of invitation

Once you have heard the whisper of a collective call and become part of a calling team, it is easy to fall into the trap of becoming the committee that will decide who will be invited and who will not. This is the trap of business as usual, the trap of linearity. We learned along the way that we were neither in charge nor in control of who would show up to participate. We always sent an open invitation to different global networks, and were sometimes quite surprised by who showed up. After some time, I learned to drop my inner judgement about who was supposed to come or not, and instead became keenly curious about what each of these women had to bring.

**Sending out an invitation** is an authentic opening to other human beings, not a means to earn money. We open the circle to people and we request their presence and participation in the circle practice, just as this is requested from those of us who are inviting. In essence, this is a gesture of equality and trust. An invitation to engage in a collective inquiry with an evolutionary intent can have no emotional strings attached. When you invite, you invite the whole being, with all the consequences that entails for both the inviter and the invitee. What you are inviting into is ‘full participation’ (more on this below). You are inviting the other to bring their full selves into the context of the collective inquiry, without reservations. This requires you to relinquish all thoughts of ownership and desire to control the outcome. (See more on this within [section 7.3: Disturbance as Invitation](#))

For this reason, it is important to be crystal clear about the intent of the gathering (more below). What you intend will shape your invitation, and that will influence who shows up. It can seem that the intention, the potential, has its own agenda, which will define who shows up and who will contribute to the wisdom gathered in this specific event. This is a form of the Open Space Technology principle describing what happens when we live in a self-organising system: who ever shows up are the right people.

Someone drew a circle that left me out,  
But love and I had the wit to win,  
We drew a circle that took them in.  
— adapted from Edwin Markham

Over the years of practicing the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter,<sup>a</sup> I have learned much about the art of invitation. In the beginning, I invited from the personality level, with quite some emotional strings attached. In my case, that translated as a feeling of trepidation about approaching people with ‘my stuff’. Later, I learned to invite more from a soul level, sending the invitation out far and wide into the universe so that it could reach the ones who needed to come. Living from my deeper calling, I can now reach out to others just to sense if this particular invitation resonates with their unique calling or not. You could say we are inviting people energetically from our heart, but the most important point is that we are issuing an open invitation and not looking for a specific outcome.

The first form that the collective calling takes is the collective crafting of the invitation by the hosting team. When we are doing this, we are actively sensing what this specific gathering will be about. We then send the invitation out from that potential, and from the unique beings that we are. We try to come as close as possible to this potential and to articulate the invitation from that place, because that will invite the other participants in. An invitation emanating

from a collective alignment can release a resonance and an answering alignment in those invited – how the call manifests for them in that moment.

Inviting people in this way makes sure that you invite in diversity. In the case of Women Moving the Edge, we had women of all ages from a wide range of backgrounds and professions; many showed up without even being able to articulate clearly why they were coming, but with an inner knowing that they had to be there. Still, these were mostly white, Western, middle-aged women, although curiously enough we twice had a young pregnant woman in the circle.

Inviting people into a collective inquiry is quite different than inviting them to participate in a workshop or a meeting. This specific inquiry is happening because you and others feel a call to engage in it. By sending out an invitation you are asking if others want to join this shared inquiry. This is another version of “I need you because of us”. My/our need to gain clarity in this particular topic is an invitation to others to join and participate. We need each other – in presence and uniqueness – in order to co-create. Our need or our invitation is like a gift to others to be and to become more of who they are.

## Intention as guiding question

Long before we articulated this whole journey as an action research project, we knew that being in a continuous collective inquiry was important, because we were always curious about what was coming next. In the Art of Hosting practice, the very first conversation with a client expressing interest to take a participatory approach with their team or stakeholders is always about clarifying the ‘real’ purpose of their wish or plan. As Toke Møller, one of the elders in this global network, would say: “Clarity of purpose is the invisible leader”. In the kind of collective inquiry we have in mind here, ‘purpose’ is to be understood not as ‘goal’, but rather as ‘intention’. We always worked with an intention articulated in the form of a question, pointing to a potential that can manifest only when we all put our best selves into the mix. This guiding question will act as a riverbed to guide our collective inquiry; it will somehow – loosely – set the boundaries and scope of the field of potential that we can collectively sense into.

Stated as a question, the intention becomes a lightning rod for the collective inquiry that the circle always is. For every Women Moving the Edge gathering, the first step would always be sensing into the guiding question around which our collective inquiry would take form. As the hosting team, we would spend a lot of time collectively sensing into it, through a series of conference calls. We were meticulous about ensuring that every member of the team felt happy that the question was articulated just right. Only then were we satisfied and sure that we were all aligned to the same inquiry, the same shared purpose – maybe to the collective calling?

The articulation of the question comes from the level of soul – at least to the best of our ability – so that it speaks of a deep potential and is not just a surface-level expression. Just as the poet who knows that the word he is trying on in this specific line in the poem is not the right one and keeps searching until he finds the perfect word in the perfect sentence, so we sense together into the wording of the question that will guide our next inquiry.

In the many hosting calls running up to the actual gathering, finding and articulating the question is the major work. This is the biggest part of the preparation work. For the hosting team, it means going through the process – which the participants will also go through later – of not knowing what wants to emerge, leaning in to grasp at least some sense of what it is about. We must go through this same process for every gathering, and once we hit the bottom of the U, there is a collective sense of “This is it!” Sometimes it can take a long time to gain full precision and to check whether the question is truly inspiring and uplifting. After this work is done, it remains to send out the invitation to others to enter the container formed by the circle process and the guiding question. Then more of life can happen.

This calling question would always be mentioned in the framing of the gathering, right at the start. It would also be written (beautifully, with illumination) on a flipchart and visible to everyone throughout the time of the gathering. There is power in formally and deliberately speaking the intent: first of all as a reminder to all present of our purpose in coming together (some participants don’t remember the exact articulation of the topic); secondly, clearly

articulating the intention seems to have influence on the subtle layers of reality, thereby helping to make the intention manifest.

Practitioners of collective presencing believe that it is important – always and everywhere – to clarify the intention of any gathering, call or event. Why is intention so important? It seems that by setting an intention, and then speaking and articulating it, we make an energetic connection with the potential implicit therein. As if intention and potential are different facets of the same whole. It will be clear by now that speaking the intent and inviting into collective inquiry is quite different than setting an agenda or offering a detailed plan of action (which will tend to lead to disagreement, sometimes even argument and conflict). The guiding question acts as a boundary or membrane, framing the scope of the inquiry and its attendant conversations. Beyond that, there is a high level of not-knowing-yet what will arise from the collective inquiry.

*Quote from participant:*

When I was participating in Women Moving the Edge, it wasn't until I was driving home that I realised: There wasn't really any agenda!! Only holding the possibility, and how absolutely powerful that is. Plugging into the divine, the collective.... whatever the heck it is called!

— Barbara

## Friendship

The ultimate touchstone of friendship is not improvement, neither of the self nor of the other: the ultimate touchstone is witness, the privilege of having been seen by someone and the equal privilege of being granted the sight of the essence of another, to have walked with them and to have believed in them, and sometimes just to have accompanied them for however brief a span, on a journey impossible to accomplish alone.

— David Whyte<sup>3</sup>

In the global networks of practitioners of practices like Art of Hosting, the World Café and Open Space, people don't hesitate to name friendship as the element that makes it possible, even easy, to access the deeper levels of emergence. Bill Torbert<sup>4</sup> also talks about 'friendship as developmental force' – as opposed to business, which is cloaked in too many layers of lesser awareness. He describes an 'alchemist work party', a gathering of consultants who each have their own (small) business – most likely all people who have found their unique gift and calling. This particular form of friendship does not imply that we interact with each other every day or every week. Rather, it means that as professionals or fellow practitioners we share on such a deep personal level – again and again – that trust, respect and friendship inevitably ensue. I always felt some unease in naming this element of friendship, because it was not the same as the friendships I had 20 years ago with my women friends. What, then, is different?

Being together in a group using the circle practice over a longer time, or with people who practice circle regularly, there grows a level of basic humanness with each other that strongly resembles how friends are together: gentle and near. We deeply know and understand that nobody is perfect, we see the flaws in each other and in ourselves and still we stay in relationship, sharing our stories and our vulnerabilities and co-creating together. We stay together in the conversation, even when things get difficult and nobody knows what will be the next step. As in all friendships, we see the uniqueness of each participant and there is no need for us to all be the same or think alike. There is a deep trust in each other's motivation to be in this shared inquiry or journey; we acknowledge that everyone is doing their best and wants to contribute to an outcome for the good of everyone involved. As Chris Corrigan stated it: "Friendship is an emergent property of good relationship and good collaboration."

Another difference with 'normal' friendship is that it is coupled with a shared awareness and consciousness. The resonance of friendship includes assumptions about what life is about, what time we are in and the importance of

hosting ourselves, or the art of becoming present (as described in the *Circle of Presence*). Added to a normal friendship is a deep shared trust in the unfolding of our future story; we all (hold an intention to) come from origin or source and we are all invited to live more and more into the unique beings that we are. There is an inner knowing that we are in a radical transition time on Earth and we all want to learn and spread the requisite skills for this journey. An essential ingredient is the shared practice of being perpetual learners and constantly reflecting on where our actions and thoughts originate. This makes for open minds, wide open hearts and innovative creations. Taken together, all these dimensions make it possible to land quickly on the same wavelength (even if we haven't met before) and to step into a collective inquiry – a collective calling – for the good of the whole.

## Notes

1: Henri Bortoft: As quoted in *Imagination Becomes an Organ of Perception*. ↓

2: Circle of Seven: *The Presence of the Circle Being* ↓

3: David Whyte: from Readers' Circle Essay, "Friendship", 2011.

4: Bill Torbert: *Website* ↓



## 7.2 The Simple Practice and Power of Witnessing



When we listen attentively there is neither agreement or disagreement; we are just in a state of attention.  
— J. Krishnamurti

Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out indefinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel at the net's every node, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that the process of reflection is infinite.

— Indra's net<sup>1</sup>

### The practice of witnessing and being witnessed

Some years ago I posted a question on my Facebook wall: "Sitting with this question: what makes witnessing so powerful? Is it because it links with our deepest soul?" My question provoked a rich crop of answers, some really beautiful and meaningful. The question had been fuelled by experiences in some gatherings and learning events. In one of these we conducted a dedicated witnessing circle. This was 'a listening circle' where, instead of using the talking piece when speaking, the talking piece became a receiving piece. The person holding it was invited to listen

and receive as others shared what they had noticed as his or her precious and unique gift to the whole. This was a very special experience for me, because we could all touch and articulate a layer that we don't normally give words to. Personally, I was surprised that people saw me for who I was and what I contributed, although hardly any one had ever named it or reflected it back to me before. The richness and the rightness, the huge depth of wisdom, the care and contributions, not just of the individuals but of the whole circle of people – our souls became present! This deep listening and then articulating back is best expressed by the concept of *bearing witness*. It was basically naming each other's essence: it was looking, noticing and speaking from the soul level.

As explained earlier, circle practice is key to both the *Circle of Presence* and the *Circle of Creation*. When you start practicing the circle, the first thing you learn is to slow down the conversation, and listen more deeply, both inside your self and to others. Over time, this slowing down and this flavour of listening become embodied in your being. When this happens, it becomes possible to see others more deeply: witnessing. This is not the Witness with capital W used in some meditation practice. Here we are pointing to a deep seeing, free of judgement, penetrating through the layers of conditioning to apprehend and deeply honour the core self of the other. To be able to abide in that space of non-judgement, you need first to be aware of and able to hold your judgements about yourself; only then can you look more deeply into the other human being. It is indeed possible to be with one another in such a way that the deepest aspects of ourselves resonate and mirror the deepest aspect of the other. Bonnitta Roy calls it a 'compassionate embrace', and it has nothing to do with any form of sentimentality – it is really a deep seeing.

In a way, witnessing is quite simple, yet it holds such deep power. My dear friend Helen wrote: "In essence, witnessing is the simple act of resting one's naked attention on an object – be it a person, a scene, a thing of any kind – without judgement, but with a simple intention to bear witness." The power of witnessing lies in this fact of non-judgement and deep respect, creating and offering a space that is truly safe for everyone.

In answer to my Facebook question, Kamyar wrote: "Your soul, and with that your highest potential, only shows up fully in a safe space. Eyes that see deficiencies and look at you as incomplete make the space very unsafe. On the other hand, eyes that witness you in your real power and see you in your highest potential bring healing and safety at a deep level. The first eye creates wounds at the soul level, the second brings healing." When you are witnessed by somebody else, held fully in that non-judgemental gaze, it breaks your own inner judgemental feedback loop and releases your energy into a bigger space. If you can reveal something to others, if you can show your whole self and they don't all run off screaming, on the contrary you are received with true respect and awe – there is something profoundly healing about that. There is a dissolving of pressure as a pattern of judgement is released into a bigger holding space where it can subside.

It is clear that this practice cannot be done alone; it is only possible in a group or a collective. *Listening the soul into disclosure* as we once named it, isn't a passive listening, but has an active side to it: reflecting back elements people have not seen about themselves. As one names and expresses what another has not yet been aware of, they become more of themselves, and can participate more fully and completely. This creates a deeper collective capacity.

Witnessing is not restricted to looking at the positive, beautiful sides of reality. We are open and receptive to all of life. Albrecht Mahr, one of my trainers in Systemic Constellation work, nailed it in a few sentences: "Reality is kind. First seeing the reality (Yes, this is how it is; even if it is ugly or painful) allows for the change to happen; an unfolding suchness... Keeping up an illusion or hope is a dangerous condition." The witnessing of pain – seeing reality as it is, pain included – builds on the capacity to witness our own woundedness. From holding our own wounds, we can expand our hearts outwards to be present to others for further witnessing. We need to be able to hold the full range of emotion, from very strong shocks experienced by individuals to the depth of sadness and grief about great collective pain caused by events like wars, disasters or holocaust. Witnessing builds on the capacity to keep our hearts open for great intensity without falling back into habitual patterns of withdrawal, denial or conceptualisation.

I want to emphasise here that witnessing is *not at all* about fixing problems, or rescuing the person(s) involved. In the bigger scheme of things, that is never possible anyway. It is holding and witnessing pain, *acknowledging what is* – *pain and suffering included*, and embracing people with all their experiences, all the while deeply trusting that the people concerned have the capacity to be with this intensity. So we hold with compassion, without solving or acting out. In other words: practicing witnessing in the circle is not the same as being in a therapy group – it has a different

purpose. Our priority is not therapy or healing, and yet as we respectfully engage with one another in this way, healing happens almost as a by-product of our learning to open to this interrelatedness. Another difference is that there is no therapist in charge in our circle. Instead, we learn through the circle practice to hold all of life, together. In our circles of Women Moving the Edge, we experienced again and again that our collective container was strong enough to hold deep sadness, pain and loss. We learned that telling our stories and sharing our emotions – when they are heard and witnessed – is enough to open some space to look into the future and glimpse what comes next.

This containing includes holding the so-called ‘ugly, nasty bits’, without judgement. There is huge value in releasing stories from the personal sphere – something you have held close, tight, private and secret, even in shame – into the impersonal sphere. There are so many ways in which we refrain from sharing things with each other, for all manner of very personal reasons. Actually sharing these experiences is what releases them into the impersonal sphere. This mechanism of releasing the personal into the impersonal also allows us to be present in life, rather than confined within our skin-encapsulated identities. Releasing from the personal into the impersonal is like allowing *my* stuff to be *the* stuff; not even *our* stuff, *just* stuff. So often we agonise about our individual stuff, feeling ashamed of it, but everybody has some permutation of this stuff. So being able to release the particular into the universal is very liberating.

‘Ugly bits’ originate not only from individuals, but also from regions, classes, genders, cities, religions, societies and more. There is no end to what can be witnessed, but you need to start small, to build up your inner muscles for this work. If the depth and breadth of an open heart seems limitless, then what about the depth and breadth of a shared, collective open heart? Our experience confirms that collective witnessing and holding of what is going on in any situation provides a way of starting to process the bigger difficult situations playing out at the level of culture, gender, class and society. This intentional collective witnessing and holding is crucial, without rushing to re-solve, as is so common these days. When we do this, curiously enough the tension, the problem, tends to dis-solve into something else. This is why we see the capacity to witness as central in any attempt to change, be it on the individual, collective or societal level.

Opening our hearts in this way, we can reach a place beneath the pain; a place where the contradiction between pain and happiness starts to fall away, then ceases to exist. This is the place of soul, of essence, of the whole of life. It is a place where you are fully at ease with the intensity of any and every emotion, with the intensity of being alive. You don’t get triggered, you don’t fall back into habits, you can stay present to yourself, to others, to the wars and disasters. You can pay attention to this deep intensity and embrace it.

*Quote from participant:*

One young man shared a story about who he had been in the past that so amazed us – it was so unexpected and so deeply personal – that it completely shifted the space. And all of a sudden the space became safe, for everyone, because one person shared a very personal story. And through that, it opened the way for others to share stories. My own experience, as I was sitting there, observing my own ongoing judgements about these people, as I was trying to learn who they were, the scales fell from my eyes. With every personal sharing that they brought and offered about who they were, I felt as if I witnessed the veils of personality falling away so I could see more deeply who these people were at the soul level. By the end of the day, inside myself I was completely still, without inner words, and in a real state of grace.

— Helen

Being witnessed (enough) by others builds our capacity to witness our own self into disclosure much more. You will become ever more able to see and witness all the constructs, the judgements, the assumptions, the ways in which you trip your self up. Then all the stuck things, the knots, lumps and rigid patterns can just melt away. When all of those stuck forms have melted away from our habits and patterns, what remains is the availability for communing with nature and life in a different way.

Identity...

Boundaries...

Witnessing...

Seeing...

What if we removed fixed boundaries and witnessed the essence?

What if we replaced identity with uniqueness?

Authenticity doesn't seem to need a fixed boundary to be in a relationship or in resonance...

*(blog excerpt)*

*Quote from participant:*

I had an image that flashed in my mind – those mirror balls at discos – catches the light and sparkles, bounces light onto the walls – I had the image of the collective, as a group, a field, acting as myriad little witnessing mirrors for each other. Not exactly a mirror ball, rather a room of mirrors, each person is a witness, mirroring, noticing the others, nurturing them, listening into disclosure their authentic self, in our practice around the circle, what one person says sparks something in somebody. Sometimes it's a reflection, a rephrasing, a building on, like something reflected back by a bit of mirror that casts a spark on all the walls. Each person around the circle or in the collective is somehow a very unique and special mirror that refracts the light just when it hits them in a certain way, and everybody can see that; and you feel witnessed because the light that bounced off you made that spark and showed it.

— Nina



**Witnessing collective pain**



*Conversation between participants:*

H: There's this business of wholeness and the understanding that the only way humanity will be able to hold the changes we need to make is in community. I mean a community that is greater than the sum of its parts, because of that mysterious something that happens between people when their hearts are open, trust flourishes, and they take steps they would not have taken on their own. We were wondering what the laws of community are. There are simple laws for swarms, what are they for community? First is: the depth of community is proportional to the degree people can be all of who they are, the degree of self-disclosure of even the ugly bits. Second is: the condition that when someone does take the step to be vulnerable that no one tries to fix them. This describes how we are (as Women Moving the Edge) together – no fixing, a holding, a seeing, a witnessing, an opening to, an embracing, and acknowledging of whatever people choose to bring into the circle. ....

C: In the wholeness piece – we were noticing that part of the power is also bringing in the ugly bits of the planet – the environmentally polluted, the socially neglected – looking them in the face and inviting them in too! This plays at the level of individual, community and planet.

R: This wholeness and open heart is challenging us – to hold and embrace more of not knowing, more of ugliness, more of uncertainty, as if we are in training around how to keep our centre and our ground, even with all these ugly bits? And there are many ugly bits. And there are many points of light too. I sense it in myself as a real stretch – I have to become a layer bigger/wider; we need to be able to do that. The ugly bits aren't going to diminish – not on the planet, at least. And besides all that, many things we can't see on the manifest level, there is all this collective pain from the past – from countries, and wars. It's big! I feel I have to expand my heart, but also the embodiment of that holding – not only in my heart, but in my whole system.

H: Humanity might be facing some dreadful situations. Our role is to live in grace and joy and be present to that.

Witnessing pain, distress, death and disaster calls in an intense aliveness. It goes way beyond what we like or don't like. It calls forth a strength that can't be found in our ego-as-habits, but that links with a deeper current of life. Witnessing each other and being witnessed by others possesses a tremendous healing quality, as an affirmation at the deepest levels of our being. It is probably a recognition that we all come from the same source or origin, and that we all participate in the world soul – 'world soul' seen as the energetic template, similar to the personal soul print, but on the scale of the world.

Kamyar, an Iranian friend, said: "There are wounds in this region. Some of them are rooted in the way people and the land are seen. Unfortunately many people who step from the West into this part of the world embody an attitude of 'knowing', 'expert', 'professional', 'fixer', 'solver'... How would it be to make it more visible for everyone – from the Arab world and also the West – that it's possible to simply witness and be witnessed by the other, and respect the borders of identity? That by itself would be a huge source of healing for all of us."

Scharmer writes in his book "... going down the U involves a kind of healing of massive wounds that have been inflicted on the collective body. That healing of the collective social body will be one of the central activities of such a process. It's not just a sidelight of project work. It's the real thing. And everything else is the context for the healing to take place."<sup>2</sup> Mystic and teacher Thomas Hübl, too, speaks of the collective aspect: "the next level of healing and integration is a collective process."

We see and know about so many groups and local cultures that are in some way hurt by other groups, other religions and other cultures. We can imagine, then, that there is much that needs to be seen and acknowledged. Just like on the individual level, it is not about fixing the hurt but about being able to listen to it, to witness and acknowledge it. When you, personally, have 'done your homework' – when you have seen and can contain most of your own individual pain – then you are likely ready to deal with collective pain, using the skills and capacities you have cultivated through dealing with your own traumas. For years, Joanna Macy<sup>3</sup> has been speaking about the importance



of not being afraid of the pain and the despair. For her, if we don't look at the pain we cannot open the deeper love. (It is a good idea to check her YouTube videos.)

Actually, pain is simply part of life. What seems to make it difficult is how we relate to it. In this regard, it is helpful to make a distinction between suffering and pain. Pain is an intense physical and/or emotional sensation. It becomes suffering, and powerlessness, when we are afraid of its intensity. When we can learn to be present with depth and intensity of pain, then the need to fight pain or seek revenge subsides. Of course we need to judge and condemn all actions throughout history that have caused pain, but in the larger context of history we can see it as life trying to develop more awareness. This is how life has always happened and still does: evolving, seeking its way through manifold experiments – this is still ongoing. The difference with earlier times is that we are now more conscious of it while being in it, while it's happening. Witnessing pain – as an alternative to war, revenge or withdrawal – means being with each other's pain, exploring what that pain is about, staying with it and shifting the relationship with this pain to its next stage, thereby shifting the relationship with our collective pain, the pain of all of us.

When you engage in this practice of shared collective inquiry (*Circle of Creation*), you will inevitably hit some of these collectively held pains and shadows, since these live in and through our individual lives, whether or not we are aware of it. These encounters arise because in this practice your attention is expanding outwards, extending the outer alignment, with a wider reach in coherence. Through our gatherings and continuous conversations in *Women Moving the Edge*, we reached a point where women in the circle were deeply touched by the immensity of what is going wrong in the world these days. Some felt physically sick and/or emotionally overwhelmed by both past and present pain and suffering – which seems to extend out for some time into the future too. Many today feel helpless in the face of the political (and human) inability to solve today's challenges. We noticed this particularly strongly in people who feel very connected to their local communities and see and experience how much suffering industrialisation causes to the local fisheries, local agriculture, local craftsmanship and so on. The people in these local communities feel overwhelmed and powerless, not knowing how to handle what is going on now, let alone how to handle the pain of what happened in the past.

The good news is that the same practices and principles we learned on the individual and personal level can be applied to these collective levels. One important principle is that just as each individual is unique, with his or her own soul's calling, so too is each group and culture unique, most likely also with its own collective calling and unique contribution to the world. This means that we are not evolving into a global culture, where every local culture will be subsumed or unified (as the narrative of mainstream capitalism would have it). Rather, we will come to understand that evolving into ever more complexity means that more and more uniqueness takes form! Each locality, each group, each culture has its own uniqueness to bring to the whole. (Bonnitta Roy calls this the incommensurability of cultures – they cannot be compared or reduced to each other.)

With this comes the realisation that we, as humanity, have inflicted enormous collective pain in attempts to unify all cultures. This collective pain can only be healed through groups of people, collectives. It is only in a collective that we can hold these levels of scale, because the challenges and complexities are too great for one person to hold. In the circle practice, everything can *be*. You speak what is going on and what needs sharing, and you place it in the middle so it can be held in the collective. It doesn't mean that you lay your (cultural, gender, class) problems in someone else's lap; the others in the circle don't have to take responsibility for it, but they can witness. If pain, in its myriad forms and levels, cannot be part of the circle, then what does this do to life? We split it up and again it is not whole.

Oftentimes, pain guides us to what our souls really want. It tells us what is not really true, good or beautiful. This works on all levels: individual, collective and global. Again, as is the practice on the individual level, the act of witnessing – now collectively on the collective level – will be crucial if groups and cultures are to understand their unique gift to the whole. We are asked to be present to the pain... to be collectively present to collectively held pain. We don't have to 'take on the pain', just as we don't need to do that on the personal level. We hold it now with consciousness, awareness and understanding of the larger dynamic so the future has a chance of being different.

As we are able to witness ever more of life, including the really ugly bits of global history, this leads us inevitably to the intensity of being alive in the present era. Some of our participants dived deep into finding out about the state of the world, confronting themselves with all kinds of scientific reports and data. As they connected with this global

pain, they felt stiffening and contractions in their bodies. Within our circle they were able to sink below the pain and reach a place of silence, where contractions and contradictions don't exist. They realised that, from this place, we can be in touch with the new world, the one that will come through a non-linear change we are not able to imagine (yet). From this place beneath the contradictions – between pain and life and, ultimately, between birth and death – we are in contact with the greater container that holds these contradictions and is life itself. I think we are starting to open to the 'real' depth of life – in other words, evolution.

The ability to think trans-locally, to be with the pain, the dying, the old identity, while also sensing and 'midwifing' the birth of the new is an emerging skill set that will be required of more and more people. We will need to learn to access it quickly and in many situations. So much of the old is dying and there is so much that needs to come forth immediately. It seems that as the stakes get higher, ever more presents itself to be held – turbulence, pain, confusion. The symptoms of dying systems seem to be all around us, in some form or other, and although things have not yet totally collapsed into chaos, still there is a lot of uncertainty and change around. How to hold space for the deep wounds of the past on the one hand and the unmanifest potential of the future on the other, whilst still being able to hold it all together? We must honour the cycle of birth, death, birth, death, birth... without pause. The entire world is wrestling with how to do this graciously and to keep doing it without burning out. There is no end to this wave of birth and death, how to stay with it in hope and beauty and believe that what we are co-creating, however small, is worthwhile?

Sometimes it is difficult for people in the circle to see how their individual stories relate to the collective ones. They are not used to thinking systemically, they don't have the embodied experience that they are always part of a bigger picture. Back in the days of feminism we used to say: 'the personal is political'. We can now paraphrase this and state: 'the personal is systemic'. Personal or individual pain always has something to do with the bigger picture, is part of broader patterns that are neither healthy nor life-affirming. A story shared by one person is touching, lived through the bodies of all other participants in the circle. Thus it always becomes a collective sharing, a collective experience. Almost every interaction in the circle releases something from an individual holding-back or wounding into a collective insight. The group can hold such huge emotion, and we don't need deep analysis, just to hold the experience, like on a plate. Each time a deep story is shared, it loosens in the individual, enriching and increasing the flexibility and vibrancy of the energetic field we are holding together. Connecting our individual stories into something larger can be difficult to see from inside the experience, but over time we see ever more deeply how the stories of pain seem to be stories about how to reconnect with the soul, in order to then listen the world soul into disclosure. The whole context is much wider and bigger and deeper than our individual stories.

## **Contain and transmute powerlessness**

We probably are in for a bumpy ride. We will most likely have to live with much more disturbance, uncertainty and turmoil in the future. Therefore we need to learn how to contain whatever arises in ourselves and in others. Deeply held unconscious fear will come up – fear of not having made it before, as humanity, and fear of not making it this time. The more deeply and honestly we face what's really going on, and the more clearly we recognise the magnitude of some of the catastrophes, conflicts and wars unfolding today, the more inevitably our feelings of helplessness will get triggered. In many of those cases where we are unable to help, it seems we are preparing to hold a great deal of powerlessness, sadness and grief. The purpose of doing this is not to create more calm and dampen things down, but rather, metaphorically, to create a larger tea cup in which the storms can happen.

That's where we need the circle, and each other, to hold the massiveness of all this. So that it can be held and witnessed, providing more space that can expand the context. The collective is needed to hold a collective centre and the collective presence to do this on the collective scale. Nobody can hold these enormous challenges alone. Returning to the circle, we know we are held. Together we can hold the power of presence, embrace, contain and witness everything that is present and transmute the powerlessness. Then we can move again with clarity – a shared clarity that can come to the surface through our joint witnessing and a shared new understanding. Our capacity continually evolves and grows, in how it is embodied in our individual selves, our local communities, our bioregions and the whole Earth.

I have been wondering what is the crucial point that differentiates collective witnessing from the pain-related suffering and frustration that has been going on for so many years without changing much. What is it in collective witnessing that makes it less likely that the conflict and the hurt will be repeated? Pain and despair are mostly met with strong resistance. Some people start shouting and screaming because they are so afraid to look it straight in the eye. But shouting back changes nothing. Other folks tend to push it away and withdraw, so that, again, nothing changes. Being more resilient in coping with overwhelming collective pain means *collectively acknowledging what is – with an open heart*. It is exactly this embodied awareness and intensity of deep pain which is the changing point. It is like the mother's body that is able to contain extreme levels of physical intensity in order to push a baby out through a very small opening. We can learn something from this natural birthing process about holding pain without much suffering afterwards, and about the ability to transmute the pain, which can be released through the body without leaving scar tissue. One participant in our first gathering wrote: "All initiations have suffering, but unfortunately not all suffering opens into initiation. Initiation can only happen in strong containers... I think we can learn more about – keep our eyes open for – create more – and support more – appropriate initiatory process in our societies." What if we are in the process of learning to collectively hold the extreme pain and intensity of birthing a new society where everything and everyone can thrive?

Again, we can recognise the full cycle here from *acknowledging what is*, through *accepting what is* – humanity has indeed caused so much pain and turmoil – to *honouring what is* through a deeply embodied realisation that ends the cycles of revenge or withdrawal and, finally, to *living what is* by keeping the lessons and understanding from the holding and witnessing alive in the subsequent actions we take, never forgetting to *keep in mind the potential of what else is possible*. In this way we expand from witnessing the wounds of the past to presencing the potential of the future.

Through collective witnessing we are weaving, bit by bit, the net that can hold humanity. This is an energetic net of holding in love. It starts small in each circle, but the capacity grows over time. When a group is engaged in holding and we are confronted with more stories of disasters and pain, we might enter a phase where we feel we can hold no more. In such cases we release the holding and, sure enough, we sink down to a deeper level, drop into the next scale of holding. It is like breathing in and out. We always have the potential to hold more, to move beneath it. Seeing what the next layer is, is where we tap into the potential and another future.

You can imagine that, in 13 gatherings with women, some of the time was spent on exploring – and yes, complaining about it too – the collective pain inflicted on women and, more generally, on the feminine. For me, personally, it was a deep journey of transformation that moved me away from my primary identification as a woman, to being a human developing capacities associated with both the masculine and feminine sides of life, culminating as a creative person in whom all these capacities merge and synergise.

Of course, there is trauma in the feminine: the witch burnings, women's voices silenced still today. So much of what is described in this book has qualities that are generally related with the feminine: the subtle, the inner, the collective... but there is also trauma in the masculine. From these traumas – and blind spots – we can allow the true gift of each to emerge and create together. That's why *Circles of Creation* invite both women and men: to hold and witness the pain that is perpetrated in all things gender-related. The point is not to 'accuse' the other gender but to witness how life has evolved, gifting each other strength through the witnessing. Eventually this will bring healing and lead to new and creative action.



## The wild is what is

### *Quote from participant:*

Something I think I am starting to understand now about witnessing, is that very flexible, fluid, subtle, non-judgemental witnessing *engages*. As if this is the gift that human beings bring to the cosmos. In general, we are so obsessed with ourselves and each other that we don't really engage with the cosmos: it's just the backdrop to the theatre that we play in. We snap twigs off it in order to build homes for ourselves and such like, but we're not *really* engaging with the cosmos. That changes when we engage our self-reflexive consciousness. When we start to practice this witnessing, we inject a different kind of awareness into the fabric of space and time. It really is an engaging with... How do I say this? The world soul comes into disclosure through awakening to itself, when humanity – we, as human beings with our unique kind of consciousness – bring that consciousness into *unselfconscious* relationship with the cosmos. So it's not about us. We are bringing the missing piece that we are, with our consciousness. Showing up with it. Bringing it to the cosmos. The image that comes to mind as I contemplate this is a something like a chemistry experiment: injecting solution (a) into substance (b), which then totally changes nature. It transforms into something else; something that's alive and can go to work in a different way because our consciousness has been injected into it.

— Helen

Might it be that we need to be held by a place, by nature, by the Earth, to be able to witness all the violence and aggression that exists in the world? I started wondering: is it we humans who are holding the Earth, or is it the Earth and nature that are holding us so that we can hold and witness the pain and hurt inflicted by people? Most likely, it's a reciprocity with no real separation, a movement back and forth (an 'interdependent co-arising'). Maybe we just have to look at places: there are places that can hold us and that can hold the wounding and the pain, and other places that perhaps cannot, and we would need to hold them? These questions remain unanswered.

Our intention to collectively hold a place or a spatial entity can activate it and invoke a poetic response from that place, through birds, animals, the wind, the trees, the sky. The same is true on the scale of the Earth. The Earth is a living being, we would not be able to inhabit her if that were not the case. When humanity learns to hold a respectful

intent towards our planetary home – to witness her – her activation will be such that she, too, will bring forth a (poetic) response. Humanity has a function in the wider cosmos, related to consciousness. In witnessing it can begin to find its form.

As was mentioned before, when we open our selves up to the pain of the Earth, and feel that pain in our hearts and bodies, there is a pitfall if we start owning it. If we embrace that pain, hold it in ourselves, take it in and make it our own, we then have to live with this burden. We see this happening a lot in environmental activists. To be clear, witnessing environmental destruction is *not* the same as carrying it in my own backpack. I do not need to assume responsibility for containing it. When we witness pain, we are acknowledging its existence and allowing it to be. Then, through the simple act of awareness and deep respect, some release will happen.

*Blog excerpt:*

There were tree frogs telling a story,  
then they were listening.  
We were listening,  
then listened to.  
Witnessing going on in all directions.

I could sense ‘the collective’ of the forest becoming more present – almost tangible – than the individual trees.

Because we were, as a collective, witnessing the whole?

It was magic.

More silence.

It was amazing, fascinating and not anything I had experienced before. We were all in awe of what was happening.

We came into rapport with nature,  
as embodied human beings.  
We reconnected with our indigenouness,  
we wove ourselves back into nature,  
the fragmentation undone,  
the bridge re-established.  
We became wild again.

*Another blog excerpt:*

Can we meet and greet ‘the plastic bag’ with the same reverence and presence as (idealised) nature? It might not have this memory of itself... nature seems to have this immanent presence, this inner stillness, which is probably why it reminds us of our own inner presence and why it feels so nurturing and restorative to us.

*The wild is what is.* What a simple sentence, but with such profound implications.

*In resonance the wildness is present.*

I use the term ‘wildness’ here not as we normally imagine it – like a wild lion in the savanna or drunken youngsters at a music festival. No, being wild is being indigenous, in mutual relationship with all aspects of what exists around us. It is being in resonance with all of life – including being seen, and being witnessed – the proverbial plastic bags included.

We will revisit this interrelationship and the practice of weaving ourselves back to nature in [Chapter 8](#).

## Notes



1: Indra's net: The Avatamsaka Sutra. See [the Wikipedia article](#).

2: Otto Scharmer: *Theory U* ↓ p.418.

3: Joanna Macy: *Website* ↓

## 7.3 Deeper Circle Practice



There are three ways to approach the mystery of the divine.  
The first practice is prayer. The second is meditation.  
And the third, and most important, is conversation.  
— Rumi

This section builds on the basic circle practice (see section 3.3). What is explained here might not make much sense if you have no personal experience with circle practice. All elements of the basic practice – framing, check-in, listening, talking piece – are still present, but they assume a more subtle form and deeper meaning. This is what allows the power of a simple practice like witnessing to spread so widely and deeply.

Practitioners of the *Circle of Creation* see the circle as the minimal, optimal structure needed to form the container for a truly generative space; a generative process of shared becoming and collective insighting (intentionally used as a verb, as we learned from Bonnitta Roy). When beginning circle practice, you learn to become present to your self and to the other participants. Over time your attention can go to the group as a whole. Like David Bohm, who noticed and wrote about the power of true dialogue over 25 years ago, we can reach the point where there is ‘sustained attention to the paradox itself’. This ties us back to [Chapter 5](#) where we stated that the new paradigm goes beyond paradoxes, beyond dialectics and beyond the habit of separation. In a *Circle of Creation*, the circle practice deepens, it has a different quality and consciousness. We not only see how so-called opposites are in reality interwoven and interrelated, we are also aware of and embody this realisation in many different ways.

When hosting a Collective Presencing process, there is no full-blown design (complete with timings) for the process/gathering/project/meeting. Instead, we have a process of preparation – which might be long or short, depending on the coherence of the collective sensing of the hosting team – and an alignment with the rhythm and timing of what is around us. Most of the preparation time is spent in an intense co-sensing of what will be the right

guiding question for the gathering. Alongside the guiding question, the inquiry unfolds within the circle practice. The circle holds the space, provides the energetic container in which the potential can unfold and, eventually, be articulated. These two elements – the holding space (the womb-like energetic container) and the guiding question (straight like an arrow) – form the creative whole in which the gathering can unfold. Welcome to the generative possibilities of circle practice!

## Speaking from Silence

*Quote from participant:*

I was noticing what my process is as I go into the silence (at the beginning of a conference call). I tend to start by connecting with self, and sometimes that takes up all the silence depending on how connected I am to my own experience. I start there, and then put my attention into the silence and the other individuals on the call and then somehow it goes above and around into whatever, however, it exists in my awareness of the collective.

— Cari

The basic version of the check-in involves those present sharing what is on their minds, in order to become (more) present. When each of us hears what is present in others, we all get a sense of the whole. The check-in process, with each person feeling the permission and safety to bring in the fullness of who they are and to be held in that, always brings a slowing down, creating a really present space – which turns out to be a container that can hold a *lot*. This space forms the foundation from which the transition into the collective can be made: into a collective sensing and shared inquiry. The importance of the check-in is, in large part, the trust generated in self, in others and in the collective as a whole. Again and again we have come to realise how important a good check-in is for the energy in the circle. Sometimes it might take almost half a day of the gathering, but it is surely worthwhile!

Over time, people's need to speak about what blocks their capacity to be present falls away. We noticed in our conference calls and gatherings that this kind of check-in got replaced with a deep, shared silence. We got used to being in 'collective sensing mode', aware of the collective field and the shared inquiry we were in. It became a newly emerging practice to start in this spontaneous shared silence and let the spoken check-in start whenever someone felt moved to do that. Nobody decides in advance how long this silence will be, it simply lasts until someone picks up a talking piece and starts sharing. The silence can be long; it centres us and brings us into this still place of non-judgement and connectedness. In a way, we start from the bottom of the U, not having to spend a lot of time opening our minds and hearts; we do that in the silence. We came to see that, after a longer silence, the spoken check-in would already bring together elements of the collective sensing – even if we didn't think of it in that way at the time it was happening. Of course there might still be something preventing someone from being present, and the space is always open to share that.

The previous [section, 7.2](#), ended with "I need you, because of us." What is needed from us is that we share our stories and our vulnerabilities. Some participants experienced an inner back-and-forth about whether or not to bring their 'personal stuff' into the conversation, because now it needed to be 'for the sake of the collective' and they wanted 'to get it right'. Clearly, such thoughts don't spring up from an inner silence! For some it seems hard to fully understand that the simple act of sharing our personal stories is a service to both the collective and the inquiry. Our story, our experience, our sensing, and our sudden insights are all ways of offering our gifts to the circle. This can only happen when we follow our own flow and listen within to what is emerging, what needs to be shared into the collective. Too often we still think that what we experience is only personal and private. We don't realise that our circle, this collective being, is woven like a fabric. If we fail to bring in our unique contribution, then something is missing in the overall weave and we either don't see the whole pattern or the fabric will not be as strong. If I hold back – for whatever reason – then the collective insight will not emerge. If one of the atoms holds back, the molecule cannot be formed! Each one of us is important for the collective, because we are part of it, right here and right now. Sharing our unique gift, from our soul's purpose, is a precondition for the circle to reach a level of generative

capacity where the new can really emerge – that one unique thing that only this group of people can do right now, and right here. The collective calling needs each of us in our total presence and fullness to come through.

So the need we just evoked – “I need you, because of us” – is not a failing or a weakness, or whatever other judgement we might lay on it. Rather, it is a deeper understanding of the interrelatedness and interwovenness that we are in the world. So often we still tend to think we are not related in any way. We live under the assumption that “I can manage my own problems and finances, have my own house, and have everything on my own.” While we might believe that we can exist in separation, this is simply not true. Participating fully in a collective inquiry means placing yourself in this relational field, somewhere in between you and me, me and us and all of life.

The practice and group culture that grew out of Women Moving the Edge is a massive invitation to sail as close as possible to your inner impulses – including your needs; because this is each one’s contribution to the whole. Through this practice, acknowledgment, recognition and acceptance come quite naturally, almost as a byproduct, but so touchingly and life-affirmingly. Because it is about wisdom and life, we each need to stay true to our uniqueness and share from that space, both giving and receiving, our selves and each other. The reception generates the next unfolding. At the very minimal level it is about receiving gifts from the others. We need something from each other in order to co-create.

It is good to remember that no conversation ever goes in a straight line, much less so a collective inquiry as practiced in Collective Presencing. We do not try to answer the question in the middle of our inquiry by thinking about it. Rather, we tell our own stories and share our impulses, our knowledge and half-baked insights. Through the connections and segues, and through reflecting on it all, we arrive at new insights related with the question. As we continue to practice, we deepen into the awareness that the details of our lives, the stories that touch us, our recent insights, are all elements of larger patterns. The boundary between the individual and the collective starts to blur.

In any good check-in process, people experience being listened to and being witnessed. This practice of witnessing is also key on the wider scale; we each witness in full attention and presence – not just each other, but together we also listen the group’s unique purpose into disclosure. Yet further out, we learn to discern the spark of life, all through the personal stories and individual insights that we offer. We tend to forget that the group, the collective, the wider ‘we’ cannot speak for itself. This is why each of us needs to raise our voice in our own turn, otherwise there can be no listening for the bigger whole. There can be no listening without speakers. So, then, first individuals enter the circle and use the practice for themselves. When that is accomplished, once each person feels held and able to bring in their voice, then the space can hold the collective as a ‘we’.

At this stage in the circle practice the talking piece assumes a different meaning than it has in the basic practice. No longer a tool that signals who is speaking and who is listening, a device that slows the conversation down, now we invite people to pick up the talking piece from the middle when they feel moved to speak. We are especially invited to speak when our minds are not yet quite clear about what it is we are going to say, but the urge to share is present. After sharing, the talking piece is placed back in the middle.

In general, in the deeper circle practice there is more silence. This silence is not just an absence of talking, it has the quality of a shared stillness, a shared presence. We have often wondered what happens in this shared silence. What are we doing/being/becoming? There is surely depth in a shared, collective and conscious silence – as if we are touching something beneath the phenomena, beneath the words. A deep intimacy can be experienced in those moments. We reach a place beyond language as we sense together into what we are holding. This reminds me of a certain definition according to which, in grounding, we bring the rate of electrical activity of the heart into resonance with the EMG of the Earth. Maybe a shared silence brings resonance between us and with the potential we are inquiring into? The Circle of Seven talks about ‘charging the container’, stating that “the silence is deference to a larger pattern of life unfolding.”

Speaking in a circle, especially at the beginning, can evoke feelings of discomfort, with heart palpitations and sweats, and an inner dialogue telling us ‘don’t do it!’, or ‘what will happen?’, or ‘will I look stupid?’ These tensions fall away when you speak only from an inner silence, when you are moved from a deeper place. Your impulse to share does not come from any ideas or emotions, notions of performing, making a certain impression or whatever habit has us speak a lot in everyday situations. In the *Circle of Creation* it is different. In the silence, our bodies are

learning to embody life as it presents itself to us. Often, speaking from silence means that our analytical mind has no clue what is going to be spoken. For the mind, this can feel quite daunting. (See [section 4.4](#) on Sourcing)

There is an unmistakable, sometimes physical urge to speak that we can learn to notice and start to trust. A story, a sensation, an idea comes up in us, and we don't know why, but we just trust that and speak it. When later we look back at our conversations, we see that often, when contributions come from that place, they feel right and are insightful. And yet we only see that in retrospect, we don't see it up front.

*Quote from participant:*

I only speak when I am physically moved to speak – an unmistakable urge that I completely trust. A story presents itself and I don't know why and I trust that. Is this a universal phenomenon that is not often recognised? When I look back at our conversations, I see how incredibly right and insightful and apposite people's interventions are. S. in our circle in Feb.; she kept wondering what this has to do with her cats and that took us to the next level of understanding – totally out of nowhere. That is something we could name, invoke, and consciously practice. Trust the inner impulses that come from a place of rightness, even if we don't understand where they come from.

— Helen

Sometimes we call this 'listening to and speaking from the middle'. The purpose of this practice is not to convey something to the other people in the circle, but to place your contribution in the middle, alongside the other parts. This is different than the conversations we are used to, where we reply, we agree, we disagree, and so on. Here we listen from an inner silence that allows us to pick up clues and hunches from more subtle realms; it is an active listening for what is present in the subtle sensing of the middle of the circle or the potential that we are inquiring into. It can help to physically look to the middle, not addressing others when we speak, not looking at them when they are sharing. So we are not talking 'to' each other as we are to do in a normal exchange, but are building our conversation pieces on each other so that a truly generative space becomes present.

As explained before (in [section 7.1](#)), the intention of the gathering is translated into a guiding question, which can be seen as this 'middle' we listen for and speak to. Perhaps the question is the surface manifestation of something deeper that we are really gathering around, this potential that is not yet manifest. Articulating the real guiding question(s) is an art in itself, because it needs to come from the highest possible awareness. Better still, it comes from a collective Felt Sense – "from this place we interpret as origin" as Bonnie would say – felt this time by the whole team, instead of one person. It can be seen as a seed that falls into a container of presence and will start to germinate insights. Holding a question is like staying with the implicit that lives somewhere between all of us – somewhere in this middle. It is a potential that we like to see, touch, describe. And in the touching, in the connection and articulation, both we and the potential are changed.

However much time we spend in preparation to find and articulate the guiding question, this does not mean that the conversation that unfolds in the circle moves in a linear fashion or that the question is all that is talked about. That is not what happens in the spontaneous life of a circle. While circle practice is the basic methodology, other activities can arise when there is a shared urge for something other than sitting – going for a walk, meditating, drawing to get new insights, singing to raise spirits, dancing to become more free and flexible. Participants often lose their conscious connection with the question, but in retrospect we see the coherence and can notice how seemingly odd comments still relate to the question and the potential it pointed to.

Over time, I have been amazed by the power of the question when it is held in this open way. We have noticed through our different gatherings that these questions keep working in us. Pieces of insights show up later, after the gathering too. It humbles me and prompts me to be very careful about how we name and articulate these questions. This explains why it can take so long to get it 'right'. It is a practice that calls for subtle alignment – it can't be rushed or forced.





## Generative dialogue

The purpose of this ‘deeper’ circle practice is not the same as that of the basic version. We might say that, in a *Circle of Presence*, part of the purpose is to become deeply authentic – something that implies, among other things, a lot of individual development. The other part of the purpose is gaining awareness of interrelatedness, because we want to access the collective wisdom that is present. (In Scharmer’s terms: it is a movement from levels 1 and 2 to level 3 – what he calls empathic listening and conversation.)

By contrast, in this deeper circle practice we seek to reach the next level, level 4 as described by Otto Scharmer, the level of generative listening and conversation. This generative capacity is not something that can be switched on or off, it is only through ongoing practice that it can be mastered, one step at a time. I understand this generative level as being aligned with all of life. For our normal identity, this seems strange, even frightening, because it can only happen when we give up the boundaries that we habitually identify with, which always plunges us into the space of not-knowing or not-knowing-yet. But it is only our habitual way of knowing that now finds itself in uncharted territory. This does not mean that there is nothing to know in that territory, or that there is nothing to find our ground in or on.

Deeper circle practice will definitely contain more moments of silence, more sharing of what has never been spoken before, more relying on very subtle inner nudges, more things we have never done or seen before, more articulation of new insights. It is not only being thoroughly conscious of being alive, but an embodied awareness that life is always evolving and always moving through us and all that is around. Accordingly, my idea and experience of myself and this group I am in is also changing profoundly: boundaries blur in this expanding and embodied understanding of what life – and our inquiry – is really about.

The biggest hurdle to reaching this generative space is perhaps the requirement to give up seeking to control the outcome. This might be a stiff challenge to our ingrained habits of discussion and debate – it is even a challenge when we are attached to empathy being the main quality present. No attachment means no attachment *at all*. This feels like a peaceful emptiness, all the while remaining engaged with the others and with the inquiry. Sometimes ‘no attachment’ means saying nothing at all, while staying present and not closing down our selves or the conversational field – leaving the conversation simmering, not letting its potential collapse with judgement or help or remarks of any kind. When we are all able to hold the conversation open in this way, a limpid clarity can arise. By not seeking

to control the outcome, we open up the huge potential of emergence. By keeping our sensing open, we might see and understand what transpires of its own accord, what insights, joy and radiance life is offering through us. (See also the next [section, 7.4 Collective Sourcing](#))

## Articulating subtle knowing

To access the generative space together we need to train some abilities that will support this. First, there is the ability to be aware of the deeper, inner or subtle knowing; then there is the ability to articulate this knowing. The first might be a more ‘feminine’ competence, the latter a more ‘masculine’ one. The real challenge lies in combining these two. Our Western-trained minds and bodies are not well prepared to do this with ease.

Being in a *Circle of Creation* provides a context in which to train these muscles, as we start experimenting together. The circle gives the space to try out speaking from and being in that deeper knowing. What usually starts off as a tiny voice in the back of our mind is given space and now invited to be shared. The pace of deep listening and shared silence creates a container that enlivens all the senses to inform this knowing and exercise senses other than those which have our preference. This leads us to an embodied sense of learning and knowing, and we learn to speak from a place that is not downloading (unconscious) beliefs and ideas that we had beforehand, but is coming from a place closer to source or origin. The more we experiment and dwell in this space together, the more easily we are able to access it.

Learning the skill of articulating embodied knowing is not like learning a new language – the words we already have in our vocabulary are good enough – it is more about overcoming the habit of *not* speaking it; we are not used to voicing anything that has not first been processed by our habituated mind. We need to learn, and claim, that this tacit knowing is valuable in its own right, alongside all the analytical and conceptual knowing, whilst still discerning what makes sense in the context at hand and what does not. Accessing and articulating the collective felt sense is a skill like any other, that can be developed by practicing it.

## Disturbance as Invitation

It is part of common circle practice to embrace disturbance. Disturbances, if held in a conscious way, make us aware of unconscious boundaries we are holding or of blocking energy in the movement of the widening field: the proverbial stranger who comes in, a perspective we don’t like, judgements about what others are saying, or other unconscious shadow elements we hold. Integrating the disturbance requires us to widen our perception, widen our perspectives, widen our holding space, maybe even reword our guiding question! It is always an invitation to open wider – either the mind or the heart or the will – perhaps even all three.

If some participants in the circle can gently and lovingly hold presence for any kind of resistance or disturbance, crafting new connections in the invisible matrix of life, shifting and lifting the veil of unconsciousness, then resistance in others begins to lessen, to soften, even becoming a field of love that holds receptivity and collaboration. The whole that we are able to see and embrace now extends to what wasn’t possible before, in much the same way that science has stretched its horizons ever wider, towards the beginning of the universe and its vast scales in time and space, as well as embracing the infinitely small quantum world.

There is a lot of underlying disturbance in the world – in our daily lives too – asking us to be present to and hold more and more. We have noticed that when groups come together to exchange and sense into what is happening, all participants are drawn into a huge open heart. Opening for the stranger, for the other perspective, creates a deeper connection – one that people are really longing for and that has a resonant feel and vibration. Opening the heart also releases the pain, allowing us to realise how intimately pain is connected to joy and love.

A major element in systemic constellation work is listening or looking for what is missing in the system. When we notice in the circle that we aren’t on track, that the conversation isn’t generative, that there is no co-creation, that we

aren't building on what is unfolding, then looking for the disturbance – or what we are missing – might be a way to get back to the generative space.

Embracing the disturbance is also about welcoming the stranger into the circle. For us, in *Women Moving the Edge*, this showed up in the form of different participants for each gathering. It was not just an in-crowd – participants from previous gatherings – who returned. We always had new people. 'Disturbance' and 'strangers' are an invitation to embrace more of the whole. We realised over time that these newcomers brought in the diversity needed to move along in co-creative ways and prevented us from getting stuck in our own little group-think. At one point, I became a little cautious about the old crew wanting to repeat their experiences. I wanted us to be on the next edge, which might be totally different to where we had been before. A disturbance can also speak through timing or place that are not 'right'; much more about this in the next chapter.

There is a distinction to be made, though, between embracing disturbance and being sucked into the emotional realm. Stories about wounding and trauma are sometimes not only shared, but even dumped in the middle of the circle with an unconscious and implicit expectation that others will solve it. People can go through tough times and are sometimes in sore need of healing. In a *Circle of Creation*, we do not react to the story, we stay away from our own habitual ways of acting. Neither saving nor empathising, we hold the story and the pain in the attentive silence of the group. The sharing is witnessed with respect, but only the part of the story that relates to the inquiry and holds a collective meaning will be integrated into the unfolding insight.

The power and practice of witnessing ([section 7.2](#)) allows an individual to step seamlessly into a functioning collective, and a collective to seamlessly embrace the new and be transformed by the embracing. With each embrace, the old collective dies and the new is born. The witnessing is of everything – the inner and outer, the individual and the collective, human and all of nature. Part of the practice is to speak that which is witnessed, and to witness that which is spoken. Part of the practice is to speak what is witnessed *as it is experienced* – in joy or in rage, in sorrow or fear or indifference. The emotional charge is part of the meal, to be digested by the collective body. The more the collective body can metabolise, the broader the range of its possible responses to that which transpires in the greater whole.



## Participating in the web of life

*Excerpt from blog post:*

Being in conversation about this, listening ever more deeply to what was arising in the middle of our circle, I suddenly reached a level of these subtle layers that I hadn't reached before. I saw in my mind's eye a huge web, a kind of irregular woven fabric that was torn and broken in many, many places. It looked like a woolen fabric eaten by moths, no pattern to discover and holed in many places. I realised that this was the archetypal energy level of connectedness and collectives. These holes were made by fragmented thoughts, over and over again. Thoughts about me! Me! Me! About separation, silos and fragmentation. All such thoughts influenced this energetic level, which was starting to die off and decompose.

As I took in this image, I realised why we need to gather in circles, over and over again, because it is such collectives that can heal this fabric of being a collective, of being in connection with all of humanity, all of earth and all of nature – maybe all of the universe. In that moment I understood the deep meaning of the web of life, I understood the many stories, myths and fairy tales about weaving, knitting, mending, stitching... all images about restoring the connective tissue in the greater web of life.

Coming together, as a collective for the sake of darning the energetic fabric of the collective and keeping it strong; that is probably what circles have done through the ages, consciously or not. This is what we need to do now, too. Even as fully individuated individuals, we need to do this now. These circles, these collectives are not about conformity and all being the same; they are collectives of fully conscious unique beings bringing their intention and attention together for the sake of the whole of life. We have a role to play in bringing forward that collective potential.



## 7.4 Collective Sourcing



When we are ready to begin again, *from that place we interpret as origin*, the place of elemental principles and primitives out of which we are born – something curious happens.

— Bonnitta Roy <sup>1</sup>

### Sourcing as collective

Some participants in our first Women Moving the Edge gathering felt very uneasy when we announced early on that we (Ria and Judy as the hosting team) would stop offering content or structure as we had done at the start. Our guiding question was present and clear, the circle practice was known and practiced, that was all the structure we provided. Even Judy, my co-host, wasn't totally sure this would work out, but I felt confident that the minimal structure was just right to let some magic happen. As hosts of this collective inquiry we knew how to guide the process, but we were by no means experts in the topic, nor did we hold answers to the guiding questions. Actually, the question was a real one for us and we had invited others to join us in the inquiry fully intending to learn from their contributions.

Being in a continuous collective inquiry – and all three words are essential here – is not something you can learn to do from reading a book, nor can it be taught with a presentation. A *Circle of Creation* is a deep-dive learning situation, around both the practices of circle, sourcing and collective presencing (all of them) and, of course, the content related with the question. In this collective learning space we help each other to experience, recognise and name the process, the practices and its elements. In this way we learn on many different levels, because we immediately reflect on what we experience.



This learning by immersion reminds us of how the old crafts were taught and learned: in a guild, by doing, over and over. By practicing the skills and understanding that there is always more to learn, more to refine, more to understand. Another beautiful model for this immersion is the way a martial art such as aikido brings students old and new together in the dojo. Older students learn as much from guiding their less experienced fellow practitioners as they do from their teacher.

Sourcing was treated extensively in [section 4.4](#). I spoke of how it feels to take your first steps in speaking from this inner knowing, and how the most essential element is to speak from the potential that is present but not yet realised. When we start practicing this in the *Circle of Presence*, we come to see that collective wisdom is like a puzzle. At first you see only your own piece, then through the dialogue you begin to glimpse a bigger picture that your piece is part of. Finally, everybody is amazed together as the bigger picture emerges into clarity. In collective sourcing, as we practice it in the *Circle of Creation*, the boundaries between you and me, between cognitive knowing (as in knowledge that already existed in my head) and subtle sensing (or intuition), between *chronos* and *kairos*, between feminine and masculine, between ‘...’ and ‘...’ – all these dividing lines have disappeared. As we leave all kinds of dualities behind and are no longer bound by the dialectical mind, what we come to see is a truly novel picture.

What gives the experience such a different quality is that this happens at the same time for all involved. This energetic quality is as different from everyday awareness as the meditative state. In collective sourcing, we are in a kind of altered state, all together. It is not actually meditation, rather a collective contemplation and inquiry into a topic and a question that speaks to us all. How can I be still as nature, whilst continuing to act as a conscious human being, at the same time as being together with all present in this group? How can we *all* be still as nature and act as a conscious ecosystem? When we pierce through the veil of the dialectical mind it becomes very clear, alive and joyful!

Through the *Circle of Presence* process, we have worked to remove all kinds of blockages and are now no longer guided by our conditioning and habitual responses. In itself, this is already an achievement. When we make the leap to a *Circle of Creation*, we use our capacity to be present to its fullest, recognising that knowledge and insights are created also in this moment. Distinctions between data, information and knowledge fall away as all are tossed into the mix to create novel insights, all the while stirring the pot with right timing and right place. The culture of Women Moving the Edge, as it is now translated in the practice of Collective Presencing, is a strong invitation to live as close to your authentic impulses and inner knowing as possible, because they are all contributions to the whole. Through this collective practice, acknowledgement, recognition and acceptance – of each other and our gifts and contributions – come quite naturally, almost as a byproduct, but are deeply touching and life-affirming. The final experience is one of being fully alive, in the moment, together with real novel insights and seeing the next steps to action. It feels joyful to drop all boundaries, all paradoxes, all dichotomies – things our minds are so good at – to just be part of life itself.

Your centre of gravity has now shifted from being ‘in your self’, within the bounds of what you name and see as your identity, to being in a creative, dynamic and generative space – somewhere ‘in between’: between me and you, between all of us, between humans and animals, between human and nature... There is no more gap between... gaps have disappeared. There is no more ‘relationship with’, but more ‘relatedness’ – and even that does not do full justice to the experience... it is full participation in life. One piece of embodying this awareness came with my own realisation at one point “that there is nothing important any more that I can source on my own. Sourcing needs to happen in and for the collective. My development on my own has reached its limits. The collective now provides the learning edge.”

It is a difficult move for our dualistic minds, our conditioned ways of thinking, even our language. We each need to go through a process of truly not-knowing-yet. Again and again. It is not like learning to ride a bicycle, where once you have ‘reached’ this generative space, you ‘have’ it for the rest of your days. No, next time, in other circumstances, with other people in the circle and another inquiry in the middle, you will need to creep again to the brink of not-knowing-yet, or else you are not generating something novel but just repeating something you have seen before. This is a tendency that slips in quite easily, as our minds tell us ‘we have been here before’. Nevertheless, today’s collective sourcing has a different starting point than yesterday’s. What changes over time is our level of comfort with being in that place of not-knowing-yet, where boundaries dissolve and life is fully present.

It is important to differentiate between collective sourcing and the experience of flow frequently described by sport teams or jazz combos. What is the same is the feeling of being in a flow and being (part of) one big organism or whole. The difference lies in being conscious of this experience *and* able to translate the feeling, the inner phenomenology and the inner insights into language to express it to each other. Collective sourcing is being in a flow of meaning and understanding together with others, uncovering more of the potential and speaking and articulating it as the flow is unfolding. In collective sourcing, there is no ball, there are no players moving, no music is played. Instead there is a dynamic dialogue and a shared meaning that emerges from the practice.

In the practice of collective sourcing, people become like tuning forks, as all sense into the collective field, the potential, the resonance, the creation of something that was not there before. This is a finely-tuned form of collective knowing that we are just beginning to develop. When we come together in this emergent and generative way, the possibilities of our conversations seem unlimited. We are not *trying* to create an emergent system, nor are we *talking* about it. Instead, we become a truly conscious, intelligent and wise whole. In order to really innovate, we must use new ways of accessing information, knowledge and wisdom. Collective sourcing strikes me as a central and necessary skill in this innovation process.

By now, the distinction between collective sourcing and reaching consensus or consent in a group should be quite obvious. Consensus and consent mean that a decision is reached once there are no longer any (major) objections from the participants in the conversation. In collective sourcing, through our unique individual contributions, we collectively start to reach innovative insights and see new pictures arising. The group operating in this way does not form a unity, but becomes a coherent multiplicity. In a way, there is now a collective field that we call 'ours', instead of 'mine', but it has not glossed over our differences – rather, it has used them to the fullest. In the same way that we, as individuals, have become a coherent multiplicity in life, work and passion, so too can the group become a coherent multiplicity. In my view, the Quakers have kept this collective practice of sourcing alive through many generations (although they use different words and concepts), stating very clearly that what they do is quite different than reaching consensus.<sup>2</sup>



## Collective embodied revelation

Sourcing is a direct, unmediated experience articulated in language. Applied to insights and the speech act, it amounts to a verbal articulation that is not first or fully processed in the mind before it is spoken. It is an embodied

experience. This is the dance of a truly generative dialogue and collective sourcing. Everybody's attention is on 'what is emerging', and on 'speaking from there'. It is a deep state of collective inquiry.

It is not possible to experience collective sourcing or collective insighting when your main focus or identity point is in conceptual space. There needs to be an alignment between head, heart and body – your subtle sensing capacity must be turned on, without any emotional attachment at all. Mushin Schilling wrote: “with some people this happens naturally sometimes, then there is ‘silver in the air’ and a mutuality is born that arises as joyful creativity going nowhere... and, not needing to go anywhere, it sometimes also goes to places/spaces that are almost like a revelation.” It is this collective capacity for revelation that we call collective sourcing. Francisco Varela and others have stressed that cognition is always an embodied action, but with sourcing and collective revelation the process of speaking and articulating is also a fully embodied in-the-moment experience. Collective sourcing is always a subtle balance because we are interested in a certain topic and question – which engages our curiosity and conceptual minds – and yet we still need to be without attachment to any specific outcome.

The subtle-level resonance that we experience in collective sourcing is far beyond the group or mass flow or consciousness that we observe in football stadia, or our own sense of pride, for example, when someone from our country has won an Olympic medal. The collective coherence to which we are pointing here relies on the depth of awareness of the individuals present in the group. Coherence in the group, created through shared inquiry, makes a deeper resonance achievable, building on the individuation and uniqueness of the individual, and makes an emergent field possible. The Heart Math Institute has much to say about resonance, vibration and heart coherence.<sup>3</sup>

Bonnitta Roy states (in a Facebook exchange): “... I would say the resonance remains at the animal (subtle energy) level. The subtle-level resonance is like being swallowed by a field, immersion, oceanic – the gestalt of being is fore-grounded. The love feel is like being grounded in the gestalt, but now completely enthralled by the differences, the nuances, the detail, the outline, the ornament, the tiny bursts of creativity that set alight a moment in time, and dance from here to there... a kind of tickling, twinkling of numinous stars – it's the detail that is awakened, every nuance, every smell, every pitch and tone, hue and timbre... becomes alive.”

Further, Bonnie says: “In the theory of generativity, the ‘we’ is always grounded at the prior level of common ancestry..... Which means, for humans, the ‘we’ is in the subtle-animal realm... The postmodern ‘search’ for ‘we’ is a projection of the rejection of our animal inheritance – we don't need to establish a ‘we’ – we are evolutionarily guaranteed this deep inter-beingness. When we reject this (by repressing nature, our animal nature) we begin the long, tragic project of domination.”

And more: “... what emerges with humans is the reflective ‘I’ (the identification of the self)... which opens the possibility for love of other. Other types of resonances are not reliant on the individuation of self-other, so it is not possible to have the same kind of ‘love’. So you see, it is exactly the self, that ultimate sense of separation, engendered by its own reflexivity (that same self that seems to close the door to real subjective resonance), which offers the possibility for a new morphic field to emerge.”

*Quote from participant:*

I am beginning to understand that what we are calling ‘collective sourcing’ might be tapping into the source of the unmanifest impulse resonating deep in the core of the cosmos.

— Helen

## Collective Sourcing as Generative Conversation

In his book *Theory U*, Otto Scharmer gives two models or maps: one about types of conversation and one about related types of listening. I have found these immensely valuable in my work with people, because the maps help them see how they listen and talk and also how they can improve these skills. From these models I learned the difference between *empathic* listening and conversing and *generative* listening and conversing. In the book's images,

you see how the boundary of the I, of the self, becomes fully open and almost disappears in a generative conversation. By participating in such a conversation, you are changed by it. In this way it is generative for all involved.

Generative is for me what has ‘more of life’; it seems to be about creating, realising more of the inherent potential. It is also generative in the sense of *radical* innovation or breakthrough, which is different than incremental or distinctive innovation. Sometimes it is also *re-generative*, in the sense of healing and eliminating blockages that prevent life from flowing to its fullest.

A generative conversation flow is to be depicted not like a canal, but more like a meandering river. In a generative dialogue, questions have no pre-existing answers and there is no one line to follow. Rather, we walk different paths to finally come to a new insight and next steps at the end, having found many other valuable insights on the way. A generative conversation is a truly creative process: since there is no linear thread to follow, one line of thought will spark another and will later be woven in with what was said earlier, and so on. The core of the challenge – as in creating a work of art – is to arrive at something powerful and interesting without knowing exactly how it will come about or what it might look like. To create a work of art, the artist must journey through a phase of sensing, seeking, reaching... and sensing and seeking some more... until the final product emerges at the end. It is impossible to predict either the process or the final form of the artwork (using some language from Jeff Barnum).<sup>4</sup>

At one moment, we called collective sourcing a sacred conversation. ‘Sacred’ in the sense that we give it all our attention as something that is very precious to us.

## The practice of full participation together

Stepping into a collective inquiry, as an essential part of the practice of collective presencing, requires our full self. In the previous chapter we spoke about full participation in life, as a practice in the leap from learning to become present to living from your soul’s calling. Now, the same is asked from us – all participants together – but this time in a group context and for a larger purpose: in service of the collective soul that is calling. Instead of relying on large-scale change programmes to steer the direction in which the world is going, it seems we are also called to learn, in this next phase of evolution, to truly participate in life. *Intentionally* participate, not with our egoic wills and wants (for convenience, habit and comfort), but – from a physically anchored body and a free will – lending our unique capacity, skills and gifts to create collective containers that can allow, invite and awaken spirit in body and matter in different ways.

Full participation requires both a high quality of attention and a clear intention; it means being fully present and embracing responsibility for the whole endeavour. Being in a group or a team with this practice builds on all the levels to become present and put all that into service of the collective inquiry. Rather than each individual body being driven by a separate, habitual will, we allow our bodies and minds to be informed and inspired by an understanding of the whole – coming not from a projection of the conceptual intellect, but *directly* from the whole.

Full participation together is everyone tuned in, connected directly with life as it is happening in the moment. This is being and becoming in the way that nature is and becomes; there is nothing between me/us and life/source/origin itself! We are all fully aligned in body and soul – or at least we try to be – and our minds don’t dominate, but are part of the alignment. We speak and act from an inner, individual *and* shared, collective silence; that is our contribution to life right now.

Collective Presencing points to the possibility of participatory collectives consisting of both humans and other sentient beings. Joining a *Circle of Creation* is a generative process of shared becoming, where a group can be defined as ‘a coherent and dynamic multiplicity’, just as we have learned that individuals can be seen as a dynamic multiplicity (see [Chapter 6](#)). Yasuhiko Kimura talks about ‘a dynamic multiplicity in and as ultimate simplicity.’ We learn together what Thomas Hübl calls “the competence of movement or the deep participation in the creative process”.<sup>5</sup> Mastering this creative process presupposes a lot of capacities that we will talk about in the next parts of this chapter.

Source / origin / life is essentially collective. It is already there. The question is whether or not we really participate in the potential it holds. Do we participate in this depth of life, or are we restricting ourselves to participation in the mainstream collective story? Collective Sourcing seems like the next version of collectively participating in life. Fully. The paradoxical aspect seems to be that full participation comes from a place of stillness and not from longing, expectation or willful force. We sit in the void together, sense into what is possible and has potential. It is a practice for any group, team or community seeking to evolve.

Once, I captured it this way:

Collective body wisdom  
From stillness and presence  
Wait for the next impulse  
We know exactly what to do!

In this way full participation is different than collaboration, where we can work together in a pleasant and fruitful way, but which leaves out parts of ourselves and parts of life as a whole. Dancing with life, with source in this way might be what Ken Wilber names the causal body, “a great formlessness out of which creative possibilities can arise”.<sup>6</sup> I leave it to Wilber experts to confirm whether this is what he meant, but I like his description!

In this practice of collective sourcing we grow accustomed to the interplay between the individual and the collective, and between the different places that we, as members of the circle, can speak from: are we speaking from the individual, habitual self or as a mouthpiece of the centre or potential? How well developed is our capacity to distinguish these? It might feel like another edge, but we can only try: “Participate as you can, right now.” The capacity for subtle sensing gets refined as we do this work, and as we practice this collectively we learn from each other. We learn to sense more easily when we are coming from source, and also to recognise when others are speaking from that space. The more we practice this collective sourcing the more refined our sensing becomes.



## Witnessing the ‘we’



For me, the ‘novelty’ actually is a result of dropping some hidden assumption that has limited thought – and the experience of that produces recognizable energy states (‘highs’)... and when the plug is pulled, then all these insights flow naturally (logically)... ... when people share simultaneous insights – it is usually because they discover together, the shared (previously hidden) limiting assumption. And then all the insights just fall into ‘sight’, simultaneously.

— Bonnitta Roy<sup>7</sup>

Collective sourcing and collective presencing can be regarded as a new human practice and capacity the hallmark of which is a specific quality of attention and energy, shared by most or all present in the group. This is why in the early days we called it a Circle Being, as our dialectic minds tried to grasp this new experience and objectify it by putting it into some kind of conceptual box. What actually becomes tangible is not a separate being or thing but the shared awareness that we are related all the time in all directions and dimensions – interpenetrating and interweaving – and that we already were, even before we realised this and laboured under the false assumption of separation. Thomas Hübl names it well as he seeks to bring about a group “which is not just a collection of ‘I’s”, but “a We without a Them.”<sup>8</sup>

One subtle aspect in the practice of witnessing lies in the choice of what one witnesses, and whether one names it or not. The fact of witnessing something brings it into awareness in a new way, because our attention draws an imaginary boundary around it. That which you put a loose attention-boundary around comes into existence in a way that it wasn’t before. Then, when you remove the boundary by shifting your attention away, it winks out of existence again and returns to how it was before – just as the wave sinks back into the ocean. In collective sourcing you remain aware of the weave of connections, of the space in between. Your identity is less in or on the self, your centre of gravity is in the ‘field’, with the connections or the interconnectedness. When we listen in this way, we speak from what is between. It is about going beyond the imprint of being separate.

We can pitch our attention at different levels. As we pay attention to our interpenetration and interweaving, the we becomes present. Listening as an individual requires one to focus one’s attention in a particular way and at a particular level. Being a collective doesn’t mean that we are all listening in the same way or at the same time. It has to do with resting the attention on the collective field of which we are all part, and which we can tune into at any time. The original confusion that had us making a separate object out of it (the ‘circle being’) arose partly from the fact that there really is a perceptibly different energy in a group when everyone has dropped the illusion of separation. The air seems to acquire a certain thickness and slowness. We create what we give our attention to; when we witness and articulate it, it seems we give it a minimal structure.

*Quote from participant:*

Through in-the-moment accessing of source – in moment-to-moment emergence – this collective we begins to express on this plane of matter, through the larger we. A wholeness of presence in the collapse of space-time opens a glimmer of the mirage on the silver glistening and shadowy sea of the vast unknown. It is as if we drop our fishing lines together, there at the edge. We wait, listen, sense, and together we experience a larger NOW, eternal and yet fleeting, an emergent way of knowing, of inviting the wholeness of potential to be present in our midst.

— Judy

From all this, it follows that, in my view, there is no ‘higher We’ that needs a capital ‘W’ (although that is the term Thomas Hübl uses in his current work). Simply enough, it is about dropping the boundaries that we have come to see as natural and real, until we experience all fixed and closed boundaries dropping away. This gives rise to a very different embodied experience on many levels, and we then live and ground ourselves in this manifest form of non-duality, even in everyday life and in inquiries about mundane matters and challenging problems. In this regard we come close to the potential of true dialogue seen by David Bohm as “transforming culture and freeing it of destructive misinformation, so that creativity can be liberated.” Bohm is quoted here by Terry Patten.<sup>9</sup> Patten goes on to say that Bohm’s “injunctions to *suspend assumptions, opinions and judgements, to participate honestly and*

*transparently, and to stay connected to others' participation* are the foundation practices that make possible the 'higher intersubjectivity'."

There is a tendency to describe this specific energy in terms of 'an energetic body' or 'pulsing as one', but we must remain vigilant to prevent dialectic thinking from slipping back in, by stating that there is 'a body' or 'a field' or 'a thing' outside ourselves. The other slippery slope that might lure us to fall back into dualistic thinking is a longing for 'oneness', whereas the experience of collective sourcing actually sees, knows and experiences the diversity at work in all its uniqueness (whilst appreciating that unity is where we all come from!).

Digging deeper into his own experience of this phenomenon, Terry Patten writes (p.17): "Emile Durkheim (1915) famously asserted that religion originally arose as a way for people to experience themselves as bigger and more alive in the intersubjective field of a group entering into higher states of consciousness." I guess we are finding a new form of the religious impulse that fits with our current time and its challenges; and it is actually helpful in finding new insights that will lead to innovative solutions.

## More on holding space

In a shamanic journey during one of the Women Moving the Edge gatherings, an image came up for me: Women sitting cross-legged and connecting energetically with each other, through their womb space. The intention of this exercise was to envision what is beyond the edge, to look into the jump off point. Where others saw a flock of birds, I saw this circle of women holding between them an energy field appearing as white fabric. To begin with, the fabric looked quite loose, and then as the journey unfolded it became more taut and firm. I related this back to an address by Larry Mercurieff,<sup>10</sup> a native elder from a tribe high in the Bering Sea, evoking the outer womb space that women need to create from their own sacred womb space inside; otherwise nothing new will be possible in the world; as a space where the new can be conceived.

We have already seen (section 3.1) that holding space is about holding a container in which the potential can unfold. Doing this consciously and collectively we can embrace deeper and wider in the field of possibility; we can weave a more expansive fabric that spans more of a collective potential. To me, this is what the elder is speaking of. I doubt whether only women have this capacity – I have seen several men hold space well. And yet, in general, there seems to be a difference between 'average men' and 'average women' when it comes to having this capacity.

We are not sufficiently aware of the power of our collective thought forms, our collective intention, our collective attention. Striving to connect with the new when alone can be challenging. In our experience, when we do it collectively, forming a web, the channel of the new is easier to connect with. It's not 'just' imagination. In this way any collective can become a safe holding space in which to be wild, to imagine the unimaginable, the undefined, where the future gets born... In response to the guiding question, a deep desire seems to awaken, opening an awareness that transcends prior 'old knowing' (which, because it is 'past', has moved from 'now' into a brain-data file). Through stillness, an expanded and uniquely new possibility is accessed, which is then synthesised to form a response that in some way takes into account the entire group field.

## Distinction between collective sourcing and collective presencing

In its shortest definition, *sourcing* is a way to access information straight from source or from the unmanifest potential and articulate it right away. *Collective sourcing*, then, means that all the participants in the group do this, in a shared inquiry with the same guiding question. The complex practice of Collective Presencing goes beyond this one element of collective sourcing to transcend the boundaries of time and space, integrating our animal senses and our being-as-nature. Mushin wrote: "this we-fullness is of utterly humanimal character; as if, when we go through a collective rite of death (and you know that it can feel that way; actually in my experience it was the only way), we get reborn as a collective humanimal with a spirit speaking Sutras and dancing Dervish. Or something similar." More on this in the following chapters.

The ultimate purpose of collective presencing – and a *Circle of Creation* – is achieving a more creative and generative life for everything and everyone, where everything and everyone can thrive. It is not just about feeling good, or learning to be present (the latter being the purpose of a *Circle of Presence*) – it is part of the new story for humanity – the evolution of culture.

## Notes

- 1: Bonnitta Roy: *Born in the Middle*, ↓ p.192.
- 2: Barry Morley: *Beyond Consensus* ↓
- 3: The Heart Math Institute: *Website* ↓
- 4: Jeff Barnum: *Social Sculpture* ↓
- 5: Olen Gunnlaugson: *Collective Intimations of the Future*. ↓
- 6: Ken Wilber, *Introduction to integral theory and practice*, 2005, p.19; quoted by Barrett Brown: *Conscious Leadership for Sustainability* ↓ p.228.
- 7: Bonnitta Roy: Facebook exchange.
- 8: Thomas Hübl: as quoted by Terry Patten ↓ p.23.
- 9: Terry Patten: *Enacting an Integral Revolution*. ↓ p.19.
- 10: Larry Mercurieff: *Indigenous Voices*. ↓

## 7.5 Holding Not-Knowing-Yet



### **The Real Work**

It may be that when we no longer know what to do  
we have come to our real work.

When we no longer know which way to go  
we have come to our real journey.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.

The impeded stream is the one that sings.

— Wendell Berry <sup>1</sup>

### **Not-knowing-yet**

It is easier to write about collective sourcing and generative dialogue than it is to actually sit in it – at least when starting the practice. ... although this writing is a challenge of its own! A generative conversation is a strong provocation to our habitual minds to serve the process of wondering, not-knowing-yet, seeing what emerges in the moment. This willingness to be of service to the mystery is grounded in the assumption that the people participating here and now are the right people, have the power, knowledge, insights, wisdom and capacity to do this. It invites a thorough suspension of all previously known ways of having a conversation, accessing knowledge and so on. It calls for a quality of profound presence and intense curiosity both. It requires a real beginner's mind, not excluding our collected knowledge to date but putting it in service of the new. Ultimately, we are in search of a clear, embodied,

collective knowing. An inner knowing, related to nature and the cycles of life; a knowing that integrates all of who we are.

Brian Swimme, in his series *The Powers of the Universe*, gives many examples of the massive tensions at play during the creation of the universe, as this evolutionary process reached a point where it had never been before. Swimme describes how, at this point, the whole universe is just ‘hanging in there’ until some kind of resolution emerges. I find it so nourishing to hear him speak about these powers when I see where we are in the world at large. We need to build capacity to hang in there a little longer...

This means staying for long enough in the not-knowing-yet. The underlying prerequisite to be able to do this is the capacity to keep the space of possibility open until collective clarity arises from the generative space. This ‘not-knowing-yet’ is not a mental not knowing – “I don’t know the answer, but somewhere in the world there are experts who can answer this question.” Such a response would apply in a complicated system, where as long as you (or the experts) analyse the data for long enough you will find a solution that works. The not-knowing-yet we are pointing to here is not even about collective intelligence or collective wisdom, where we will see the full picture of the puzzle by the end of the conversation. No. The not-knowing-yet in a generative space resides at a different level. It is a not-yet-known – by anyone, anywhere. The challenge is to strengthen our ability to sit – and to live – suspended in the void with no clue of what is next.

The not-yet-known is always a place we have not been to before. Even if we have been in generative dialogue a thousand times, it remains a place of novelty and real innovation. It remains a place of uncertainty, of full suspension where we have only vague clues about what might be next. Every time our edge of knowing – individually and/or collectively – moves further; what we didn’t know yesterday is known now and a new edge is already right there in front of us! This is not only about conceptual knowing; the edges we hold in our emotional habits and in how we relate with subtle ways of knowing seem even more daunting. In this phase of holding the process of not-knowing-yet, we are challenged to move the edges of these subtle and inner fields. The barriers asking to be transcended might be self-made or cultural. The difficulty lies in the fact that they are so ingrained in us that we don’t even notice that we hold on to them for dear life and for the sake of our very identity.

Holding not-knowing-yet, as a collective skill, asks for absolute commitment to the shared inquiry, otherwise unconscious reactions (Scharmer’s downloading, the habitual patterns I mentioned earlier) easily take over. Sticking to the circle practice can offer a structure to prevent this from happening. Many people find it quite scary to stay in this uncertainty. We, in the West, are strongly identified with our (mental, conceptual) knowing, so the impulse to retreat to the safe space of default behaviour and downloading (the knowing) can be REALLY huge! Not knowing can feel like entering a void or teetering on the edge of an annihilating precipice. Hanging in at this point means trusting that even if nothing (generative) seems to be happening – we don’t know how, when, where, what – the shared and continuous sensing and observing will guide us, because there is always more to discover from the subtle layers of reality if we hold fast to our intention. One sound piece of advice: start with observing your self first. Bonnitta Roy aptly calls this attitude and practice ‘staying in the search space.’ It is not a void, but an active engagement that seems to create a vortex that draws what is needed to itself.

In a *Circle of Creation* the boundaries of the open space are held, on the one hand, by the guiding question, the intention and purpose and, on the other hand, by the circle practice and the energetic container that has been built ahead of time by a hosting team. All these boundaries enclose an energetic space where the process of not-knowing-yet can be contained and can compost into new life. The shared engagement in the collective inquiry gives priority not to finding a solution or answer within a certain time frame but to reaching the generative space. This puts time in a different perspective and, most likely, calls for more time – at least in the beginning. As long as no collective clarity has arisen, we stay in this not-knowing-yet, questing ever deeper for the unmanifest potential that is in need of us. This might occasionally mean that decisions are not taken, even though the need for decisions might seem urgent. Nevertheless, we do not move unless it is from a collective and generative clarity. In this context, the ‘downloading’ attitude would be to quickly search for some kind of consensus or majority. Clearly, though, in this context we want to go beyond consensus, consent or known agreements. If we are willing to let the process of aligned knowing unfold, then sooner or later it will do so. Living in this unfolding, it becomes crystal clear that life



is always changing, always evolving, always different, moment by moment. Of course it always and already was this way, but now we are participating in it consciously and intentionally.

Being collectively present, in the now, with our shared inquiry, is not only about finding novel answers or insights, or even manifestation or co-creation. More than this, it is about being in resonance with unfolding evolution, and being conscious of this. ‘Holding the space’ and ‘holding the not-knowing-yet’ are the names of the process forms that can maintain the creative tension until emergence shows up, in the shape of something radically novel; like the point when a universe with no living cells tips to a universe with living cells. Evolution on Earth spent millions of years in this tension before a few cells somehow emerged and gave life to nucleated cells. At the present juncture in evolution, the capacity to hold the space for this creative tension and the willingness to tolerate the process of not-knowing-yet needs to come from a collective. It seems we are practicing doing this with smaller collectives, which will most likely expand to larger ones later in the evolution of humanity.

It is obvious that this type of generative conversation or collective inquiry is quite different to “effectively communicating a defined message”, which is how Terry Patten defines ‘rhetorical speech’, distinguishing it from “speaking trans-rhetorically to investigate the unknown...” (p.10), which points to this ‘not-yet-known’. Charles Savage describes it beautifully: “from the arrogance of knowing to the humility of discovery”. (Personal exchange, Autumn 2009.)

Why is it so hard (for us, Westerners?) to be in not-knowing-yet? What appears is always new and surprising, isn’t that appealing enough? So many preconceived ideas and judgements reside within us that are ready to jump onto the podium and declare that they hold the truth! There is so much presumed knowing, without any conscious engagement with the actual situation and question at hand. There is so much identification with what we (conceptually) know. For most of us it is a struggle to keep coming to the situation afresh, with new eyes, fully present in the moment. How many times do we have to experience this cycle before we can trust it and move through it with grace and ease? In my own case, I know that I still have a way to go before I master this quality.



## Holding intensity

Staying in not-knowing-yet, holding the creative tension, requires the ability to hold ever more intensity in the body, without escaping into action – reaction or downloading – when things start heating up. This ability is first gained and

then enhanced by any training or personal practice that includes conscious embodiment as part of the focus. This can be part of an individual daily practice, whatever that might be. The core of this capacity is concerned with holding the tension of uncertainty – in other words the tension of creation, of what is not yet – and gently sensing what is coming to the surface. In this case it is the tension of co-creating new insights, with each other, the surroundings and all levels of reality; collectively fully participating in life. Robert Fritz states in his book, *The Path of Least Resistance*:<sup>2</sup> those who are able to hold the greatest creative tension (and not confuse it with personal emotional tension) are able to create the most. It is about being able to hold and maintain your centre in the midst of uncertainty and chaos. In the words of my friend and Aikido master Bob Wing: “It is OK to lose your ground, but to lose your centre is bad.” We’re being asked to hold the vitality and sense of urgency as we develop the capacity to sense into what wants to emerge.

*Quote from participant:*

The first night (of the gathering) I was in existential angst. No stated goals, outcomes, handouts, and the experience of the Void. What will we do for 3 days? It was a deep point of transformation for me. This is where life comes through. We don’t come up with the same old answers. And in this space new questions emerged. What hasn’t been, can show up. Magic, but uncomfortable magic. And so profound.

— Edveeje

People who are familiar with (Western) Tantric practices understand the notion of holding the energy high and not releasing it too soon into any kind of acting out. Through practice you can learn to hold higher and higher levels of (sexual) energy without coming to a release. There is no end to what you can experience in this subtle journey of discovery, and the energy waves that move through your body are ever more subtle, but really exquisite. Holding intensity means holding the bubbling energy – this feeling of being totally alive – and you can always choose to go one more step further before surrendering to a final release. As one of our participants once asked: “Can I hold that much joy?”

I have already talked about the capacity to collectively hold collective pain, wounding and trauma ([section 7.2.](#)) This is of course the other end of the spectrum to the sexual pleasure just mentioned, but it points to the same capacity: holding intensity. Thomas Hübl says: ‘being present is being more intensive in what we are doing’. Holding disturbance in a present and conscious way ([section 7.3](#)) also belongs to this capacity of holding intensity. Sometimes this phase of holding the not-knowing-yet can feel like a collective initiation; it begins by feeling frustrated, but later it is powerful. It is a ‘groan zone’, part of any participatory learning process. Helen described it as: “being in the unclarity, waiting for the sediment to settle, waiting for the waters to still.”

Holding intensity evokes many layers, which Bonnitta Roy has distinguished as follows (in an online forum of a course):

- holding the not-knowing, the creative tension
- holding the intensity of pain and emotions
- holding the vital, primordial energy of life
- holding the cosmological energy, which is huge

To hold them all, your body-mind needs to be open. This means that contracting patterns or habituated forms – on all the levels evoked above – have been ‘deleted’ or integrated/healed, allowing the energy to flow through mind and body without being captured or interpreted by the mind (our narratives and other ego stuff), opening for more of the life force.

## Listening and searching

Otto Scharmer said (in an online talk about Education in Aarhus, Denmark) “A leader needs to be a black belt in observing and listening.” Listening is the foundation for all new forms of leadership; it is the foundation for all social innovation today.

Section 7.3, “Deeper Circle Practice”, describes how we learn to speak from inner stillness and how ever-more-truly-shared silence seems to enter the group naturally when we are aiming for generative dialogue. We come into a rhythm and pace of speaking and listening that is both waiting and searching. We suspend everything that no longer works and listen deep inside ourselves, into the collective container, into the context and into the unmanifest potential. We are not questing into known concepts and acquired knowledge (only), rather we are accessing and adding information that is beneath the surface, coming from the aquifer of intuition, stories, images, past experience and more. We are listening for salient points, for clarity and newness. Not-knowing-yet as part of a generative space is a state of openness and uncertainty, constantly sensing into the future and its potential so that at a certain point a clarity arises that is from an altogether different paradigm. It is an active, engaging and open waiting until the inner and the outer align in all participants.

These periods of silence are not experienced as an absence of words; they have a quality of freedom in them: the freedom of being present and being able to listen for the next impulse. It is being like an empty tube and listening to the intangible, the land and the wisdom to be uncovered. It is a restful quality, quite unlike the frantic behaviour that has become so commonplace in mainstream society. In the Theory U process, it is the phase of letting come, hearing the emerging impulse through our collective sharing. Dropping into this shared still point, we are creating a holding space for a very generative kind of work. Because it is so full of freedom, it carries all potential!

The practice of shared silence often brings collective awareness into being – the collective being conscious of itself, as a collective. This awakening can even happen unexpectedly in the unlikeliest teams, people and contexts. The quality of the one(s) hosting the conversation – their capacity to be silent, at peace and at rest – has an impact on the group, although we still don’t really understand how this works. Holding an inner alignment in silence might play a big role in birthing the new collective way of being and how we hold the emergent.

In the searching, we have noticed an aspect of curiosity – What is next? What will happen? – and, maybe more surprising, a longing. Curiosity might be the more cognitive aspect of this longing, which in itself has more of an emotional tone. Both express a specific kind of relationship with what is possible and not yet manifest.

*Poem by participant:*

At the heart of our relating I see that we need to be mindful and to listen deeply.  
Listen... listen... listen...  
it has come up over and over again.  
Listening to the land  
Listening for the wisdom  
Listening for answers  
Listen to the call  
Hearing the invitation  
— Ria

## Radical Patience and Radical Trust

Not-knowing-yet requires us to let go of our habitual patterns of creating solutions and outcomes. In this phase of not-knowing-yet, when nothing new seems to come up quickly enough, when the collective space stays silent, anxiety can easily creep in. When this happens, it is showing us that we are still holding on to some expectations. How uneasy we can feel when nothing seems to be happening! The strong need to know and to have some (quick) outcome kicks in, together with a compulsion to fill the void. When nothing seems to happen, it is hard to hang in there, to just stay with this not-knowing-yet.

These unconscious expectations are so subtle that we hardly notice them – until the point they are not met, when we get frustrated in one way or another and fall back into our habitual patterns of reactivity. There is much to learn and become aware of at this stage. Our expectations and longing to know get in the way of what we are seeking on a

deeper level: to participate directly in life and let something truly novel emerge. Part of clearing the space for the field to become generative is exactly the work of bringing those expectations into consciousness and releasing them. This is how I understand the Buddhist injunction to ‘abandon all hope of fruition.’

In order to achieve a truly generative collective space, we need to let go of *all* attachments, including our sense of urgency. In essence, urgency is a judgement, an emotion, not an objective fact. It can therefore be seen as an emotional attachment that people can be very invested in. A sense of urgency is a kind of fear. Confronted as we are with so many problems in the world, this is a difficult reality to grasp. What does it take to stay with “It is enough to sit together in not-knowing-yet”, without rushing into repeating known ways of working and so-called solutions?

All around we hear conversations about change and transformation, also about what needs to die. The current mainstream pattern for change is: first observe and see what is, then judge what is, and then try to change what is. What we are proposing here is fundamentally different: observe what is (including my own and our shared assumptions and habitual responses), and then *accept* it – quite different from judging and seeking to change what is. The practice of being in not-knowing-yet is also a practice of not judging, staying centred no matter what. The challenge is to be like an open tube, an instrument ready to receive a tone from a potential that is ready to manifest. All of a sudden we realise that ‘what is’ is not what we thought it was at all! The practice is to (simply) observe, accept, honour and live what is. Only then can we see, sense and know what becomes possible in a new way. There is a strong tendency to move too early into sensing the potential, skipping the current reality and trying to jump ahead through a gap, absenting our selves from all that is actually present in the here-and-now.

Giving up hope, attachments and expectations, really letting go is an act which is not without impact. To take whatever happens as the only thing that could have (as one of the principles of Open Space Technology invites us) without attaching to it in any way – either positive or negative – bespeaks a radical trust in life. Just this: this is it. Trusting that life is meaningful and worthwhile, even if we don’t see it at first. Going with the flow, relaxed about outcome. This seems to be a good guide for life in general.

Radical trust in life means radical trust in the process of our shared inquiry; sooner or later some clarity will arise. This implicitly includes the notion of radical patience. Holacracy, a new governance practice, embeds in its process the principle of ‘not deciding until the last responsible moment’. This is so unlike the common practice in our institutions and organisations to set up structures, rules and regulations before anything has even happened. When you actually hold an intention with radical trust and patience – and this also means radically trusting the participants in the group – radically new insights can come through and life can happen in you, me and between us. It feels so alive! The personality, scared of the void, doesn’t know or trust that something will come up on the other side of this not-knowing, but at some point you take a leap and jump, trusting that ‘something’ is there from another level and of another quality all together.

*Quote from participant:*

I suppose ‘moving the edge’ (the practice of Collective Presencing) means to me becoming more comfortable with the unknown or the invisible, so that it becomes more of an interesting companion than a source of blocking terror.

— Diane





## Notice and allow emergence to happen

... we had not made a decision. We had just stopped talking when we knew.  
— Tom Atlee<sup>3</sup>

We have already touched on emergence ([section 3.2](#)): “Emergence is the manifestation of something really new, the novel that never existed before. An example of emergence from science is what happens when hydrogen and oxygen atoms are combined; it makes water. The wetness of water is found in neither hydrogen nor oxygen, it emerges from the interaction of the two; it is an emergent property. The scientific concept of emergence is now finding its way into mainstream conversations, but is not always well understood. In the realm of collective intelligence and wisdom, we talk of emergence when connections have been made between different elements – like different insights from diverse participants – that lead to a totally new feature or insight. A potential that was not known or even possible before, has come into existence, and we notice an innovation in products and/or processes.”

Wikipedia’s definition of emergence mentions how complex systems arise out of the multiplicity of relatively simple interactions. Generative conversations, too, are complex systems, and so they hold the potential for the emergence of new dynamic patterns. However, the gestation period needs to be long enough – just like a drop of water hanging from a blade of grass, it needs to be full enough of its own weight to fall in its own time. Then we have arrived collectively in a fully connected space, like dropping together through the bottom of a wet paper bag to find ourselves floating in timeless space where really powerful thinking, feeling and sensing can happen. In these unfolding moments, the knowing that arises has a limpid clarity, a simplicity (not simplistic) and a rightness to it. It is a knowing that has an utter naturalness to it – as if this is something we have always known how to do. It is easy to miss it if you are looking and waiting for something spectacular; because oftentimes it is about seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary, or about connecting obvious facts and simple meanings to drop into a deeper shared understanding.

The precipice, the gap between what was known and the emergent: is it hard to cross? Or is it fun and exciting? There seems to be a delicate place where the multidimensional field of this circle transcends our two-dimensional language. We sense a potential, it often proves impossible to describe. Our language, with its labels, is very limiting



in this regard. Nevertheless, it is simple enough if we are present to our inner felt sense, just as it feels, and we make the effort to language it; or follow the collective flow just as it presents itself right here in the moment.

I remember one instance in a gathering where we all came back from a break, each taking our place on a cushion or a chair, some starting to draw and doodle with the many art supplies that were lying around. I put on some music, as not all were present yet. More women started to draw... there was no need to turn the music off... we revelled in the shared silent space of music and drawing... and it came naturally to its own organic end. Life is here, it doesn't need to be 'done' or planned. Another example from another gathering, right at the end: some wanted to leave straight away, while others wanted the freedom of not rushing back into their lives... we stayed undecided on the level of language and decisions taken, but the sun called us out and with no agreement or conversation about it we all ended up on the lawn in front of the house, talking in little groups of two, three or four. This is what I like about living in emergence, some things are spoken about and agreed upon, but there are still things that just happen, as if the collective does its own thing and we are just entrained into it.

When people who are able to pool open mind, heart, and will come together, you can reach a collective understanding and embodiment of a very specific and collective capacity: holding the space open long enough for emergence to happen. The whole point is that there is absolutely no way of knowing exactly what will emerge in terms of process, content or insights. The pattern of increasing complexity that is present, combined with ever more uniqueness in each participant, expresses as new properties present in the emergent.

For all the challenges that are present and imminent in the world, I believe that this is a very important competence. In a way, we are able 'to leave our slippers at the door' and take part in these collective inquiries so that these new properties can lead us to the new ways forward – the new that needs to resolve and regenerate what is no longer in balance.

## Not picking the apples before they are ripe

When we operate from our old mindset, there will come a point in the process when some new clarity has shown itself, and we will assume that the sourcing is over and done with. We tend to forget that we are in an ongoing process of inquiry, discovery and continued sensing. Sometimes more waiting is needed, as we are still learning how to understand the messages and insights arising from the inner and subtle planes. We have seen many times that groups or teams reach a novel insight and understanding and revert back to their normal planning mode, infusing their novel insights with some unconscious management stuff, only to learn later that how they had translated the insights into action was "off" and that the new insights were quite different to how they had understood them in the first place. So, space needs to be held continuously open until full clarity arises and the inner alignment and outer balance have settled. Once this has happened, action can proceed smoothly and easily.

In addition to the metaphor of the drop of water falling from the blade of grass, we came across another one about apple trees: often the fruit is picked before it is ripe. That is painful and the fruit does not taste as good, it is not as nourishing. In this practice, we are being invited to allow our fruit to fall, not to offer it too soon or allow it to be picked too early. This goes counter to the relentless pace of our professional and, increasingly also our personal lives, the demands to produce without space for regeneration, rest or nourishment. We are under constant pressure to pluck our own underdeveloped apples and give them to the world too soon. This leaves each of us feeling depleted at a soul level, ever more frequently to the point of breakdown, burn out and illness.

Another useful metaphor is the soup that needs time to simmer and cook. Sitting in a collective silence and a shared not-knowing-yet, we are building a strong container – one that can hold whatever needs to cook. So much of what we do in the world is not wise because it's not properly cooked (half-baked!). We have not left the diverse ingredients together for long enough to allow their flavours to mingle and stew, keeping the lid on it until it's ready. The agentic bias of our mainstream world, the let's-get-down-to-action-in-the-world, tends to open the oven door too soon, so that the soufflé flops. Because we feel we have to stick with the timetable we came up with before the start, we get a distressing amount of flopped soufflés going out into the world. What or where is the knowing of the moment when the apples are ripe for picking, that the stew is just right to eat, that the soufflé can hold its own form?

Again, it's in the collective listening and the shared sensing that clarity can come to light. Sometimes it shows up as a subtle 'quickenings' that illumines with bright clarity what needs to happen next.

## The edge is so alive!

With enough practice, you can come to a point where being in the creative tension of this not-knowing-yet becomes a desired state. With practice the anxiety can drop away to be replaced by a sense of comfort. There always comes a point – even for the members of the hosting team – where nobody knows what is going to happen and where what is happening is totally new and unexpected. These days I just love to be in that space, because the not-knowing-yet is so full of creativity and excitement; it feels so alive! It seems to me that this kind of edge is where life really happens; all the rest is just repeating what has already been. (More on this in [Section 9.6](#).)

*Quote from participant:*

I am amazed when we can get to that edge – almost on to something – so much is right there, just beyond our grasp – that is really the generative space! It is very seductive! It has a lot of juice.

— Judy

## Notes

1: Wendell Berry: *Collected Poems*. ↓

2: Robert Fritz: *The Path of Least Resistance*. ↓

3: Tom Atlee: *The Tao of Democracy*. ↓ Prologue.

## 7.6 Opening to We-in-Now



### Living as an ecosystem

Just as the individual is a process and a becoming – and not at all a fixed entity – so, of course, is any team or group also a continuously evolving and unfolding process. In our search to capture the essence of this particular piece of the puzzle we call Collective Presencing, we came up with the concept of ‘Living as an Ecosystem’. Opening to and practicing the *We-in-Now* is quite different than what we classically refer to as ‘group dynamics’, as here we transcend all ingrained patterns in any of the individuals making up the group. This is an embodiment of the new paradigm where everything is interwoven and interpenetrating back and forth, while being together with others in the wider world.

Collective Presencing as a whole can be seen as a practice for teams, groups or communities holding an intention to evolve. The *We-in-Now* is about learning to be, speak and act as a human ecosystem. *Observing what is in We-in-Now* means noticing that a collective energy has brought us together, is inviting us to become conscious of its purpose and to live out its potential. *Accepting what is in We-in-Now* means accepting this collective soul journey, which requires us to embrace growing intensity at all levels – ‘not-knowing-yet’ being a crucial and difficult piece of it. The next step, *Honouring what is in We-in-Now*, means embracing and integrating collective pain, often concealed in personal stories. It invites us to hold cultural pain and deep cultural differences, realising that these will not disappear. Ever. The culminating step is *Living what is in We-in-Now*, a full embodiment of living – in speaking, knowing and acting – as an ecosystem.

*Quote from participant:*

We were wondering about: What is the transformative dynamic? What made us come to this point?

Many elements were named...

start from silence...

deep listening...

walk the talk...

contain the pain and destructive forces...

holding chaos...

emptying for the whole world...

start from diversity...

trust the system...

listening to life itself...

But the real answer was to me:

A community that has the willingness and the practice to tune into the notes of grace.

— Ria

In the current mainstream paradigm, the coexistence of the individual and the collective is seen as a polarity, or at least as a tension. *We-in-Now*, as we have described it in its many facets so far, transcends this polarity and frames the tension differently. A collective inevitably consists of individuals, and we come to see our personal boundaries not as barriers that separate us as distinct beings, but as the interface where we can constantly connect with others and with our surroundings.

In the paradigm of collective presence and collective authenticity, the personal actually borders on the impersonal. Uniqueness and diversity are seen as features of the complexity that is life. Judy, my co-initiator of *Women Moving the Edge*, started researching the link between the personal and the impersonal before our project took form. Her findings led her to state that “the personal is important as the starting point, as it is the doorway to the impersonal.”

Religion and spirituality in their different forms have mainly offered us a view that shows us the individual on one side and the impersonal (however you want to name it) on the other side, with nothing in between – unless, perhaps some priests to act as intermediaries. Here, we state that the group, the collective, the team can be seen as an intermediate step from the individual to the impersonal and that, on this level, we can learn to integrate the qualities of our uniqueness with the qualities and principles of life. Bonnitta Roy sees the planetary level as a meso-level between the individual and the cosmos. In contrast, I think we need first to practice in smaller groups!

Some people find the concept of the impersonal somewhat cold – as if all the life and juice have been extracted. What I am pointing to here, though, is to living your uniqueness fully in the visceral realisation that life, the whole, this group, can reach its potential only if you participate with your full life force. Judy expresses this in her blog: “*My experience is that evolution is freeing itself in and through me. As personality becomes the servant to soul, to planetary and cosmic impulse and intention, **the impersonal becomes the outward manifestation of the personal.** Convergence into oneness – as evolution, seeking ground in this realm, finds its freedom and unique balance in and through me.*”<sup>1</sup> Otto Scharmer, interviewed by her, said it in these words: “*The capital ‘S’ Self in a very intimate way, is kind of connected with the Collective Self, and actually it serves as the gateway, or it kind of is the vehicle for the Collective Self to come to being.*”

In this reciprocal dance between the individual and the collective, the individual provides the gift of vulnerability and authenticity, which opens a gateway for the collective to step through. Any holding back, or fear of being vulnerable, holds back the whole collective. It can feel like a sudden turn-around, realising that in being vulnerable (and sometimes needing to be strongly invited or nudged into that vulnerability), something new bursts through and feels very vibrant and alive!

*Quotes from participants:*

The juice for me is in the collective where we're all very present. Inter-independence! It is about the individual being really present (independent) and present to the interrelationship, the wholeness of the collective.

— Judy

This is very much how I identify myself these days as I see myself as a constant interweaving of different conversations. They all are kind of related, they build on each other, they weave concepts and ideas closer together or weave a new colour in. The cloth that is woven is never finished, keeps on changing and becomes wider, bigger and deeper. And this doesn't only happen for myself, it also happens in the collective I'm most related to. Mostly women, I notice now.

To take the notion of ecosystem as the main identification means I drop more and more any attachment to form; or maybe better to say: any attachment to stable form. What I am seeking for these days is dynamic balance. There is nothing linear in that, but it is an always moving in many directions and levels.

— Lisette

Our minds, used to separation and distinctions, have difficulty grasping that there is a kind of unity – or similarity – of content and process at different levels, and a kind of fusing of the individual and the collective. Nevertheless, we have to work with our own experience and awareness, the building blocks of our own knowledge – we cannot do otherwise. This is why it is important to have diversity in the circle. What if the experience of *We-in-Now* is a deep integration of our animal nature – this natural, basic and intuitive stance of always feeling connected, always ready for relationship, that doesn't think and act as separate beings – as we experience with our cats, dogs, horses and other animals?

As in previous chapters, this one ends with an overview of this part of the map. This is another occasion to remember that going through this process is rather messy and chaotic – it does not flow neatly from box to box as it appears in the matrix!

## Observing what is in *We-in-Now*

Learning to become present in your self is a journey in itself. Learning to become present as a collective is an altogether different proposition. Your body awareness must reach out to another level, where your individual sensing is working on behalf of the group. At the personal level, you can have body awareness, subtle sensing and inner knowing just for yourself. At the group level, our initial experience might be that of wanting the “we-all-feel-so-good-together” experience or, on the contrary, we might hate that kind of group feeling or find it irritating. The next level in, though, is a sense of subtle discernment: where is this group going? Is it moving in the direction of the shared inquiry? How can I use my body-sense to further and support the emerging insights? For this to happen, your senses need to be attuned to clarity, truth, love, support... this is beyond any steps in individual emotional development.

*Observing what is in We-in-Now*, we notice that this delicate, energetic collective field is much more than the sum of the present participants. Each person shows up with her or his own authenticity, as fully as possible, and gets to see and experience how (s)he is woven into the collective purpose. On the surface it might be clear what has brought us together – a question or an invitation – but what might be beneath that, the collective potential, the collective form of a soul's calling? We can start to be aware of it only when we engage with each other in this collective endeavour. We soon find that we live in kinship with each other – and with our surroundings. By placing our attention on what may seem at first to be very intangible, we begin to develop our own connection to that collective potential. This realisation will lead to truly coherent creation. Slowly but surely, the song of the collective will appear through all the diversity present.



## Accepting what is in We-in-Now

As we move through the collective journey we each hold the circle and the circle holds each of us. We witness and are witnessed. We each open and reveal what we often keep inside – a gift for each, a gift from each. But it might take some time to see the collective potential through all of this; to get a sense of how the diversity will reveal something novel for all present. The not-knowing-yet can take more time than our habitual habits can tolerate, and they will try to kick in. In me, in you. Can we accept this? *Accepting what is in We-in-Now*? Can we trust the process and each contribution? Can we link with radical patience, trusting that the innovative and emergent will show itself in right timing? Radical patience and radical trust in process and people is a radical act, but a very basic and simple one: just accept what is, right here, right now (including all the ways you don't, yet).

## Honouring what is in We-in-Now

Just as the individual, in her journey of becoming more aware and present, will hit layers or spots of personal pain, so too, in this deeper collective practice, we will hit different forms of collective – or cultural – pain. These unconscious memories can be revealed in the sharing of participants' stories, and can also pop up through unconscious layers of physical memories. We are not used to recognising these stories and experiences as expressions of collective trauma, and we certainly don't have a framework for putting them into context.

### *Quotes from participants:*

What happened was that I was already feeling sick coming onto the call, felt OK during the call and then afterwards I had to go and lie down. I really was sick. I found out later on that others had the same symptoms, but at the time it felt like heaven and earth were moving through me – a journey of descent to purge. I could feel in my body the longing to purge, but not quite enough letting go, or something. I was barely conscious. It was quite a violent experience in the physical. I knew at the time there was no way to reflect or analyse – I just had to be present, and then a deep sleep afterwards. .... It's taken most of a week for my body to return to a healthy balance again. .... It felt like something I personally am holding, and it felt like something much larger. Something in the field, yet I'm holding it also personally.

— Judy

It was also touching me on a very deep level. All the times that I had invited the other women to speak from the place within and to drop from the head, and the already known – the memory – I had asked them from my need to be with me. Be with me in this quest of remembering to be in reciprocal relation with all of matter: the trees, the rocks, the ocean, the flowers and much more. There is magic in relating with 'life within matter'; magic that we will need in order to heal the wounds of our world and to solve the many intertwined problems on the Earth. But the memories of the witch hunts and the collapse of Atlantis reside also on this level of knowing within, and I am very, very afraid to use this power in a way that might be not life-affirming but manipulative. I need all the others to go there with me, and sense together with me: Is the knowing from within pure or somehow distorted?

— Ria

All these stories, these experiences, as subtle and real as they are, point clearly towards our interconnectedness, woven together over vast stretches of time and space. This is mostly invisible to our conditioned eyes, intangible to our dulled senses, but still there to notice, and it has a huge influence. It reveals a deeper sense of interdependence, flowing into an embodiment of our systemic nature that has always already been part of us, even if we didn't realise.

The shared exploration in which we now participate takes on a larger perspective, and we see our own soul's calling integrated in the collective one. To put it the other way round (as it is so difficult to describe as one continuous unfolding): the collective soul is penetrating us, working itself out through our full participation. We come together to continually inquire and sense into this larger multi-layered collective soul. Do we realise how evolution is moving

through us as a collective? As humanity, we are beginning to build this more expansive capacity. We are taking our first steps, it seems; and yet trusting our inner, subtle and collective knowing.



## Living what is in We-in-Now

*Excerpt from blog:*

I can hardly describe what happened in us and in between us. First it was named as a not-knowing, and later also as a not-talking... but then, what is it?

We seem to listen, to tune into, to sense...

into what?

the delicate, the subtle, the fine, the intangible...

It seems to be possible to access – in our bodies – the unformed, the unmanifest...

the sound of silence...

silence...

collective silence...

suddenly it was there: a connected silence; a tangible in-between space; a sacred space; a space full of possibilities; a generative space...

— Ria

An essential practice and capacity of this living-as-an-ecosystem is Collective Sourcing – Collective Insighting as Bonnie calls it. It is a human capacity that we are starting to practice in different groups around the globe. So far, the process has this kind of sequence: coming together around a common theme or question, experiencing and noticing the diversity of perspectives and experiences, hanging in there, moving through a chaotic phase where nothing seems to work, where nothing is appealing, somehow being able to move through that phase, and then things begin to shift and there is a different quality in the air. The not-knowing-yet and the ongoing attempts to be in a generative dialogue eventually lead to a point best imaged as a collective leap. It is difficult to convey how it feels: a higher vibration, gentle sparks, very alive, high energy.... Articulating what we are noticing when this shift in the quality of

energy happens, when this collective attention comes together, can make it more conscious to all present and can further hone the shared attention.

This experience feels so alive that people are becoming addicted to being in that space of receptivity for the new. We all recognise internally when we're in touch with it, even when it's still too tender to be named. The vibration is raised and we have called it into being by the question and our constant attention, yet we haven't 'done' it. This field of interconnectedness is always present; we need only to rest our attention there. It is likely that at this point in the process there comes a redefinition or an adaptation of the guiding question, because together we have reached a higher vista in the inquiry.

At the outset, we were tempted to label 'it' as a new entity – for a while, we called it the Circle Being – seeking, with our conditioned dualistic minds, to make it into another thing-like being. These days, I think that it is more like a shared consciousness of interweaving and interpenetration that gets established. Through that awareness, a new potential is within reach and it seeks to let itself know and be known – and this is possible only through us, the individuals in the group, with our bodies capable of feeling it. It is quite palpable, this quality of shared presence. It's a change in atmosphere. Things slow down – time shifts. A quality of depersonalisation sets in, and we have left behind our habit of casual talking-for-the-sake-of-it. Now, we speak only when we are moved by the larger purpose, the collective Open Will, which needs a voice through us. One hallmark of this state is when, from the not-knowing-yet space, someone voices a proposal and the rest move authentically and easily with it. When the proposal does not come from this shared attention, no one follows and nothing happens.

*Excerpt from blog:*

Our closing was an expression of this 'being tuned'. No one spoke about it, but at a certain moment everything was said, all the last practical questions got an answer, and we all 'came down' from the chairs to the meditation cushions. Silently we gave hands and somebody started humming Amazing Grace... everybody joined in... and we were right on time to go for lunch.

— Ria

Sometimes we would describe this as: "We've dropped into the field." But clearly, we didn't drop into anything – not something that exists outside of us. Rather, we now embodied the realisation of our shared becoming. We become aware that we are invited into – and engaged and committed in and as the awareness of – this ecosystem, where boundaries don't have the same meaning they used to. This is how I understand Thich Nhat Hanh's concept of the Collective Buddha.

*Quote from the Circle of Seven:*

*Otto:* It strikes me that the quality of the collective field here can be described as a clearing in the woods. It has a vertical dimension and an openness. And it is held by a surrounding outer or horizontal boundary. It's a holding space for the emergence of a new impulse.

*Circle of Seven:* When you talk about following an impulse, it feels related to what you said about an incubator, a place where there's an intention to develop capacities to pay attention to life's intent. Being true to that intent within the boundary of this dedicated time together defines what the Circle of Seven does. We use our own storylines, situations, and connections in service to that emergence. We're not here for ourselves. I trust that what comes in the flow as 'my' challenge or seemingly personal situation has meaning beyond me. Though it is personal, it is respectfully placed in the clearing because we trust it also relates in some way to broader factors that need clarification or realignment.

— Circle of Seven<sup>2</sup>

This collective awareness is aligned with a collective soul level that seems to have a will of its own. Perhaps a more practical description would be that we are ever more in tune with the collective potential we have committed ourselves to. Sometimes it felt like it was not us deciding what we were going to do; the deeper potential was *asking*

us to listen in more attentively to what wanted to manifest in the world through us. It most definitely was not always what we had in mind beforehand! This is what we call *Living what is in We-in-Now*. It is the constant focus of our listening and deeper sensing that attracts threads of potential that resonate with the original intent of our shared inquiry.

To help us understand this link between the personal and the collective, we often use the metaphor of the mycelium, the vast network of underground cells that permeate the soil to take charge of fungal decomposition. The mushrooms we see above ground are but the fruit or the flower of the mycelium. If the 'I' is the mushroom and the 'We' is the mycelium, who, then, am I when I drop my separate identity as my place of basic grounding? It might feel frightening at first to drop one's identity, but it feels so alive that it is quite easy to transcend this subtle fear.

Don't forget that we are in a process, in a movement, in a becoming. So far, I have never been in a group that has been able to reach this shared awareness and then sustain it for hours on end. Perhaps that is not what is needed. I don't know (yet). Most of the time we experience a back and forth from ordinary awareness to this space of collective presence. Sometimes it is enough for one person to speak from the place of habitual patterns and the whole energy can dissipate. But the continued intuitive sensing will allow us to move into the collective presencing space again. We can ask questions that lead us deeper into the not-knowing-yet, we can listen for pop-out points that bring us to an edge of clarity and novelty.

We definitely need our gentleness here, the friendship we talked about earlier. It is sometimes quite tempting to get annoyed or frustrated when someone makes a remark with sparks of judgement in it. But we can (learn to) stay in awareness, in gentleness towards one another and let these hiccups pass. Life goes on and there are other times and spaces when the click will happen; all in right context and right timing.

We have been attentively watching what happens when our will is opened collectively. Once we were three participants in this process, and we were able to write a report collectively. All of us were used to writing on our own, directly from source and we engaged with this subtle knowing together to make this possible. In the book, *Inside Out. Stories and Methods for Generating Collective Will to Create the Future We Want*, Tracy Huston talks about the 'collective interior', pointing to this shared consciousness space. We believe astonishing magic is possible from there: bringing forward that which is waiting to be born and take its rightful place.

## Implications for the notion of Leadership

*Excerpt from blog:*

There is no separation between being and becoming;  
it is living-as-the-system,  
living-as-the-field.  
It is living-what-emerges,  
no separation between leader and what is led.  
There is no border,  
no precipice,  
it IS.  
— Ria

What form can leadership take – does it need to take – once we learn to live as an ecosystem? What could 'being a leader' mean in the knowledge that you are an inseparable piece of the whole? Like tango dancing, when it is really creative, it is not a dance of a woman and a man, but it becomes 'a being with four legs'. Who is leading? Who is led? Is there a difference between who is creating and what is created?

In the process of Collective Presencing, the person shifts her base of identity from her personality to the whole group that is present, the context it resides in and the potential that it holds. Leadership is thus no longer related to

personality, but becomes fluid and field-based, residing in each one present. Peter Merry wrote:

... we need to think of leadership as leadership in the Field – regardless of specific formal positions in the structures, etc. And we continually need to implicate ourselves. So there is a shift from “you” to “us”; a world where the One and the Many are transcended but included. ... This will be in many different functions and levels in organisations and societies, woven together in an ecological holarchy where there is no judgement about the ‘level’, simply natural functional fit.<sup>3</sup>

So leadership becomes a collective function, taken up in a natural and organic way by each of those present, depending on what is sparked in each of us. In this space of collective awareness, who leads is continuously shifting from one to the other. There might be some who are holding more of the whole, or who are keeping an eye more on the inquiry and the intention, but ultimately we are all in it together. In this way we are able to hold much larger fields of inquiry and much greater spaces of potential and emergence. That is most likely what we are training for in such groups.

*Quote from participant:*

My experience of collective intelligence and what we can achieve collectively when everybody can contribute what they know/are, is that it's exponentially greater than anything we can do in following a traditional leader. Makes me incredibly hopeful for our future, because once you've seen it, you just can't deny it. And it's pushing us into a very intense learning period as humanity.

— Helen

## Notes

1: Judy Wallace: *Circles Moving in Me*. ↓

2: Circle of Seven: *The Presence of the Circle Being* ↓

3: Peter Merry: *Leadership from the Field* ↓



## 7.7 More a river than a thing – WMtE part 7



It seemed to us that our project was flourishing: Four gatherings in 2009 and a next one planned in January of 2010. We really felt we were on to something! We started talking about Women Moving the Edge as a separate being, just as we had talked about the CircleBeing. I have already mentioned that trying to ‘define’ something is just a habit of our minds trained to see reality as a collection of separate elements. Soon enough we stopped thinking in terms of so-called beings, while nevertheless retaining the notion that we can share an awareness of potential and resonate with a collective calling, either in a circle of colleagues or in and for a project itself.

Through the diversity of participants in the different gatherings, we learned a lot about the practice and the power of witnessing. “Meeting people where they are and moving the edge while we can.” These gatherings didn’t always go the same way, didn’t always achieve the depth we liked so much – or were attached to? I started to see the whole project as a little stream, meandering along its own path. Every gathering was like a flat environment where the stream could overflow beyond its previous boundaries, and afterwards the water trickled back between the banks of the main river. Through these floods the stream was fed by the diversity of women present, in a continuous widening and constant reflection. Without this, there was a real danger that the few of us who were present most of the time and wanted to be in that generative space would circle back on ourselves and get trapped and rigid in our practice.

We began talking about having regular calls, or coming together regularly locally... but none of those ideas materialised. This was probably because such activities were not part of the action research project; it was more about a longing or a need for continued contact and interaction felt by some.

As good Art of Hosting practitioners, we sensed it was time to start harvesting the learning from our previous period. We started a series of ‘book calls’, wondering how our practice of collective presencing could be used to manifest the book now before you. We came in for another learning that we couldn’t ‘make it happen’ and had to listen for right timing. As ever, we could take only the next, minimal, elegant step, and yet the calls were absolutely precious

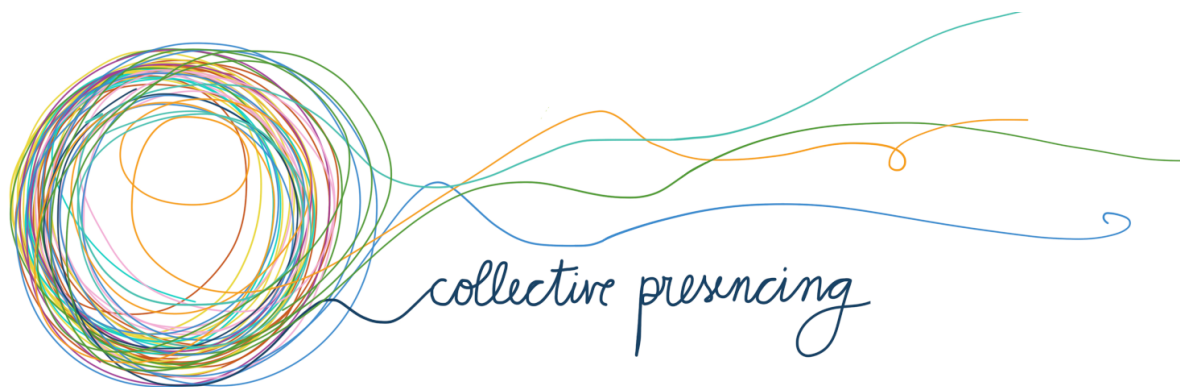
as we were articulating and languaging our deeper understanding of what this whole practice was about. Much of what was spoken then is part of what you are reading here!

Through all these experiences, we started to see that our practice was not just about collective sourcing – important as that is – but also about right timing and right relationship with place. That is when we started to use the term Collective Presencing, for both the book and its related website.

At this juncture, the universe stepped in, in the guise of Kosmos Journal, inviting us to write about our experiences and findings for publication in the Journal. The seeds for this had been laid a few years previously in a conversation between Judy, Ria, Nancy Roof (editor-in-chief of Kosmos) and Helen, who had already written some other articles for the journal. A first article <sup>1</sup> appeared in the Spring-Summer 2012 issue.

## Notes

1: Ria Baeck & Helen Titchen Beeth: *Collective Presencing: A New Human Capacity*. ↓



## 8. Subtle Simplicity: We-in-Here

8.1 Dying in Atlantis

8.2 Wholeness of Knowing

8.3 What if it is easy?

8.4 The next, minimal, elegant step

8.5 Standing on our own feet – WMtE part 8

8.6 Opening to We-in-Here

8.7 Widening Coherence as Process of Subtle Outer Alignment



## 8.1 Dying in Atlantis



The question “What is Life?” is a linguistic trap. To answer according to the rules of grammar, we must apply a noun, a thing. But life on Earth is more like a verb. It repairs, maintains, re-creates, and outdoes itself.

— Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan <sup>1</sup>

Did I ever tell the story of remembering the last seconds of being alive in Atlantis? I was doing a daily exercise during a 9-day workshop when I found myself catapulted into the last seconds of my life in Atlantis, looking back over what I had done in that life... and it was terrible! Being in this workshop, this memory came up totally unexpectedly. We were invited to do a daily exercise for 30 minutes to sense into anything we encountered: a chair, an insect, the road, the house, whatever... Over the days, I had felt an increasing resistance to doing this particular exercise – a resistance I didn’t understand. Finally, this hugely intense memory released itself in deep, deep crying. In those moments, back in Atlantis, I had the visceral realisation that the whole world was literally collapsing due to human actions, and I had had a part in creating it! I had used my subtle sensing and intuitive powers in deep synergy and co-creation with my male partner, for the sake of ‘power over’, for the sake of feeling god-like. The pain of this dawning realisation in those last seconds of life was quite excruciating. A central element was that, as a woman, I had been holding back part of my inner knowing, a part of what I knew that life should encompass – maybe a love for life itself? In this Atlantean society, we had become very skillful at harnessing subtle energies to co-create what we desired; many couples were trained in that competence. In those final seconds I realised that Atlantis was crumbling because of our misuse of the human creative power. And as I saw this I vowed to myself that I would never again go into the subtle energies and their link with creation – this co-creation between matter and energy – hence my resistance to the daily workshop exercise.

In telling this story, I make no claims for the truth or literal reality of past life experiences, but I do know that this experience was very, very real to me! It was a deep and sudden knowing, wherever it came from. I suspect that I am not the only one to have been traumatised in our creative power and vowed never to use it again. Now, though, it seems to me that we are being asked to become collectively conscious of this, to re-member our relation to the power of creation, while at the same time taking great care that no trace of our habitual patterns (of power) remains. No trying, no pushing, no pulling, just the noticing, the witnessing, the presence – and realising that there is creation power in these acts, particularly in our relationship with the Earth. In my view, as humanity we are reaching that potential in this current era.

## Introduction to Chapter 8

As long as you think that nature is ‘out there’, then you have the basic separation that allows you to see the environment as ‘other’ and people as distinct from that, and that separation of ‘self’ from ‘nature’ is really what white man brought to civilization. That is the disease, the deep, deep wound that will be healed one way or the other in the decades to come.

— Paul Hawken<sup>2</sup>

On the map of the *Circle of Creation* we are entering the third column, the *We-in-Here*, ‘Here’ being understood as both place and time. Not place and time as we register these on the surface level – rather, we focus here on the subtle dimensions of place and time. At the same time, place becomes the whole globe, and time becomes an entry point to the grand scale of evolution. In the same way that the individual is a unique entry point into the collective space, this place, this time, right here and now, is a unique entry point to all of Earth and to unfolding evolution itself.

In the wider evolutionary time frame, recently some humans have been on a journey of individuation which has now reached the extreme of separation and fragmentation. We see this especially as a strong disconnection with place – with nature itself, both locally and globally – and with time, specifically what I have come to call ‘natural rhythm’. How can we as human beings identified with our mental and conceptual capacities, fall back onto the surface of the planet, back into our actual, real, natural context? Exactly here and now? This reconnection has a relevance quite different from most of the stories of civilisation we have been telling ourselves.

For some, consciousness is seen as non-local in space and time; somewhere outside our bodies, outside our minds, outside the planet we inhabit. But *embodied* consciousness – awareness, mindfulness, presence, whatever you want to call it – asks us to ground that consciousness in our bodies, in the physical time and place where we are right now. There is immense creative power in this, especially as we hold the intention to do it together in this collective practice.

How we define ‘*in-here*’ is critical. It relates to subtle place and time, to interweaving with the subtle context that we find ourselves in. But it is crucial to understand that we include here more than just the human community. The ‘here’, this planet where we live as humanity, is shared with living beings beyond number. Planet Earth, too, is nested in something larger, and larger, and larger. So, we share this ‘*in-here*’ with myriads of creatures, from the impossibly small to the vast expanses of the universe. They all have some energetic presence. More still, it includes the non-material dimensions, the intelligences that we don’t see, the subtle realms, which we are beginning to co-create with. Of course it is complex, on all manner of levels.

In this complex context, allowing insights and novel actions to emerge from this space of *We-in-Here*, we learned that planning comes down to collectively seeing and understanding the next minimal elegant step.

## Notes

1: Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan: *What is Life?* ↓



2: Paul Hawken: *Deep Wound of our time.* ↓

## 8.2 Wholeness of Knowing



The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said that reality arises through a series of moments which feel into the past moment as they feel for(ward) the next moment. For Whitehead, the action in-between was nothing at all like the tight wire between the physicists' cause and effect. Rather, Whitehead thought of this feeling-process – which he called “prehension” – as incredibly sensitive, provocative, and loving; and he construed it as the long, long moment of possibility, freedom and choice, in the timeless space of becoming, before the actual occasion is concretized into being. If you situated yourself imaginatively inside Whitehead's process reality, you would experience yourself as a living centre of transformational process. Without a sense of separate self, nevertheless you would *feel* the act of cause-creating-effect-creating cause... and in the a-temporal pulsations between cause and effect (actual and potential) you would discover vast promise and freedom. The more you prehended your neighbors and relations, the more extensive you would become, until you felt the in-becoming of one body through the simultaneous presence of many bodies. The more stabilized your prehension, over the long slow moment of feeling, the more expansive you would become, until you realized the in-becoming of one novel moment through the simultaneous presencing of many moments.

— Bonnitta Roy<sup>1</sup>

### Conceptual knowing alone is too thin

You might remember that Women Moving the Edge was born out of frustration with the limited conceptual and conversational approach in the original Moving the Edge gathering. Tina said: “There is something I don't know here; like a language that is not developed yet. The tools that I have and have been introduced to are like having only

an egg to attack an elephant. It makes sense to come together and explore this together with women. In a gathering like Women Moving the Edge it could be interesting to inquire how we can deal with this; breaking down all ideas of how this should be done and breaking down these concepts of the personal and impersonal. Dancing and drawing and maybe other ways? Can we look into that as a collective? Maybe what I'm saying is that the form we use – (conceptual) conversation – is really limiting in itself.”

Exclusively conceptual knowing – repeating information that we acquired before this moment – is too thin for our practice of Collective Presencing. You might wonder: too thin for what exactly? The answer has to do with our relationship with Life Itself. In this new practice we are looking to experience life happening fully in the act of knowing itself. This only happens in “phenomenological experiences where certain aspects of the perspectival world drop away.”<sup>2</sup>

Just as in large-group conversations using formats like World Café and Open Space Technology, where we convene and design so that ‘the whole system’ is in the room and every voice can be heard, it dawned on me early on in our project that this kind of ‘prehension’ – the whole system of how we know, through many different faculties – needs to be present too!

This quickly led us to the notion of ‘Wholeness of Knowing’. A knowing that includes all senses, all modalities and all the ways in which we know. In the beginning I framed it as a difference between feminine knowing and masculine knowing, but even that is too small a space. Actually, it is a total integration of all possible kinds of knowing. It is like ‘getting something’ you never understood before while drawing some colours and lines on a piece of paper; or intuiting what you need to do next while walking in nature or taking a shower. The knowing is in the totality of your being, not just in your head. It is as if your cells, your brain, your emotions, your body, your being all understand something – all at once, all in one piece, with a certainty that doesn’t waver.

*Excerpt from my blog:*

My shaky moment was this morning, when Judy tried to go into some design of the first day and my body told me that we were ‘not there yet’. I get a lot of clues from my body about being on track or not, about something that might be missing. Mostly it’s attuned to whether we have addressed the real issue or not (yet). Sharing all of this with her, it became clear that this ‘wholeness of knowing’ is exactly one of the core elements of what we have to bring into the world.

In the words of Arnold Mindell: in the emergent you need all channels; you need the phenomenological. Since the inception of Women Moving the Edge, we were aware that conceptual knowing alone was too small to capture our experience and help us reach for the next. Over the years we used everything we had and everything that was available: dancing, singing, walking in nature, silence, slowing down, free drawing, listening to music, pictures, systemic constellations, collective hot tub in the snow in the dark – all aspects of our human embodiment. In these embodied practices, another knowing becomes available that we badly need to see more clearly: an all-at-once knowing.

Philosopher Christian de Quincey wrote a whole book – *Radical Knowing* – to emphasise and clarify that mental knowing alone is too thin to understand the world and to know what to do in the world. He states: “Here is the dilemma: On the one hand, we have lost touch with the deep foundation of reason in the feelings of the body, and the network of feelings in nature. On the other hand, we have not made full use of the gift of reason we already have. This second problem is rooted in the first. But both must be worked on together. Our problem, then is not really too much, but not enough, reason – not enough of the right kind: *clear reason* rooted in the feelings of the body and open to transcendental shafts of wisdom.”<sup>3</sup> He goes on to explain the difference between truth and wisdom: “By wisdom I mean an often ineffable knowing born of direct experience, a kind of intuitive pragmatism that works to the extent that it takes account of the whole. It is inclusive and integrative, and invariably involves empathy and compassion.”

Dave Snowden, expert on Knowledge Management, begins some of his keynote speeches with a quote from Polanyi:<sup>4</sup> “While tacit knowledge can be possessed by itself, explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly

understood and applied. Hence all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge. A wholly explicit knowledge is unthinkable.”

Bonnitta Roy mentions – as the kind of scientific work that actually matters: the integration in the mystic scientist – the four movements in scientific discovery, as described by philosopher Roy Bhaskar: “It can look trans-personal or mystic or even neurologic or psychiatric – Wilber calls them ‘state changes’ – but what we mean is that certain fixed or perspectival ways of knowing fall away and the knowing (with its articulation) is phenomenological, in the moment.” Myself, I have always held the intuitive and experiential knowing that the more I conceptually and consciously know, the more surface I have to apply my intuition and sensing to; which then makes for this mystic scientist.

Wholeness of Knowing implies taking the time and making the effort to become conscious and articulate our inner sensing into language that can be understood by others. People with a strong intuition or good subtle sensing capacities sometimes miss out on any solid expression in language. “I just know” or “That’s how it feels to me” is not sufficient when we aim for collective insight and generativity. The point is that it is possible, provided we pause long enough, to allow the inner knowing and subtle sensing to encounter our conscious brain and let the latter find words, stories, movements and metaphors to express the former to others.

The language and knowledge of the consciousness blessed with a nondual imperience/experience obtains two unique qualities: ‘distinction without separation or differentiation’ and ‘knowledge through identity or knowing by being’.

— Yasuhiko Genku Kimura<sup>5</sup>

In most of the gatherings that we convened, we started, after some good framing, with music and dancing, and/or with expressive pictures that spoke in a special way. These modalities help to relax the body and the habitual mind and invite everyone into the felt sense (the concept introduced by Eugene Gendlin). The felt sense becomes like a portal into a more embodied wholeness; it includes and goes beyond the perspectival and conceptual thinking. What is longing to emerge is a new kind of insighting that hasn’t existed before, a knowing that can’t be grasped or hijacked by the mind alone. So the mind has to surrender to something more, something bigger... into a network of knowing on the spot.

Sometimes there is a tendency to link sourcing (section 4.4) with going to a deep, still and serious place, but the energy can also have movement, lightness and a lot of sparkling. The knowing through drawing, dancing, nature, constellations is beyond the language of a normal conversation. It has a non-verbal quality and brings along the subtle knowing in different ways.

*Quote from participant:*

Clarity of inner knowing leads to magic and our next step is how to do that together. Some elements:

There was something in the body;

There was wounding, fear and vulnerability;

There was clear asking;

There was moving to ground and to Earth itself;

The Earth is calling each soul to voice its inner knowing;

Then there is a spark and something is ignited.

In the inner stillness the trees, the rocks etc. can speak to us.

— Judy



## Practices of Embodiment

### *Quote from participant:*

I experienced it – the movement and the dance – I was invited in and I made a conscious decision to go with it. The barriers seemed to disappear. I think, if I engage, the mind is moved to the background and I become more present.

— Judy

### *Excerpts from my blog:*

Judy and I both felt that this was enough words. We invited Eve-Marie to guide us in an experiment with drawing, using many colours. That was basically it: use colours and let them take over, drop your mind and your judgements, just go with the colours and the movement they evoke. “It is just paper.” “What would a four year old do now?” These were some of the questions that seduced us to a no-mind or less-mind space, the space of creativity. I loved to come to this point where it was just the fun of letting my hand move with the colours. Being present with the colours. Good stuff to come to an open mind!

— Ria

Judy asked Karen to guide us in a body exercise that invited us to sense our bodies, look for an impulse, give it a way to express in the body and then come to rest again; cycle after cycle...

— Ria

Any practice of embodiment is a movement away from a knowing restricted to mere thinking and conceptual language. In our habitual, conventional use of language we tend to speak from what we already know. Using modalities such as movement, nature and drawing invites a more direct way of knowing – a different kind of language. Most (Western/Indo-European) languages create a distance between the experience and what we actually say. The practice of sourcing ([section 4.4](#)) helps us learn to articulate insights from a place where we don’t already know.



Any practice of embodiment will develop our capacity to function like a tuning fork, sensing the energy in our own being and in the subtle present context. We invite the body's wisdom into our wholeness of knowing. Like a finely tuned instrument, we can sense the timing of when to speak in a meeting and when to be silent. This is an exquisite level of sensitivity, of the sensual elegance of the embodied experience that we are only just beginning to cultivate.

What each of us individually knows and senses is very unique. Even how we articulate or bring our inner knowing forward will be unparalleled. While this might be obvious by now, nevertheless it has some implications, which are worth making explicit. Only *I* can know – checking into my whole being – when my knowing is fully authentic. This is my unique gift and contribution to the collective, and it applies to all of those present. This provides an excellent motivation for getting quite rigorous about stripping away habitual patterns. If I cave in too easily and allow others' forms of knowing to take priority over mine, my task is to listen deeply and speak or share when I sense the need to. If I tend to speak more than others, now might be the time to learn more about the right timing of my contribution to the whole. It's an invitation to allow my way of knowing to be as fully present as that of others – not less, not more. Others don't occupy the same space. There's no competition. No right or wrong, just more perspectives, eventually leading to collective insight. This kind of articulating, and the knowing that happens in the expression, brings more harmony than we normally expect from a conversation.

## The synergy of different types of knowing

Process work shows the roundness of our universe. It shows that if we have the courage to follow unintentional signals to their edges, we do not fall out, but discover new worlds.

— Arnold and Amy Mindell<sup>6</sup>

I have already mentioned that I used to see the world in terms of feminine and masculine characteristics. My trainer in constellation work, Johannes Schmidt, once called the feminine the 'night consciousness', related to the moon, darkness and all other such attributes. He says that when you look at somebody with day consciousness you see whom you encounter. With night consciousness, you approach them with your back, not with your eyes open. At the point when he explained this, it came as quite a revelation to me. Often I would clearly sense that I needed to attend a training or seminar, but without any clarity about what I wanted to learn. I would enroll and attend because I knew inside that I needed to be there. In a way, I showed up with my eyes closed. I participated in order to learn something, but didn't know beforehand what I wanted or needed to learn. Johannes' explanation gave me an early understanding of this Wholeness of Knowing, as a combination of different ways of knowing.

The real synergy between these and other kinds of knowing is of yet another nature. Firstly, there needs to be a balance in these paradoxical polarities: the intuition and sensing need a clear awareness to be able to speak their knowing. The conceptual understanding needs a clear embodiment to be able to ground the knowing in the here and now. Secondly, beyond this balance we aim for a deep synergy and a mutual enhancement of the two.

Is what I am doing leading me to feeling more alive? Does it hold my interest and curiosity? Does it express beauty in a unique and original way? Does it lead me to feeling more nourished and engaged? Does it capture or express the moment in a way that feels right and true? And does it connect me in some way to a larger sense of the whole? Such questions are answered more fully at the sensory level than the intellectual.

— Michael Jones<sup>7</sup>

*Quotes from participants:*

There's some kind of cellular, bodily aliveness, different levels of vibration in me – then that's the layer or the experience of learning and integrating, even interpenetrating – it's very subtle, and yet can be huge, almost explosive – that's my experience of how this comes in, ever more into deeper and deeper parts of me. As this is alive in any of us, some level of vibration is there, attracting to it others who are seeking that, resonating with that.

— Judy

It's as if my whole body is a channel, not from my cognition; it feels like my whole body is engaged in it, an energy conduit of my trunk is open and clean, stuff is able to come through. It is an interesting sensation. There's not that kind of mind or head engagement that I feel in a stimulating conversation. It's a kind of calm presence and knowing.

— Helen

It seems to me that the experience of the *Wholeness of Knowing* is forever expanding, as it has become more full and organic during each gathering. It's quite incredible really. Each participant becomes a tuning fork and together we're sensing into the field, creating novel insights or artifacts that weren't there before. It's a finely tuned way of knowing that we, as humanity, are just beginning to develop. When we come together in this way, I know that the possibilities are unlimited.

This kind of collective dialogue or inquiry does not move in a straight line, but meanders out in many, many directions. It seems that, in and through the conversation, we are creating a space – maybe a sphere or a container – of possible contributions to new insights and next steps. While some people talk of a 'higher' consciousness in this regard, we are seeking not a higher vibration but a more wide-ranging one – expanding in all kinds of directions and dimensions. Qualities related to this wider range include the beauty that is present, the resonance with both a wider context and a deeper experience, the listening to and response from the land and nature around us.

Helen wrote what I think is the bigger framing of what we have named the *Wholeness of Knowing*:

What keeps the universe expanding from each point in it is the search for knowing. The outcome of this search is not 'more knowledge' but 'more relationship' – greater embrace and interpenetration between the parts of the whole. It is not knowledge that is sacred, but the deliberate embrace of not-knowing, the opening up to the thirst for intimacy with more of God's creation. God's creation is God, surrendering up every part to not knowing and setting out on the eternal adventure of exploration, encounter and discovery of the manifold forms of being.<sup>8</sup>



## Systemic Constellations as embodied collective knowing

Systemic constellation work, as it has grown out of family constellations, is a methodology that uses not only language, but also space, embodiment and relationship. Representatives of the elements of an issue or question report their bodily feelings and their inner senses. That is the phenomenological information that the facilitator has to work with. The representatives are like antennae receiving information from the ‘system’ or ‘field’. “We are embodied receptors”, my trainer would say. In general, representatives know nothing or next to nothing about the question or issue at hand, leaving them empty and available to receive this representational information.

The skills you need as a constellator – the facilitator of a systemic constellation – are the same ones that enhance our journey of becoming present: the capacity to defocus; bring your awareness away from the problem or issue as narrated by the client; listen with heart to all phenomena, *including* what is missing; be at ease with not knowing how things will unfold; maintain inner silence to let something come to light; show vulnerability in ultimate service to the system; perceive the phenomena as they are (without judging). The more I, as facilitator, am able to create an empty field within myself in this way, the more I am able to see, hear, perceive the information coming from the overall field, the relevant system for this issue at this moment.

In family constellations, the overall purpose is to disentangle different elements of the family system in order to restore the healthy flow of life and love, which will ultimately bring some relaxation or healing. Constellation work doesn’t bring instant solutions, but aims to unblock stuck energies and free the way for life, growth and evolution to happen. It reveals and releases the hidden and blocked dynamics in the system so that more energy and resources are available for innovation, co-creation and sustainability. If you are looking into the hidden dynamics of organisations, the focus can be similar in getting things untangled, but this way of working can also be used in very different contexts, like exploring how the market will respond to a new product, or how different product names resonate with customers.

Constellation work is always about seeing the bigger whole, through time and space; seeing what has been excluded from the system, including the history, the ancestors and any element that is not given its rightful place. What I find most interesting is how we can take a next step, using constellation work to support the novel to come forward, to help emergence come into manifestation, to generate more insights and actions that have life-affirming effects.

Constellations show us that it is possible to tap into information that is valuable to the issue holder, in other words, someone who cares about his or her issue. What if someone – or several people – care about the next step for the good of a certain culture, piece of land, or even humanity as a whole? What if we try to tap into the information related to ‘the more beautiful future our hearts know is possible’ (Charles Eisenstein)? What if we could set up representatives for struggling parties/nations, or planet-wide systems like the global economy, and learn how to relax and heal the system at that scale? I think it can be done, provided the issue holder(s) has a genuine motivation and the facilitator can embrace an awareness that transcends paradox.

Constellation work is essentially a systemic methodology, and it shows us again and again that every person, and every element, every energy, even every concept, exists only in and through its connections – all kinds of connections, in time and in space.

This implies that this work can impact and change not only the inner image of the issue holder but also other people involved in the system. This is still very difficult for our minds to grasp, since they are so used to physical cause-and-effect logic that they can’t really deal with the new paradigm where everything is already related with everything else in an ongoing process.

Constellation work is activating a representation of the issue at hand, as a complement to talking ‘about it’. The enactment of an issue brings real-time energy into the room in a way that an intellectual conversation cannot. In our various gatherings, the proposal to use constellation work would always come from one of the participants, towards the end of our time together. Curiously enough, it never occurred to me, as a constellator, to suggest it! All participants would become active players-representatives in the constellation by choosing an element that had shown itself in the conversations the days before. Representing this element and getting clear(er) on the relation with the other elements always added tremendously useful information and insight to our shared inquiry. Always, all participants would be deeply moved and receive breakthrough insights. The debrief afterwards would last a long time, as ever more information and insights continued to emerge. It is the bigger system, with its interweaving and interpenetration, that is understood more clearly in the minds, hearts and bodies of those present at the constellation. Even years later, some scenes and learnings from constellations we have done are shared and continue to have meaning in many other contexts.

## Notes

1: Bonnitta Roy: *Post-Dialectical Excerpts*. ↓

2: Bonnitta Roy: *AQAL 2210: A Tentative Cartology of the Future*. ↓

3: Christian de Quincey: *Radical Knowing* ↓ p.35 et seq.

4: Michael Polanyi: *Knowing and Being*. As quoted by Dave Snowden.

5: Yasuhiko Genku Kimura: Facebook post, April 18 2013.

6: Mindell: *Riding the Horse Backwards*. ↓ p.11.

7: Michael Jones: *Artful Leadership* ↓ p.10.

8: Helen Titchen Beeth: *Women Moving the Edge – invisible beings and other dimensions*. ↓

## 8.3 What if it is easy?



One cannot merely follow the timetable we have set for our influence on the world, we must also honour and respect the infinitely more complex timetable the world has set for itself. That timetable is the sum of the thousands of independent timetables of an infinite number of natural, historical and human actions.

— Vaclav Havel <sup>1</sup>

“As Way Opens” is a reference to the old Quaker saying that we should “proceed as way opens” after patient, prayerful waiting for Spirit to move in the world, and open or reveal the way forward.”

— Sophia's Children <sup>2</sup>

## What if it is easy?



## Fluent

I would love to live  
Like a river flows  
Carried by the surprise  
Of its own unfolding

— John O'Donohue<sup>3</sup>

This title, this question, is bound to be misunderstood. It is a real challenge for the Western-trained mind! The question does *not* imply that we should always seek the easiest way, with the least effort and no perseverance. Rather, it says that if things don't flow easily, then something, somewhere, is not aligned, not in coherence, not in the creative flow. What if it were possible to live always in the ease of an unfolding, natural way?

In our journey of ever widening coherence, we have reached the point of articulating the *We-in-Here*, which can be described as a subtle interweaving with the context we find our selves in. Over time and through different experiences, the notion of 'connecting' has expanded substantially for me. Connecting doesn't only occur with other people. *In-here* includes the place where we are, and the planet, nature, animals, the stars and the more subtle realms: whatever we are able to sense and relate with. My concept of 'connecting' has also had to expand from a linear back-and-forth between an entity here and an entity over there, to an understanding of interweaving and interpenetrating. Both expansions on the concept make the picture more whole and afford us a more embodied understanding of the widening coherence that is possible for all of us.

Widening our awareness in this way, to include the more-than-human world while being in a well-connected circle of humans, seems to make it easier to connect more deeply, to intensify that experience and awareness. The skills of subtle sensing and our growing awareness of complexity and interrelatedness serve here in sensing phenomena like natural rhythm and alignment with the whole of the context we find ourselves in, including the Earth, the invisible and the intangible.

*What if it is easy?* points to a simplicity that results from a deeper alignment and wider coherence. It is not a simplicity in cause-and-effect. We don't fall into the trap of making things simplistic – we know full well that we are dealing with highly complex matters. The coherence we are pointing to is not what we normally understand as 'perfection' or 'perfect harmony'. The Dutch Center for Human Emergence<sup>4</sup> once described it as 'effortless simplicity' – one of the characteristics they identified in their action research on Turquoise practice (as part of the Spiral Dynamics framework). What, indeed, if a non-linear, emergent life flows easily? What, indeed, if a non-linear, emergent shift is easy?

*What if it is easy?* builds on trusting the whole system you are in. In one of our gatherings, we closed with the inquiry and the challenge of learning how to be in this generative flow even when dealing – collectively – with practical day-to-day tasks. This is where the real trust in each other, in a natural rhythm and in the collective alignment comes in. Do we dare to flow? Do we trust the interweaving when it comes to practical things like doing dishes, preparing meals and cleaning rooms – and beyond to actions in the outside world? Here, I am evoking the practice of reconnecting to the patterns of Life, and of speaking, acting, moving from that connection, rather than relying (solely) on organisational structures and planning. It comes down to inviting embodied awareness of coherence and generativity into our daily and professional lives and contexts. This is how we envision moving and dealing with our complex issues collectively: not by pushing, pulling or rushing, but by seeing what unfolds naturally when we collectively tend to a clear intention. A wise lesson you also find in the I Ching: "act only when you can move gently and innocently, and all will be well".

From Native American and other indigenous cultures, we know that the concept of 'relationship' means connectedness with everything on every level. One of the highest compliments you can give in this culture is: "he takes care of his relations". This refers to connectedness to all of life: to people, rocks, clouds, wind, water, Earth. The purpose of your life, then, is to be a positive influence on your relationships. The prevalent Western 'me'-orientation is absent and the habitual ego-self becomes almost invisible. What comes into focus instead is the effect of that self on everything that it is connected with – people, plants, a space, a breeze, a flower; the effect of my

intention and my actions on everything around me is what is most important. Relinquishing our human-centric perspective brings us into an equal and co-creative relationship with other intelligences active in our planetary sphere. Most likely, it will take a long time before we can truly understand their nature, or indeed our own evolutionary role in Gaia's unfolding. Nevertheless, we humans are all indigenous to this Earth. This embodied understanding is crucial for our capacity in *We-in-Here*.

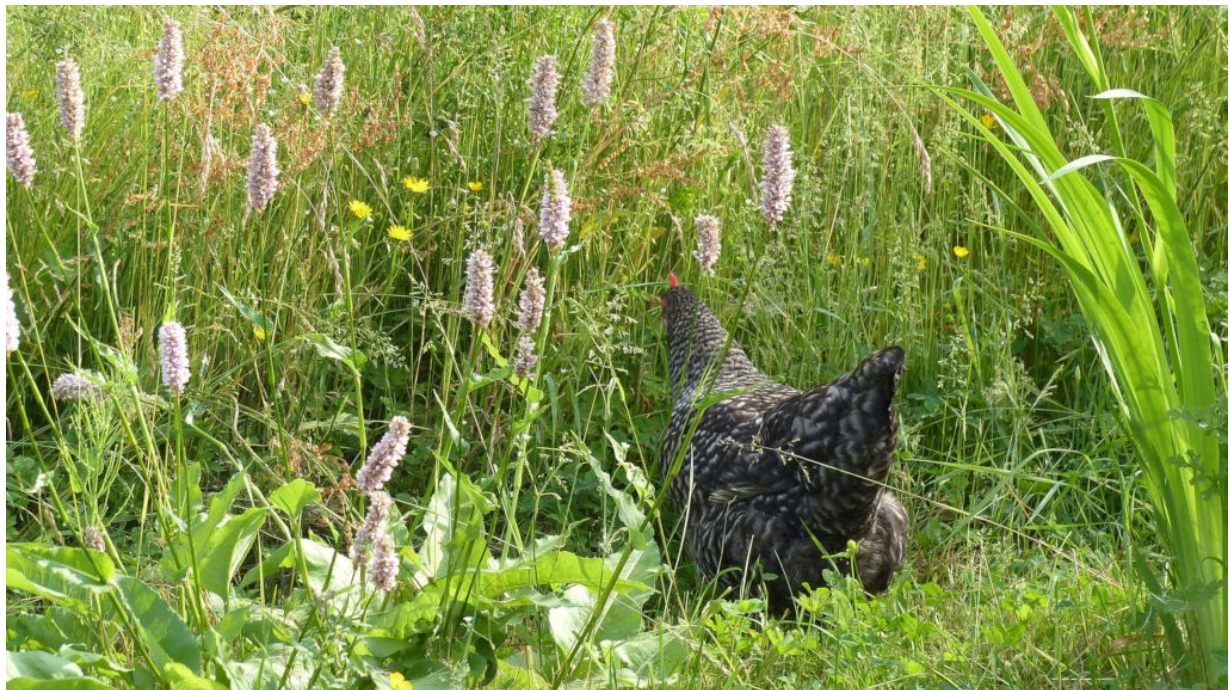
Some people are born with unique capacities to sense and communicate with these other-than-human intelligences that seemingly operate from other dimensions. Indigenous cultures have always seen this as natural. Only the Western-influenced world has denied their existence or seen this capacity as freakish. I believe everyone is born with this capacity, and we can exercise it like any other kind of intelligence. However, it seems that each person is unique in the how and what of their capacity to receive information from the subtle. No two people manifest exactly the same knowing. When we leave aside all competition about what is 'right' or what is 'true' and move toward collaboration and co-creation, this awareness is crucial.

*What if it is easy?* closes the gaps between the individual and the collective, humanity and nature, tangible and intangible, chronos time and kairos time – because, quite simply, there are no real gaps. Our default thinking here in the West makes us believe that the gaps are real, although on closer inspection they don't seem to be there. It really can be easy! If it is not easy, then something is out of kilter in our alignment, in the coherence and in the process of generativity, either with the people, or the purpose, or the timing or the place...

*Quote from participant:*

As you were speaking about the creative tension, I was also nodding to myself about how I feel and experience that in my own life. How I am holding a lot of that kind of tension as well. When it is unconscious, there can be a lot of unpleasant acting out, general dysfunction. When holding consciously, then the whole question of right timing comes into play, knowing when is the moment of release.

— Helen



## Natural rhythm

It will be implicit from our subsequent discussion that this incarnation will differ in kind and essence since it must manifest itself not ‘in time’ but in time freedom, and will be transparent.

— Jean Gebser<sup>5</sup>

Time freedom is being freed from time and thus free for the spiritual.

— Jean Gebser<sup>6</sup>

Some time ago somebody asked me “Busy?” – instead of the classic, meaningless greeting: “How are you?” – in a tone of voice implying that busy is good, and the ideal state for all of us. I answered: “No, I’m not busy.” He stood bewildered, didn’t know how to respond, or how to take my comment... No, I’m not busy. I don’t like to be stressed, so my schedule is not fully booked. Nevertheless I am doing meaningful things all the time and I am engaged in many, many projects and conversations. I enjoy what I do and over time things just fit snugly in my schedule and flow well.

The pace that Western society lives at these days is profoundly unnatural. People seem to be living in a ‘trance’ – running on and on and on in perpetual motion. Many people see this as normal, but it is not! I call it a collectively shared illusion that life has to be run at (very) high speed. There is something fundamentally unnatural about the pace at which we race around in today’s world. Our relationship with time and with the importance of everything we (think we need to) do is quite out of sync with reality.

Why do we conform to this mainstream rhythm, even when we don’t like it? What if, instead, we were to hold this question in our focus: *How can we weave ourselves back into nature?* How can we live with natural rhythms and cycles, slowing down with the winter, perking back up with the spring? It is all the doing that seems important, and leaps to the eye, vision-centred as we are. Though the moments in life that touch us deeply and have the greatest value – like a beautiful sunset, a moment of deep friendship, a sudden insight – arise more from a quality of being than (only) doing. The whole point about ‘being’ is that it is invisible if you don’t look for it.

Speaking to friends and family, trying to explain how to live in a different relation with time, is really countercultural – they mostly don’t get what you are pointing to. Globally, though, we are beginning to see a countermovement manifesting in the form of slow food, slow money, etc. The slowing down is there to rebalance us and help us to rediscover our own natural rhythms. The crux of slowing down is not to always act slowly. It is about being present and going with a natural rhythm. It is being in sync with our own individual energy level, but also being in alignment with the context (human and non-human) we are in.

A natural rhythm might not be slow at all – remember the ‘act in an instant’ that relates with the bottom of the U (see Scharmer’s Theory U). But ‘headless-chicken syndrome’ is widespread: no time to stop and sense, people are in permanent crisis mode, no time for reflection, always heading for the next thing in life. In this regard, we need to fine-tune our capacity to distinguish between what feels alive, easily flowing and connected to the source, and what feels (over-)enthused, addicted to intensity and always rushing. It’s important to stay centred in sensing what wants to happen, and to distinguish this from the Western habit of always being on the move.

*We-in-Here* translates as a disciplined practice to first take the time needed to sense, to access our inner knowing and to carefully discern what is right action in this moment. It comes more quickly and easily with practice, but you cannot dispense with sensing at every step. If we look around at the world in this light, we can all see what happens when we don’t do that. Sure enough, things can go quickly if they are aligned, but subtle discrepancies can be important so we need this capacity for discernment to prevent us from falling into this (Western) blind spot. ‘Act in an instant’ is not so much about speed as about a deeper inner knowing that this is the right thing to do right now.

*Excerpt from my blog:*

It amazed me throughout the whole day how easily things would flow, how naturally we made transitions from one way of being together to another. Like M. and I walking down this road, and at a certain moment, not talking about it, not checking watches, not agreeing about it, we just turned and walked back. This is a quality of alignment that is really dear to my heart. As someone said later, Kairos and Chronos come together.

As we slow down, we learn to live in both Kairos and Chronos at once. We release ourselves from planned time and allow ourselves to inhabit a more unstructured time-space, never letting go of our intention. As we hold this awareness in us, this specific kind of knowing and consciousness becomes embodied in us and we can stay present in the 'fast-forward' world in a more conscious and grounded way.

Natural rhythm, together with intention, then replaces what we currently know as planning, which too often happens only on paper in organisational multi-year plans or to-do lists at home, only to be overwritten by what actually happens in the natural unfolding of life. It strikes me that so many people – myself included – have a wrong idea about how much time it takes to get things 'done'. It seems that we are all bad at this, as if we take our wishes for reality, not counting the time it takes to bring ideas into manifestation.

*Quote from participant:*

I just so want, would love for the masculine to take a holiday and not make plans for a while. Not try to solve the issues for a while. It feels like a crazy, outrageous thing to ask.

— Lisette

Tending to a natural rhythm also implies letting systems die that no longer support life. This seems almost inconceivable in our traditional organisations and institutions. They exist and we expect them to endure for all eternity. I spoke before about conscious closure ([section 5.1](#)) as an important part of the natural cycles of life, including death and birth – a natural rhythm. Living in alignment with a natural rhythm means that the old can die without regret, making room for whatever comes next to emerge and fall into place. Conscious closure gives space for a new way of being and understanding to take a form that we don't yet know.

As my notion of connection has changed over time, so too has my idea of time. Time is no longer a series of linear blocks that follow on from each other, from history into the present and out into the future. Time for me now is more an experience of all-and-everything-moving-into-the-next-experience, the next moment of the unfolding future.

The biggest challenge I notice in *We-in-Here* is combining the practice of trusting the natural rhythm with being in a group. Living in a natural rhythm might be known to some, but we really have no clue – or experience – of how to be and do that in a group! What will happen in a group if we all speak, move and act naturally? Fear of chaos easily kicks in. Still, if we look at nature – where no planning happens – we see coherence and beauty all around. So the question here is: how to be in mutual relationship with all of life, the other members of the group, even including our neighbours!? How can we have a collective experience of being natural, wild beings, in deeper relationship with the land and natural rhythms?





## Weaving ourselves back into nature and (co)evolution

I remember quite well the moment when I realised the enormous difference between identifying as ‘a citizen of the world’ on the one hand, and as ‘an inhabitant of the Earth’ on the other. Since recognising this difference, I notice more and more how few people actually see the Earth at all – they live only in ‘the world’. Often there is confusion, and people use the two words interchangeably as if they mean the same thing. How strongly the man-made structures, systems and organisations of this world we work and live in are embedded in our notion of reality! How difficult is it to feel part of nature instead of (or as well as) feeling part of the world? We are so used to living in a world built on concepts and ideas that have been translated into stuff and structures. But ‘this world’ has become separated from the Earth and the fullness of Life.

There is – or there need be – no contradiction between the two. It is about living in the interface nourished by both, being in between. ‘Connecting with the Earth’ can have unfortunate New-Age connotations, but I mean this in a very real way. We do not live in an exclusively man-made world. We are fundamentally part of the living Earth, which remains the world’s wider context. The Earth is our progenitor! As Alan Watts said: “The Earth peoples, (like an apple tree apples)” It is because the Earth is alive that humans have come forth. Are we aware of this scientific fact? *Really??* Most citizens of the West behave like typical white tourists in Kenya: just visiting. It feels as if a huge part of humanity has become tourists in our own home, without ever really connecting to this living, life-giving planet.

The rise of humanity was no random evolutionary accident. Of all species on Earth, only we humans have developed the consciousness that makes it possible to dissociate from our natural surroundings, to experience ourselves as differentiated and separated. It is this sense of separateness that has brought us to the brink of catastrophe. This moment in time is dawning like a critical rite of passage that humanity needs to traverse. What lies beyond is an awakening to the realisation that humanity is not separate from Earth. Nobody is. Ever.

Sarah Whatmore, professor of environment and public policy at Oxford University calls it “more-than-humanism”. Man is not the measure of all things. In our journey of growing awareness of interweaving and interpenetrating, after connecting the lost bits within ourselves and connecting more deeply with each other, the next step is to return to a reciprocal relationship with the Earth, to “allow myself to grow into the soil.” In one of our gatherings, it dawned on us that our guiding question held the new insight into this: the need of the Earth is not only a problem, it is an



invitation to become fully ourselves. It is sometimes called ‘a relational turn’, having an intimate relationship with the natural environment as with one another.

... the integration of nature-environment-indigenous cultures with the ‘new age’ or ‘green’ phenomenon is not merely a descent to ‘pre-’ forms of consciousness, but it is a return to ancestral roots, in order for the new consciousness to evolve. It is truly something deeper that is evolving through us – through phenomena like ‘the re-enchantment of the world’ (to use Bhaskar’s term) or as Eisenstein says ‘we are falling in love again, with nature’ – these are not ‘regressions’, but the important prior steps to the new.

— Bonnitta Roy (online, link no longer exists)

Maybe ‘weaving ourselves back into nature’ is still too small a notion. Perhaps the wider context is that we are weaving ourselves back into co-evolution. I felt very humble when I truly realised how we, as human beings, co-evolved with all that is around us, visible and invisible. We are so used to thinking of ourselves as at the top of the food chain, immutably and forever. But humanity is an inherent part of evolution and we co-evolve with the Earth, just as a certain butterfly has evolved over time to feed from a specific flower. In this regard, we humans are quite small and equally at the mercy of these greater forces.

It is this deeper and wider awareness that ultimately ties us humans back into nature and the Earth as a whole. It is a relatedness – interweaving and interpenetrating – that goes way beyond the concept of sustainability. A notion that comes closer is ‘thrivability’ – when and where *all that exists* can thrive. True partnership with Earth or with nature is nothing other than using our free human will to choose consciously for this overall balance, instead of going with the prevailing paradigm of separation and fragmentation. We do have the free will to choose ever more balance, in and on all levels of existence. When we weave ourselves back into nature, into Earth, into Life, we are the conscious part of that ecosystem, and *only* that. Being the conscious element in the whole in no way implies that we are the most important! Step by step, we arrive at a lived experience of the oneness of humanity-as-a-whole with Earth-as-a-whole.

Bonnitta Roy redefines sustainability and thrivability as integrating our animal nature back into our daily lives. She calls this one of the major human shadows: we are unaware of just how much we have inherited from our animal ancestors. We consider to be exclusively human – and therefore intrinsically superior – many of the features that are actually found in the animal realm: altruism, the experience of bonding, taking care of each other, the ability to play, and many more. When we allow our actions to be grounded in the wisdom of co-evolution, they will be regenerative in nature, nothing else is needed. Remembering the Earth as our true context and connecting back to her offers a next level of wholeness.

One capacity which we have inherited from our animal ancestors is an effortless connection with all of nature. For many of us this capacity is buried beneath layers of cultural conditioning, but it is still there. We are all indigenous in some way. Embedded in our DNA is the knowledge of how to live in resonance with the land, the animals, the stars and the wind. Some call reconnecting with this capacity ‘re-wilding’. David Abram (author of *The Spell of the Sensuous* and *Becoming Animal*) makes the point that we have lost that wild side and we need to reclaim it. This goes far deeper and wider than just noticing and respecting nature, beyond just coming into relationship with a place. He points to an embodiment of this wildness, this core quality of freedom and spontaneity, that relates to the archetypal, the instinctual and the natural. We are mostly blind to how domesticated we are and how deeply ingrained our social conditioning is. The wild harks back to the wonder of our childhood, the joy of walking barefoot, the release of getting totally drenched by the rain, the awe of looking over a cliff, the aesthetic arrest of a majestic sunset.

In everyday society, being wild – behaving in ways which depart from the cultural norm – holds many negative connotations. Often, though, if we are not blinkered by our cultural lenses and shackled by our social conditioning, ‘doing something wild’ is a very ‘common sense’ thing to do. We need to reconsider and reevaluate this notion of wildness. Being wild does not mean being crazy or out of control, although our conditioning tells us to fear ‘it’. Isn’t *that* crazy? Being fearful of nature... of our own true nature?! How do we dissolve the barriers in our own minds

that keep us feeling apart, separate from a direct and transformative relationship with wild nature? It is our own wildness that breaks through all of that.

*Quote from my blog:*

We dived deeper, trying to understand what is ‘being wild and natural’ – as is part of our guiding question.  
... untamed, but with a structure...  
... listening, tuning in to oneself...  
... unmediated...  
... intangible, but present...  
... beyond articulation...  
... so alive, but like a whisper...



## Listening to the land

But the old, aboriginal idea of how are we to live – and when I say aboriginal I don’t mean Australia, I mean wider than that – is actually the dreaming of a human being, the *logos*, the intelligence of a human being, can only go so far. Then there comes a point when you actually need to get *dreamt by the land itself*. Now that sounds rather esoteric, but actually it’s been a common policy in tribal groups all over the world for thousands and thousands of years.

— Martin Shaw<sup>7</sup>

From my Greek friends – both named Maria – I learned that the Greek language recognises an element of the soul called *Kaimos*. “Unfortunately”, they say, “English seems to have no equivalent to describe it. It is a longing of the soul to be reunited with our land and sea.” I recognise this from my own experience. When I was without a home of my own for several months, I noticed a deep longing for a piece of land I could have a relationship with over a longer time – even if I only rented it. I am a gardener – ‘by nature’ or the result of 200 years of professional gardeners in my ancestry – and during those months I became very aware of my longing for a simple life on the land.

I have already spoken of the reciprocal relationship between humanity and the Earth, between people and the places where they live. The question of which came first is not applicable. People and place, humanity and Earth, have evolved together and will continue to do so. In reality, there is no separation outside our rational mind that sees two different ‘things’. What is core, inescapable, is the *relationship*. There is a constant mutual influencing of people with their families, communities and culture, and of people with the places where they live and work, just as the landscape influences the people and their culture. The Western idea of separateness is an illusion. Listening to the land is a practice that can be learned and honed over time. It is one example of how we can weave ourselves back into nature.

How does one set about coming into relationship with a piece of land, with *this* place? First of all, it means tending it, respecting it, giving it attention and care. When I visit other people’s homes, my first impulse is to step out into the garden, to look around and see the place – witness the life that is there. Giving care can be expressed by doing myriad small things: tending the plants, removing the pieces of glass and plastic you find around the place, bringing some flowers into the house, sowing some new vegetables, planting a new tree or shrub, walking around in the region. Tending to the details and the beauty is essential. I have done many such simple things in every place and garden where I have lived. Such gestures give me a grounding place to start my journey of living there. There is profound value in this simplicity. At the very least, you feel grounded.

When I first heard of ‘listening to the land’, I wasn’t sure exactly what it referred to. At that time, I wasn’t aware that I had been doing this all my life: *really* noticing this particular piece of land, this garden, this field. Sensing what it is calling for: this path should be here, so that it flows with the slope of the land; the resting place should be there, under the tree that will provide some shade in summer; at this spot, the soil is better for this type of plant; this spot is always in shade, so the ferns will thrive here. Evidently, the power of witnessing does not apply solely to encounters with other human beings. We can extend it to the places and nature around us.

As you start to practice this kind of witnessing, you learn to recognise the subtle field of a place. Some places have distinctly different energies than others. We can sense this in homes and public buildings, and it is the same kind of energy we can notice on different pieces of land. A good friend of mine, born and raised in Switzerland, needs rocks beneath her feet to feel really at home. People who have been to sacred places know that these hold a vibration that can be quite strong and tangible. Many of us will recognise this phenomenon from visiting churches or other age-old places of prayer.

*Quote from participant:*

From the constellation (around a conference about the state of the world), which for me turned into a constellation about the state of the Earth – this experience of being neutral with the Earth, just noticing – that was the nourishing factor for her (= Earth). That was reinvigorating her immune system. It became so quickly about us humans, and what we need to do and how we need to organise ourselves – how much is it ‘I want to do it’ and how much is it ‘something wants me to be with it’?

— Lisette

At a gathering called *Powers of Place*, I was struck by something one participant said: “places are witnesses”. And indeed, so they are! They store the energy of what people do, both positive and negative, and hold that energy over time. We do leave an imprint on the land, whether intentionally or not. Later, if the imprint was life-enhancing, we can benefit from this stored memory. If, by contrast, the land has hosted painful historical events, we might need to relate with the pain and grief held there. In this awareness of interconnectivity between people and places, again, the qualities of deep listening and mindfulness are crucial. If places are witnesses, we had better relate to them in a conscious and respectful way.

From the many stories told at that beautiful gathering, we realised, too, that places invite or call us. On the people side of the co-evolution, we can relate and co-create (or not) and thus leave an imprint (both manifest and energetic) with our actions. We are called to walk the land, to listen, hold and witness every feature of the place that draws us. When we ‘land’ in a place in this way, we enter into a conscious commitment between humans and Earth. Thus, our intention can ‘activate’ a place, which can then become a conscious partner in co-creating. The place is given a seat

in the circle of life, and is indeed honoured as the very seat of the circle. In this way, there is an interaction between containing and being contained. We are invited to be contained by the place – it holds us – but it wants us to reciprocate and contain it. If places are calling us, then people can listen, respond and co-create. Without place, without context, without story, without consciousness, without clearly-stated intent, there is nowhere for a creation to land.

For many, being in nature puts us in contact with the sacredness of life. Stepping into conscious relationship with any place – whether natural or man-made – also links us to this sacredness. This conscious relationship with the place where we live restores to us the experience of being rooted, at home, belonging – just like animals and all of wild life. This relationship is not just to this particular place but to the planet itself, the home of humanity and so many other beings, both incarnate and intangible. When we engage in this conscious relating, we can sense which life-affirming actions will heal and restore the place or enhance its inherent qualities. It will bring us to our next level of balance and resonance.

My relationship to the land where I live is mostly a solitary one, as I like to wander through the many details of what needs and wants doing in our garden. Yet this action research project was about the collective, as we were trying to understand this *We-in-Here*. Our penultimate Women Moving the Edge gathering challenged my limiting beliefs in this regard. We had previously used the metaphor of all being empty tubes: if we then connect with each other we have a bigger tube that can capture resonance and insight on a bigger scale. What, then, if we were to do this in connection with a place?

*Quote from participant:*

We can sit in a circle and source together; can we now come together and source with the Earth more explicitly? Life on Earth depends on us learning how to do this. If we don't, life on Earth will not withstand what's coming, with climate change, and with the systems being knocked out of sync, there are too many perfect storms waiting to manifest simultaneously.

— Helen

Was I willing to step into a deeper understanding of how land and humans interpenetrate each other? Going beyond respecting the environment, to a lived awareness of the co-creation that needs to happen between the land, and the stones, and us as human beings? Could we infuse stones and land with new memories? New information? It sounded pretty far out to me. And yet it seemed like the natural next step to take, and so that is what we did.

We were called to visit the landscape in the south of England, most particularly the stone circle at Avebury. In years before, I had visited this little village inside the huge circle of massive stones, both on my own and with friends. Each time I visited – out of the blue – I had started to cry. Surely that place held some energy that stirred some of my own inner strings; totally unconscious to my mental mind! Now we were visiting with a collective intention of – somehow – recoding the stones for the time we are living in. We had no plan, no map of where to go or what to do, just a strong intention, which had emerged from our collective sensing in preparation for the gathering. As we tried to decide where to go and ‘do our work’ after lunch, it was clear that there was no alignment between us. We could find no agreement or coherence at all. And so we each went our own way, about the little village and among the stones. I understood that we all had to sense more deeply, beyond any imprints from eons back in history. This was about here and now, and I had to clear my sensing organs from the imprints of earlier memories. At some point later on, we were finally able to come together and collectively place the building blocks of our collective co-creation with the local landscape. It was both impressive and intense!

We can only listen to the land effectively when we are willing to listen to all of ourselves. There might be times when we are unwilling to do this because it threatens our social persona. Of course, we will never know for sure if our ritual in Avebury really did move something in the desired direction of more balance and coherence. I do know that it shifted the awareness of all present in a fundamental way. On that day, the sense of interrelatedness with stones and landscape, with the memory of times forgotten, was etched permanently into each of our beings.



*Quote from participant:*

When I move out into nature – which I feel more and more I need to do now – when I just go out into my garden, or look out the window, I feel so held, and so part of the whole, and so belonging – but not (just) belonging to humanity, but belonging to nature. And I find that when I step out of that, and step back into ‘the world’, that’s when it’s possible for me to feel lonely, and/or alone, And that’s where it’s possible for me to feel alienated, or to imagine feeling alienated, and to imagine other people being alienated, or feeling alienated from others. But the moment that I shift my witnessing onto the natural realm, it’s like the boundaries fall away and I just become part of it. And I feel welcomed and belonging. That’s just an amazing discovery for me – to have become conscious of that. It’s made a big difference to me.

— Rachel



## A poetic response

*Quote from participant:*

I am haunted (in a mystical way) by our encounter with the Forest. As I think more about it, I realise that the stillness of the group held me in its consciousness and that was why I could maintain an empty mind state for so long. By myself in the garden or just on my deck, I’m less effective at holding emptiness. Most important to me was the realisation that the altered state of consciousness of ‘forest’ is full and thick with communication, but in a different frequency and vibration. The art form of ‘tuning’ will one day be taught in schools. It is our nature and within our ability. Intention – stillness – focus – presence. Did you notice also how the vibration of ‘forest’, being made up of many individual frequencies (like a musical chord as opposed to a single note) had a broad, full quality?

— Les

In the meantime, an article by Freya Mathews reached my desk.<sup>8</sup> That’s where I got the concept of ‘interpenetration’. She evokes a poetic order, next to the causal one, which is about meaning – not in opposition to



cause and effect, just next to it. What I read was stunningly aligned with our own recent experiences and the general direction we were moving in with *Women Moving the Edge*.

She starts by describing a 5-day gathering she had attended at a place of power in Australia. The Symposium, she says, unfolded...

...via a logic of synchronicities. A set of initial conditions had been put in place to provide the framework but the event was, within that container, largely self-determining: what happened at one moment suggested what should happen at the next, and the structure of the entire event was highly recursive: each happening or offering fed back into, and inflected, everything else that was happening.

The upshot was that a complex and elaborate poetic invocation took shape organically in the course of the five days, and this seemed to elicit a complex and elaborate poetic response from the world.

This was because it emanated from a cosmology that did not distinguish, in an absolute way, between an internal and external aspect of things. According to this cosmology, reality was irreducibly psychophysical in character, a forever changing and unfolding pattern of movement that was as much psychic as physical.

Freya's inquiry led her to wonder...

...if one somehow managed to slip under the psychic skin of the world, and "enter" its subjectivity, would one experience the "outside" as "inside"? If one stepped inside the world, in this sense, might the trees and grass and rivers no longer appear as external to oneself? Might they – along with oneself – now be experienced as internal to the psyche of the world?

One has only to surrender one's subject/object mind-set – where this encompasses all discursive thinking – and relinquish one's discursive goals and ends, in order to be borne along on its fast current. When this occurs, a path begins to open up in the midst of the phenomena.

To experience the world from within [...] is to experience it as a field of communicative meaning, meaning that draws us from one encounter to another.

— Freya Mathews<sup>8</sup>

*From my blog:*

I noticed how my labelling – ‘a blue heron!’ (including exclamation mark!) – removes me from this being; installs a distance between him/her and me. I tried to move closer, paying a lot of attention not to make too much noise while stepping on fallen branches and leaves. Still, I was in ‘separation mode’. Then I decided to ‘do’ nothing. I sat still for quiet some time, not ‘trying to take a picture’, but just me sitting here and the heron sitting over there.

I was very happy with this scientific and academic articulation. In accessing information from the subtle levels, I have often noticed that people tend to fall into hyperbolic, stilted or pseudo-mystical language. Me, I want a language – and also an engagement and relationship with this information – that is more matter-of-fact. Not too excited about “oh, I got a message!”, and not doubting it either, but simply taking it at face value as an expression of the experience of interpenetration. Just as we can go inside and forever fine-tune our minds, emotions, body sensations, inner sensing, the same seems true when applying our subtle sensing outward, into the inner dimensions of others, nature, the Earth or the universe. It probably relates with the wildness we mentioned before, the primal connection we inherited and which still lives on within us. A certain aptitude is needed, though: the ability to surrender our defences and suspend a reductionist worldview that says “this is not possible”.

Over time we realised that there are many ways of experiencing and understanding the subtle worlds. There are those who communicate with nature spirits, others speak with angelic beings, or devas or the archetypes. Again, ‘communicating with’ is still too dualistic, with us over here and these energies over there. That’s not how I experience the interwovenness of all that exists. When you hit the level of resonance with any of these subtle energies, it touches you, it changes you. In no way is there a subject ‘in here’ and an object ‘over there’. Life interpenetrates all of it without any borders to speak of. In that resonance with life, with the life force – even when there is work to tend to and a lot to take care of – it can feel effortless.

*Quote from participant:*

I sense that the individual and collective journey down the U is a clearing, a refining, a purification, and letting go of the not-needed, including the small self, into the birthing of the presencing process so that, in the most expansive (deep and wide) level of continuous inquiry, we can reach a vibrational frequency where the other-than-human community are invoked into co-presence. They tentatively and attentively await this level of human integrity, of individual and collective authenticity, that can be the fertile co-creative birthing ground for the larger community of beings (human and other) to call in together the future potential. It seems that only once this level of finely-tuned and refined co-presencing in us is well cultivated and stable, do the other realms begin to play. We need to have bodies and be grounded in the manifest realm in order to do this work.

— Helen

As I am not a poet, writing about this poetic response does not come easily to me. Below you will find a compilation of (snippets from) blog posts written during the 13th and last Women Moving the Edge gathering, which was centred around this question:

*What if we could experience being natural, wild beings in a collective,  
in deeper mutual relationship with natural rhythms and cycles of the Earth?*

I recommend you read it slowly, as you would read poetry...

## The bird knows we are in this together

On Saturday afternoon we had a most remarkable time. Already the morning had been so rich that I was flabbergasted with the rich content that had been shared.

We talked about language and words....

... hearing the birds respond to each other... so many languages going on that we don't understand...

... and words are limiting... yesterday's way... just a handle... easy to let the sacred slip away...

We talked...

about the yearning, the longing not to be cut off from the natural rhythms,

about the courage to speak from source,

about being vulnerable and still trusting.

We dived deeper, trying to understand what is 'being wild and natural' – as is part of our guiding question.

... untamed, but with a structure...

... listening, tuning in to one self...

... unmediated...

... intangible, but present...

... beyond articulation...

... so alive, but like a whisper...

And what is 'a collective'?

... a safe holding in order to be wild...

... to imagine the unimaginable, the undefined...

... where the future is born...

Being natural and wild in a collective, is giving space for each orbit.

(as the electrons, quarks etc. in a molecule)

But there was way more to unfold!

There had been a story shared about an encounter with a morning dove, with the realisation 'the bird knows we are in this together'; another story of a deer leading the human to show its little ones; and a meeting with a fern in an experience of total unity.

Then pain came up of being misguided into the belief in fragmentation, the belief in a chasm, the betrayal of higher and lower...

We relate to the words, the concepts...

chair...

dove...

tree...

Instead of relating with the being itself, with respect. L. shared this with her tears and said: "I have to remake myself; my mind sees it, but my cells don't know..."

The cells would know soon enough...

## Wild again...

We took a long lunch pause to let this rich content sink in and let it digest a bit. We were mostly in silence and on our own. We reconvened on the screened-in porch. In the morning we had gathered in the living room, then the sun had called us out in front of the house after the break, but by noon it had already become too hot!

The porch is a bit long and narrow for a circle of seven chairs, we were sitting more in an oval, than a circle. Not much was spoken... long stretches of silence unfolded...

The morning had brought the realisation of the importance and simple act of "I see you", which brought back the deep realisation from a constellation in a previous Women Moving the Edge gathering, where the representative of Earth has said: "The simple act of witnessing me, is amplifying my resilience."

In the silence I was musing on all of this.

Identity...

Boundaries...

Witnessing...

Seeing...

What if we remove fixed boundaries and witness the essence?

What if we replace identity with uniqueness?

Authenticity doesn't seem to need a fixed boundary to be in a relationship or in resonance...

This was all going on in my thinking, but energetically, in my body, a shifting was going on, a recalibration in my cells and energy system to our new understanding. I had to lay down to let the energy doing its thing.

B. called for movement, felt a need to stretch her body, as if her body needed to expand. She invited all of us to do the same. The circle disappeared in silence and each of us was following the energy in her body as naturally as we could... some silent, some little noises made, some deeper breathing, some responding to sounds of birds and insects outside.

Again it was silent for a long time. Eventually, we ended up sitting and lying in a half circle, all facing outwards, in total connection, communion, resonance with nature around us, so present and close, with only the veil of the porch screen.

There were tree frogs telling a story,  
then they were listening.

We were listening,  
then listened to.

Witnessing going on in all directions.

I could sense 'the collective' of the forest becoming almost tangible – more present than the individual trees.

Because we were, as a collective, witnessing the whole?

It was magic.

More silence.

It was amazing, fascinating and not anything I had experienced before. We were all in awe of what happened.

We came into rapport with nature,  
as embodied human beings.

We reconnected with our indigenosity,  
we wove ourselves back into nature,  
the fragmentation undone,  
the bridge re-established.

## The wild is what is

Because of the constellation lunch was late and we reconvened halfway the afternoon, back on the porch where we had this incredible interweaving with nature the day before. Judy invited us to check in, but we were silent again. Sitting in a half circle we were all facing outwards, with nature filling half of the circle.

loooooooooooooong silence...

Back to the overall question of our gathering: *What if we could experience being natural, wild beings in a collective, in deeper mutual relationship with natural rhythms and cycles of the earth?* Important insights came up.

*The wild is what is.*

Simple sentence, but with profound implications.

*The wild is what is.*

This tied me back to the importance of witnessing; the noticing, the seeing of what is present – including the being seen, and being witnessed. As someone summed it up: *In resonance the wildness is present.*

So wildness is not how we normally picture it: being wild like a wild lion in the bush, or being wild as drunken youngsters at a music festival. No, being wild is being indigenous, in mutual relationship with all aspects of what exists around us. It is being in resonance with all of life – the proverbial plastic bags included.

## The wild life

This was our last morning together. The sun was still present, with the promise of more summer to come. We spoke to the question: What do we now know about being wild and natural beings? Here a list of insights mentioned in our collective:

- gift the time of listening to yourself
- deep listening – a kind of attunement – a kind of anchoring in – is becoming one with the whole
- every cell, every nerve can listen for the subtle cues to bring us into balance, into wholeness
- show up open and ready – and not exhausted – for this kind of listening, for collective presencing
- in listening to the middle, something more is possible, it is a totally natural way of accessing information and knowing. This capacity gets amplified in the collective and that has a lot of juice for me; and juice feels wild!
- unwinding from the stories of history in my body
- see and acknowledge also the pain, witness it, is necessary before the new can come in – harmony is not shutting pain and ugliness out
- witnessing is not hard to do!
- it is possible to act focused and aligned without a plan, on true course
- the wild and the natural is seeking us, wanting a mutual relationship; the dissonant will then fall aside
- ‘they’ – seen and unseen – were looking at us
- everyone is welcome to the circle, no matter how open or not.
- Thank you for showing up as who you are
- I see you – Eye see you.
- The gifts of the wild are: the field, the seeing, the being seen.



- Reclaiming the word ‘wild’, in a grounded sense – coming from a place of stillness and gratitude – it takes you on your path.

And there was more!

After the break we gathered again in our favoured spot, the screened-in porch. More information wove itself together around the future and this piece of land that had hosted us so well and profoundly. The information was offered from messages received during the night, from books, from experiences a long, long time ago... and the tapestry woven was magic and very meaningful for the owner.

The last messages came through...

Something is excited that we are starting to get it.  
There is a flow between us here and the trees there.  
Seeing and being seen.  
There is a shared flow and joy.  
  
There is so much more. You don't know how big this is!  
Open and receive.  
  
I have been in-formed.  
It is not about self.  
  
Being as mycelium.  
The wild is emergent.

## Notes

- 1: Vaclav Havel: *(widely quoted)*
- 2: Sophia's Children: *Proceed as Way Opens*. ↓
- 3: John O'Donohue: *(widely quoted)*
- 4: Center for Human Emergence (NL): *Website* ↓
- 5: Jean Gebser: *The Ever-Present Origin* ↓ p.297.
- 6: Jean Gebser: *The Ever-Present Origin* ↓ p.299.
- 7: Martin Shaw: *Interview with Transition Culture*. ↓
- 8: Freya Mathews: *The World Hidden Within the World*. ↓

## 8.4 The next, minimal, elegant step



Rushing into action, you fail.  
Trying to grasp things, you lose them.  
Forcing a project to completion,  
you ruin what was almost ripe.

Therefore the Master takes action  
by letting things take their course.  
He remains as calm at the end  
as at the beginning.  
He has nothing,  
thus has nothing to lose.  
What he desires is non-desire;  
what he learns is to unlearn.  
He simply reminds people  
of who they have always been.  
He cares about nothing but the Tao.  
Thus he can care for all things.  
— Lao Tzu<sup>1</sup>

Living in this way, with the subtle and the so-called ‘real’ world at the same time, we come into a different kind of relationship with time. Time changes from being linear to being a dimension that shapes and orders creation in convoluted ways. It shifts from the default stance of following a straight line from idea to completion, to a meandering walk alongside a river, with many bends and turns, from the point of intention or question through to its unfolding as it reaches a point of form, expression or insight.

## The next, minimal, elegant step

*The next, minimal, elegant step* is a concept I learned from Anne Doshier, elder of the World Café community and guide and holder of many more great projects. She would regularly end our collective conversations and inquiries with this question of what the next, elegant, minimal step could be. There is great wisdom implied here, not to mention a certain simplicity. It has particular value when we are challenged to find the ‘right’ action to take in the many complex and ever-changing situations in which any action unfolds.

Remember, we are describing here another part of the journey of collective creation (*Circle of Creation*). How do continuous collective inquiry, co-sensing and collective sourcing make things manifest in the world? How are we learning to stay in the generative space that will enable humanity to move towards a more coherent way of creating? Too often we have seen individuals and groups reach a novel insight – through sourcing, letting come – only to then step back into the old, ingrained habits of organising and project management. It is as if they think “Now we know the new goal or purpose and we are going to make it happen – even if it’s something innovative – in the way we have always done things around here!” In so doing they step out of collective sensing and sourcing.

To my mind, the question is: What is an *emergent* creation process? How does it happen? What are its features? How can we ensure that we stay in the generative space and don’t fall back into ‘business as usual’? Again, Freya Mathews articulates it beautifully: “Overall, what was most astonishing, to my mind, about this ‘colloquium’ was that it seemed to unfold via a logic of synchronicities. A set of initial conditions had been put in place to provide the framework or container for the event, but the event was, within that container, largely self-determining: what happened at one moment suggested what should happen at the next, and the structure of the entire event was highly recursive: each happening or offering fed back into, and inflected, everything else that was happening.”<sup>2</sup>

In this complex world, when we want something creative and generative to happen, there is hardly any place for classic planning as we know it. Of course, certain aspects of life and work are simple and straightforward, and these need to be organised and tended in the best known way. In other parts of life, though, what will actually happen can be left to surprise, provided the intention is clear and the container is set. This means that another element of not-knowing-yet needs to be held with ease. Otto Scharmer was quoted as saying: “Sometimes all we know is which direction to face and where to put our foot down for the next step.”<sup>3</sup>

When looking for how to proceed in the complexity of a generative process, it is important not to lose sight of the container of the broader inquiry. The initial conditions and the framework that Freya Mathews speaks of are defined by the power of the collective intention. If the container or framework is not supported by an intention or clear purpose, then what happens can go in all directions; there is simply no glue to hold it together with a certain meaning. Being in a coherent pattern of intent, immersed in the collective inquiry that we hold dear, is a much easier way of aligning with the rest of Life. In this way, other creative forces around us can more easily join in the co-creation.

As humans raised in the West, well trained in planning and project management, we have no clear understanding of which parts of the task we actually do need to do, and which parts will take care of themselves, or be taken care of by life in general. If the collective, the group, the team is really present and aligned, even when we are trying to look into deep systemic questions, we will sense together the next elegant step. There always is one – even if it is to sit together in inquiry one more time. This calls for **the capacity to embody and live from stillness, in the sense of being fully relaxed about the outcome**. Sometimes it is called ‘going with the flow’, but there remains a danger that the flow might come from subtle ego-patterns that we are collectively blind to. To avoid this potential trap, it is important that we refrain from attaching to any step or specific outcome, whilst nevertheless holding firmly to the collective intention.

On other occasions, when all inner and outer energies are aligned, the next step might be to ‘act in an instant’. If this resonates with all, then just do it! If such action looks different, bigger, more outrageous than what you had in mind or have ever done before, then a little courage to follow your deeper knowing might work wonders!



## Elegance and simplicity

It is becoming fashionable to refer to ‘the simplicity on the other side of complexity’. For me, the next, minimal, elegant step partakes of the quality this concept is pointing to. Elegance and simplicity seem to show up when we are in alignment within and between us. If it is not elegant, not simple, not easy in a certain way, then we can be sure that something, somewhere, is out of alignment.

We must watch out for a certain form of collective (over-)enthusiasm, when everything seems clear and easy and there is strong agreement on what needs to be done – and then afterwards nothing happens on the manifest level. The habitual habits of ego have crept in: we enjoy all having the same idea, we are the ones we have been waiting for, we feel we finally belong! What we have forgotten is to call in more diversity, and so we have taken our wishes and hopes for reality. This shows the difference between decisions taken from a collective ‘high’, and steps in a generative process towards a collective intention that grows from the silent space within, and which includes substantial diversity in the group. One might say that, in such cases, the awareness in the collective was not high enough and the sourcing did not go deep enough – neither had reached the level of overall alignment, right timing included.

We are not looking for simplicity for its own sake, but as a necessity if we are to achieve a way of living that is really life-affirming. Simplicity in this sense is not related to technology – we will need and can use a lot of innovation in that area! Rather, I am talking about simplicity in processes and relationships – the simplicity of self-organisation and emergence. Just enough design to let life happen, not too little and not too much. This brings me back to my gardening practice: observe what happens naturally and build on that. Gardening is simple when you work in synergy with nature. Nature takes care of the really complex processes, all we can do is provide the conditions in which these processes can thrive, so that the plants have enough resilience to respond to changing, and even extreme, circumstances.

It seems to me that much of the planning we do in linear time (*chronos*) really over-complicates things, creating a lot of stress for the people who need to implement it. In our own project, we had our own typical struggle, thinking that we would need a meta-team or core team of 5 or so. It turned out that this was not the case – since a team just didn’t form. Judy and I were the callers and we were the core team; it was that simple. The hosting teams would form around us, including local women who felt called to co-host with us. As strange as it might seem for Western-trained

(management) minds, there is simplicity in trusting synchronicity, trusting the timing we experience (*kairos*), trusting the mystery of life. This is not a journey back to *simplistic* solutions, but onward to *simplicity*. No more structure and plans than necessary. Constant experimentation, prototyping and collective learning. Simple steps that combine the ordinary, the simple and the subtle in innovative ways.

In one of our gatherings, the story was told of a taxi driver from Afghanistan, living in a large US city, who felt grief at the loss of his simple but good life. Aren't many of us grieving for that quality of life? For the purity of simplicity, connected with local roots? It seemed to us that this is where well-being is found. There is a quality in simplicity that we can recognise as beauty. Simple beauty. Fully participating can be simple, clear and beautiful. Isn't this what many people are looking for when they go on holiday: being with the land, simple seasonal food, going back to nature and the simpler life? Perhaps, when more parts of the current, unsustainable, over-intricate systems break down, there will be an opportunity for many to rediscover this simplicity. Could it be that this quality is even more needed in matters of great complexity?

## Life tinkers all the time

Possibly the most basic and necessary feature of any living process is the fact that it goes gradually. The living structure emerges, slowly, step by step, and as the process goes forward step by step there is continuous feedback, which allows the process to guide the system towards greater wholeness, and coherence, and adaptation. This is obvious, of course. To a biologist or ecologist it is self-evident.

— Christopher Alexander<sup>4</sup>

In the perspective of the next elegant, minimal step, it is good to remember that nature – or any ecosystem or complex situation – never runs on planning. The first time I heard the expression 'life tinkers all the time', it rather shook my unconscious assumptions. Perhaps 'tinkering' has gotten a bad reputation, but life really *does* evolve through trying, adapting, exchanging – again and again. Consciously living in a complex, evolving system as a human being, you can only ever take one step, then evaluate and sense what is next, continuously looking for feedback, responding and evolving with the changing context. It is through this continuous process of experimentation that the novel happens. Dave Snowden puts it this way: when working in complex systems, we have to move from fail-safe design (where all is planned and nothing is left to chance) to an attitude where safe-fail experimentation is welcomed and supported.

Don't look at the steps in this process in a linear way – this is not how life happens. Sometimes you try something out and you don't even know what you can learn from it, even if it is clearly a good (or a bad) outcome. Any system can be viewed as a ball of twine that has been tangled to become a snarl of knots and intertwined loops. You need to take a step back to unravel each knot and loop as it presents itself, but there is no system or pattern to guide you. You just have to try and see what you can learn as you go, noticing whether your action loosens the knots or not. This same strategy can serve to allow novel insights and projects to emerge into manifestation. There is no way we can plan the future, as it is created with all that is around. We can, however, learn to sense and trust the weak signals – provided that we are open and still enough to notice them – seeing the phenomena as signs, and going with them.

In this tinkering mode, an unexpected turn or unknown resource often just shows up right in front of you. The clue is not to overlook it, as we are so used to looking out for the steps that we already had in mind ourselves. Weave in these surprise treasures right away and more will become possible. We no longer need great plans, we just need to stay permanently connected to reality, as it is in the present moment, let decisions happen when they are ready, address new tensions one at a time, and dynamically steer our way into the future. Oh, and not fall into the trap of assuming that there will be an end point, a place and time where you will know it all, when everything has become clear and there is no more reason to search or co-create. That time will never come: life is an infinite game! <sup>5</sup>



*Quote from my blog:*

Collective body wisdom  
From stillness and presence  
Wait for the next impulse  
We know exactly what to do!



## Retrospective Coherence

I have already expressed our view that time is not a linear progression of successive seconds, minutes or years. Although we do experience an unfolding throughout our lives, sometimes called the ‘arrow of time’, nevertheless this is in no way either linear or predictable. There are always events – all manner of experiences – that inform the next one, but it is only after this next one has happened that we can somehow know which of the prior events contributed to it and how. In other words, it is not linearity but the complex dynamics of change that make it possible for elements of novelty to show up.

I first learned about the concept of ‘retrospective coherence’ from Dave Snowden. He links it with situations in the domain of complexity (which he differentiates from the obvious, complicated and chaotic domains – really worth studying!)<sup>6</sup> In a complex system, there is no such thing as simple, linear causality. Any event can trigger a host of different and often unexpected responses. Yes, there are always ‘some’ events with ‘some’ effects, but we don’t know where and when those effects will show up. It is only in retrospect, after the facts are known and the events have played out, that we can see what triggered what. Because the linear cause-effect chain is missing, all we can do is probe the system and do many safe-fail experiments. Of course, feedback loops then need to be built into the learning process to enable us to listen to what Life is telling us.

Amy Sample Ward<sup>7</sup> distinguishes three forms of listening: listening to learn, listening to share, and listening to act. I’m not sure if I am using these here in the way she intended, but probing and sensing places our listening and sensing organs at the service of the inquiry into what is the next thing to do. What can we now do that is in alignment with what has been shown us in our inquiry so far? The simplicity of the next elegant step, informed by the collective sensing, is an appropriate way to navigate in complexity. In this regard, there is no point in ‘making’

decisions. Instead, we feel, sense, recognise the point of coherence for all involved. Even though we don't know for sure what response our next step will elicit, we *can* learn to sense the coherence – or at least part of it – before we act. We can sense what action best fits the whole, which part of the potential is ready to manifest.

This way of acting really is very far removed from what we are used to. Such action springs not from personal will (a determined act) but from the collective practice of continually aligning intent. This is one reason why the inquiry and questions are so important. That next simple step, that act-in-a-moment, swiftly and surely, flows from the collective practice of aligning intent and being present to all the subtle signals we are picking up from the world where we operate. We read the signs of the full context while being aligned with our collective intention. Our guiding questions are really calling us to sense into the fabric of life and the ethos of our times, now and now and now. This is the practice from which our next act stems. We are *not* thinking up a model or hypothesis and then testing it – that comes from a different paradigm. This is a constant 'sense-act-sense-act' sequence, firmly plugged into the data coming back at us, a tight feedback loop of reality, with strong psychic roots deeply embedded in the collective alignment of intent.

## Right Timing

There is timing in everything. Timing in strategy cannot be mastered without a great deal of practice. Timing is important in dancing and pipe and string music, for they are in rhythm only if timing is good. Timing and rhythm are involved in all arts. In all skills and abilities there is timing. There is also timing in the Void.

— Miyamoto Musashi<sup>8</sup>

Only where time emerges as pure present and is no longer divided into its three phases of past, present and future, is it concrete.

— Jean Gebser<sup>9</sup>

It is time to compose – in all the meanings of the word, including to compose with, that is to compromise, to care, to move slowly, with caution and precaution. That's quite a new set of skills to learn: imagine that, innovating as never before but with precaution!

— Bruno Latour<sup>10</sup>

Over the years, I have given a lot of thought to the notion of right timing. Perhaps my use of 'right' here is somewhat confusing – as if there is such a thing as wrong and right timing. That is not what I am seeking to convey. Perhaps it would be preferable to call it 'now-timing': the sense that we act in a moment of flow and coherence, from an inner knowing that 'this' needs to happen 'now' if we are to cohere with life-affirming action.

Sometimes when people share their visions, ideas or plans for the future, I have an inner sense and feeling in my body that inform me whether those things will come through any time soon. These people are passionate about their beautiful vision, but the link, the grounding into their context is missing, and so the vision has no connection with the time and space where they actually find themselves. Training in sensing and sourcing can give us a sense of right timing, which we can develop as a specific sensing organ.

Of course 'right timing' is linked with 'natural rhythm'. Some years ago I used to say: "We no longer have time to do it quickly." meaning: we don't have time to experiment with quick fixes that might have negative long-term consequences. We had better use our time to sense deeply and do the one thing that is aligned and connected, inside and outside, even if it looks like a very small step.

Right timing does not necessarily fit with my personal goals, or even our collective ones. It is an alignment of our collective intention *with all around us*. This is not something you can plan for in advance. You can see it in the moment or recognise it looking back. Especially when interacting in a context with younger, more ‘rocket-fuelled’ people, or in business contexts in general, the rush to action is so ingrained that there is no time to sense whether the timing is really now. One of our participants named it “picking the fruits too early”. We get so immersed in doing that we forget that it is the permeating tissue that makes it all alive, among and between us. Again, this links with not-knowing-yet: the not-knowing-yet of timing.

*Excerpt from my blog:*

Finding the right timing in Awebury was a bit more challenging for me. I was in a stressful place, because some part of me had added the label ‘important’ to the ritual that was going to unfold. Importance relates to ego, and that gave me the unwanted stress. Then the point came that it dawned on me: we were waiting for the right timing. I just mentioned that to my neighbour at the table, and sure enough there was G. who showed up! We got acquainted and then the rest of the circle joined and we could walk to the places we were supposed to be. Rich learning again that there is no point in pushing and pulling! Sometimes you just need to wait until the right timing is there and you are balanced and aligned with your self, the group and the environment.

From habit, we will relax for a short while and then move into action, because we can’t stand the tension! When we are in discomfort, we tend to want to grab back control. The not-knowing-yet of timing has to do with trusting something will happen even if we don’t make it happen. It is like wanting the baby to be born before it is ready – something that naturally-inclined women and parents don’t want. So the not-knowing-yet of timing is coming into relationship with life as we would with the unborn life growing inside us. Because, in everyday life and business as usual, we tend to be quite unconscious during the process of letting things come into being, we miss the real gift and learning to be found in gaining an embodied intelligence of what it feels like to be alive at that pace.

We realised early on, in a systemic constellation, that the somewhat negative element named as Holding Back was, in essence, Sensing the Right Timing, with real value and truth at its core. Sometimes what is seen as ‘just waiting’ or ‘inhibiting responses’ is really holding space for more new insights to surface and for innovation to manifest. Holding space and place for emergence is an active holding, far removed from passive waiting. We don’t leave the apples hanging until they rot! It is about learning systematically to access and inhabit the dimension of time we known as *kairos*, and to deliberately step out of the habitual, sometimes brutalising regime of *chronos* that is our current familiar mode.

Joseph Jaworski<sup>11</sup> speaks in this regard of ‘a cubic centimeter of chance’. Others call it a ‘window of time’. These are the moments where we just act, following an inner sense of right time, right place and right action. The fruit is ripe, in this very moment. It takes deep sensing and great trust to wait for these moments. Many of us, in the pre-manifest phase, get anxious or frustrated at not getting there and fall into the trap of making something happen. In such instances, we are not trusting that we, and our intention, are aligned with the universe and that we will be supported in ways our minds cannot predict. Alternatively, when something happens, we might jump on it without pausing to sense again, and more deeply into its relevance, so blundering past our quiet knowing that this is not yet it. This is all about learning to trust the process. Often it is about taking enough time in earlier phases, so that later things happen quickly and easily.

The most important practice at this stage is listening. Listening not only to your inner voice but also to what other people around you really tell you. Once you sense the invitation to your calling – once a “messenger” shows up with an invitation to something you can’t not do – respond with “yes” first and only later figure out how to do it (follow your feeling first, then bring in your rational mind).

— Otto Scharmer<sup>12</sup>

It seems apposite to end this section with some inspiring words from Sri Aurobindo:

Time is the remaining aid needed for the effectivity of the process. Time presents itself to human effort as an enemy or a friend, as a resistance, a medium or an instrument. But always it is really the instrument of the soul.

Time is a field of circumstances and forces meeting and working out a resultant progression whose course it measures. To the ego it is a tyrant or a resistance, to the Divine an instrument. Therefore, while our effort is personal, Time appears as a resistance, for it presents to us all the obstruction of the forces that conflict with our own. When the divine working and the personal are combined in our consciousness, it appears as a medium and a condition. When the two become one, it appears as a servant and instrument.

The ideal attitude of the seeker towards Time is to have an endless patience as if he had all eternity for his fulfillment and yet to develop the energy that shall realise now and with an ever-increasing mastery and pressure of rapidity till it reaches the miraculous instantaneousness of the supreme divine Transformation.

— Sri Aurobindo <sup>13</sup>

## Notes

- 1: Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*, 64. ↓
- 2: Freya Mathews: *The World Hidden Within the World*. ↓
- 3: Otto Scharmer, as quoted by Arawana Hayashi. ↓
- 4: Christopher Alexander: *The Process of Creating Life*. ↓ p.230
- 5: Finite and Infinite Games: [Book article on Wikipedia](#).
- 6: Dave Snowden: *The Cynefin Framework*. (video) ↓
- 7: Amy Sample Ward: In: *Thrivability: A Collaborative Sketch*. ↓
- 8: Miyamoto Musashi: *The Book of Five Rings*, 1643. ↓
- 9: Jean Gebser: *The Ever-Present Origin* ↓ p.26.
- 10: Bruno Latour: An Attempt at a “Compositionist Manifesto”. ↓
- 11: Joseph Jaworski: *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*. ↓
- 12: Otto Scharmer: *Daily practice toolkit*. U.lab MOOC, Feb. 2015.
- 13: Sri Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga* ↓ p.62-63.



## 8.5 Standing on our own feet – WMtE part 8



The 9th iteration in the Netherlands closed a phase. Towards the end of the gathering, I presented the first articulation of the 2 maps (with quite some gaps still in the 2<sup>nd</sup> one), and the Spirit-Source model. We were uncertain as to the right balance between being explicit – offering the models and theory – and allowing everyone the process of their individual and collective experience. The feedback was sufficiently enthusiastic for us to realise that both were needed.

In a way, then, we found ourselves moving up the right side of the U. Moving from exploration more into practicing, as well as diving deeper into further exploration. The edge – whatever that might be, I am not going to try to define it! – was always moving, becoming ever subtler. It remained just as hard to articulate what happened during our time together, but each time seemed more magical than the last.

Another novelty showed up around the 10<sup>th</sup> iteration: the gathering was called to a place *by the place itself*. *The place, with its specific authenticity and history, showed up more like a partner in our process than just a space that was hosting us.*

We realised that we were nearing the time to move from occasional gatherings to a phase of replicating and using the practice and the pattern elsewhere. Our practice was now sufficiently well-established to spread beyond the boundaries of our project. We had developed (stumbled upon, generated) a collective practice that could now be applied in different contexts and that we could teach to people. So off we went to the Global Presencing Forum! Our practice was even granted a place in the track of Inner Cultivation. Through the discipline of articulating the specific description required to reserve our spot in the conference, we discovered that we had been experimenting and learning about the inner and subtle dimensions of the U, together with its collective dimension. Our practice would stress that these inner, subtle and collective dimensions deserve and require the same weight and importance as the more out-in-the-world elements.



But another lesson loomed around the corner. In our enthusiasm – and yes, I was proud we had been invited – we were hoping that the Forum and the Presencing Institute would provide us with a springboard to wider vistas. Besides our little presentation, which led to some good connections, we were somewhat disappointed by the overall energy of the forum, especially the second day. For ourselves, we hadn't really found the clean space in thinking quite big, and at the same time holding it with humility and non-attachment. Again, the timing wasn't right so perhaps we were really preparing the ground for later seeds to germinate? Or were we supposed to stand on our own feet with no one giving us a platform?

## 8.6 Opening to We-in-Here



### Interweaving with subtle place and time

Of all the steps and phases in this journey of Collective Presencing, the one described in this chapter might be the most difficult. People born in the West and subscribing to a mainstream Western worldview might well feel a connection with others, with spirit or with source. Few, though, will have preserved an intimate connection with the land they live on or the places they visit, and fewer still have a natural rhythm bound into their context and their own personal, natural flow of energy.

As I look around at the many forms of ‘We-space’ practice that are mushrooming up in different places around the globe, this capacity seems mostly neglected. Human-centred as we are, we are removed from our animal nature, our ancestors, that which is intimately linked with the land and the context we move in, just as we are cut off from that gracious pace we notice in so many animals as they move through the forest or on the plains. The rabbit right before my eyes in the neighbour’s neglected garden across the street doesn’t stress about things to do. She stops working on her nest as a lorry thunders past, to methodically resume her task afterwards at the same pace, doing one thing after another. Packs of wolves show a similar collective pace when hunting together for hours. They don’t seem to get angry at one another for not moving fast enough, or for moving too fast, or for doing the wrong thing. They lope along together, interweaving all their actions with whatever they encounter along the way. This is the quality I am pointing to here, but then adding in human awareness, consciousness and language.

On the map of the *Circle of Creation*, *We-in-Here* is a movement into wider coherence than the *We-in-Now*. We are invited to let our awareness grow into more areas of interweaving and interpenetration. The Western mind, with its feeling of superiority in relation to all that is embodied, can have a hard time here, as it needs to relinquish this stance to become a true and equal partner with so many other kinds of knowing.

This outer alignment concerns the capacity to consciously resonate with the vibrational frequency of the planet. We know from space travel how important this frequency is if we humans – and probably other living creatures too – are to stay healthy and sane while travelling into space. We can train ourselves and each other to be more conscious of this resonance.

## Observing what is in We-in-Here

This movement of outer alignment expands out to embrace the many levels and layers of the subtle context. We align with and feel part of an ever greater ecosystem – not just this group of people, but this specific group in its specific context at this specific moment. As this capacity grows in us, we notice ever more synchronicities, recognising how much of life is linked with other parts of life. Growing out of the consciousness of *We-in-Now*, we learn to see the collective wisdom expressed through the many voices in the circle and to appreciate how the very different stories shared there all connect with each other. In *We-in-Here*, we also cultivate our awareness of the ways in which we influence and are influenced by the place where we are. We also notice those moments when a good flow is absent: those times when we are collectively holding a wish, a hope or intention, only to notice that the timing is not (yet) right for it to manifest.

This is *observing what is in We-in-Here*: We experience the group as an ecosystem within its larger context, which is itself a larger ecosystem, interwoven with nature, places and timing. As a collective, we become ever more aware of the interweaving of all of life.

## Accepting what is in We-in-Here

“What if collective sourcing is becoming an ecosystem that will teach us to be as the Earth?” This was a guiding question for one of our gatherings, with far-reaching implications for myself. If we collectively align with our personal source and our collective intention and the practice of collective sourcing, we learn how to be and act like an ecosystem, with each member of the group acting not as ‘just me’, but keeping their centre of gravity constantly grounded in the experiential awareness that ‘I am part of an ecosystem’. As it dawns on us that the ecosystem extends beyond the boundaries of the group we in are right now, we are challenged to integrate all kinds of learning and knowing that come from even wider and more subtle systems. This is the consequence of accepting that interweaving and interpenetration do not stop at the boundaries of our common humanity and our conceptual point of gravity. We learn to listen to all manner of insights coming from nature walks, dancing, poetry, movement, dreams. This is another of the ways in which we shift from engaging ‘with the world’ to engaging ‘with the Earth’.

## Honouring what is in We-in-Here

As we have seen in the previous movement, we now step beyond accepting, to honouring. If we truly honour that we are alive in nature, that we are an integrally interwoven part of it – also *collectively* as this particular group – then we learn to sense when we are indeed aligned in this way, and when we are not. The benchmark resides in this one question: What if it is easy? If it is not easy, sure enough we will find some small nook, some hope, some motivation that is grounded not in inner and outer alignment, but in some left-over ego habit or fear.

## Living what is in We-in-Here

In the intricate and mind-bogglingly complex interweaving of our passions, our souls, the timing, the place and beyond, it becomes obvious that long-term planning no longer does the job. Instead, we rely on setting an intention, as clearly as we can, and sensing collectively into what is the next, elegant minimal step. To live this step to its

fullest, we need all knowledge, hunches and intuition to weave together into a fabric that shows the exact contours of what we need or can do now. We then act collectively on that next, minimal, elegant step.

## 8.7 Widening Coherence as Process of Subtle Outer Alignment



When one takes up an intimate science with life, everything is found to be a field of relationships, both nested and open – patterns that weave in love, wonder and joy, that course as rivers in a floating sea of becoming. All relations are constellations of other relations, greater and smaller, without diminution of the ties that bind or the spaces that allow. The heavens are a mirror to the myriad constellations operating below, the tiny ways that a single word, gesture, or touch makes differences that the universe hears. A stone among many is but a relation in a constellation of relations, that once were a mountain, a great pressure, a star. Nothing can be ordered without the other, all the way around the mulberry bush. The overall effect is not of parts aligned by their mere comings and goings, but of the growth of one body capable of enormous feeling.

— Bonnitta Roy <sup>1</sup>

Organic beings and environment, however, interweave.

— Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan <sup>2</sup>

Messy coherence is the essence of managing complexity.

— Dave Snowden <sup>3</sup>



## Widening Coherence

In the *Circle of Presence* we described the movement of outer alignment as a widening of balance. Our journey didn't stop at that point, however, but kept on going, teaching us that restoring balance is too small a concept, because we saw it as concerning only humans. Here in the *Circle of Creation*, we are in a process of integrating ever more *subtle* aspects of outer alignment. In other words, a growing awareness of the constant interweaving and interpenetration going on all the time, a wider embrace than the growing awareness of complexity and interrelatedness referred to in the *Circle of Presence*. 'Coherence' captures this notion better than 'balance'.

Recalling [Chapter 5](#), where we described the journey of transitioning from a more linear paradigm to a more organic one, we realise that this is not about a conceptual understanding of complexity. Rather, it is about consciously embodying and living complexity in all aspects of life, a practice which ultimately leads to a truly generative life. This is no longer about 'being in relationship with', or even 'being related'. It is an awareness of 'constant becoming together' – a constant interpenetration and interweaving that can scarcely be articulated in our subject-object pattern of language.

People engaging in a *Circle of Presence* learn to navigate in four domains at the same time: observing/witnessing what is going on in the self, consciously participating in the process with others, observing what is going on in a group and stepping up as leader when necessary and appropriate. All these levels of conscious participation are needed. Building on these capacities, we now take them further in a *Circle of Creation*, the purpose of which is not (only) to become present in a range of situations but also, through collective inquiry, to actually live life and work in a radically different and novel manner. We are now building on our capacity to operate from a place of authentic collective wisdom in service of action that is unique, authentic and coherent with the world, including ever deeper levels of our selves, as well as time, space and more subtle aspects of life. Thomas Hübl names this evolutionary practice in a question: "Which is the 'doing' that we are all connected to?" It is indeed a practice to become a conscious collective or group that is aligned with time and space and with its own intention. Our field of attention is forever widening and expanding, holding multiple dimensions at once.

This process of widening coherence is similar to what happens in a *Circle of Presence*: the process of inner alignment (in the vertical axis on the map) blends with another alignment that extends from the selves into what is around us (horizontal axis). We move from feeling more in balance with the people in our group to an experience of being in wider coherence with the world around. In a *Circle of Creation*, too, we can distinguish a number of widening waves, from *I-in-Now* through *We-in-Now* and *We-in-Here* to *We-Now-Here-and-Potential*. Again, these different domains are not areas with clear-cut boundaries, but we separate them out for the sake of clarity.

### I-in-Now

*Focus on:* my soul's calling

*Open to:* subtle interweaving in my self

Following the maps, and building on the capacity named in the chapter on *I and Myself*, we naturally seem to come to a point where openings to a truly authentic self manifest in more and different forms than we could ever have imagined. There comes a moment when we can more clearly discern the leitmotif in our life and understand the deeper purpose behind many widely diverse experiences. These seem to converge and weave a life that is not driven by mainstream standards or models, but feeds on the sparks of our own inner creative powers. Often this manifests in what I call 'patchwork professional lives', where we engage in many different projects, probably in different partnerships, perhaps combining different professions. This might look chaotic to outsiders, but to us it makes total sense because we clearly see the underlying pattern.

In this process of coming to grips with our soul's calling – the best name I have found for it – there is a danger that our egos will play their last tricks with us. Some of us play it too small (It is not possible that 'I' should do this!), others play it too big (I have a special mission in life and everyone should know about it.) Even when we have overcome this hurdle, we might still tend, when confronted with big social challenges, to project our frustrations

onto ‘the system’ (the hierarchy in large organisations, the way parts of society are organised, the government...). The invitation here is to participate fully in life without letting anything from ‘outside’ hold us back from doing what is ours to do.

Doing this will often mean taking a bold leap that results in that interweaving of life, work and passion. In such an arena, the typical notion of work-life balance is obsolete. We live and enjoy a very emergent life, with many projects – paid and unpaid – that speak directly to and from the soul.

## **We-in-Now**

*Focus on:* the collective calling

*Open to:* subtle interweaving within the collective

By now – as if this journey were linear! – we will have recognised that there is no real separation between I and us: I need the collective to be able to live life fully, just as the group needs my unique contributions and capacities in order to realise its full potential. We recognise that we belong to groups of people who feel called to the same purpose or intention. Building on the awareness and consciousness of all present, an amazing flow can be reached in which each can shine in their own unique way.

This collective flow seems like a magic undercurrent buoying up meetings and gatherings in such a way that the spark of life is ignited in many participants – a sacred crucible that births the innovative insights and answers so needed in our complex and ever-changing environment. At the same time, we need to train our patience muscle and learn to hold a great deal of intensity before we reach this point of collective grace. In the practice of collective sourcing, when we are all aligned within ourselves, we can encompass with our collective attention a much vaster field than we could ever manage alone. The circle itself becomes a much larger conduit, with an exponentially amplified potential for sourcing and inspiration. This is possible on condition that we learn to see the group as an ecosystem of which we – and everyone else present – are an integral part.

## **We-in-Here**

*Focus on:* subtle place and time

*Open to:* subtle interweaving with context

Living in this constant awareness of the unfolding of life requires us to collect the diverse intelligences from everyone present. The practice of fusion involves a complex journey of unlearning, letting go of our complicatedness in order to find the simplicity of the elegant next step. When consciously living in an evolving dynamic system, we understand that we can only sense and know that one single next step. This allows us to live collectively and continuously in the present moment. If this minimal, elegant next step is informed by and through our collective insights, how much more present would we be to life, to ensure that the next step we take is a wise one?

In the language of Theory U, moving from the bottom of the U up its right side, bringing our novel ideas into the world of manifestation, our Western-trained minds are strongly conditioned to fall back onto our planning and project management skills. How can we stay in awareness, and even expand our attention to the context and the time we are in, without getting caught up by the urgency of mainstream action orientation?

Place and Time, too, are aspects of life with which we are intimately connected and we can learn to extend our attention into these dimensions of our reality. This is how we weave ourselves back into nature and the whole of Earth and life, rediscovering natural rhythms and understanding the powers of a particular place. Greater outer alignment gives us more sensors for the whole system, for right timing and right action, for a sense of what fits.

## We-Now-Here and Potential

*Focus on:* full generativity

*Open to:* full intimacy with all of life

“What if we ground in a reality that is emerging, always moving and in multi-dimensional and multi-vibrational ways?” This question that came out of a WMtE gathering in the summer of 2011 captures quite well the essence of the last column in our map. If you observe a truly creative group process, life is indeed like a soup with many ingredients that flavour each other. It is a soup that holds a lot of potential, as it isn’t a finished soup that can no longer be changed. It is a soup that is always in becoming, as we are with it, with many surprises, synergies, synchronicities and creative twists. The future is in no way a linear extrapolation through the present from the past. Rather, it is potential coming into manifestation – through our shared attention and intention – in many new forms.

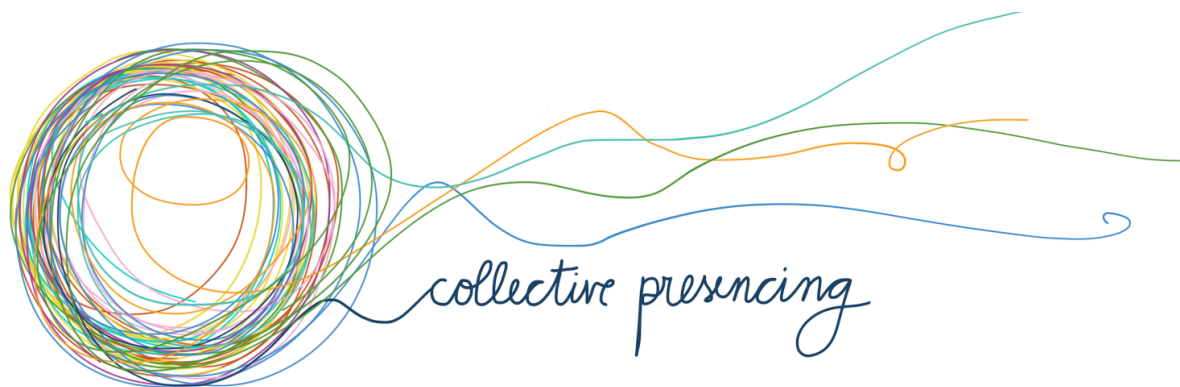
When we are steeped in this paradigm, as we embody it more and more, we start to love this potential, this not-yet-formed mystery, including the phases of not-knowing-yet and other intense moments, because it feels so alive! If all participants in a group own this capacity, then art, play, love and co-creation aren’t far away. We are grateful for the ordinary and in love with the potential. The synergy that shows up leads to a truly generative space where life’s potential manifests in forms, actions and insights never seen before.

## Notes

1: Bonnitta Roy: On *Facebook* 28 May 2013.

2: Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan *What is Life?* ↓

3: Dave Snowden: *Of tittering, twittering & twitterpating.* ↓



## 9. Gathered: We-Now-Here and Potential

9.1 We-Now-Here and Potential

9.2 The field of potential in need of us

9.3 In love with life's potential

9.4 Wild and magic – WMtE part 9

9.5 Collective Presencing applied

9.6 Life as love in action

9.7 Opening to We-Now-Here and Potential

9.8 Circle of Creation

## 9.1 We-Now-Here and Potential



And here we should re-emphasize that our concern is not with the conquest of a future, at least not that ‘temporal’ future that is generally deemed to be the future. *Rather it is a question of what is future in us, that is, what is present to the same degree that all past in us is present.* ... Our sole concern must be with making manifest the future which is immanent in ourselves.

— Jean Gebser<sup>1</sup>

This last chapter is a difficult one to write. First of all, the structure of the English language, where most sentences are structured with ‘a subject doing something to an object’, has evolved based on an assumption of linear cause and effect, and cannot therefore express the complex nature of life. Such a structure is not conducive to expressing a process of mutual becoming, of collectively reaching to source and bringing forth insights as concrete action. In this chapter my task is to describe a process that is more interpenetrative and interwoven than anything we have articulated so far. Moreover, pointing to what is possible when we have established such collective inner and outer alignment is not at all common, so very hard to imagine if you haven’t experienced it for yourself. You will notice me resorting to many valuable and poetic quotes from people painting more the full process.

For lack of a better term, I use the noun *generativity* and its adjective *generative* here. For me they capture the capacity or aspect of creating something novel that hasn’t existed before. Rainbow Hawk defines it as “a life-affirming response”, which is even better in my eyes, because ‘creating something novel’ still has a linear tinge to it. Similarly, ‘letting emergence happen’ presupposes a disconnect between me/us and what happens. Generativity is, to me, the full embodiment of the emergence movement that happens moment to moment, both inside and outside, all at once.



What does generativity look like? I have often tried to find images offering a visual representation of emergence or generativity, but searching for these terms on the internet returns only pictures showing transformations: typically from the caterpillar to the pupa to the butterfly. Beautiful as this is, and full of wonder, it is a process that has happened many times before along similar lines. That is not generative in the sense I have in mind here. A picture of different coloured wisps of smoke swirling together in all directions came the closest, but is still not adequate. Can we imagine stretching our identities, our collective being in the world, to resemble such swirling, fluid movements? What would that look like in our daily lives and work?

When I realised that evolution is not just about humans evolving, the insight hit me hard. Now I can say: *of course* the whole of life is evolving! All dimensions, all beings, no matter how solid or subtle, from rocks to angels and back. How much potential lies dormant in there? Have we even begun to envision that? And what if we truly understood and believed that the emergence of novel insights and actions were possible, and that evolution does not proceed in a straight line, but makes jumps and unexpected turns?

... the desired position is to rest in the Unmanifest and express in the Manifest, not alternately but simultaneously and by mutual implication.  
— Beatrice Bruteau<sup>2</sup>

## Re-identification

It really seems a new cosmology, language and ways of expression are needed, which are totally beyond already existing conceptual and scientific frameworks. Even beyond the existing esoteric injunctions.  
— Albert Klamt<sup>3</sup>

In previous versions, this chapter was named *We and Future*. But over time I have come to a deeper and fuller appreciation of what Thomas Hübl said so beautifully: that “the future is not what is happening tomorrow but the future is a potential we can develop into and that tomorrow is different than today.”<sup>4</sup>

Thomas noticed that some people, when talking about the future, would take it as a pretext to avoid engaging with life here and now. However, engaging with potential as we see it is actually an invitation to be so present that we *literally* – in this and every moment – participate fully in life, in all the dimensions and layers that we have described so far. When we do this, the real intensity of life shows up. In Gebser’s words, Origin comes through. Origin, meaning (Dutch: oorsprong; German: Ursprung) the ‘primordial leap’, literally the point where things can spring forth. Then the future becomes really interesting!

This full participation in life leads us unavoidably to reconfigure our Western sense of identity. Bonnie Roy wrote: “When one takes up an intimate science with life, everything is found to be a field of relationships, both nested and open – patterns that weave in love, wonder and joy, that course as rivers in a floating sea of becoming.” (quoted above, [section 8.7](#)) What might it mean, what *could* it mean, to live as a collective and not just as an individual, “as rivers in a floating sea of becoming?” Or, as Mushin Schilling likes to say: “to live in a participatory multi-verse?”

How do we *do* that? ‘Doing’ not in the sense of ‘making something happen’, but in the embodiment of our daily actions. We have mentioned sourcing as one form of this embodiment. We have described collective sourcing, wholeness of knowing, right timing, the next minimal step and the powers of place... When we bring all these pieces of awareness together, all at once, what potential lies dormant there? To me it seems huge, especially if we were to engage with it in a collective, shared awareness!

One way of capturing this in a question could be: “How do we, as a collective entity, co-create with the subtle dimensions of life?” Fully understanding that we humans, too, have subtle dimensions that are not captured by our six physical senses. Again, we need to be careful not to fall into the trap of separation, with ‘me’ or ‘us’ over here,

and the subtle realms, just like any other entity, over there. Think: *jointly becoming*! We must be careful, too, not to deceive ourselves by seeing co-creation as a hidden act to save the world. Think: *witnessing*! Remember the message from the Earth: “the act of witnessing amplifies my resilience.” Could we ever truly integrate all of this into our mainstream concept of ‘this is me’, or even ‘this is us’? Getting my mind around this leads to some cracking inside me, some groaning... until a re-identification settles itself deeply into my core.

*Quote from participant:*

I am the world, and the world is in me; the principle of One connects both if I relinquish myself. Then there is space for the field and what comes through it.

If I am not (only) a body; then what is IT that is being expressed? The energetic is so fluid, quickly to move... this re-identification has implications for the field and for the development of the field.

The asking becomes paramount, it is going to bring a possibility... the cellular structure will be changed and influence others. If I ask to be present to who I really am, then it becomes contagious!

... is it possible that it is true: that we are capable of holding the whole universe? We are it, and it is US! The fullness of awareness is not dependent on time or process. The experience of it brings it about.

— Lesley

In this re-identification, the boundaries of the ‘I’ are less fixed. Similarly, the boundaries of the ‘we’ are less fixed, as are ideas of what is possible and what not. I have come to see myself more as a uniquely coloured node that travels in different webs of meaning, meeting other nodes, co-creating new possibilities. This node doesn’t have a lot of freedom. It cannot go anywhere it wants, because it is bound in these webs of culture, family, locality and more – and also by some exciting collective potentials that are resonating within! Can we then see the groups, the teams, the organisations we are part of as specific coloured webs of encounter, that meet other webs in a wider ecosystem, constantly co-creating novel manifestations in our world?



## What else is possible?

To begin with, it takes time and effort to sit in a *Circle of Creation*, to try to reframe the big problems of our time into questions and intentions that point to the inherent potential and opportunities they carry. What makes this

difficult is the way we are pressured into a really different view of what is happening and how it happens. As a budding therapist, I learned from my mentor that each crisis is an opportunity for change. Now, this seems to be the case at the greater scale of humanity and its relation to Earth and life as a whole. This reframing of the problems of our time is similar to the re-identification just mentioned. Our cognition-heavy worldview, with its addiction to linear thinking and mental concepts, needs to give way to another worldview which is not just more integral (in a conceptual sense), but where we – literally and in our very bodies – expand to integrate more and more...

This blend of reframing and re-identification is a constant invitation to stay in a very open mode of experimentation, or better put: a mode of collective becoming. There are no *best* practices here, or even *good* ones! Only *emergent* practices. We live and work constantly in a vast soup of a myriad elements: a space that is consciously and intentionally held, with a shared intention and continuous collective inquiry as we move into action; a constant iterative process wherein action comes into being as it happens. There is a constant returning to connection, to presence, to source, to natural rhythm, to the world around. It is ongoing emergence, continuous collective presencing. There is not even a movement back and forth (that would still be too linear) that we *do and live* in the physical plane. We sense, source, act, reflect, sense, source, act... We have long given up living in our heads only. We stay firmly embodied and aligned, inside and out, in service of a potential that we sense is there and needs us to make it manifest.

In our Western world there is a strong tendency to ‘look for solutions’. In the complexity of this participatory multi-verse where we live, however, there is only this constant cycle of experimentation: sensing and trying out – again and again and again! Rather than reinventing something, or doing ‘the scaling up’ thing, we now engage with emergent practices and prototypes brought forth from within our context. We go into relationship with – no, again too linear! Better: we fully participate in the experience of staying in inquiry, sensing from source, rediscovering and re-identifying each time, and thus increasing connections all around.

The philosophical question might be: How will the formless inform the new form? To be honest: I don’t know the (philosophical) answer. But I do know that I can sense – be aware of – (more) potential present in individuals, in groups, in organisations, in cultures, in regions and in countries. Potential that is as yet untapped. And I know that others can do (or learn) that too. Deep in my bones I know for sure that the combined skill and capacity of dedicated teams to do this will be crucial in evolving our society and its governance.

If we combine this sensing in a balanced and coherent way in our teams, novel insights and actions will emerge. This also happens in the ‘real’ world – we just have to remember the unimaginable that has already occurred, like the fall of the Berlin Wall! All of a sudden, huge shifts become possible. Collective Presencing, as a practice, can support more of these breakthroughs or paradigm shifts, small and not so small. The breaking down of our old mainstream systems has by now become obvious to many. We notice, too, that the new ways of working have not yet found their form. It is as if we are in no-man’s land. We do see some signs of the new, we start to notice patterns, as if the first mushrooms are burgeoning up from the underground mycelium. When will we be aware of the whole new ecosystem, and live and work in it naturally? What is just beyond what is?

*Quote from participant:*

I had an incredibly strong vision of a circle of women’s arms and hands accepting a new baby into the world. So this real circle of co-creation is like midwifing the new – like collective self-midwifery. We co-create a container that is then impregnated by our inquiry. And then we sit and wait the time it takes for everything to cook. Then we birth out patterns, or forms, into the world.

— Helen

## Is magic real?

I fully realise that I have entered ‘dangerous territory’ with this book – at least when people look at me and my writing here through the lens of the scientific materialist paradigm. From the sixties into the eighties, a new-age

culture took many forms, and many people are still totally fascinated, even blinded by it. But during this period, an essential core has opened up in many people. What many have scornfully dismissed as weak-headed, fluffy, magical thinking is in fact a pre-sensing of new capacities activating in humans at this time.

Take this quote from Gebser and see it at work – collectively lived – in a group:

This is not in the sense that he or she can exercise, say, a new kind of magic power, a new mythical equipoising of polarising, or a new kind of mental superiority over persons, events, or processes. It is rather that his or her being present is in itself sufficient to effect new exfoliations and new crystallisations which could be nowhere manifest without his or her presence.

— Jean Gebser<sup>5</sup>

One way of looking at this process is to see it as a psychological transition, for *groups* of humans. A transition from childhood to adulthood. A shift from a stance of individual and collective powerlessness to one of responsibility and full maturity. All the previous chapters of this book have pointed to what is real and what can be, so that we can understand that the human realm is the realm of *choice*. It is a matter of where we put our attention and awareness. Once you step into psychological maturity, you are free to decide how you wish to feel, and what you wish to believe. We wish to expand mental knowing into a wholeness of knowing which includes – and integrates – *many* different ways of knowing. What we experience as reality will flow from that – because we experience the world not as it is but as we are.

And indeed, many synchronicities are occurring. When we set a clear intention, life bends its ways to help that intention to manifest – although never in the ways that I and we have envisioned!

*Quote from participant:*

We have learned that there is a vibrant realm of invisible (to us) intelligence co-existing with us in this universe of ours, somehow interpenetrating our dimensions, that is just dying to be invited into our conversations, if we only think to ask and open up. As a result of opening up to co-habit with these invisible realms, I find myself now inhabiting the Kosmos in a totally different way, experiencing how truly alive everything is, and how real the seamless quantum ‘vacuum’ is – and how magic is real. All without drugs!

— Helen

In one of our gatherings we started with ‘a coning’, a specific way of inviting different energies of the subtle dimension to join forces with us humans. Coning can appear like quite a rigid ritual. When I first learned about it through the books on the Perelandra site,<sup>6</sup> my greatest insight was that humans and subtle beings or energies each have their own role to play in the wholeness of life. Humans are the ones with the free will to decide: to choose and hold an intention. But most of us humans still hold the belief that ‘there is no alternative’ to the way we see the world now, as the neo-liberal mindset has conditioned us to accept. In the practice of Collective Presencing, while fully accepting *what is*, we choose to believe that far more is possible than what exists today, including where our human capacities are concerned. Equally, we accept that Origin continues to be present, that we can tap into it through sourcing and other such practices, and that in the process of collectively doing this some kind of magic can indeed happen! Referring to Clarke’s third law: Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

Ultimately we don’t know how a true process of creation happens. How is it that carrots look like carrots everywhere in the world? How did life spring from no life? How does life enter in the conception of a baby? In the world of conings, folks mention the work of the devas and nature spirits, which I see as one way of ‘defining’ what makes creation happen – but it remains a mystery. The point I want to make is that you don’t need to believe in conings or devas to realise quite viscerally that we can be more or less aligned with these mysterious forces – whether we call them Life, or Origin, or Generativity... I think all these labels are pointing to the same reality.



When we do manage to achieve a space of alignment – inner and outer, individual and collective – we are so much more coherent than most other human activity in the world as it is playing out these days. Provided we don't allow ourselves to drop that coherence and revert to identifying with the human-made world only, this shifts our energy and, ultimately, our capacity to co-create. Over time, coherence and resonance with our shared intention are the benchmarks that we are collectively tracking, because that's where something can come into being. So, instead of desperately trying to make things work, we go where the juice is, where the least effort is required!



## Feedback from Life

Going where the juice is, checking whether it is easy (enough), while staying connected to our shared intention builds on the assumption that the world is a helpful place. To be precise: 'the world' – meaning the man-made world – might not always be 'helpful', if we view things through a short-term lens. In that case, we probably need to zoom the lens out substantially in all directions, and to allow ourselves to trust the universe, trust Life. Even in the face of so much wounding, anger, hatred and fear.

As I have repeatedly stated in previous chapters, we always start with *what is*. Looking the world in the eyes does indeed confront us with the damage done to both people and to the fullness of life on Earth. Engaging with potential doesn't mean turning our heads away from *what is* in the ugly corners of the world. *What is* is always the starting point for any kind of change – otherwise we ground ourselves in a fantasy.

Every minimal, elegant step we take is a safe-fail experiment. This means that we need to constantly track what the impact is, where it resonates, what responses it elicits. As we practice, we are building a collective capacity to notice this kind of feedback from Life. Can we see that the different webs, made up of these different coloured nodes, are slightly changed by our small actions? Are we sensitive enough, together, to notice which kinds of behaviours and actions we want to amplify and which we would rather dampen? Are we receiving and registering the weak signals that point to bigger changes in the offing? Can we take in the feedback 'as it is', without conceptual maps or fantasies to bring it more into line with our implicit – and maybe unconscious – hopes?

If you have ever tried to untangle a snarled ball of yarn – something I love doing! – you are never really sure if the move you are making is actually helpful. And yet you need to keep going, trusting that you will make it in the end. This is the trust we need when dealing with complexity and unmanifest potential. There is no way we can plan things



in advance, we just have to take one step at a time and see what happens. Again, watch out for any linearity creeping in through the back door. We are all part of that tangled skein, entangled in it but present together, using all our subtle senses to move in the direction where more of Life's potential can manifest, moving in the creative dance to which Life – Origin – can respond.

## Notes

1: Jean Gebser: *The Ever Present Origin*. ↓ p.296 (italics as original)

2: Beatrice Bruteau: From *A Song that Goes On Singing*. ↓

3: Albert Klamt: *Quoted by Helen Titchen Beeth*. ↓

4: Thomas Hübl, in an interview with Olen Gunnlaugson: *Collective Intimations of the Future*. ↓

5: Jean Gebser: *The Ever Present Origin*. ↓ p.300

6: Perelandra Center for Nature Research: *Website* ↓

## 9.2 The field of potential in need of us



The field of systemic constellations introduced the concept of ‘systemic conscience’ to the world. Systemic conscience is a systemic awareness of the system as a whole that will ‘use’ any member of the system – and most commonly the most vulnerable one (typically children, in the case of family systems) – to signal that someone or something that belongs to the system (the family, organisation, company, etc.) is not included in it. One way of understanding this is as the whole of a system’s field ‘using’ people to make something visible. We can extrapolate this notion of ‘systemic conscience’ to the field of the future, the field of potential. Otto Scharmer talks about “the future in need of us.” This can be seen as a similar dynamic – not, this time, to heal something from the past, as in typical systemic constellations, but rather, a field of potential that calls on different people to bring it into actuality. In this regard, participants in a *Circle of Creation* are in service of a greater, systemic purpose, as set out in [section 7.1, Collective Calling](#).

In one of my encounters with Bonnitta Roy, she came up with the – at that time – startling question: What are people for? This question landed home and stayed with me for quite some time. It arose from the awareness that so much of what we humans think is uniquely human is actually inherited from our animal antecedents. This being the case, what precisely do humans bring to the whole? What is the legacy of humanity that can bring all the rest of life forwards? There is much that humans can do, that (we assume) plants and animals cannot: we can self-reflect, manipulate abstract concepts, create something beyond ourselves, question something and be in not-knowing... But are these mostly conceptual capacities *really* our only unique contribution?

In recent years, the reality of a collapse of (Western) middle-class society – something that will fundamentally change our mainstream way of living – has been sinking in, a little more every day. In this context, the ability to hold an inner alignment, to stay present, centred and grounded in ourselves – instead of escaping into panic, powerlessness, distraction or denial – is crucial. We will be able to hold presence and awareness in the face of any kind of collapse only by being in circles (communities, teams, organisations, collectives), by staying in connection with each other. Without this shared and collective consciousness, we will tend to fall back into all kinds of

regressive behaviours and be unable to achieve innovative insights and generative action. I think no one can imagine what the world and our daily life will look like in a few years from now. We will need each other for support, to rebuild the fabric of the collective and allow truly creative ideas come to fruition.

Not falling into old patterns is not the ultimate purpose here, however. It is simply a condition for doing the work. In the practice of *Collective Presencing*, it is the collective sourcing ([section 7.4](#)) that brings in knowing and insights that we cannot access individually. Beyond the insights, aligning wider and deeper, we can collectively sense what potential is ready to manifest through us, because we add the awareness of here-and-now. This is what brings forth generative action. I sense that this is (part of) humanity's evolutionary path: to learn to be in this collective practice that is – and leads – to generative action.

This seems to me to be one of the things that we, as humans, can add to life. In the meantime it can also allow the regeneration of much of what we have damaged and destroyed. I believe this is how humanity and life on the planet will move into the next phase of possibility. Collective practice, as it is emerging through the many experiments of We-spaces, teal organisations and ecosystem awareness, is essential for all the potential that wants to manifest. We are, collectively, in that birthing or pre-birthing process right now.

What seems unique to us as humans is the ability to design processes that invite co-creation and lead to life-affirming action. We see this in the building process that Christopher Alexander has been experimenting with, which leads to qualities like beauty and harmony. We recognise it, too, in any good permaculture practice, as it generates food while supporting more wildlife, building more resilience, and so on. The practices of the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter,<sup>a</sup> too, are in essence about co-creation, both within the hosting teams and within the groups of participants. It is clear from these three examples that it is not about following rules, plans or formulae. It is an iterative experimental practice. They are all about co-creation with what is present, and at the same time the design process leads to novelty, beauty and adds more of life to what went before.

## Fields and fields

As we have entered more and subtler sensing and awareness, the word 'field' shows up, as if by itself. Many people use this word, in different contexts, meaning different things. The best definition I have found for a field is this: "A space in which an energy is held."<sup>1</sup>

Like a physical field, we call something a field when we 'see' the boundaries around it. Otherwise we call it 'nature'. So a field – in the energetic world – is to be seen not as a separate 'thing', but as a space of awareness in which an energy is held that we throw a loose boundary around so we can talk about it and sense into it. Just like individual people – whose boundaries, in the Western way of thinking, are quite fixed – fields have boundaries. But they are not forever immutable. As with individuals, the qualities and boundaries of fields will change due to many encounters with other energies, whether manifest or not.

Our Western-trained awareness has been one of fragmentation, of knowing facts and things with clear boundaries. The practice of *Collective Presencing* bends our awareness increasingly to what exists in *between* the facts, in between the people, in amongst all of life. This is why we speak of fields, but because there are many different fields – regions of awareness – to sense into and to talk about, some distinctions might be useful.

Rupert Sheldrake defines a field as 'a region of influence'. Social, cultural fields are shaped by what has come before and expressed through strong habits/rituals – like the founding myths that give coherence to a collective cultural or organisational field.

When Otto Scharmer says "we need to learn from the future", I understand this as meaning that we need to be in conscious relation with the field of potential, and sense what exactly out of this field is most likely to come to manifestation through us. Again, the field is not a thing, and neither is the potential! It can be seen as regions where our attention can go and notice something, but if we turn our attention away, there is just a big soup of energy – with us included!

Through our different gatherings, we came to see that there is a collective field, a collective potential or possibility, that we were all sensing before we gathered. Almost as if it ‘exists’ in itself, but again, it is not a thing! It is a possibility, a potential that we resonate with – where others do not. It is not we individuals coming together who then create ‘this field’ between us. The field, with its huge potential to manifest newness, was probably guiding us, inviting us, attracting us, seeking resonance with us, to come together in the first place. Again, it is not a question of which ‘caused’ the other. Resonances seem to happen, probably bubbling up out of life itself, traversing both manifest and unmanifest realms – and again, there is no boundary between the two! The field of potential is in need of us, embodied human beings, to make it visible, tangible, manifest. It is only through us that the potential can be embodied and can result in generative action that can actually change something fundamentally.

The field of unmanifest potential that we can collectively listen and sense into can be distinguished from the social and inter-subjective field that we hold among us (*I and Us*, [section 3.5](#)). Depending on where we put our attention, we can notice different sensations in each of these regions. We can see each individual in the circle as holding a pole of awareness, being in inner alignment. In between the poles – and in the awareness of it – the field of potential becomes tangible. It is a practice of multiple awareness to do this collectively, for collective purposes.

All these distinctions and attempted explanations still leave us with many more questions... This is life on the edge!

I'm interested in this field thinking. In groups we expand this thought process to contain you and your life as a full process, not just parts and bits. How can I think and feel you as a field? Not just as a personality but all of your life at once? Is there a possibility of this and how can we expand our thinking into this field thinking in a company or institution, a global process, a group, whatever.

— Thomas Hübl<sup>2</sup>

*Quote from participant:*

My sense is of being an instrument of the future unfolding, of playing my notes/chords to call in harmonic synchronization. Everything becomes less and less personal, slowly taking one step at a time. Moving into the impersonal, the fleetingly impermanent, the seemingly impermeable; and yet as each new horizon appears, I permeate, and am permeated, interpenetrated. As an embodied human presence born of and into an older system, the resonance of the new plays in me seeking the way along the frontiers of evolution.

— Judy





## Who is holding system-wide potentials?

In the third chapter ([section 3.1](#)) we talked about what we understand as holding space, its main function being to hold the space open for the potential to manifest. In the global Art of Hosting network,<sup>a</sup> we have noticed a pattern in working with complexity, that we articulate as follows: “It takes a field to hold a field.” In practice, this means that when seeking collective intelligence and collective wisdom through conversations with large groups, you need a (hosting) team that itself uses its collective wisdom. This cannot be done by a lone expert. But what about system-wide – and even world-wide – potential? Is anyone holding the space for potential at these scales, other than (or even) the powers that be (the 1%, the establishment)?

There are many individuals acting out on the world stage – just look at the massive outpouring of emotion before and after the Brexit and the Trump votes. We would do well to restore some kind of balance and collective grounded presence, both to sense into what actual inquiries and guiding questions are essential system-wide, and who are the groups and teams who will (can) hold the potential on these larger scales? What kind of group can keep the space open and not collapse into default thinking or emotional patterns – and then live up to the new insights and generative actions that come into view?

### *Quote from participant:*

I would like to speak to the re-patterning of energy. It is really important to see the whole big context we are in now. It is a pattern interrupt; it is no longer for us to do business as usual. Part of what we need to be doing is holding the container in which the energetic pattern can reconfigure itself. Because there will be a certain amount of chaos and as we know from hosting – that is part of what holding is about, to keep a sense of containment, of calm, while all hell breaks loose. We don’t need to do anything in any particular way, but we have to hold the space in a more harmonious way so that re-patterning can happen.

— Helen



Many of you, reading this book this far, have heard the story of the Imaginal Cells – the early butterfly cells in the pupa in its cocoon that need to find each other in order for the butterfly to take shape. If we extrapolate from this metaphor to global or system-wide scales, we can ask: What is this cocoon, and who is holding the cocoon while the imaginal cells find and organise themselves to become the butterfly?

Some of us have been living and working with the practice of *Collective Presencing*, and have manifested small projects in this way. It seems that we are now asked to do so on much larger scales. What skills and capacities are needed to do this? It is one thing to hold the acquisition and renovation of a house and land in this way, for example.<sup>3</sup> It is something quite different to hold a generative space for a country, a region, a local educational system, let alone even wider, more global systems. So much more is at stake, so much more is active in the field, so many more emotions flare up, so much more collective trauma is unconsciously held. In a way, it seems that all of that (emotional) movement needs to be held in a much, much greater emptiness and deeper emotional steadiness – the way a mother embraces and contains an overactive child.

*Quote from participant:*

At this time there seems to be a huge movement of groups of people searching for mature ways of being together and taking responsible action together. I feel that is a true movement towards cultural maturity. Perhaps we are trying to transform the ‘happenings’ of the 60’s and 70’s and the congresses of later decades into the councils of the emerging future.

— Marianne

Maybe it is too early to do this on such a scale. We do see it these days on the scale of organisations and businesses, as written about by Bryan Ungard.<sup>4</sup> How Bryan describes their way of working strongly relates to much of what is described in these pages. He states: “The decision to love is also a paradox because one is committing to the person as they really are and to their highest potential – unconditionally accepting and valuing *what is* while also serving *what wants to be*. In some traditions this is expressed as “I love you just the way you are, and we have a lot of work to do.” This is essential in developmental work: to start honestly where we are and simultaneously to work to see and unlock the potential that could be.” This is a perfect description of what I have called holding space!

Being able to hold space on such a wide and comprehensive scale is a huge invitation – and challenge – for the people willing to do this collectively. The capacity to hold steady and stay present includes the ability to witness pain and ugliness on very great time scales and across huge territories.

Here is a 2017 quote by Jordan Hall, pointing to the relevance of *Collective Presencing* on a wider scale, right at this time when so much seems to be going the wrong way:

“By yourself, you can’t think non-linearly. This isn’t your fault. Individual human beings cannot think non-linearly. Only “collective intelligences” – those agents of “inter-subjective consciousness” – can. To put it more simply, we **implement** and **do** things as individuals. We **innovate** as tribes. And the world we live in today – the world of the 21st Century – is a world of continuous innovation. ...

*The conflict of the 21st Century is about forming a Collective Intelligence that can outwit and out innovate all its competitors. The central challenge is to innovate a way of collaborating and cohering individuals that maximally deploys their individual perspectives, capabilities, understandings and insights with each other.”<sup>5</sup>*

Collective Presencing has the potential to become a practice for global governance. Holding space on this level is holding the meta-perspective of the species in the universe. What does a balanced governance look like in daily life, when it is in service of the greater whole?

## World Soul – Anima Mundi

This inquiry leads us to the notion of ‘world soul’ – the English equivalent of the Latin ‘*Anima Mundi*’. Wikipedia says:

“The world soul (Greek: ψυχὴ κόσμου, Latin: *anima mundi*) is, according to several systems of thought, an intrinsic connection between all living things on the planet, which relates to our world in much the same way as the soul is connected to the human body. The idea originated with Plato, ... He wrote: Therefore, we may consequently state that: this world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence ... a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related.”

The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as: “the soul of the world; a power or spirit supposed to be diffused throughout the material universe, organising and giving form to the whole and to all its parts, and regularising the motions and alterations of the parts. Therefore we can say that it is akin in meaning to ‘cosmic order-generating (i.e. syntropic) energy’.”

The following memory might be an experience of the World Soul – or at least related with it... In the preparation day for the Women Moving the Edge gathering in Holland, I was sensing deep, deep energetic layers of reality. I understood that we were re-weaving the holes in the fabric of the collective connection. These holes were like tears at different places in the energetic fabric. They came into being because our lives, thoughts and actions have been so fundamentally fragmented for so long, without there being enough people holding strong enough intentions to keep this energetic fabric alive. I realised in that moment that we need many of these collectively-held intentions to be able to reweave and repair what has been torn for a long time.

What if the World Soul is the ‘field’ that is guiding us collectively? What if all humans – and all beings on the Earth – are there to bring the potential of the World Soul consciously into manifest form?

*Excerpts from my blog:*

Silence settled in, and we were all listening inwards to our next impulse, like in the exercise Karen had offered us the day before. The impulse that came up in my body was to bow. A very deep bow, so deep I ended up lying on the floor with my hands turned upwards in receiving position. I explained to the others that I wanted to bow deeply for the mystery that is the World Soul (that I had recently encountered in *Return of the Feminine and the World Soul*,<sup>6</sup> by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee). Later on, Karen, our London guest, did just the same, but she didn’t use any words, which made it even more powerful as a statement.

I came to understand some more of what this World Soul means. Connecting in with it, this living substance of the Earth, is how right timing and right place can be sensed and discerned. .... Collectively we became more aware that there is nothing ‘to do’, nor even anything ‘to get’... it is all about surrendering and aligning to Life, whether we related to it as our individual Soul or the World Soul.

In a way, the very fact that we find ourselves more and more often in groups of people who sense they have something to do together – as we described in Collective Calling (section 7.1) – could be seen as invitations from the World Soul, calling us – the humans – to rise up into full possibility. Again, let’s not fall into the trap of imagining us over here and the World Soul somewhere over there! We can indeed attune to the field of potential on such a large scale, and it can inform us and we can inform it. It is interweaving and interpenetration, from the individual all the way up to the Earth. The potential of the Earth, with humanity as an inherent part, cannot come alive without our doing our personal, individual parts *and* doing our very unique collective parts!

What if the need of the world – all our man-made constructions – is an invitation to all of us to become who we really are? To reach our highest collective human potential? To come, as humanity, into right relationship with the Earth?

But the old, aboriginal idea of how are we to live – and when I say aboriginal I don't mean Australia, I mean wider than that – is actually the dreaming of a human being; the logos, the intelligence of a human being, can only go so far. Then there comes a point when you actually need to get dreamt by the land itself. Now that sounds rather esoteric, but actually it's been a common policy in tribal groups all over the world for thousands and thousands of years.

— Martin Shaw<sup>7</sup>

What seems to be important here is the fluidity of our witnessing capacity. We are invited to shift the boundaries of our attention and move from a tree to an ecosystem to a leaf, to a membrane, to the planet... As the boundary shifts, so does the subtle energy, so does our relationship, so does our inner experience of our own size and shape. It all shifts as we shift the boundaries of our attention. So it's the elasticity and the fluidity that seem to become more important. It's a kind of dance that brings us into a very active, dynamic, co-creative relationship with what we're witnessing.

If we integrate here the piece of knowledge from quantum science called 'Schrödinger's cat', whereby the act of observing and intention 'collapses' the probability waves of the electron into behaving as either a wave or a particle in its actual manifestation, we could say in simple terms: the intention influences the potential, because when the probability collapses into one manifestation, the other probabilities vanish.

Maybe what we are in need of right now are many groups who can hold collective intentions and collective fields of potential, who can, together, hold the World Soul and its other possible manifestations. This could be an alternative, another Earth-wide, world-scale intention, to counterbalance the groups and individuals currently holding the neo-liberal intention on the economic and political scene. It seems to me that if we can hold it Earth-wide, including the man-made world, all of nature *and* the subtle realms, our intention could be stronger than theirs as we invite more forces and energies to co-create with humanity. We are then not manipulating, but holding strong collective intentions for the good of the whole. We are in conscious co-creation with the other intelligences in the cosmos that we assume also have the highest benevolent aspirations for what they can get their arms around.

What if collectively holding the space for the unmanifest potential of humanity is a new form of governance, the next form of 'doing politics'? This points to the big difference between the government of (parts of) the world, and governance of the eco-system of the Earth. It is beyond 'being citizens of the world' – how we have been thinking of ourselves, which has so severely limited and reduced us. It is about being, collectively, 'inhabitants of the Earth' – a very grounded way of being. Doing politics has a lot to do with power and domination, while governance of the Earth has to do with nurturing and stewarding, very alive, very embodied, very close to the ground.

Have we ever done this before? No.

Is it a big challenge? Yes.

And still, nothing stops us from trying, iterating and learning!

Doing this consciously and intentionally will change our common understanding of what it means – could also mean – to be alive. It seems to me that the purpose of being alive *as a human being* is the creation of the possible. Being alive *as humanity* then means becoming active players in this ecosystem with and in and on the Earth. As Brian Swimme points out, this is the first time in history – in evolution – that the human species has become a geological force. It is quite impressive to realize that, and to use our power to create in a generative, instead of an extractive, way.

## Notes

1: Field (definition) in: *A Language to Map Consciousness*. Samuel Sagan. ↓

2: Thomas Hübl, interviewed by Olen Gunnlaugson: *Collective Intimations of the Future*. ↓

3: *Dorpsstraat* ↓

4: Bryan Ungard: *Operationalizing Love: Building loving organizations.* ↓

5: Jordan Hall: *Situational Assessment 2017: Trump Edition.* ↓ (Emphasis original.)

6: Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee: *Return of the Feminine and the World Soul.* ↓

7: Martin Shaw: *Interview with Transition Culture.* ↓

## 9.3 In love with life's potential



And because time as such is coming to an end and is being supplanted by time freedom, any temporal projection 'forward' is illusory and illusionary.

— Jean Gebser<sup>1</sup>

### Calling in the potential by living it

*Excerpt from my blog:*

I feel a lot of juice in the collective silence that is waiting, expecting... when we are together in the not-knowing-yet. It feels like making love with the potential of the future. Just like in lovemaking you are totally open, ready to be surprised, and not exactly knowing how it will be this time. Being in love with this future potential, moment by moment, seems to me the best definition of being alive – and it is basically the core practice of our gatherings!



In most cases, learning to walk and run happens from the experience of falling forward with grace. In these times, this image helps me. I feel myself tumbling forward in the saying of yes. Falling forward in the availability of shifting consciousness, and how it changes the game. Learning to find my legs.

— adapted from Tenneson Woolf<sup>2</sup>

‘Calling in the potential’ is the best way I have found to enunciate the concept, and the embodiment, of this constant awareness of being in relation with potential, with source, with origin. This includes the ongoing awareness of the space between where we are now and the potential for innovative manifestations. We started out by naming it ‘calling in the future’, but this invited the temptation to see it as a linear extension of what is now, overlooking the complexity involved. Besides being aware of our relationship – our interrelatedness and interwovenness – with people, with places, with nature, subtle timing and so on, we have a sense and an awareness of the not-yet-manifest that is waiting to be born. We are putting love in the middle between ourselves and the next possibility, loving this space of in-betweenness, this bowlful of potential. It also means suspending both judgement and ego patterns when we are informed by source and a next step becomes clear. It is not that we are calling or inviting ‘it’ in, as if it is somewhere ‘out there’ and we call it to come ‘over here’. The potential is here, in us and all around us, always.

Fundamentally, the future is present ... these are the right people, this is the right place, the right time, and the right process.

— Edward<sup>3</sup>

The by-line of Women Moving the Edge was ‘to move the edge of consciousness’. That is no small purpose! It was clear from the outset, that if we wanted to move the edge, we need to invite the future in. We did this by organising the gatherings and fully immersing ourselves in a new way of being together. We were inviting people not to a nice get-together, but rather to step into a field, into a way of being and doing that holds the potential for the future. Somehow, we were seeking to create a disconnect from our starting point, by jumping into the future and then building a bridge back into the present. If we just move step by step from here and now, we are in danger of getting more of the same, more of what we already have and do and are. But if we take the time in the here-and-now to inhabit the space of our full potential – and what is embodied in the field – we can invite that potential right into the here-and-now, opening the field to all that is possible.

I know, from the countless therapy sessions I have conducted, that even though most presenting problems stem from situations a long time ago, healing happens in the present moment. How can we apply this insight to change and transformation relating to the future? If healing takes place in the now because we access the past and the present in some kind of field that is beyond time and space, might the same not be true for the manifestation of future events? This prospect invites the integration of the ‘time freedom’ Gebser refers to. I cannot claim to fully understand this, let alone embody it, but I sense that I am drawing ever closer.

*Quote from participant:*

We co-create a container that is then impregnated by our inquiry. And then we sit and wait the time it takes for everything to cook. Then we birth out patterns, or forms, into the world.

— Helen

You might remember that I started writing this book in earnest in a beautiful place in Greece, called Axladitsa-Avatakia. It was described as “not a retreat centre, or another seminar centre, but a home where we live the future; a place of living wholeness, as an example for how we will need to live in the future”. Each year the women who stewarded this place organised an ‘Immersion’ gathering, inviting participants to live wholeness, to live the future now. Similar to the Women Moving the Edge, it created a focal point in space and time where people could gather around an inquiry and become, together, ‘a landing strip for the future’.

## Inviting – invoking

When working with ritual and ceremony it is easy to fall into rather rigid attachment to specific forms of being together, of what needs to be said and done, when and where. I no longer remember where I picked up the distinction that can be made between ‘ceremony’ and ‘ritual’. Ceremony is when you live as nature does, in natural flow and reverence for life. Ritual is when you want to invoke the energy of ceremony with the intention of connecting with life.

The way circle is practiced in collective presencing – the quality of attention those present hold for each other, for the place and so much more – most resembles this quality of ritual. Our ultimate wish is to blend with life’s energy in all its dimensions, so that living the sacred becomes everyday practice. Thus, despite the attention, care and artistry we devote to it, we don’t want to make it into something special. We create the simplest possible form that can invite in the poetic response from the world. Letting go, having patience, setting aside our opinions and judgements – all these can be seen as part of the ritual that allows us to bring ourselves into closer alignment with life.

The process of finding and articulating the right question for the collective inquiry can be seen as the current form of the ancient practice of invocation at the beginning of rituals. In this process, those involved sense more deeply into the potential they have been drawn in by. Articulating this with precise wording allows the collective felt sense to be named. This is the intentional space into which a wider circle of participants will then be invited. It is a very specific field, a bounded enclosure resonant with our shared intention, into which we invite more of life. Exactly what this ‘life’ consists of can be named however you choose – whatever fits for you in this regard: a poetic response from the world, elemental beings, subtle energies, other realms, beyond the veil... anything goes, depending on your cosmology. In the collective here-and-now we invoke a seed of potential which we coax into the manifest realm through our aliveness, our being on the edge together.

The naming and the reaching out are the active part out of this process. But surrender is also required: letting go of any planning and control in order to be receptive for the information life offers regarding your invocation. This combination of agency and surrender invokes a quality of interpenetration between realms so that the universe can operate coherently across dimensions. I must confess to feeling some (socially conditioned) awkwardness as I write about this. I think it has to do with the false belief that we exist only in and on the material plane, even though we all can and do sense much more, both inside and outside ourselves: we exist also in the inner depths and the outer vastness.

### *Quote from participant:*

The awakened human is like a multidimensional nodal point, anchored in the physical realm and receptive to contact from other realms, on condition of actively reaching out and inviting in.

— Helen

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, in *Alchemy of Light*,<sup>4</sup> speaks of co-creation with the forces of life, with the archetypes. This is another notion that points us to a much larger context of being and creativity in which we are constantly immersed. If, when we articulate our guiding question, we are in collective resonance with life, then life will respond. Nothing else is possible. So it is that, when we listen for ‘what wants to happen’, we hear nothing more nor less than the whispers or echoes of our own deeper intent. If we understood this more deeply, we could so much more easily and wisely manifest new systems and products that truly serve our well-being.

Non-material life, in whatever form we conceive of it, cannot *not* answer an invocation – or so the mystery schools teach us. The subtle realms are fascinated and attracted by the physical, and will always show up when invoked. It is therefore important that we invoke not mischief, but what is healthy and wholesome for the greater whole.

As an illustration, many years ago a group of us conducted a systemic constellation where we called this kind of energy the (Jedi) ‘Force’. We laughed when it presented itself in the exercise, but for me it held a huge lesson. After

some cumbersome movements in the constellation around an issue on the scale of Europe, we ended the constellation and did a debrief. The man representing the Force said “You didn’t ask me for help! I could do anything!” “Such as what?” I wondered. He replied, “Like *anything*! Bringing you to the moon or anything!” And yet, it had simply not occurred to any of us to ask this force for help! As humans, we are so accustomed to seeing ourselves as the pinnacle of creation that we ignore the other energies present in the universe that also deal with creation. All we have to do is invite them in!

At this juncture, we can extrapolate from ‘being held by the group’s field’ (Chapter 3 *I and Us*) to a larger scale: the group-in-here-and-now needs to learn, and gradually embody, the truth that it is held in and supported by an even wider field. We live at a time when we are invited to relinquish our sense of being isolated (and alienated) beings in a strictly material universe, in order to make room for the mystery of creation. Through our intention we can invoke that which is relevant to the transformation of now. We don’t have to *make* it happen. We don’t have to come up with the newness ourselves. We simply have to offer our own consciousness as a vessel, as a gateway into this space and this moment, for all that is swarming in the liminal space that we have assumed for so long to be empty.



## Interweaving and interpenetration

In terms of the implicate order one may say that everything is enfolded into everything.

— David Bohm<sup>5</sup>

Can we stay in the practice? Can we bridge the gaps between the habitual and the new ways? Can we navigate through life holding both a glimpse of the new and the frustration of falling back into old habits or failing to lead the others into the new? Practice is to be in that state that bridges human and cosmic worlds, big nature and minute nature. It is so much vaster than the human realm, vaster than the question of whether we will make it through the coming transition with our Internet, hot running water and soft towels intact. One of the core assumptions of Neuro-Linguistic Programming is that the solution space is larger than the problem space. In order to bridge the gap between the one thing and the other, we need to be in a space which contains and transcends both ends of the spectrum as a much smaller feature of the landscape in the larger space. This means that we can take our eyes off the ball, so to speak, realising that the challenges we face are less of a big deal than we tend to think. Instead, we can

approach things in a natural, paradigm-bridging way that can shift the field without effort, because the practice is about connecting into a much vaster space.

*Quote from participant:*

Building on that – the dance, the shifting of focus from something minute and detailed to something huge, and then linking that with our individual stories, sometimes what we bring into the circle is a detail, something very small, and sometimes what we bring in is overarching, overwhelming, and the collective is then called to flow, to dance between, to stretch from the minute and tiny to the planetary...

— Nina

It seems as if we are bridging the gaps: the gaps between the individual and the collective, between the subtle and the manifest, the tangible and the intangible, the ordinary and the divine. If we really take this to heart and understand that intention and attention are at the core of creating – that is like bridging the gap between mind and matter.

*Excerpt from my blog:*

As in lovemaking, a lot of what is going on between the two partners is not only physical, but includes many subtle movements and exchanges of energies. What we understand now more and more in our exchange here is that we can create our reality in a love-making with the subtle dimensions. You could even use the concepts of interpenetration, of embracing... at least we participate, from our three-dimensional space, in the other dimensions – and in return these more subtle dimensions influence us and this dimension of space and time. It becomes impossible to know where one dimension ends and another begins; again like in good lovemaking where you can't remember who started which move or who initiated what. Most likely there are no clear boundaries between dimensions anyway, not even between people or things, as we all are formed by our exchange and living together with others and all that surrounds us.

— Ria

## Notes

- 1: Jean Gebser: *The Ever-Present Origin* ↓ p.296.
- 2: Tenneson Woolf: *Toddler Walking, Bouncing on Boulders, and Skiing Moguls* ↓
- 3: Edward, interviewee, quoted by Barrett Brown ↓ p.135.
- 4: Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee: *Alchemy of Light*. ↓
- 5: David Bohm: *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. ↓ p. 177.



## 9.4 Wild and magic – WMtE part 9



I haven't yet told you the story of the big paintbrush. In one of our gatherings, Lisa had brought a giant paintbrush as a talking piece. It lay in the centre of our circle, together with stones, candles and other meaningful objects that participants had placed there. She had brought it along because it held a specific meaning to her, related with her artistry. Towards the end of that particular gathering we did a systemic constellation around the topic of money, wondering whether we could shift our view on it. I found facilitating that constellation quite difficult. Whatever I tried, whether moving representatives or having them speak to each other, nothing seemed to bring any real release or clarity. Judy recalled:

As I was representing the Sacred Feminine in the constellation, something was incomplete. In a sense, the Space Holding aspect was represented by someone else, but there was no wild piece. ... At the very end, we all felt something was missing.

Often in a systemic constellation when we don't have a clue about how the elements in a system relate to each other, it is because there is an element missing. I learned in my constellation training to ask myself at every beginning: what is missing? In this case, since most people were already representing some element, I grabbed a chair, put it into the constellation and asked something like: What is missing here? What would bring energy? What would restore the world? At first, nothing happened. I waited. We all waited. Suddenly, Lisa grabbed the paintbrush and plopped herself in the chair in the most seductive pose I had ever seen her take! Collectively there was a "Yes!" The power of this sensual, seductive, alluring aspect burst into the middle. A different quality of aliveness was present after this episode. The turquoise paintbrush became a symbol to us for that specific energy.

Another story I have not yet told concerns a ritual with standing stones in England. For our 12<sup>th</sup> gathering we had a string of rendez-vous in time and space: getting to Rachel's hill in the South Downs, being hosted at Hazelwood House in Devon, and then making a 3-hour day trip to Avebury (and back). Logistically it didn't make a lot of sense,



but it felt right nevertheless, so that's what we did. This was actually the first time that we had had a sense before the gathering that we needed to do a ritual. Of course, you could say that the deep circle practice we use is a ritual in itself. But this time, we had to do something with the land, with the stones, and Avebury is full of big stones! Besides circle practice and deep dialogue, I don't do rituals in my life, but now I had a deep sense that this work with the stones – whatever it turned out to be – needed to be done first. I could not give any more explanation or description of it beforehand. But I sensed that the next possibility – maybe doing this kind of work in groups with both genders – was coming closer.

The ritual we did ended up being in two parts. First at the two stones called 'The Cove' inside the stone circle in the village of Avebury, and then inside West Kennet Long Barrow a short distance from the village. After the first part I knew deep inside: now my book can *really* be finished. The ritual, and the wisdom and clarity we received, held learning and confirmations about being constantly aware of connections and the importance of collective holding. I saw the ritual as making an imprint for a new groove: for conscious collective entities that know how to create, connected with all dimensions in service of life.

Beyond the circle that had gathered at Hazelwood House were a few women who had intuitions similar to the ones we had been working with. We had been surprised before the gathering to learn that a number of them felt a strong connection with this gathering in the UK, while nevertheless feeling that they were not supposed to come in person. Rather, they felt called to do something similar in their own places – places as far apart as the Dolomites, Lebanon and southern Germany. It was no surprise then, that the next gathering built on this kind of magic and subtle energies, and we plunged into the multivalent world of sound.

As the process of the 13 gatherings unfolded over time, a continuous point of attention was the shift from fragmentation and separation to a stance and perspective involving holding more of the whole. This sometimes meant having to adapt our carefully articulated question for certain gatherings, because the assumption of separation had slipped in through the back door without our noticing until we took the time to look deeply enough.

It also became clear that while we had done well in the dynamic of going deep, deep, deep into sourcing and sensing into the potential, we also needed to return to 'the surface'. Our attention began to shift towards *how to stay in the space of sourcing while taking the next step in the world without leaving behind the full quality of collective presencing?* How to stay in the collective practice and quality of attention while moving to manifestation and action? What does applied Collective Presencing look like in practice? The journey of ascending the right side of the U has until now not fully included the multiplicity of presences that are the pre-requisite for collective emergence and generativity. Can we give the inner and subtle and collective dimensions the same weight and importance as the visible, the outer, the action? Somehow, we found, if there is no wild and magical energy in the mix somewhere, then we are missing the point!

## 9.5 Collective Presencing applied



In those moments when awareness succeeds in being at one with feeling, sense, movement and thought, the carriage will speed along on the right road. Then man can make discoveries, invent, create, innovate and ‘know’. He grasps that his small world and the great world around are but one and that in this unity he is no longer alone.

— Moshe Feldenkreis <sup>1</sup>

### Articulating the subtle

The occurrence of the present being transformed by the future occurs in the creation of new language. You do not create the new language. The new language (of the future) creates you in the present from the future and the inconceivable transforms into the conceivable in the process of your transubstantiation (the future transubstantiating the present).

— Yasuhiko Kimura <sup>2</sup>

I have already talked (section 4.4) about ‘sourcing’, and (section 7.4) ‘collective sourcing’ as *collective embodied revelation*. It takes some courage to learn to voice our subtle sensing, because we have to overcome our conditioned assumption that this is not ‘real’ or ‘true’ or ‘useful’ information. At the present juncture, though, I wish to give some attention to a next step that follows on from the subtle sensing: the precision of language and making (subtle) distinctions. Perhaps because of our discomfort, we tend to use sloppy language, as if trying to hide what we really want to express. But as in the concept of Felt Sense and the practice of Focusing described by Eugene Gendlin, we

do have the capacity to be extremely precise in both what we sense and how we articulate it. Becoming more explicit, and perhaps using words in uncommon combinations or inventing new expressions, improves the quality of our communication and the collective wisdom of the whole – just as we have done in writing this book and articulating the finer differences in this collective and subtle landscape.

John Hagel has described in multiple blog posts that tacit knowledge, which is often the knowledge formed by and in new experiences, is best accessed through long-term, trust-based relationships. It is exactly this tacit knowledge that we need to be very specific about: taking time to name, to language, to find the right words and concepts.

Wherever this communicative engagement is actualised, it is manifest in a *poetic* order – an order of poetic revelation – that unfolds alongside the *causal* order. This poetic order, or order of meaning, exceeds the causal order but in no way contradicts it.

– Freya Mathews<sup>3</sup>

*Quote from participant:*

I love this process because we bring night consciousness into the daylight, it is just so valuable to have words and language for many different things. I love to be in this kind of generative conversations, where this deeper layer actually gets to the surface, or we push or pull it to the level of awareness.

— Ria

For some, the articulation of a deep sensing is a real challenge, as Judy said: “the words are almost not there – I can’t quite grab them”. In particular, giving language to the inner sense in a way that can be received and taken in by other people might be a big hurdle. Still, it is both necessary and important to get into the detail of the articulation and tease out the subtleties until the sensing is clear for others (and yourself, too) because what becomes known through us when we take the care to articulate carefully is part of the life force. It is actually an interweaving of the individual and the life force; of the subtle sensing with the precision of the mind to find the right form of expression.

In this way, a group using Collective Presencing as its core methodology could become a new version of what we now know as ‘think tanks’. This could help leadership on different levels and in different domains of society to sense into what is going on and what is the next step to take. Collective Presencing is a practice for accessing what is in the spaces between the elements, and what is emerging between and through them. Because it is whole-bodied, it accesses more and deeper than conventional thinking groups. If we want fully integrated, alive, embodied organisations, this is a practice to make it work.

Questions have been raised: When is it appropriate to have this level of collective sensing? When and in what conditions is it useful? What does it really look like when applied in a business context? How to scale up from a little ‘sensing team’? There are big hidden assumptions beneath these questions, as if business is the biggest context and scaling up is the best way to move forward. I would turn it around and ask: how can business fit into the wider picture of taking care of the earth and all living beings? As I learned from *Walk out, walk on*,<sup>4</sup> in complexity, it is not scaling up that will do the trick, but rather scaling across.

If we allow ourselves to dream, we can imagine presencing teams being hired to help people and organisations with all manner of wicked situations and problems. As outsiders, their role would be not to do the sensing themselves but to invite participants into these practices, step-by-step. The different practices are powerful in themselves and by using them, participants will themselves learn to make the fine distinctions first named and articulated by the team.

*Quote from participant:*

It is happening in this call, for me I am taking very practical things out of it. Noticing this is the context in which I want my thinking and being to be in, as we take the organization to the next level. Almost too good. Feels kind of dreamy. Wow! That I could act in the world from this container is like a huge release; something about not doing it all yourself; because I put my deepest level of trust in our collective. It feels energising and I could act with a different level of clarity and confidence in my intention. It is not about giving over or being a puppet, but really resting in this level of intention and holding. And I love the dance we are in – how we are applying it, challenges on the ground, kind of action learning.

— Cari

## Continuous collective inquiry

Continuous collective inquiry, in groups of different sizes, is a crucial capacity and practice for dealing with the complexities and turbulence we are confronted with these days. It is an essential tool and element of being resilient for groups of people; being able to sense into what might be a next step that is coherent both inside and out. Long-term planning needs to be replaced by collective sensing into the possibilities right now, combined with constantly keeping an eye on the feedback coming from the bigger system (or life) we are dealing with. I remember vividly the question Christopher Cooke raised in a gathering of Spiral Dynamics practitioners: How capable is humanity of dealing with intense, rapid change? Looking at it in that way, at that moment the future looked bleak to me. Right now I feel more confident, thanks to the practices that we have discovered and practiced.

Dave Snowden, in his Cynefin framework<sup>5</sup> (briefly touched upon in [section 8.4](#)), makes helpful distinctions between simple, complicated, complex, chaotic (and unordered) situations. Planning can work in simple and complicated situations, when there are simple and ordered straightforward relationships between cause and effect, but in complexity we first need to *probe* – try out a few things – because the linear causality doesn't exist. Once we have done that, then we can *sense* the impact of our action on the system and figure out how to *respond* with a next step. Our deep sensing capacities in the collective inquiry can be very helpful in figuring out what to try out first and also in the sensing phase, as it integrates more dimensions of knowing.

Just as no one knew they needed an iPhone or tablet before these devices appeared on the market, continuous collective inquiry is not something that people feel they need and think to ask for. Nevertheless, when people start engaging with it in their work and life, they find it resonates deeply. We didn't 'invent' Collective Presencing starting from a need or problem; rather, we *encountered* it from the angle of potential, from a shared collective felt sense of what might be possible. Constantly being in sensing, inquiring and reflecting mode is a way to stay connected to the unceasing unfolding of life.

*Quote from participant:*

I see that sensing into the subtle, sensing each word as it comes, I begin to feel the timeless space of fullness and resonance vibrating in me, in these very delicate slowed down moments. I am challenged and yet called to trust that my experience is one beyond this time and space dimension, or at least a taste of it. We, as humans, are learning to move into the multi-dimensional; beyond, and yet just beside, the space/time home we now know as life here on Earth.

In these circles we open a space for this future potential. We have an embodied experience outside of time and space (place), and yet we are all very present here. It is holding this contradiction that opens the new frontier – to collaborate and participate with the subtle – to reach new clarity in right timing and right place to generate the new.

— Judy





## Groping in the dark

*Excerpt from my blog:*

And suddenly I saw how conversations and gatherings are conceived, live and die. Like human beings, they come up from a wide and infinite sea of possibilities; live for some time and then retreat back. By our willingness to listen to the next question, we call the next gathering and conversations into being.

*Quotes from participants' conversation:*

To me it's always amazing, this sensing into what is the next question – like we want to look beyond the edge, but we're not there yet... It's really like – groping in the dark... I like it! Because I feel something will emerge.

— Ria

The groping in the dark reminds me about the night consciousness we talked about last time. It's exciting to think about the potential.

— Judy

In “Nowhere”<sup>6</sup> – an inspiring and unique collective of organisations and businesses in the UK – they believe that great questions (they call them Breakthrough Questions) allow us to venture into the unknown where true innovation happens. They have the power to unlock the creative potential of people, teams and businesses. Working with such questions is essential if we wish to shape a sustainable future. According to Nowhere, these questions have three specific qualities:

- you alone don't know the answer
- it keeps you awake at night; it genuinely holds your interest



- if you did know the answer it would change everything

In [section 7.1](#) on Collective Calling, I described the process we used to find the guiding question for the next gathering. As you might remember, the process is by no means linear. Starting the conversations with a check-in, through the dialogue that follows we sense deeper into the unmanifest potential that can come through the gathering in a few months. This is what we try to listen to and glean information from, in order to language the calling question.

*Quote from participant:*

If we were asked to hold hands and lean over the edge and to bring back the question that is just beyond our sensing ... what would it be?

— Helen

The process of articulating this next question is like a swirling around. Each person present has to speak what is coming through, without knowing if it is meaningful or not; only in the end we can see if it was a fruitful contribution. It is a lot about holding the not-knowing-yet ([section 7.5](#)), but when you get the hang of it, and can stay present and grounded, it becomes a process of amazement and joy. We are collectively sensing in the deep dark waters and suddenly we come up with a coherent articulation that has resonance. The awe and joy tell us we are in real generative space!

It can be hard work to stay long enough in the not-knowing-yet until the resonant articulation presents itself. And yet only once this stage is reached can the question serve in the gathering, team or project. And then, at some point the energy disperses. This specific inquiry comes to its end, the cycle is completed. We would all go our own ways, taking the experience and the unfolded meaning with us. Some of the meaning would ripple out, seeding other conversations, but this gathering was over. At other times, the question is still alive after a meeting, but mostly we have gained some new insights – consciously or not – and a new cycle can start. I understand this also as a non-attachment to form, making it easier to release this form, this event, thereby making space and opening up possibility for a subsequent weaving of threads of potential.

So far in my experience with teams looking for something new – be it in business, government or elsewhere – I have not encountered much appetite or skill for finding a real, resonant question to work with. People don't seem to see the value of the question as a means of seeking for new solutions, let alone envisioning setting aside time to sit in circle to find such a question, which feels like groping in the dark! Still, as Nowhere has made clear: for real innovation to be possible we have to ask these breakthrough questions. Otherwise we stay mired in the same frame of thinking; and no new insights can emerge.

## Leadership and continuous collective action research

But continuous collective inquiry is not enough! The inquiry needs to become action research, where we are not just inquiring through inspiring and generative dialogue, but also starting to act in the world, together, and then taking the responses to these actions back into our inquiry. Just as we need to keep all our senses open to gather novel insights in the dialogue phase, so too must we have a clue about what kind of prototypes make the most sense and how we can understand the feedback from life.

The action research approach ensures that the collective insights arising from the inquiry are made into actionable steps – doing something very physical in the 3-dimensional world. The group can then sense into the impact of their action on the system under consideration, reflect together on what this actually means and sense into what steps to take next. This cycle iterates over and over again.

A study by Barrett Brown<sup>7</sup> shows that the higher the complexity of worldview or meaning making system of the designer or change agent in sustainability initiatives, the more successful a change initiative will be. He looks at the

later stages in the action logic system (Cook-Greuter, Loevinger, Torbert): from Strategists, to Alchemists to Ironists. Comparing role, service and design approach between the different stages, his findings are quite revealing. Briefly, the role of the leader is seen first as ‘to catalyze’, then ‘to create conditions’, then ‘to hold and wonder’. The perspective on service evolves from being of service ‘to’ others (personal meaning), to service ‘on behalf of’ (trans-personal meaning), to ‘serve as spirit itself’ (unitive meaning). The principal design approach morphs from ‘operating *on* systems’, to ‘dialoguing *with* systems’ to ‘designing *as* the system’.

It is this latter (ironist) stage – where we collectively ‘hold and wonder’, where we ‘serve as spirit itself’ and where we ‘design *as* the system’ – that I have tried to describe in the different elements of the *Circle of Creation*. By being *in and from and as* the new paradigm ourselves, and acting differently in this way, combined with the rigour of research, we will be able to have some impact in large-scale complex change programs. Not in a linear and planned way, but something quite radically different.

We know from Chaos Theory that the initial conditions of a complex system are critical to what will emerge from it. This is why we take such great care of all the conditions described so far. The rigour of research, the constant collective reflection and learning are just an extension of this care.

According to Alain Gauthier,<sup>8</sup> who has been looking at collective leadership for many years, the word ‘lead’ originates from the Indo-European root ‘leith’, which means to ‘go forth’, to ‘cross the threshold’, or even to ‘die’. He asks: What threshold must be crossed before something new can emerge? What if leadership, in ‘crossing the threshold’, meant:

- facing the unknown with openness and trust
- sensing what is emerging by being present to what is
- participating creatively in a wider field of knowing and doing, giving voice to an evolutionary impulse
- taking self and others to where we have never been before?

Peter Hawkins also pointed out that we need to develop effective leadership teams. He was talking not about typical, traditional heroic leaders, but about effective *collective-leadership* teams which are more than the sum of the individuals. He added that we don’t know much about how to develop these! It stands to reason that these new types of teams need a new and crucial competency: a new research methodology or technology. The practice we have been describing in such detail here needs to intentionally evolve and we need to ground it in practical application.

*Quote from participant:*

The dynamic of action is about a question that is brewing and unfolding in the midst of life; the learning as a challenge to our own epistemology. *The phenomenon of being in the learning process itself* – for the sake of wholeness – for the sake of death or dying, or story, or the land, or how we constellate ourselves; be able to create in that phenomenon those things we have yet to language. We are *observers and participants of the phenomenon, at the same time*.

— Mary



## Share emergent practices and patterns

### *Quotes from participants:*

As Helen was talking I remember this trilogy about the steerswoman. Their role was to go into unknown territory and map the territory. She had to pack her backpack with food and a compass etc. There were steersmen, but they were rare. The gathering place of the steerswomen was the Archive; the sacred place of maps of the unknown. ... The greater point of the myth is the quest for the greater knowledge, and to bring it back and share it with others who can't go there.

— Edveeje

What I love is that we are looking at the meta-patterns, about how to develop these practices that we haven't quite looked at before. What happened last time, what could happen this time? We're touching into things that we haven't given voice to until now. I think it's important and interesting that we are exploring and moving that edge.

— Judy

The concept of *emergent* practices comes from the work of Dave Snowden. In his Cynefin model,<sup>5</sup> he states that there is no such thing as *best* practice, or even *good* practice, in a complex environment. There is no way to do things in the 'best' way, because in a complex system too many variables can change quickly, unexpectedly and often. It is not even possible to have 'good' practices – these are only possible in complicated situations where experts can figure out a few alternative ways of doing things. Relating with the future or with potential falls squarely in the complex domain, and new practices and insights emerge along the way. The point is that only when we really grasp that we are part of the wider system, the ecosystem of planet earth, will we understand that publishing and spreading these practices and patterns *is part of our job*. It is not just for our own purpose, our own team or organisation that we are learning, it is for a much wider audience and ecosystem!

It is often the knowledge formed by new experiences that provides early insights into the changing world around us. As the ever-changing core team of Women Moving the Edge, we were fortunate to have installed the practice of directly transcribing our conference – collective note-taking. In this way, the tacit knowledge that we built over the

years could be accessed through our long term, trust-based relationships and was articulated through the many conversations we had in the different hosting teams. Throughout our numerous phone calls and the different gatherings, we could constantly pull up threads from previous conversations, recognise patterns and connect dots that hadn't been linked before.

If we can see all our own and each other's work as experiments and probes into the wicked questions of our time, we can see the value of being able to learn from each other – finding some validation of the patterns we have noticed ourselves and seeing the wider meta-patterns popping up in different places. When we are busy with our own projects we tend to forget that we are all part of a bigger system in which all these try-outs have their place. We forget that any living system learns through the feedback it gets. Can we remember that writing about our own experiment – successful or not – is feeding the whole ecosystem? This is the only way the wider ecosystem can learn! When we do this collectively and consciously, we are building a new kind of competence in the area of shared meaning making.

With this book and its related website, time has come to share Collective Presencing with the wider world. I have taken all the material and patterned it in my unique way, feeding it back into the wider field. I imagine that by doing this the field is strengthened, deepened, broadened, becomes more substantial and more universal. Happily, I see this awareness of harvesting – sharing out the nuggets of our learning – growing in many more people: just take a look at what is shared on Medium these days!

I have learned something else too, by sharing some of the patterns that I saw early on – even before I could see the whole map. When I showed these maps, incomplete as they were, people got excited! I was surprised by the buzz in the room. This was another expression of the synergy: the capacity to articulate the patterns in combination with the holding and the silence. People seem to be hungry for explanations and teachings when integrated with experience.

Beyond all this, it is important to share our patterns and practices because this is how we are building the commons – the field of shared knowledge about what is possible in a process of shared inquiry – that is open for anyone to consult, use, re-work, build on, create with.

## Theory and practice of change

Change happens in the transition from potential to actual, not from one actuality to another.

— Maria Pachalska & Michel Weber<sup>9</sup>

It might be clear by now that the model-theory we used in the Women Moving the Edge gatherings was not about bringing change in from 'outside', but about providing enough of a container and a guiding question, so that life could then manifest as new insights and novel initiatives. Somehow, when working on projects or with organisations, the old linear idea of how change happens easily slips back in. As if we can 'do' something, as if we can make change happen. We can't! We can only provide some holding and some guidance. If people don't want to change, they won't – certainly not because of us or our beautiful practices. We need to be very careful to keep this foundational theory of change constantly in our minds. Our focus is on how to let life unfold in life-affirming actions. What is it that this project wants next? Can we explore with our clients from a place that is deeper than where they habitually speak from?

In complex systems – all these systems we're working with: individuals, organisations, business, large systems change – you never, *ever* know beforehand how an intervention will be taken in by the internal organisation of this being. We can only hope that if we intervene from our highest centredness, groundedness and awareness, and in alignment with life, that something life-affirming for the system will ensue. We believe that a collective awareness that is more aligned inside and out, aware of more interpenetration and interweaving, will source actions and manifestations that are also more aligned. What we currently see in the world is a fragmented consciousness that manifests incoherence in so many ways. Let's at least try to create greater coherence.

It is also crystal clear that, given the level of awareness that large-system change work calls for – holding the space, facilitating the process, sensing the current need of the system-organisation, getting to know the individuals, the business, the industry – consultants and facilitators doing this work are on the edge of how much they can hold. When there are so many levels and dimensions to attend to, no one person can hold them all. Because of this complexity, we need teams who can hold all these elements together, who are themselves an example of how team alignment can be different, where we are not delivering a product but stepping into a process of co-creation with our clients.

The work we envision here is eco-systemic in nature. Such hosting teams – as *Circles of Creation* – are at the core of any ecosystem approach. Only this kind of format and methodology will be able to hold the space and the inquiry for what is next in this vast field. It is the power of the carefully crafted intention and the guiding question, mixed with the human contributions and connections, that make an ecosystem work. The rest we leave to life.

I also want to link back here, within this frame of theory of change, to the concept of conscious closure ([section 5.1](#)). Organisations and businesses, too, are ever-changing, complex evolving systems, while most people – founders in particular – seem to assume that they (should) exist for eternity. One of our participants, Cari, went through this process of conscious closure and noted: “There were ego attachments to my income, and my job, and yet it was remarkably easy to let go of (the organisation). If this is meant to die, it is meant to die. I am not attached to it being alive, but instead sensing what wanted to happen there. The loyalty for me was to something bigger than the organisation – not to the organisation but the soul, something larger.”

## Notes

1: Moshe Feldenkreis: *Awareness Through Movement* p.54 ↓

2: Yasuhiko Kimura: Facebook 29 November 2012.

3: Freya Mathews: *The World Hidden Within the World*. ↓

4: Walk out, walk on: *Website* ↓

5a: 5b: Dave Snowden: *The Cynefin Framework*. (video) ↓

6: Nowhere: *Website* ↓

7: Barrett Brown: *Conscious Leadership for a Sustainable World* ↓

8: Alain Gauthier: *The Inner Dance of Collective Leadership*. ↓

9: Maria Pachalska & Michel Weber (Eds): *Neuropsychology and Philosophy of Mind in Process* ↓



## 9.6 Life as love in action



The universe is not a place, it is a story; it is an unfolding creative event.

— adapted from Brian Swimme

I regard the essence of the notion of process as given by the statement: Not only is everything changing, but all is flux. That is to say, what is is the process of becoming itself, while all objects, events, entities, conditions, structures, etc., are forms that can be abstracted from this process.

— David Bohm<sup>1</sup>

Back in 2005, Brian Swimme released a DVD set about the Powers of the Universe.<sup>2</sup> In it he describes the basic universal powers he has discovered through his life's work as a scientist and cosmologist. His teaching captivated me from beginning to end. These powers of the universe might surprise you: seamlessness; centration; allurement; emergence; homeostasis; cataclysm; synergy; transmutation; transformation; interrelatedness; radiance. These powers that inhabit and direct the vast universe are also at work and alive in us, whether we realise it or not. While our Western lifestyle might not feel very conducive to emergence, allurement, synergy, radiance, interrelatedness... still these qualities are within the grasp of each and every one of us, and available for deployment at any time.

In his talk about the power of emergence, Swimme tells us that the universe is not a place, it is a story. It is an ongoing creative event. I had to let that sink in. Deeply. If the universe really is a story, then everything in it is a story. In the first chapter ([section 1.4](#)) I described being present as a process – the process of becoming present. I mentioned elsewhere how my teacher would repeat over and over: “We – are – a – process!” We are *always* becoming. Life is becoming. In recent years, a new branch of philosophy has emerged: process philosophy. It seeks to explain how every moment is always new, totally novel. Of course each moment is also built on previous

moments, on our memories and what happened before, but there is *always* the possibility for novelty – in every moment!

If life is essentially an unfolding story, then there is no master plan – just a pattern of ever-expanding, ever-deepening, ever-intensifying interpenetration and interweaving, with all those universal powers at play. Ultimately, what we are exploring in these pages are the conditions that must be in place for us to intentionally deploy this capacity to live in the unfolding story of an ongoing creative event, *collectively conscious*. The universe is not a place, but an energetic pattern. Our lives and identities are not fixed, but unfolding. Our collapsing Western society is not a fixed thing: it, too, is an event that is evolving and becoming.

My spell checker still says generativity is not a word in the English dictionary. But Helen, my friend and linguist, says I can use it safely; it is by now part of our shared language. To me, it is the word that best captures the quality of this unfolding, creative event. In everything that we do, we can ask ourselves the question: does this enhance the life force? When we engage with one of these breakthrough questions, is this quality present in our conversation? Or is it heavy and (too) serious? What if all the collective action research we do from now on can tick the boxes on allurements, emergence, interrelatedness, synergy and the rest?

If we see life – and the projects we find important and the situations we interpret as serious problems – as a process with no master plan, then life becomes more an affair of tinkering. I didn't know what the word 'tinkering' meant when I first read it in a blog post of Nancy White,<sup>3</sup> who wrote about tinkering as a way of creating knowledge. Actually, she calls it 'playing with knowledge':

I love the idea of tinkering and find it central to the practice of stewarding technology for ourselves, our communities and networks. Imagine. Create. Reflect. Share. Adjust and go at it again. Experiment. Mash-up and recreate. Build upon the work of others. It is for me a deeply ingrained practice of learning, both by myself and with others, particularly in my communities of practice.

Life as becoming, life as a process of tinkering, as 'playing with life', might present a grand paradox given the urgency with which we experience our problems and the many unmet needs of the world.

## Love and Action – Love in Action

What is needed is care; a great deal of patience; and the laying aside of many preconceived opinions, wishful dreams, and the blind sway of demands. There is a need for a certain detachment toward oneself and the world, a gradually maturing equilibrium of all the inherent components and consciousness structures predisposed in ourselves, in order that we may prepare the basis for the leap into the new mutation.

— Jean Gebser<sup>4</sup>

*Quote from participant:*

In Western society, there is no connection between Love and Action. It is not thought of in the same frame of mind. Love and action/manifestation are not connected with the infinity sign, until now. They are connected in the new paradigm. Often when talking about how to make things happen, the concrete is important, but we missed this awareness. What seems to be the force, the cohesiveness, is love that really motivates us to make something bigger than ourselves happen. This needs to come into awareness and full presence... acknowledge that love is in the middle.

— Judy

Remember my original question, the first one I ever wrote down?

*What are the basic, universal, archetypal, human principles for living and working communities of the future? Not for the sake of community per se, but in order to create places where everyone and everything – including the Earth – can develop optimally, in order to bring about paradise on Earth?*

I think these two quotes, from Gebser and from Judy, give the answer. Short and powerful.

We have seen that we can invite the future in – or the potential – and be in a loving relationship with the unfolding of what is next. This is a state of relationship without judgement. Love is not understood here as ‘the good’, in contradiction with ‘the bad’. Rather, love is recognised as a fundamental impulse of life, a mysterious power. You might have noticed: we are back to the quintessential witnessing quality. It is a free flow of energy, with no resistance, no needing to know. Connecting that with action in the physical world is quite something.

When we are aligned – collectively conscious – we don’t attach. Neither in a positive nor in a negative way. It is not always easy. What arises from the new insight might challenge our habitual patterns. Still, when the action, the next minimal step becomes conscious to all those of us involved, we say: “We’ll do it anyway.” That is an expression of love in action.

In [section 3.2](#) I shared our view on how emergence – novel insights around a collective inquiry – can happen through the synergy of and ongoing movement between ‘holding space for potential to manifest’ and ‘staying in inquiry for inspiration to show up’. I see this as the process that can guide us to collective wisdom. Now that we have reached the chapters describing *Circles of Creation*, we move from collective wisdom to generative, collective action. One of my greatest lessons on this journey has been that emergence, related to action, is quite simple: it’s just a matter of getting up and doing it!



**Radical amazement with the ordinary**

I prefer Enchantment to Enlightenment. May we embrace the divine ordinary. Chopping wood and carrying water.

— John Davis<sup>5</sup>

While the man of craft and technology surrendered the naturalness of man the domesticator, man today is also surrendering his laboriously acquired second nature, culture, by losing his own artistic skills and workmanship.

— Jean Gebser<sup>6</sup>

It was in Greece, at Axladitsa, where I originally started my writing, that Vanessa Reid evoked radical amazement as an element in the practice she calls ‘conscious kitchen’ (knowing where your ingredients come from, who prepared the food, etc.). She pronounced her radical amazement at how the peas are aligned in the pod, how the carrot radiates out from the centre, how the herbs grow along the side of the trail. The experience of radical amazement, too, is related with the practice of witnessing. It’s the joy of recognising the wonder in each other, and in all that surrounds us. It’s radical amazement about the ordinary – just a carrot, just me, just you, just our own uniqueness that feels to us just normal. Just one action, one next, minimal step. Just a try-out, a prototype, and then a next one...

The ordinary is all around us and we hardly notice, and there are novel combinations and synergies that we might not see because they are so simple! When we are present in a shared inquiry – collectively conscious – then we can point out the simple and novel combinations to each other; we suddenly see the treasures. There is an elegant simplicity and beauty, both in the ordinary and on that other side of complexity.

This radical amazement – some might call it *sacredness* – is a perspective we can have on everything, from the most mundane and most routine chores to any kind of spiritual practice, and all the way to the most technological innovation. If I just list what I have read today and yesterday, the radical amazement for life<sup>7</sup> and for the newly created links in how we live<sup>8</sup> and work together<sup>9</sup> – it is downright fantastic!

The story of Women Moving the Edge cannot by any mainstream standard be called a success. There were no huge crowds, we didn’t earn a lot of money, hardly anyone on the globe knows about it. But while it might not have been successful, it has been oh, so rich, with such deep ripple effects in all of our lives. What we did was really, really simple: we sat in circle, shared an inquiry, practiced a lot of witnessing and a lot of listening. There were no fancy techniques; no PowerPoint presentations, no specific goals to achieve. Still we created magic, we were filled with awe, curiosity, excitement and brimming with new insights. Our adventure eventually led to this practice called Collective Presencing, which is now being shared out into the world, inspiring others to practice it throughout the process of prototyping and manifestation.

We just lived our lives; we followed our inner guidance, our soul’s calling into our collective calling. We engaged wholeheartedly, with our vulnerability, sensations, dreams, dancing, drawing and everything else that poured forth. Also our intellect, our understanding of what is at play in the big theatre of the world. So much hardship to contend with, so many changes coming our way; we learned how to be with what is and comfortable with the not-knowing-yet. We also learned how to be conscious of all the good things in life that we so easily take for granted. It was simple. And it felt awesome! It still does. Embodied deep living is when radical amazement is possible.



### *Quotes from participants:*

I am resonating with the beauty of the ordinary. It seems that everything in Nature is what it is and can be appreciated as beautiful in its simply being and when we can get our judgement out of the way, that leads to a place of stillness. An utterly calm and wonderful place to be. And in that place everything is just right and just is.

— Diane

Let's be joyful about what we did. We generated something! The wonder! Whoever could have thought we could do such a thing?! We did it!! It is not to brag, but isn't this amazing?! Incredible. It's nothing to do with making money – we are all willing to contribute in our own ways – with money, with attention, our voices, preparation, harvest... Trusting the beauty, trusting timing... that leads to co-creation. To move your own flow, and knowing that your own flow is an essential thread in the collective weaving. Denying this leads to our fragmented minds.

— Ria

## Joy, radiance and bliss

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life; I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.

— Joseph Campbell <sup>10</sup>

Since reading the Hacker Ethic, <sup>11</sup> quite some years ago, I have known deep inside me that whatever is there to come or to build, joy and passion would need to be an integral part. Reading the story of how the operating system Linux came into being, and having lived with a son – then only 14 years old – who was full of passion about helping this community of programmers thrive, I knew it was a feature of the future that should not be denied.

I heard later, in many gatherings and trainings that I was part of, the need for more play. I wondered what people were actually searching or hoping for. It is not the play for its own sake, I guess, but this quality of lightness, instead of being so serious about the questions and intentions at hand.

People of my age (I'm over 60 now) have either had to behave, or work, or take responsibility – meaning that a lot of our patterns tend to make us somewhat over-serious. When I'm together with younger people, I notice they are more playful. I am reminded of my grandchildren (aged 0-10) who love to play and laugh the whole day long. Why don't we do that? What have we lost in our current version of growing up?

I do think we need more playfulness. We know and deeply realise that not everything can or will be nice and easy, but with – collectively conscious – groundedness and presence, the experience can be lighter, easier and still leave space for laughter, dancing, joy, awe and allurements. Being with trauma, fully realising all the ugly stuff that is going on in the world – witnessing it in a shared space – leaves also space for wonder, bliss and the awesomeness of this thing we call life on Earth. If you are able to live with your heart wide open, knowing quite well that awful experiences can happen, being able to keep the joy in your life while mainstream society is in a process of collapse, this seems to me like a sign that you have given up your attachments to outcome. Most of your ego patterns are gone and you are able to live this life as the unfolding, creative event that it truly is.

I wrote early in 2009 that I wanted life to be more intense! In my diary I find:



Things can be serious, but don't need to be heavy. Serious things can be light, from stillness. The heaviness is not of life itself; it is what we attach to it.

Flowers grow,

birds fly

and humans co-create.

That's to enjoy, and challenging.

That's life!

Is there heaviness in the bud opening?

in the rain pouring down?

Is not lightness that goes with life?

Many times, in my original Belgian women's circle, when we would sit in a shared silence I would come to this specific experience that I used to name 'joyful sacredness'. A deep, inner joy that feels sacred. Helen described it as: joy is a reward for coherence and alignment. When we pay attention to alignment inside and out, we are in flow, it is blissful. If we indeed live in the practice of constantly moving toward greater alignment and coherence, with a greater and ever expanding holier/wholer whole, in ever greater holons, bringing more bits into the batter, then that full participation ([section 6.2](#)) seems to bring forth some of the powers Brian Swimme discovered: synergy, interrelatedness, emergence and radiance!

In [section 6.4](#) we mentioned: What if following your passion-bliss-joy were the way to live, and creating the new world would be a by-product? Can we imagine all doing that at the same time, in alignment with each other? Life is happening anyway, whether we participate fully consciously or not.

According to Brian Swimme, the powers of the universe are not separate powers, but work together in an ultimate and larger radiance, which is beyond description. He says "part of our intention is to be in mutually enhancing relationship." If more of us stepped into our vulnerability and our unique power, following our soul's calling in service of a collective calling, would we not be a good example of radiance in the human realm? Vulnerability – as a core element in love-making – seems to be key. It is a gift to ourselves and to the others in the circle. In vulnerability we open up more, something pours through the cracks of a no-longer-needed identity, and a wider space opens up – to embrace more (of others) and radiate more (to others). Radiance bursts forth from the vulnerable core. Surrendering to the wonder of it all, overcome by the delight of each fresh encounter, radiance is born.

Can we hold that much joy? The vastness, the intensity? This level of aliveness is at once exciting and humbling. Those of us who are used to numbing our senses tend to jump out of the intensity. Others of us seek peak experiences but then miss the sense of wholeness, alignment and mutuality. I have already stressed the importance of learning to [hold a lot of intensity](#). It is an embodied practice, to hold the intensity of collective trauma, of not-knowing-yet, and also of this exciting aliveness! While we can speak of different forms of intensity, the capacity to stay centred through the intensity is the same.

True radiance doesn't care what it looks like. That's how I understand the last of Angeles Arrien's four principles: be present; show up; speak your truth, and don't attach to the outcome.<sup>12</sup> It seems difficult for our Western minds to understand that the point in taking action is not to manifest or to create, but to be radiant with life! More and more. The integration of being and doing/living seems like the next stage of species growth, opening up whole new vistas. Radiance seems to be the by-product of a radical generosity, both with our many ways of knowing and with our surrendering to receive the knowing that surrounds and interpenetrates us. We are beginning to understand that to live in bliss is within our reach. We can do evolutionary work in a celebratory way! Do we really need to buy into the idea that it first needs to get worse? What if it is not about getting out of the mess, but getting into radiance, joy, pleasure, flow?

*Quote from participant:*

That for me is really participating in the radiance – this abandon to *the joie de vie*, the *élan vital*, the magnificent burgeoning life force that we've shut down to in our civilisation, but it's STILL THERE!

— Helen

Source: Wondering what is becoming possible?

Spirit: Curious for the new insights and answers

Life: Embracing more aliveness.

*Quotes from participants:*

What comes up for me is the word 'magnificence' – health, vitality, coherence are all great words & concepts & things to have, but it's WAY bigger than health & vitality, it's this magnificence! How wonderful it all is! And maybe that's the intention – to join in all that, instead of manifesting something.

— Ria

As I listen to all of this, I am aware of how attached I am, fond of my feet of clay; and aware of my appetite, my thirsting for a simple life. How paradoxically that, for me, so strongly reflects or embodies the magnificence. ... Somehow the striving for more, for better, for further, is ceasing now; just in order to sink into the magnificence of what is, exactly as it is. We speak a lot about presencing the future, calling in the future. But what would we be calling the future into if not into the already always unspeakably abundant and magnificent present that so often we just don't see, here in plain sight. Maybe part of participation in the radiance is to hold that steady state – in a way that nourishes the soul, and not getting caught up in turmoil – personal, and in the world over all.

— Helen

Awe can blow apart any sense that we know what is going on. The question is, are we looking for the comfort of probing what we already believe or are we looking to experience life as it is beyond our preconceptions. One thing life keeps showing to me is that it is not what I think it is, that my mental frameworks are temporary life rafts that are swept away by the currents of existence.

— Anthony Lawlor<sup>13</sup>

*Quote from participant:*

The point of the interpenetration is almost to increase the intensity. It is to increase the interrelatedness of all the dimensions in their different aspects – it increases the complexity and it increases the consciousness that is capable of experiencing the magnificence. It is all a huge symphony of joy! On all imaginable levels. Learning to share that with other beings... to open up our consciousness so that others can partake in our senses, but we can then also partake in their vistas, which we normally can't with our sensory systems. So, it is very much about the interplay and sharing of information. It seems to be about experiencing in many different ways, an ever increasing whole. It is all very ecstatic.

— Helen



## Collective lovemaking with potential

It is surely no coincidence that the German word for ‘creative’ is *schöpferisch*, from *schöpfen*, ‘to draw up water’, for the creative person ‘draws up’ from the wellsprings of life, from the life-soul, bringing to the light of day and the thinking realm of consciousness what has been forgotten as well as what has not yet been realized. The creative person externalizes what has been recalled; recollection becomes memory.

— Jean Gebser<sup>14</sup>

This might be a strange title, yet it comes closest to describing what a *Circle of Creation* is actually about. As mentioned before, my original focus was on the future instead of on potential, and I asked myself: “Collective lovemaking with the future, what would it look like? All elements of lovemaking, wild, deep, soft, everything!?” Actually it is a very good metaphor as it brings up all the lovely feelings of lovemaking, now applied to thinking and sensing the future/potential, of what is to come. By now, we have experienced it: the joy of being in collective flow, like in a collective improvisation, which interweaves ever more aspects of the cosmos. Not just one small group of musicians, but all co-creating together. In exactly that way which is always juicy, always edgy!

It is crucial to be aware of the liminal space, between what is and what is possible. I notice it all the time in the train or underground, people are inside their own bubble, not aware of any connection with anyone else. They withdraw into themselves. Love is when I am aware that there is relationship, when energy is going back and forth. If we put love between us and the potential... us and the wild, us and the deep... the soft, everything? The collective sourcing, the sharing of the pain and trauma, playing music without asking the group for permission, reading a poem for the first time, it all leads us to realise: to be alive is to be on the edge, together!

For practitioners of *Collective Presencing* this sensing into the potential has become a habit, a normal state of being. Always – collectively conscious – sensing into what is trying to form, what possible connections might lead to a next minimal step? It is so joyful and expectant, as if constantly on the outlook for what will happen next time your lover is around. The sense of joyful expectation. The sense of Santa Claus bringing gifts that are a full surprise, but just right.

As practitioners, we constantly tune our ears to notice the story coming into disclosure. Having been with practitioners in online circles, reaching across continents, we are sure we can now do this across the planet. The potential for this way of gathering together has been amplified and magnified. We can connect across many so-called boundaries; they are permeable, there can be flow, in simplicity and with a lot of subtlety.

## Manifestation – birthing – creation – generativity?

I struggled long with what to call this quality of circle, until I finally settled on *Circle of Creation*. I was wondering, do we really manifest something? The root of the word manifest comes from the Latin ‘manus’, meaning ‘hand’. Essentially, what is manifest is what can be held with the hand, something solid, tangible and visibly stable. To me, there was too much of the implicit assumption of linear causality in that verb: first there is nothing, then we do something and then it is manifested.

Another version was: are we birthing the new? The mother is not birthing, but giving birth to the child. Did the couple create the child? Did we create this new collective practice? Do I create my garden, when it is full of the mystery of how the plants grow from the seeds? How the perennials come back every year and still grow the same kind of flowers?

Do you remember the dessert cart phenomenon, from the first Moving the Edge gathering? Nobody proposed it, nobody agreed, but one person stood up and the rest followed: the break happened. Nobody manifested this coffee break; nobody created it – or maybe we all did it? Including the waiter who had brought the cart into the conference room. I think our language is just too poor to express this quality of collectively-being-in-the-doing. Most of our language names the linear causality, the manifestation, the things. We long for words and concepts that speak of the complex intricacy, the interweaving, the interpenetration, the ever-widening coherence, the unfolding capacity of ever more generativity amongst us.

### *Quotes from participants:*

Something else that I have noticed from going back through my journal – when you go back over the notes (and our harvest of notes is high quality), with hindsight you can see the prophetic quality. The whole business of holding space for the emergence of the future potential... and is sensing the future not causing it? Is that true? To what extent is holding space for the emerging potential making it more likely to happen; rather than something else?

— Helen

Maybe holding the space and sensing into what is held has the power to manifest?

— Judy

The Bushmen say: “forever there is a dream dreaming us”.

## Notes

1: David Bohm: *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. ↓

2: Brian Swimme: *The Powers of the Universe*. ↓

- 3: Nancy White: *Tinkering and Playing with Knowledge*. ↓
- 4: Jean Gebser: *The Ever-Present Origin* ↓ p.300.
- 5: John Davis: comment in blog post, Magellan, June 2012.
- 6: Jean Gebser: *The Ever-Present Origin* ↓ p.306.
- 7: *Want to build an organization that lasts?* ↓
- 8: ... *a Multifaceted Approach to Shared Living* ↓
- 9: ... *the Way Carpooling Works Around the World*. ↓
- 10: Joseph Campbell: *The Power of Myth*. ↓
- 11: Pekka Himanen: *The Hacker Ethic*. ↓
- 12: Angeles Arrien: *Website*. ↓
- 13: Anthony Lawlor: Facebook, Summer 2013.
- 14: Jean Gebser: *The Ever-Present Origin*, ↓ p.319.



## 9.7 Opening to We-Now-Here and Potential



We are coming to the end of our last chapter, where our focus has been on describing what full generativity might be and might look like. It is clear from our descriptions that it requires a collective-conscious intimacy with all of life. I really mean: all of life. The wild, the exotic, the magic, the subtle, the alluring included. We have spent enough time noting that our collective witnessing capacity needs to expand to hold collective pain and trauma, to make sure that these so-called ‘positive qualities’ are not a denial of the so-called other side. On the contrary, it is our ability to hold intensity – including the big historical and cultural traumas – that allows us to hold ever more life-affirming energies.

### Observing what is in We-Now-Here and Potential

As I write this it is mid-August. Still quiet summer time for me, but my attention is beginning to shift towards what the next working year will hold. With our 4-person small business-in-formation, we have also been wondering what kind of workshops we will offer next year. Strangely, I have not had many ideas so far – just one. But sitting in a circle (online) this week, as the conversation unfolded, one person offered some ideas, which then triggered in me connections to new names of people to work with. The next day, I reached out to one of those new names, she responded with enthusiasm, and we arranged to talk the following week. That, for me, is living in the soup of life. You don’t have a clue, but you trust life and its unfolding – you trust, too, your team with its collective intelligence, wisdom and sensing – and suddenly something appealing just appears. The one small idea that I did have seems to be unfolding in a good direction and a conversation is planned. Of course, we will need some longer-term planning as we nail down the organisation, but for now we are happy to muddle along in this soup, taking it one step at a time. We have opened our minds to the notion that this soup will nourish us, as long as we are present to ourselves, to our collective field, and to the responses from life all around us. We don’t need to cling on to strict planning as we would if we didn’t trust what life will bring. Our intention is clear, and we hold our minds open for what will unfold.

## Accepting what is in We-Now-Here and Potential

*Accepting what is in We-Now-Here and Potential* implies a deeply embodied understanding that we need to bring our authentic capacities together in a collectively conscious way, otherwise any potential that we might sense will not be realized. Coming back to our small business start-up, some time ago we realized that, although we each have our own business, we cannot fully realise whatever is in our midst by remaining separate units. Accepting this requires taking many steps – including many administrative ones (not my favorite pastime). But we do accept that, and act accordingly.

In another team where we use Collective Presencing as our basic practice, we have accepted that there is a potential that we all resonate with and feel called by, but so far the time and place have not been right to bring it into any manifest form. We invited and invoked our shared inquiry, but so far it hasn't gelled and so we accept to remain in the sensing phase, holding the not-knowing-yet.

## Honouring what is in We-Now-Here and Potential

In a next phase – and again, not in any linear way – where you collectively deeply honour that you are in service of a potential – the process of unfolding moves from the more frustrated feeling of is-this-going-to-become-anything-at-all? to a sense of being in love with the collective potential, where we looking out for what can happen if we keep our senses open, collectively. Our attention is geared towards: what is hidden in the gift that we are receiving from life? We do not rush in and tear off the wrapping paper, but we calmly untie the knots, of which sometimes there are many.

Honouring here means seeing our efforts not as a struggle with the knots in the ribbon, or with the wrapping paper, but as engaging in a continuous and collective piece of action research, learning with every step.

## Living what is in We-Now-Here and Potential

If we honour the continuous collective inquiry, if we accept that we are in the service of a collective potential, and are open and ready to live and work in the soup of life, then our lives and our projects will always be in the process of becoming; always creative, always generating more life-affirming action. It is amazing to have almost daily feelings of gratitude that give you a soft heart: for yourself, for your colleagues, and for what you see happening in the world – even if that is sometimes quite ugly. It is amazing that the gratitude is not only for the major breakthroughs or sudden insights, but also for the daily chores – like when you find someone has already done the dishes, helpfully cleared something away or attended to some small detail – and 'everyday' experiences, like noticing the flowers along the road, seeing the clouds passing overhead, and so much more. Work flows easily, insights come frequently and in their right timing when we are engaged in a team like this. The practice of Collective Presencing gives you all this, and more!

## 9.8 Circle of Creation



I tend to go along with the idea of an expanding universe; I don't have an Omega. I don't think there's a final end point; I think it's a song that goes on singing. We don't sing the song in order to come to the end of it. The divine Self-expression isn't trying to complete itself. We impose that idea because we generally do things with some kind of a defined goal, but here we're doing something with the Infinite, and so it doesn't have a limited or defined goal for itself. It's trying to express the Infinite in the various media of finitude. I would say that life attains its goal – it becomes what it is supposed to be, fulfills itself – precisely by never coming to an end. If it ever did come to an end in which there was no more novelty, there would be no more life; it would be dead.

— Beatrice Bruteau <sup>1</sup>

The *Circle of Presence* gave us insights and a methodology for collectively reaching a place where we all are present and can start to live from collective wisdom. A *Circle of Creation* is built on the assumption that speaking, acting and living from stillness, as participants in collectives, is an acquired skill and that we are ready to jump even deeper and wider. This will make our circles, gatherings and teams ready for a deeper emergence that is in service of and in resonance with more of the world and the Earth around us. It is a search to live constantly in the emergent and come together to full generativity.

The difference between a *Circle of Presence* – where we learn how to become really present together, so that we are ready to presence more of the present potential – and a *Circle of Creation* is, well... about creating and being fully generative in a collective way. I remember being in the gathering at Hazelwood House – the first international

gathering that I was part of, in September 2005 – and asking myself about this difference: Do we feel a need to change (something that is already here)? Or: Do we feel a need to co-create (something totally new)?

It is clear by now, that we understand creation here as an artistic and collective expression where really something new comes forward, where you all feel really alive in the process. To me, I think that's what we, as humans, are actually looking for and we can use this quality of experience as hallmark or benchmark to gauge how we are doing.

A *Circle of Creation* is a deepening of what is possible in the inter-subjective space, the We-space, but also fully Here and fully Now. It is a human capacity that hasn't been possible before because it integrates full individuality and authenticity with a collective calling and purpose. This is uncharted terrain. In a way, we try to connect the deep individuation that is so typical for Western society nowadays with the subtler community and connection levels of indigenous societies; or as it can be recognised in mysticism.

You will notice in the map that follows that we build on the movements described in the first map, both vertical and horizontal. The process of unfolding authenticity, integrating more and more subtle information, jumps to an unfolding generativity. The movement of widening balance, becomes a widening coherence, as our awareness of interweaving and interpenetration grows.

In a *Circle of Creation*, we are no longer limited to the space of conversation or the space of a group's meeting. Continually expanding in all dimensions, we see that conversations among humans are 'too small'. We are expanding our awareness into nature and Earth itself, into the history of the land and the people, into the future and into more subtle levels all around. It also includes a deeper alignment with space and time. We will have noticed along the way that we have had to give up many good intentions and ideas because they didn't seem to be aligned, expressed in (not) right place and (not) right timing. This is what we call the *We-in-Now* and *We-in-Here*. From this total collective presence, now and here, we can live more of the present potential with qualities of radical amazement and joy, living – collectively conscious – a gathered, omnipresent generativity.

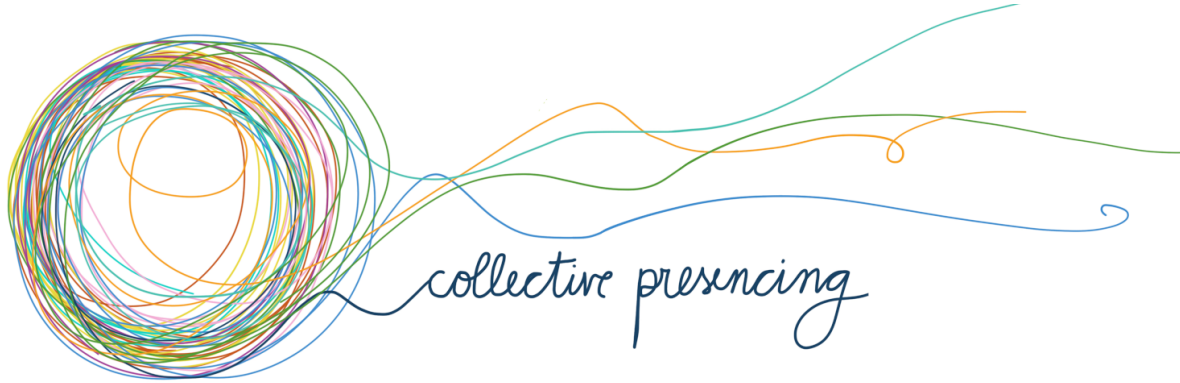
## Circle of Creation Map



<b>Circle of Creation</b> Building collective capacity for Generative Action in service of life	<b>Process of Subtle Outer Alignment: Widening Coherence</b> Growing Awareness of Interweaving / Interpenetration			
	<b>I-in-Now</b>  <i>Focus on:</i> my soul's calling  <i>Open to:</i> subtle interweaving in my self	<b>We-in-Now</b>  <i>Focus on:</i> the collective calling  <i>Open to:</i> subtle interweaving within collective	<b>We-in-Here</b>  <i>Focus on:</i> subtle place and time  <i>Open to:</i> subtle interweaving with context	<b>We-Now-Here and Potential</b>  <i>Focus on:</i> full generativity  <i>Open to:</i> total intimacy with all of life
	<b>Process of Subtle Inner Alignment: Unfolding Generativity</b>	Open your identity to your Soul's Calling   Notice the diversity present in the group  What is the Collective Soul calling us to do?	Observe synchronicities, the interweaving of all of life	Notice feedback from life itself  Open your mind 'to be in the soup' of life
		Witness the resistance or grandiosity in your personality  See your self as unique human being	Holding intensity and not-knowing  Radical patience and trust	The field of potential in need of us  Inviting and invoking
		Projections onto 'the system'  Participate fully in life	Weaving ourselves back into nature  What if it is easy?  Holding collective pain in evolutionary context	In love with potential  Continuous collective action research
		Express your soul's calling through interweaving life, work and passion  Live and enjoy an <b>Emergent Soulful Life</b>	Practice and host Collective Sourcing  The group <b>acting as an ecosystem</b>	Express all knowing for this specific project, here & now  Act collectively <b>on the next, minimal, elegant step</b>  <b>Enjoy a Creative and Generative Life</b>

## Notes

1: Beatrice Bruteau: from *A Song that Goes on Singing*. ↓



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The up-arrows ( ↑ ) link up to where the item was referenced above.

The 'W' links link to relevant pages on Wikipedia.

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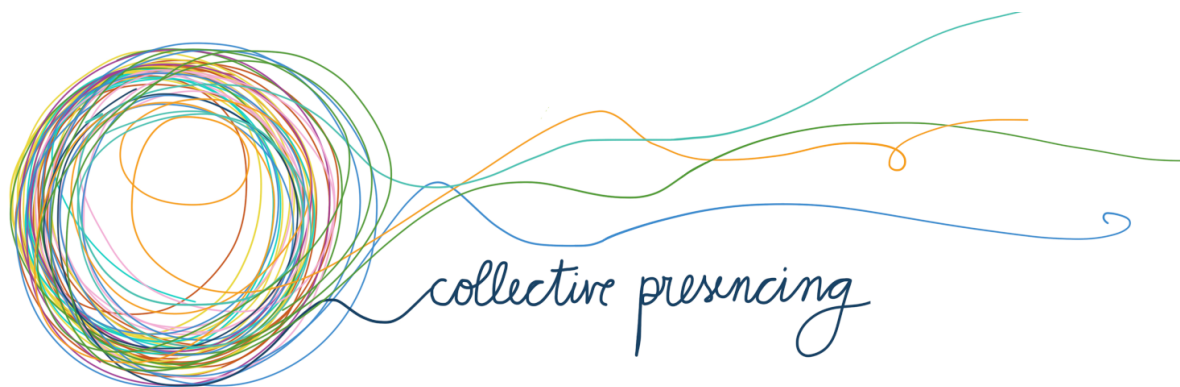
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## About the author

Ria Baeck has boundless curiosity for exploring aspects of life where her inner sense intuitively feels that there is something of real value hidden, waiting to be brought out into the open. Always on the lookout for new connections in work, collaboration and co-creation, she continues to hold space for the question: what is the next piece of potential that is ready to be made sense of and come to life? Thus she helps open up paths for others to follow.

In Ria's three decades of professional experience she has mastered the arts of creating safe learning spaces and of supporting genuinely participatory, innovative approaches to life and work. She brings a well-developed embodied presence, an inner calm, and highly developed sensing skills, all of which are vital to the design of emergent processes — including gatherings, learning groups and action research projects — of which she has initiated, designed or led many.

Ria loves understanding the underlying nature of life as it is lived together. She is forever digging down to a deeper level, to bring to light the essence of how we deal with complexity, individually and collectively. This naturally leads on to sharing those insights with others, and asking the next deeper level of questions that appear.

Facets of Ria are interwoven throughout this book, in which she shares many of her stories, interpreting and mapping them out as far as she has ventured, in the hope that those maps will serve to guide others towards journeys that lead them yet further.

She was born and raised, and is still rooted, in the Flemish countryside, where the heart of her practice is nourished in a small community, sharing a home and tending the land. At weekends you can find her in the garden, enriching the soil and growing vegetables organically. Also growing is her family, with three sons and seven grandchildren, so far...

Ria holds a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology (Leuven, Belgium); and has been professionally trained in Art of Hosting, Systemic Constellations and Emotional Bodywork.

## About the editor

So how come the book sounds like a native English speaker wrote it? Helen Titchen Beeth is one of Ria's housemates, who was raised and educated in England. She has been a professional translator as well as taking part in many gatherings. She lives Collective Presencing and holds it dear to her heart. So Helen was the perfect person to take every word that Ria wrote and lovingly edit the draft text into the fluent and resonant language you will find here. She also took the bulk of the pictures which gracefully adorn the book!

## About the technologist

Simon Grant has been engaged with the edges interfacing between the human and the technical for decades. When he came across Ria, late in 2018, the book was a series of blog posts. Wanting to read and search through it as one piece, he turned it into a single HTML file. Ria welcomed that, and Simon worked on it further, formatting it with CSS, checking carefully through all the references, making many little corrections and enhancements as he went, and collaborating in fitting it into and enhancing the website. Meanwhile, he joined Ria's and Helen's household...



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