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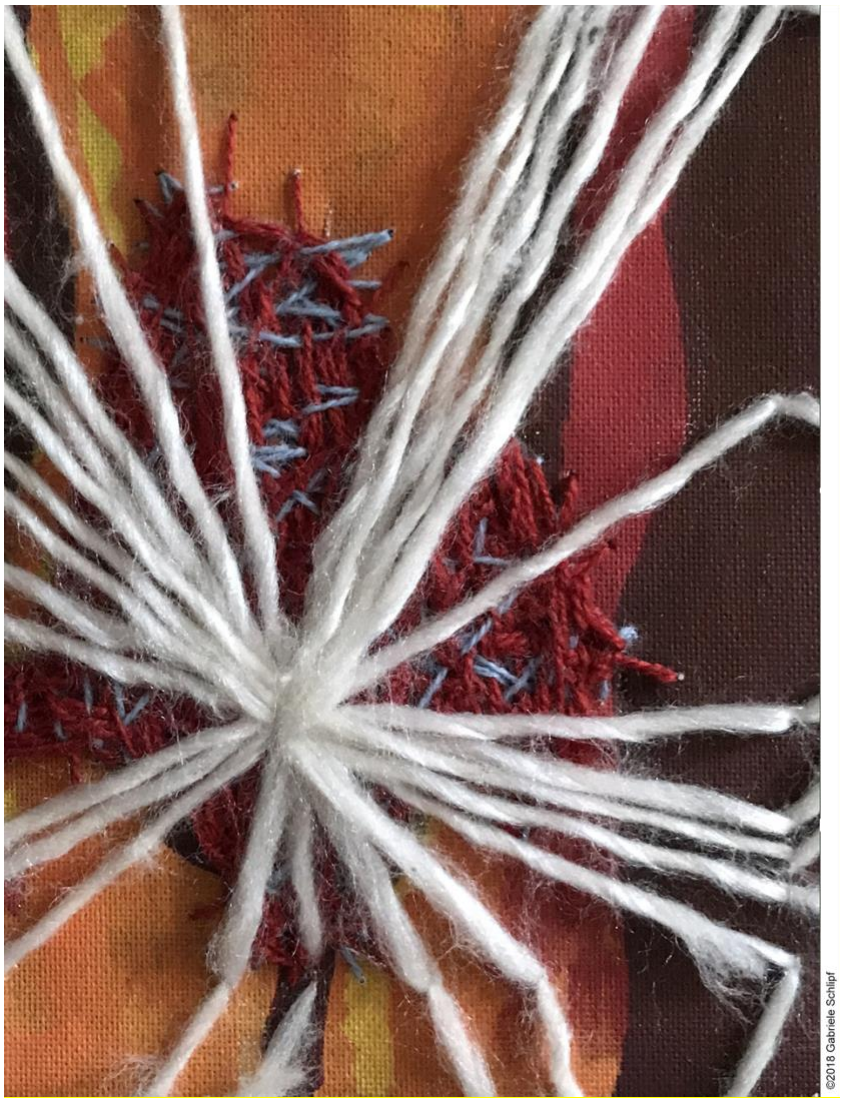

FEATURED ARTICLES

Radical Collaboration to Transform Social Systems
Adam Kahane

The MAP to Compassion
Deborah Heifetz

Social Poetry
John Stubley

Advancing the Field of Presencing
Olen Gunnlaugson

A Deep Dive into Social Field Shifts
Lukas Herrmann

Nurturing Activism
Antonio Starnino

Dismantling Structural Racism in Organisational Systems
Rebecca Freeth, Akanimo Akpan, Mahmood Sonday

The Extended Citizens' Assembly Model for Collaborative Governance
Antonio Casado da Rocha

AND MORE!

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Editorial

Entanglements:

Working with the Invisible Dimension of Systems Transformation

Oliver Koenig, Eva Pomeroy, Megan Seneque, and Otto Scharmer

Crafting an Editorial is not a trivial undertaking. Rather, it is a task of deliberation and synthesis which causes us, as an Editorial Team, to reflect on the entanglements of our own *becoming,* as individuals and a team, with and alongside the journal's evolution. As we take pause and look back on the archives of our past issues, a pattern emerges: we see a collectively written script that weaves contemporary and poignant analysis, global context, and thematic exploration, all serving to guide readers in their own inner and outer work, whilst also delineating and articulating further the contours of the emergent, evolving praxis of Awareness-Based Systems Change.

In a previous Editorial, we wrote, "The complexity and multi-dimensionality of our existence is at odds with the way the human mind has been taught and learned to behave" (Koenig et al., 2022, p. 2). This feeling of being at odds with a complex and multi-dimensional reality has only intensified since that time. In his blog highlighting the way in which pervasive, accelerating crises have come to interact, Tooze (2022) writes, "What was once a relatively legible map has become a tangled mess" (para 4). Perhaps the better term for it is "intra-act"—a term coined by Barad (2007). Through it, she captures the mutual constitution of entangled agencies, both human and non-human, which in the context of our

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polycrisis ridden situation deeply challenges our ability to cope, and thus threatens our ability to be in contact with a shared reality and shared sense of that which wants to break through. Rosi Braidotti (2019) eloquently summarizes this collective sentiment:

> Fatigue and fear overlap and accumulate to produce a feeling of utter impotence. This closing down of the horizon of possible actions is the symptom of negativity of our times. Negativity expresses itself in a (...) dimming of a sense of possibility, which triggers a systemic fragmentation and a shattering of our relational capacity. This weakening of the desire to act often feeds an appeal to external powers to take over the tasks of organizing how to live our lives. This negativity ultimately brings about a shrinking of our ability to take *in* and *on* the world that we are in, simply because it hurts too much. (emphasis in original, p. 179)

We feel these entanglements manifest viscerally in our individual and collective reactions to the resurgence of escalating conflict in Israel/Palestine, where entrenched division and collective trauma has sparked new cycles of revenge and retribution. In the thick of it all, the polarizing force of this and other conflicts not only forges divisions between nations but also fractures alliances within movements dedicated to regenerative and peace-supporting causes. From an Awareness-Based Systems Change perspective, these fractures underscore the profound impact of the relational dimension in collaborative systems change endeavors.

A recent opinion video showcased in the New York Times (Goldbaum et al., 2023) aptly portrays social media's role in this polarization, noting its algorithmic tendency to simplify complex issues into binary choices, effectively becoming a place "where nuance goes to die" (Goldbaum et al., 2023, 3:30). This highlights the need for careful consideration of technological advancements, like artificial intelligence, as both transformative and potentially divisive tools. While most of us are still grappling with the societal impacts of these technologies, most would agree: annihilating the 'other' is not a solution. Yet, this understanding does not shape what's happening collectively now. Humberto Maturana's concept of “the legitimate other” (Maturana, 1988) seems crucial in this context. Embracing this concept requires us to respect different realities and be curious about their origins, rather than seeing them as threats. It's a perspective that calls for reconciliation that begins within, acknowledging *the other that resides in each of us*, which, if not addressed, perpetuates the external and internal patterns that re-produce conflict.

To break free from this deadlock, we must overcome the barriers that confine us. In his book, *Crack Capitalism*, John Holloway (2010) writes “The need for a lasting and radical reorganization of society is more urgent than ever, but we can only get there if we recognize, create, expand and multiply all kinds of ruptures in the structure of power” (p. 42, translated from the German version). Equally, Awareness-Based Systems Change is not about *breaking down* but about

transcending and opening up into the fissures and ruptures—the cracks, not just in a physical or political sense but also in the context of different ways of thinking that segment humanity into isolated enclaves of thought and identity. In order to do that it becomes necessary to not only rethink, but also reimagine, the intellectual, epistemological, and ontological foundations of our civilization as well as our own make-up as individuals. Such decolonializing endeavors do not simply involve intellectual work, but also *affective* work and *relational* work which "entails mending broken relationships in ways that honor the integrity of this difficult process by focus on the development of deep respect, reciprocity, trust, and consent rather than prioritizing the end or outcome in transactional ways" (Stein et al., 2021, p. 7).

At the heart of Awareness-Based Systems Change lies a profound recognition of the complex and mostly invisible interconnectedness of our actions, thoughts, and the built and natural (eco-)systems we inhabit. Cultural anthropologist Marilyn Strathern's (1995) profound insight resonates strongly here: in order to understand what is happening beneath the surface of the unit of any analysis, neither the individual nor the system in isolation is sufficient but rather, it is the web of relationships that extends beyond the human sphere that sheds light on lived phenomena. When we extend this understanding to Awareness-Based Systems Change, where the unit of analysis—and intervention—is systemic change, the implication is that change at any scale is initiated, supported and sustained by changed relationships.

Change of this nature, relational change, can never be mandated let alone managed. It is through attending and connecting the quality of our inner-outer relationships that we are able to create the conditions—an open mind, open heart, and open will—for the relational changes that undergird systems change. This demands approaches that lean away from static, pre-determined future outcomes into creative, embodied and dynamic processes, that emphasize connection to a collective sense of purpose actualized in the present moment. The curated articles in this issue highlight such approaches and their potential for activating and supporting systemic change.

This issue is a call for conscious engagement with the complexities of our systems, a call to make visible the invisible and a call to create pathways that enable us to sense into collective purpose and shape a future in resonance with it. We see the evolution of our journal as a microcosm of this call in its own right as it brings together and connects a confluence of actors and efforts already seeding the future. Most importantly, as we read and work with the contributions to this issue we hear a dialogue among diverse voices engaging in, and experimenting with, individual and collective ways of sense-and world-making as well as *being in* the world.

Circling back to the beginning of this Editorial, we confront our intense connection with the world—a connection that often leaves us feeling overwhelmed and numb. Yet, it's precisely in this state of overwhelming entanglement that we find the urgency to re-examine and reshape the systems

that define our reality. This process involves recognizing the intricate web of relationships we are part of and the critical need for regenerative systemic decolonization. It's a journey of transforming our vulnerabilities into strengths, a theme that Rosi Braidotti (2019) captures compellingly:

> Accepting one's vulnerability is the starting point for a process of transforming, it collectively and socially, expresses a sort of epistemological humility that reiterates the never ending nature of the process of becoming. It defends community-based experiments to transform the negative conditions and states into affirmative alternatives. It is a praxis that promotes action and knowledge out of negativity and pain. This pro-active activism manifests the living being's shared ability to actualize and potentiate different possibilities. This transformative energy is the core of affirmative ethics. (p. 175)

We, ourselves, are inspired, challenged and humbled by the work, thought and praxis represented in this issue.

Articles in This Issue

This sixth issue is the most extensive of all our issues, with more submissions and more accepted articles than ever before. Time will tell whether this is a blip in the journey or a reflection of the continued maturation and increasing recognition of our journal. We feel optimistic: just before the release of this issue, we reached the milestone of more than 100,000 abstract and article reads, and in less than three years since its inception JASC articles, collectively, have already been cited almost two-hundred times.

At the beginning of this Editorial we wrote about the journal's co-evolution, to which this issue is testament: we are delighted to introduce the first article of our new format co-curated and developed by our new supporting editor Fiona McKenzie together with Editorial Core Team member Megan Seneque. This new section of the Journal is entitled *Innovations in Praxis*. It serves as yet another expression of the journal's intention "that we cannot democratize the ´know-how´ that underlies this work until we can illuminate and articulate what is happening in deep systems change and how it happens, and then make that knowledge widely available" (Koenig et al., 2021, p. 2). The new format is intended to foster a space for practitioners who want to share their work in an explorative and authentic way, but are not seeking a standard and peer-reviewed journal paper submission. This section will showcase stories of change that recognize and link to the relational field and the context in which new practices are being initiated. In utilizing the term *Praxis* we emphasize 'change in action,' the ever evolving practical application of concepts and ideas in the real world. Praxis constantly evolves through *the doing* and reflexivity in relation to the doing, just as it influences the doer (Freire, 1968). We distinguish this from 'practice' which tends to imply established or repeatable routines or acts. With

praxis, we welcome the inevitable complexity and messiness of learning and transformation.

This issue opens with a *Commentary from the Field*, from our newest Editorial Board member Injairu Kulundu-Bolus. In her lyrical thought piece "On Regenerative African Futures: Sovereignty, Belonging, Death and Forgiveness as Fertile Paradoxes for Decolonial Soul Work," she explores into the dynamic complexities of African futures. Through a sensorial engagement with the paradoxes that often hinder progress, Kulundu-Bolus challenges the binary thinking that limits our capacity for radical transformation. Reflecting on the collaborative journey at Rhodes University's Environmental Learning Research Centre, this Commentary argues for a soulful grounding to navigate and embrace the paradoxical realities of sovereignty, belonging, death, and forgiveness. It proposes that understanding and integrating these elements can create a sanctuary for expansive personal and communal growth, and lays the groundwork for a living decolonial project that transgresses outdated norms and fosters creative nourishment for emerging futures. As an Editorial Team, we experience Kulundu-Bolus's commentary as an embodiment of the core tenets of Awareness-Based Systems Change.

This issue features our second *Invited Article*, an occasional format that allows us to showcase pathbreakers in the field whose writing represents a significant body of work developed over time and across multiple contexts. In his article, "Radical Collaboration to Transform Social Systems: Moving Forward Together with Love, Power, and Justice," Adam Kahane takes the readers on a three-decade journey of transformative practice and theory, in which he articulates an innovative approach to social change. Drawing from diverse stakeholder experiences across various international contexts, this piece narrates the evolution of radical collaboration. This method seeks not just to reform but to fundamentally transform social systems by harnessing the universal human drives of love, power, and justice, navigating through social complexities with the intent to enact swift, scalable, and equitable change. With a perspective that embraces conflict and experimentation, this approach serves as a compass rather than a prescriptive route, offering a strategic map for understanding and moving within our social landscape towards collective transformation.

This issue includes six original *Peer-Reviewed Articles* in total. The first, "The MAP to Compassion: A Systems-Based Model of Human Needs," by Deborah Heifetz was initially inspired by her fieldwork in Israeli-Palestinian peace processes and could not be more timely or necessary. In her article, she introduces the Human Needs Map, a diagnostic tool derived from decades of Praxis, designed to decipher the complex interplay of human needs and emotions that often disrupt relationships and incite conflict. This systemic model illuminates our protective instincts, demonstrating how unmet needs and emotions dynamically interact, influence behavior, and can perpetuate conflict. By providing a language to articulate the interconnectedness of needs and emotions, the model offers new pathways to understanding, healing, and

narrative transformation. Heifetz draws attention to the model's broader implications for designing societal and cultural structures that more effectively consider human needs and emotions, offering insights into peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and applying it first-hand to the deadlocked context of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

In his seminal piece "Social Poetry: Introduction to Foundations and Tools," John Stubley opens us to an approach to social arts both theoretically derived and embedded within a lineage of praxis. Through this piece, Stubley offers a deep dive into the transformative power of the human imagination in understanding and shaping social realities. He proposes that by developing our capacity to perceive the dynamic interrelationships and growth of social phenomena through metaphor and conscious image perception, we can align our cognition with the living processes of society and nature. The concept of Social Poetry, as explored in the article, moves beyond traditional ideologies and aims to strike a balance between seeing social phenomena as purely external or entirely human-created and viewing it as internally and socially constructed. This novel approach, borrowing from Goethean phenomenology, seeks to reveal the inherent theories within phenomena, offering a holistic vision of social unity that can inform and inspire the responsible evolution of civilization. More than just an intellectual project, the article also offers numerous concrete and practical starting points for those wishing to put this work into practice.

Olen Gunnlaugson in his article "Advancing the Field of Presencing: Five Principles to Inform the Development of Emerging Presencing Approaches" proposes a development in the field of presencing research that moves beyond the established and widely-used Theory U framework. Introducing the concept of Emerging Presencing Approaches (EPAs) and drawing insights and discoveries unearthed from stewarding the lineage of Dynamic Presencing, Gunnlaugson presents five foundational principles aimed at nurturing a more diverse, trans-disciplinary exploration of presencing. These principles are designed to embrace different epistemological, ontological, and teleological perspectives, as well as to deepen the embodied consciousness within presencing practitioners. This article serves as a call to broaden the conversation around presencing, inviting new insights and methodologies that could enrich the mastery and application of presencing in both personal and professional realms. Gunnlaugson's work, particularly his proposition of 'letting be,' an essential overlooked gesture within presencing, invites practitioners to embrace the liminality of presencing and to discover deeper insights that emerge from a more profound engagement with the 'U' process.

Lukas Hermann's article, "A Deep Dive into Social Field Shifts: Examining Field Autonomy and Malleability During an Awareness-Based Change Program," utilizes the concept of a social field framework recently developed by Pomeroy and Hermann (2023). The study investigates how social fields—that are characterized by a certain degree of autonomy that sustains interaction patterns—can be influenced and transformed. Through longitudinal research

conducted in three schools participating in an awareness-based change program, Hermann illustrates the power of relational awareness to disrupt entrenched cycles of de-generativity in relationships and foster generative, responsive interactions. The findings reveal varying degrees of field malleability, with some institutions experiencing extensive transformation and others retaining persistent patterns, thereby providing valuable insights into the conditions necessary for effective organizational change. The study calls attention to the importance of understanding and navigating the inner dimensions of organizational life to achieve authentic systemic transformation.

Antonio Starnino's article "Nurturing Activism: Addressing Relational Tensions Through the Social Field" also makes use of social fields as an analytical framework, examining the impact of relational dynamics within activist groups. Starnino references the social field as a framework to understand and address the ideological and social tensions that arise from power inequalities, which are identified as significant barriers to achieving activist goals. Drawing from social movement literature and employing Scharmer's concept of social fields, the article explores how the foundational conditions of individual group members influence their interactions and can either foster alignment with group values or create conflictual tensions. Through a personal case study, Starnino demonstrates that by shifting the group's social field to prioritize relationality, activist groups can improve collaboration, navigate strategic shifts more effectively, and maintain solidarity to prevent dissolution. The social field is thus presented not merely as a theoretical construct but as a tangible, embodied practice vital for the success and adaptability of activist movements.

This section closes with a co-written piece by Rebecca Freeth, Akanimo Akpan and Mahmood Sonday who confront the pervasive issue of structural racism within organizations in their article "Dismantling Structural Racism in Organisational Systems." They challenge the adequacy of the terms "diversity" and "inclusion," arguing that these may inadvertently weaken efforts against racism's deeply entrenched nature. The article posits that a more robust approach, aimed at dismantling structural racism, necessitates a comprehensive understanding of its historical roots in colonialism and its perpetuation through economic exploitation. With a heightened awareness of how racism is embedded in organizational systems, Freeth, Akpan and Sonday guide us through strategies for systemic action towards its dismantling. They share insights from their work in systems change in the context of South Africa, focusing on navigating structural and cultural shifts in organizations, especially those with social justice missions, where unaddressed structural racism undermines foundational goals. By scrutinizing the systemic roots, purpose, and culture of organizations, the authors aim to move beyond the superficiality of DEI initiatives to achieve a deeper, more authentic eradication of racial inequities.

This issue's *In-the-Making* features Francisco Miraval and Herlinda Quintana's article "Adaptive Humanism: Moving from Limiting to Quantum

Narratives to Connect With the Emerging Future," in which they inquire into the concept of transformative narratives within the human experience. Drawing on their experience working in the Latino community in Denver, Colorado, they argue that individuals can become trapped in "limiting narratives" that hinder the exploration of new possibilities and impede proactive engagement with the future. The authors introduce "Adaptive Humanism" as a methodology to transition from these restrictive stories to "quantum narratives"—dynamic and self-correcting stories that are forward-looking and rooted in future potentialities. Leveraging the principles of Theory U, they suggest a non-judgmental space and process that focuses on the emerging future can facilitate this shift. The article digs into the psychological, philosophical, and sociological facets of limiting narratives, enriched by real-life examples compiled through interviews conducted by the authors. They explore how entrenched narratives continue to shape our collective mindset, emphasizing the need for a conscious reorientation towards narratives that align with an evolving future.

In the accompanying Discussant Commentary, León Staines-Diaz and Marysol Uribe build on Miraval and Quintana's piece by examining the broader socio-historic context from which limiting narratives arise. They nest the creation and emergence of narrative within cultural epistemologies, made particularly relevant through the case example that forms the basis of the *In the Making* article: individuals from the Global South (America) relocating and making their way in the Global North (USA). The authors point to the tendency of epistemologies of the Global North to place responsibility for narratives heavily on individuals, overlooking socio-cultural and historical context which not only shapes limiting narratives through histories of colonization and oppression, but can also be a source of guidance for new, more expansive narratives. Drawing on transformative models from both the Global South and North, they urge for the inclusion of a plurality of diverse voices, including dissonant and contested perspectives, and the creation of pathways that bring into relationship narrative and knowledge created by underserved communities with those shaped by central institutions.

In the aforementioned new article format *Innovations in Praxis*, Antonio Casado da Rocha presents "The Extended Citizens' Assembly Model for Collaborative Governance," detailing the progressive shifts in political culture towards collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa, Basque Country, Spain. The piece is informed by participatory action-research and data from two Citizens' Assemblies, highlighting the potential transformation that such deliberative processes can induce, evidenced by increased action confidence, enhanced capacity, and the co-creation of a shared vision for the future. The article posits that the growth in confidence to take action among participants could be an indirect result of the collaborative effort to forge a common vision. It engages with the broader discourse on the efficacy of standard Citizens' Assembly models, addressing identified barriers like outcome dependency and scalability challenges due to limited resources. To overcome these hurdles, the article introduces a prototype for an Extended Citizens' Assembly, which aims to

institutionalize and broaden the transformative impact of these assemblies through frugal, hybrid online-onsite deliberation methods. This model marks a significant contribution to the praxis of collaborative governance, nurturing democratic experimentation and vision-building at the urban and regional levels.

This issue's *In-Dialogue* curated by Eva Pomeroy with Dayani Centeno-Torres, Carolina Da Rosa, Viviana Galdames, Laura Pastorini, Janine Saponara, and Mariana Suniata-Miranda, is entitled "Ecosystem Activation in Latin America: Embracing the Complex Edges of the System," and centers around a reflective conversation following the Presencing Institute's Ecosystem Leadership Program in Latin America. This program, a striking example of grassroots action, saw 160 leaders from fourteen countries in Latin America convene to foster collaborative action through awareness-based system change methods, including an interweaving of Indigenous knowledge and ceremony throughout the program. The dialogue follows the collective reasoning and effort to create an inclusive space that integrates various stakeholders and sectors, aiming to catalyze ecosystem activation within a region that is challenged by complexity, polarization, inequality, and violence. It emphasizes the transformative power of connection, trust, and collective intention in post-pandemic times, and in a context where healing trauma and systems change are deeply interrelated. Furthermore, the dialogue touches upon gender dynamics and feminine archetypes within the program, acknowledging a significant female presence and leadership that fostered an environment conducive to creativity, mutual support and exploration. Through the conscious cultivation of an inclusive, collaborative and non-patriarchal space, participants engaged in both healing and activation and, through shared experience, fostered relationships and collaboration on local and regional projects.

With this issue, we bring our third Volume of JASC to a close. This editorial, alongside the assemblage of articles in this issue, individually and collectively point to the essential but often unseen elements that underpin transformative processes in these tumultuous times: power, relationship and the hidden structures that support or hinder each. Each article, in its own right, provides an angle on nuanced and entangled forces that drive systems change, offering not just new understanding but potential practical gateways to scale out, scale up and most importantly, scale deep (Riddel & Moore, 2015).

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Commentary from the Field

On Regenerative African Futures:

Sovereignty, Becoming Human, Death, and Forgiveness as Fertile Paradoxes for Decolonial Soul Work

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Introduction

This think piece is a sensorial grappling with slippery paradoxes within Regenerative African Futures that persist in elusive ways. It hopes to trouble conditionalities (either /or thinkings) that stagnate our ability to move into Regenerative Futures. In a world where the tendency to bifurcate is part of our programming, this piece wonders how practicing a sense of awareness around the paradoxes of sovereignty, becoming human, death, and forgiveness might help us arrive at a more radical embrace of the soul work before us. Perhaps by attending to the slippery edges of the continuum we can begin to be aware of the streams we are embroiled in, and make greater strides into praxis-based responses that do not shy from this. This piece reflects the collective work underway over the last few years for co- conspirators who have been working with and around the Environmental Learning Research Centre at Rhodes University, South Africa. It suggests that transcending these paradoxes requires a deep sense of soul-based grounding that can help us make home and sanctuary for our most expansive selves. This is critical and mutual work for awareness-based systems change. Lastly, the piece suggests that by foregrounding the soul

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in the work of mutually becoming human we regenerate tender and vital spaces for our co- inquiry in ways that help us gain a kind of alchemical resilience through some of the most fragile and atrophied spaces in our inner and outer landscapes.

The poet Rilke challenges us to "take [our] practiced powers and stretch them out until they span the chasm between two contradictions" (Rilke, 1989, p. 261). This think piece is about capacitating a radical "AND" that conjoins seemingly contradictory paths. The intention is to write what feels difficult to grasp and sometimes difficult to say as a way of releasing the anxious loop it reproduces. Here, the praxis- based work of non- duality truly begins. There are no easy answers to be gained here, but rather the hope for an immersive 'third way' that gifts us an uncanny appreciation of how every opposite plays its part in a picture of wholeness. Alice Walker said it well and simply when she said that "you cannot curse a part without damning the whole" (Walker, 2010, p. 198). Similarly, when we emerge to bear witness to seemingly disparate parts of a system, we might get an understanding that ultimately shifts the discourse in ways that might be looming, difficult AND necessary.

The impetus to see this work as part of Regenerative African Futures acknowledges that a living decolonial project works like two wheels of a bicycle: the first wheel is the work of transgressing what no longer serves us. The second wheel ought to be the creative work needed to nourish the conditions under which something different can grow. These nourishing possibilities could emerge from digging up old archives to rediscover ourselves (Busia, 1992, p. 869). They could emerge from pulling forward the umbilical cord of our intangible cultural heritages (Mkhize, 2023). They also could emerge from deft acts of revelation that help us see how it is we are moving in the moment (Drexler-Dreis, 2015, pp. 255–256). Regardless of their source, regenerative practices need to be about "seeking a now" that can "breed new futures" (Lorde, 1997, p. 255).

Some might wonder why the focus here is on African futures? By calling forth a focus on African Futures I mean to go beyond privileging the Global South as a potent place for meaning making as sacred a point as this might be. By talking about African futures I am summoning the idea of Africa as the primordial mother of all. By doing this, I also mean to engage the African contexts in ways that can generously bless similar ongoing discourses elsewhere and so ruminating in praxis from here might hold the legacy of blessing the whole.

The related paradoxes explored in this think piece are ancient- newly-appreciated constellations of co- inquiry. By chronicling these paradoxes, I hope that we can better see, sense, and hear ourselves more acutely in this moment and hopefully experiment on these continuums through decolonial rites of our own making. In other words, I am wondering what co- constituted practices help us sit with these fertile paradoxes, without collapsing into our fragmented bifurcating muscle memory. De Sousa Santos helps us in thinking around this by stating that:

> The fertility of a contradiction does not lie in imagining ways of escaping it, but rather in ways of working with and through it. If the time of paradigmatic transition has a name, it is certainly that of enabling contradictions. (Santos, 2014, p. 238)

Everywhere we look, engendering the promise of a paradigmatic transition haunts us through the social, economic, and ecological poly-crisis that are definitive of our times. May these paradoxes help us to slow down to the work within and between us and all sentient relations in ways that truly surprise us.

Four Related Paradoxes in Regenerative African Futures

On Sovereignty and the Philo-praxis of Collectively Becoming Human

Can we adequately practice Ubuntu and elevate powerful possibilities for our collective entanglements in becoming human, without also finding ways to adequately acknowledge and uncover the unique possibilities that each individual presents[1]? Here the real paradox arises when we ask questions about

[1] It is tricky to try and say something succinct about what Ubuntu means for this paper without this becoming its whole focus! Please pause with me here to briefly attend to this before we move on. The trouble is …I have a sneaky suspicion growing over time that Ubuntu as a philo-praxis of liberation refuses to be written and that attempts to try and define it over time can make the mystery and promise of its essence slip through our fingers. Generous attempts at this definition include those respectively made by Leonard Praeg (2014) and others. The closest I have gotten to unraveling this paradox comes from the work of Ndumiso Dladla whose nuanced writing implores us to understand that Ubuntu cannot be perceived as a kind of liberal humanism. I will quote his ruminations in full as an orientating foundation to what is useful for this paper:

> It is precisely the understanding of be-ing Human as verbal and continual motion, always in a constant state of revision and reconfiguration that makes the translation of Ubuntu into Humanism untenable. Humanness is the accurate rendition of Ubuntu; of Human being and becoming. Thus Ubuntu may never be translated as Humanism (see Metz2007a, Cornell 2014; Praeg 2014)… the prefix "-ism" inevitably fixates and arrests from motion some or another moment or aspect of reality. The result is the creation of the dogmatic and unchangeable, the foregone and the finalised…Ubuntu as ethics is inseparably connected to the recognition that motion is the principle of being. Thus, the ethics of Ubuntu revolves around contingency and mutability…Ubuntu is both the source as well as the embodiment of the ethics of the Bantu speaking people. The implication is that being a human being is simply not given or passive. Ubuntu is simultaneously gerund and gerundive. As such it is an orientation to the practice of the philosophy of Ubuntu. It is in this sense a philo-praxis. Simply being born of the species Homo Sapiens may

what sovereignty has to do with Ubuntu. Ah! Sovereignty! A word that has been used politically to denote the forcible demarcation of territory in colonised lands… this concept sits at the heart of so much grief and loss protracted over time. But what about sovereignty as a spiritual concept? What about the possibilities it affords us in terms of the unique work of self- actualisation that is in service of the whole? And what about the aspect of will-full choice that is at the crux of this? Some useful definitions of sovereignty include being who one truly is, becoming what one can become, and being the subject of one's life and not merely the object of others' lives (Kabat- Zinn, 1997, p. 50). This definition goes further to declare something that we are often very shy of saying:

> Everybody's true nature is sovereign. We have only to recognise it, and honour it in other people—in all beings, in our children, and in ourselves. Of course, having "only to recognise it" isn't so easy. It is the work of a lifetime, if not many lifetimes. We may not know or may have lost touch with what is most fundamental in ourselves, with our own nature, with what calls to us most deeply. When we don't recognise our true nature, and live far from it, we can create a lot of suffering for ourselves and for others. (Kabat- Zinn, 1997, pp. 50–51)

It strikes me as poignant that this perspective, which I whole heartedly believe in, is one that is so difficult to stay with in the world. The layers of cultural programming that obscure the possibilities of sovereignty are astounding. Can we adequately invoke the possibilities of Ubuntu (the philo-praxis of mutually *becoming human* from Dladla's perspective) without doing reparative work around encouraging each soul to feel safe enough to belong and become themselves as a part of belonging and becoming in community with others? Here I am sensing into the concept of sovereignty as something different to the rampant individuality that neo- liberalism idolises. I ask this earnestly in a context where 'choice' or that loaded word 'agency' (which I have become intensely weary of) is often storied as a privilege; that only some live to author their lives in ways that resemble will- full choice.

This point dare not deny that there are many writ out of Regenerative Futures because of the systemic erosion of this very sense of sovereignty. But

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> be a necessary condition to be a human being but it is not sufficient. One ought to become—in the ethical sense—a human being (Dladla, 2017, p. 53).

Learning and unlearning what it means to be human is a motion woven into the philo-praxis of Ubuntu. Additionally, the word 'contingency' in Dladla's quote is useful because it highlights that Ubuntu might be possible but it is ultimately unpredictable. What this means for the paper is that Ubuntu as a philo-praxis of liberation is a compelling and mysterious happening. We must always gesture towards it, but can never truly rest in its full realisation. Ubuntu holds an unrelenting sense of enactment and as such is a worthy struggle for Regenerative African Futures.

rushing to regenerate a sense of Ubuntu, without clearing the soul of the societal conditioning that predates, controls, and consumes its sovereignty does not help us to collectively reset the age we are in. Coming into the inner realms of personal sovereignty and personal autonomy—not as the future main stay of action—but as a way of strengthening our collective co- conspiration in transgressive ways seems key here. And within this is a belief that we can indeed create new regenerative pathways that are not enslaved by the spell of modernity. Perhaps, the possibilities of our collective freedom eludes us because aspects of our sovereignty have been utterly corroded. Perhaps we struggle to bear witness to each other because we are still learning to do that work for ourselves outside of the programming of competition and scarcity. The possibility of our unity continues to evade us paradoxically because we are entrained to hustle for our own individual space rather than collectively coming to a sense of freedom that could transgress the templates of modernity. In other words: how can we become what we can become, if I cannot become what I can become? How can both be authentically held in praxis?

Faithfully Mirroring the Landscapes of Body and Land

And on that dream of the liberated soul, the sovereign soul, how can we do this reparative work without unintentionally bypassing our connection to the land as a central part of this? So much of the climate change discourse asks us to focus on what we are doing to the earth and all sentient beings. This is laudable and yet paradoxically so much of that discourse is storied as privilege in contexts where predatory socio- material conditions are so dire. Care for the environment? How, when I am hustling to make ends meet? Can we truly understand and care for what has happened to the earth without understanding and caring for what has happened to us along the way? Colonialism as a project began its experiments in domination with a desire to conquer lands. The bodies that it found on those lands were an encumbrance that were treated as equally malleable. Toni Stuart reminds us that what we do to the land we have already done to the body, and yet we continue to story the trajectories of the human being and the earth as separate and competing with each other, when what is happening to both of them faithfully mirrors each other (Stuart, 2022).

Some emphasis on building eco- literacies holds the paradox of believing we can find adequate ways to resonate with the change in the climate without truly understanding that everything that we see happening ‘out there’ has already happened to us. They emphasise the ecological work without wanting to touch the decolonial work. We have a lifetime of patterns on our bodies that echo the monocultural and predatory neo- liberal patterns we have tried to dominate the earth with. It is not the earth that needs saving… we are the one’s dying while we call it progress. Priya Vallabh takes this point home and links it with sovereignty and belonging by stating that one of the fundamental keys for the realisation of sovereignty is the re-establishment of one’s own authentic and accountable relationship with the land (Vallabh, 2021). Here the call for land in

South Africa and elsewhere holds an incredibly deep promise of regeneration that is about much more than capturing the "means of production" in capitalistic terms. It is a poignant rejoinder to regenerate our full humanity in relationship with the sacredness of the earth.

On Heartbreak, Death, and Decolonial Love

Can it ever be possible to talk about regeneration without fully embracing death as part of this process? Life- death- renewal is the pattern that all life makes. Rupi Kaur eloquently reminds us that "people too must wilt, fall, root, and rise in order to bloom (Kaur, 2017, p. 115). And yet we have been conditioned to chase the endless summer of sustainable progress working within the metronome of neo- liberalism's rhythm. Our activism and deep frustrations with the way things are often calls us up and out in ways that rally against injustice. We arrive to resist, to persist, to push our lives against the grain of what threatens life. This pattern in our activism asks that we exert our very life force against foreclosure. The irony is not lost on me that historically and contemporarily death—literal death—is often the painful result of these actions. One can only gasp in horror at the calculated brutal assaults against life around us, and there can be great paralysis in apprehending the violence both slow and bombastic that is at play right now. The heightened nature of these polycrises create a traumatised malaise in which will-full ways of consciously responding *otherwise* are easily trivialised. It is seen as a weakness "to hold tension, in matters both large and small" because doing so seems "uncertain or indecisive" (Palmer, 2004, p. 177). More is said on this:

> Standing in the tragic gap is unpopular amongst us because it contradicts the arrogance of power deeply rooted in our egos and culture…Ultimately, what drives us to resolve tension as quickly as we possibly can is the fear that if we hold it too long, it will break our hearts… And the heart's fear of being broken is not fanciful: holding powerful tensions over time can be and often is a heart-breaking experience. (Palmer, 2004, pp. 177–178)

Might our heartbreaks constitute another kind of death that is necessary in the pursuit of regenerative futures? Can this kind of death be seen as a foundational cornerstone of the praxis of decolonial love? For great fear of disrespecting or dishonouring *sooo* many triggers that come up in my attempts to articulate this, I need to rely on a poetic interlude to help galvanise what seems at play here:

> …all love must lead to death, of one kind or another. All love must lead to death. And out of this death a new man or woman is born…. Love does not lead to only one death, but to several deaths; and because of love one must keep dying and being reborn, from time to time… love only dies only when you resist another death which love brings upon you, in order that you be reborn, and grow.

> That is why there are few real loves in the world, because people fear yet another death that they must endure. They count the deaths and rebirths they have undergone and say- so many and no more, so far but no further; I will not die again for you, but I intend to stay here where I am, how I am now, and here in this fixed place. I intend to build the castle of myself on this rock. (Okri, 2007, p. 267)

What deaths are being asked of us in order to rebirth the possibility of decolonial love in the world? And can we abide with the reality that these deaths are not something we can ask of any 'other,' that there is no one 'out there' we can force to do this—that these other kinds of deaths are intimate initiations we surrender to by ourselves, for ourselves often alone and out of the view of public discourse? And in the face of the tangible terror perceived in the outside world, can we dare to believe that these intimate regenerative deaths actually matter? This is a paradox in what might constitute the process of systemic change. And for those who dare to go deep into these forays how can we better recognise each other and anchor the strange ambit of our praxis?

Reinscribing the Dreaded Work of Forgiveness

Related to need for another kind of death, might forgiveness be a death of some kind? And how do we approach this otherwise when the historical narrative has taught us to be disdainful and distrusting of the results of forgiveness. We are often taught that it can be a weakness that betrays what is at stake. Take for example the contradiction of how Mandela's mythical legacy is universally praised, but also locally derided as the harbinger of the sinking pitfalls of contemporary South Africa. Anaemic forgiveness without adequate intergeneration restitution is what continues to plague the prospects of peace in South Africa. Insights into this quandary are clearly set out:

> Yes, the past did happen—where we lost our lands and resources, but we were told to forgive, and we did. However, we still had concerns about the things we lost and how we were going to get them back… We have forgiven but we don't know how to move forward: whether to forget everything and move on with our lives, or before we move on let's have a talk on how we will be compensated for things our grandfathers lost due to the system at the time. We have forgiven but we didn't forget (Swartz, 2016, p. 187).

When we think about the current state of the nation as the fruits of forgiveness without restitution, it leaves very little room to breathe into the discourse of forgiveness as something that could serve to bring us home to ourselves and each other. It is also really important to note that often when we think about forgiveness on these terms, it is those who are most aggrieved, those who have been 'perpetrated' that are often asked to do the work of forgiveness.

What often falls out of view is the mutually constituted collective that *all* have had some part to play in. Sharlene Swartz's work on "Everyday Restitution" expands our understanding of Hillberg's victim oppressor saviour triangle that we have become accustomed to, by producing a pentangle that exceeds the roles we usually ascribe to the drama triangle:

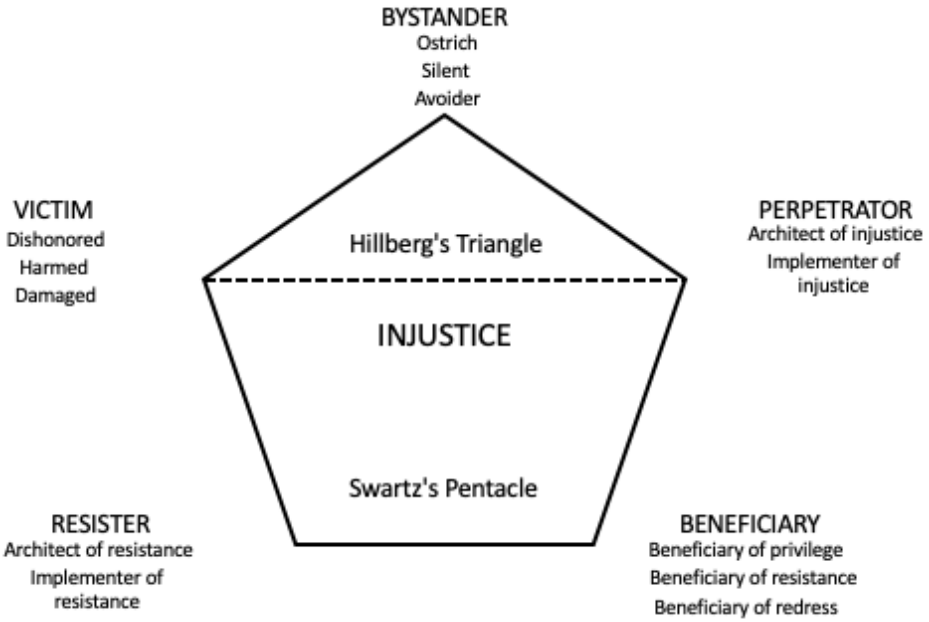

Figure 1: Swartz Pentacle of Restitution from (Swartz, 2016, p. 178).

By extending the list of actors in this way Swartz's work allows more people to relate and locate themselves in the past, while also inviting them to take responsibility for the dehumanising actions of others. This is a moral obligation to show up and contribute to the rehumanisation of everyone, including themselves (Swartz, 2016, p.187). There is a greater mutuality reinscribed in her offering. This pentangle gives us more ropes to hold on to that are symbolic of the tension between us. More actors are called to come off their particular "rocks" and do the work of restituting the whole—by mutually becoming human together. Can any of these actors (and many more that must exist in the fray) begin to truly create something new without the alchemical work of forgiveness? It seems to me that forgiveness within this perspective widens it up beyond the labour that those most dishonoured, harmed, and "damaged" so to speak, can offer (Swartz, 2016, p. 187). And after all aren't we all "damaged" by that which harms a part of the system? There is alchemical work that all actors in the field have to do, in order to re-enter into communal rehumanising. Forgiveness here could be seen as the release of pent-up energy held in whatever dynamic or archetypal part that one is caught up in. Forgiveness could be the decision to forgo that which continually closes up options for the future for all—it could be part of the critical sites for the learning and unlearning of our programming. And going beyond the South African context like the heart-breaking violence in

Palestine and Israel where we see old dynamics being painfully fortified, what is forgiveness as a transgressive act? And what needs to die in us for forgiveness to do its work? Valerie Kaur leads us in a demonstration of an inner dialogue that leads us to the shorelines of what forgiveness means for her:

> I do not owe my opponents my affection, warmth or regard. But I do owe myself a chance to live in this world without the burden of hate. "I shall permit no man, no matter what his colour might be, to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him." Said Booker T. Washington. It reminds me of a line from Toni Morrison's novel Love: "Hate does that. It burns off everything but itself, so whatever your grievance is, your face looks just like your enemy's." I refuse to let anyone belittle my soul, or diminish my own expansive sense of self. The more I listen, the less I hate. The less I hate, the more I am free to choose actions that are controlled not by animosity but by wisdom. Labouring to love my opponents is how I love myself. This is not the stuff of saintliness. This is our birth right. (Kaur, 2020, p. 140)

Here she is struggling to become more of herself in the face of that which threatens to contract the expansion of her soul. I would hope that we could have similar intimate reflections on the great systemic burdens of apathy, ignorance, isolation, and protectionism that also form parts of extremely polarised dynamics, for they too are a weight on the human psyche, and contraction of the soul whether greatly acknowledged or not. Adequately facing these burdens within and between ourselves is also part of the necessary heartbreaks we must endure in becoming human.

Mutually 'Surfacing to Soul'[2]: Regenerative African Futures in Motion

Figure 2: Lighting the Inner Flame by Injairu Kulundu-Bolus

All of these related paradoxes circumscribe an underlying belief in something that forgoes the meaning- making we have been taught to value. To approach these paradoxes is to surrender to another set of principles in life that ultimately believe that the *intangible* spirit of our efforts matters and can indeed influence our tangible view of material reality. Schumacher gives us a glimpse of what this kind of belief entails:

> Through all our lives we are faced with the task of reconciling opposites which, in logical thought, cannot be reconciled…Countless mothers and teachers, in fact do it, but no one can write down a solution. They do it by bringing into the situation a force that belongs to a higher level where opposites are transcended—the power of love (Schumacher as cited in Palmer, 2004, p. 179).

This work is the domain of love and the domain of the soul. More is said on the insurmountable works of the soul:

> The soul is generous: it takes in the needs of the world. The soul is wise: it suffers without shutting down. The soul is hopeful: it engages the world in ways that keep opening our hearts. The soul

[2] The words "surface to soul" are indebted to the prolific words of Sez Kristiansen in (Kristiansen, 2023).

> is creative: it finds a path between realities that might defeat us and fantasies that are mere escapes. All we need to do is bring down the wall that separates us from our own souls and deprives the worlds of the soul's regenerative powers. (Palmer, 2004, p. 184)

How can we bring more reverence to the work of the soul as we apprehend the trickiest questions of our times? How might these practices constitute a kind of *alchemical resilience* in collectively becoming human? This requires that we continue to honour a vision of this being possible *exactly* when the pain of the world threatens to make us contract into ourselves in a resigned and diminished sense of self. Perhaps, as Okri suggests "our capacity for change can only be as great as our understanding of our spiritual patrimony" (Okri, 2023, p. 69). Decolonial soul work holds reverence for a nameless and expansive spiritual patrimony as a wise and deep resource for what we can be and become together. I believe that awareness-based work has always in some ways implied taking the time to pause, reflect, sense, and listen in creative ways. These gestures held in suspension are part of re-leasing the work of the soul in system-based change. This think piece advances the sensibility that resting our conspirations in these tender spaces matters greatly in creating the forays of what is possible. May we "surface to soul" in ways that can create a future worthy of our longing (Kristiansen, 2023). And may we find ourselves and each other as we do so.

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Invited Article

Radical Collaboration to Transform Social Systems:

Moving Forward Together with Love, Power, and Justice[1]

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Abstract

This article summarizes a body of practice and theory that the author has, with colleagues, built up over the past 30 years through working, in many different contexts, with teams of diverse stakeholder leaders collaborating to transform the social systems of which they are part. It tells the story of the development, through first-, second-, and third-person observations recorded in a sequence of five books plus a guidebook, of an approach to social transformation that focuses on unblocking three innate human drives that are in permanent tension: love, power, and justice.

[1] This paper is based on a speech I gave in Tokyo in March 2023 (Kahane, 2023). I am grateful to Akanimo Akpan, Rebecca Freeth, Michel Gelobter, Oliver Koenig, Riichiro Oda, Eva Pomeroy, Earl Saxon, and Megan Seneque for their feedback on drafts.

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Keywords
collaboration, system transformation, scenario planning, love, power, justice, multi-stakeholder processes

Introduction

Here is a hopeful story.

In November 2022, I went to Sharm El-Sheikh to participate in the 27th annual Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27 of the UNFCCC). The global climate crisis threatens all of us. It is a super-wicked challenge[2] that we must address at three levels: transforming our energy, industrial, food, transportation, and financial systems; transforming our underlying social, economic, political, and cultural systems; and, more fundamentally, transforming how we relate with one another and with our shared planetary home (IPCC, 2022).

Although everyone is threatened by climate change and so everyone has a general common interest in contributing to these system transformations, different people, organizations, and countries have different specific interests, capacities, understandings, and ambitions. Examples include the differences between subsistence farmers in Kenya and coal workers in Germany, between the governments of the U.S. and China, between corporations and activists, and between young students and middle-class retirees. To effect the necessary transformations, these stakeholders must find ways to collaborate—but this is not easy or straightforward.

In Sharm El-Sheikh, 35,000 people—government representatives, NGO leaders, businesspeople, activists, scientists, journalists—had come together from all over the world to advance these transformations. Everyone knew that they could not do much by themselves and that they therefore had to work with others—including with people they didn't agree with or like or trust. Every day for two weeks they met intensely in hundreds of parallel meetings—panels, protests, workshops, negotiations, coffees, meals—to search for ways to move forward together. I felt the sense of community that environmental justice activist-scholar Michel Gelobter experienced at COP: "It's like a big religious

[2] "Wicked challenges are defined in the systems science literature as challenges that are hyper-complex and multi-layered. They represent an assemblage of interlocked problems, where every problem is a symptom of another problem and the solution for one problem creates problems in other layers. They also involve many unknowns and they have longer and uncertain timescales. Super-wicked challenges have extra characteristics, including the fact that time is running out, those who cause the problem also seek to provide a solution, the central authority needed to coordinate solutions is precarious, and inefficient or non-existent responses are pushed into the future due to irrational discounting and ineffectiveness of existing paradigms and practices." (Andreotti et al., 2023, p. 81, referencing Rittel & Webber, 1974 and Levin et al., 2012).

ceremony where tens of thousands of people of different faiths are all praying for the same outcome" (personal communication, 2022). The central open area for accredited delegates consisted of three enormous single-story prefab buildings, each containing long hallways of open-sided pavilions where meetings of all sorts ran all at the same time all day long, and so COP was also a sprawling, cacophonous, societal transformation bazaar.

I found this experience of being a tiny part of such a super-charged global collaboration to be both uplifting and overwhelming. After I had left the conference and had the space to reflect on it, I realised that it had enabled me to get clearer on a few simple things. The collaborations at the conference had produced progress—although not enough for us to be on track to prevent the worsening of the crisis. It is not probable that over the coming years we will succeed in getting on track—but if we can make wiser choices today, we can produce less suffering and more sustainability. Getting onto such a better track will require much more and much better collaboration—and such collaboration is possible.

Philosopher Moses Maimonides said, "Hope is belief in the plausibility of the possible, not only the necessity of the probable" (Abramsky, 2011). I am hopeful.

Here is the primary question I've been asking myself for 30 years: *What does it take to collaborate with diverse others to address the daunting challenges of our time?*

I am a practical practitioner: I facilitate collaborations among diverse stakeholders who are trying to transform the social systems of which they are part. I started doing this work in 1991 in South Africa during that country's transformation from racial oppression to non-racial democracy. This transformation was not straightforward or easy because there were deep differences among South Africans in their positions, ideologies, cultures, and needs. I facilitated a one-year process called "The Mont Fleur Scenario Exercise" in which 28 South African leaders—Black and white, men and women; from the left and right and opposition and establishment; politicians, businesspeople, trade unionists, community leaders, and academics—worked together to chart a path to transforming their country.

The participants in this exercise contributed to transforming South Africa, and in particular to the unexpected (and contested) emphasis on fiscal prudence in the economic policy of the government of Nelson Mandela. In 2000, Trevor Manuel, a member of the scenario team who was by then the country's first Black minister of finance (a position he held for 13 years) said: "It's not a straight line from Mont Fleur to our current policy. It meanders through, but there's a fair amount in all that going back to Mont Fleur. I could close my eyes now and give you those scenarios just like this. I've internalized them, and if you have internalized something, then you probably carry it for life" (Kahane, 2012, p. 12; this project and its impact are described in Gillespie, 2004; Kahane, 2012; le Roux, 1992; Segal, 2007. The underlying methodology, scenario planning is

described in in Kahane, 2012; Ramirez & Wilkinson, 2016; van der Heijden, 1996).

It was through this extraordinary experience that I discovered my vocation as a facilitator. Over the decades since then, my colleagues in Reos Partners and I have facilitated hundreds of such multi-stakeholder collaborations, in all parts of the world, at all scales, on all kinds of social transformations, including related to health, education, food, energy, development, justice, security, governance, peace, and climate (for case studies, see Bøjer, 2018; Freeth et al., 2023; Freeth & Drimie, 2016; Hamilton, 2014; Insulza, 2014; Käufer, 2004; Magner & Kahane, 2021; Reos Partners, 2023). Working in many extraordinary contexts has shown me the dynamics of social transformation painted in bright colours. I think that exactly the same dynamics are present in ordinary contexts—in families, organizations, communities—but there these are often painted in muted colours and so are harder to make out. The extraordinary has enabled me to discern what I hypothesize to be universal.

My 30 years of practical experience, from Mont Fleur to COP27, has given me many opportunities for trial and many opportunities for error, and therefore many opportunities for learning. I was trained as a physicist and then as an economist and so, as the joke goes: I lie awake in bed at night wondering whether what works in practice can really work in theory. This article explains what I am learning about what it takes to collaborate to transform social systems, both in practice and in theory.

Collaboration is becoming both increasingly necessary and increasingly difficult. This is because the challenges we face involve more stakeholders who need and want to be involved in addressing these challenges, including because they are more interconnected and interdependent and because they are less willing to defer to experts and elites. Division, fragmentation, polarization, demonization, and violence are also increasing.

In this complex and contradictory context, the conventional approach to collaborating is becoming increasingly ineffective. To address our challenges effectively, we therefore need an unconventional approach that my colleagues and I call "radical collaboration."

Radical collaboration is a way of working together with diverse others from across a given system that fundamentally transforms—rather than only superficially reforms—that system, and does so with the requisite speed, scale, and justice. Radical collaboration differs from conventional collaboration in that it involves not only focusing on the good and harmony of the whole, but also embraces conflict; not only on agreeing the problem, the solution, and the plan to implement the solution, but also on experimenting a way forward; and not only on getting other people to implement the plan, but also on recognizing and stepping into one's own role in the system (see Kahane, 2017, p. 2, in which "radical collaboration" is referred to as "stretch collaboration"). This approach is "radical" (from the Latin *radix* or root) in that it attends to the root of how we are and act as we work together.

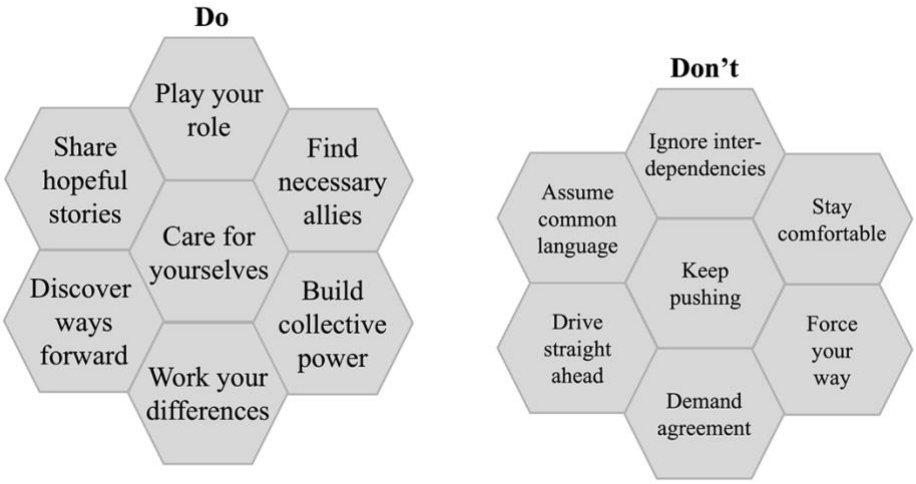

Figure 1. Seven practices for radical collaboration.

The specific reason I went to COP27 was to share the work of the Radical Climate Collaboration initiative. This initiative, organized by Reos Partners, the Climate Champions Team, TED Countdown, and Leaders' Quest, produced a publication entitled "Radical Collaboration to Accelerate Climate Action: A Guidebook for Working Together with Speed, Scale, and Justice" (Kahane, 2022). Reos conducted in-depth interviews with 36 experienced climate collaboration practitioners from across the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia, and then held 7 in-person and online sense-making workshops with the interviewees and others (65 persons in total) to iteratively crystallise the key findings. The guidebook presents the results: an integrated set of seven actions or practices ("dos" and "don'ts") for radical collaboration (Figure 1). We need to employ these practices to be able to transform systems far enough, fast enough, and fairly enough to adequately address climate change and other super-wicked challenges.

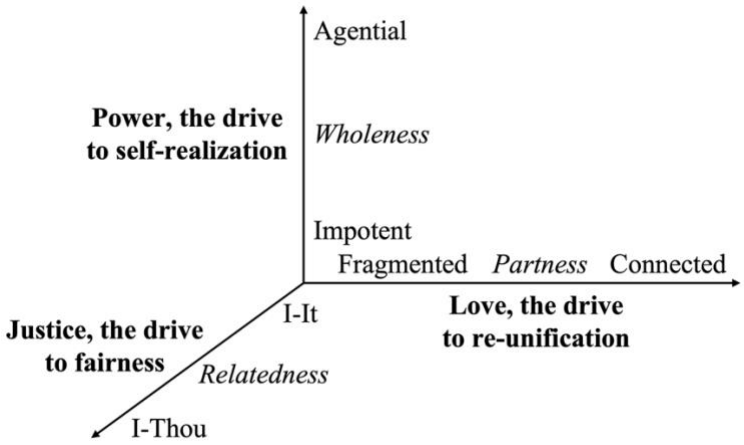

Figure 2. A theory of social transformation: the drives of love, power, and justice produce movement along the dimensions of partness, wholeness, and relatedness.

When we are employing these practices to enact radical collaboration to address such challenges, what is the root that we are tapping into? My theory is that we are tapping into three universal human drives: love, power, justice. We enact radical collaboration through working with these three drives along three dimensions of social space, just like we travel in three-dimensional physical space through moving side to side, front and back, and up and down (see Figure 2). This theory doesn't give us a recipe for social transformation: it gives us a map of the social territory we are in so that we can understand what is happening, and a basis for a set of practices for moving through this territory to transform what is happening.

Love

The first force that was driving what was happening at COP27 was the obvious one: most of the 35,000 people who participated (and the organizations and countries they represented) did so because they were concerned about the climate crisis and wanted to contribute to addressing it. Their shared concern was summarised in the slogan: "keep 1.5 alive," meaning working together to limit the increase in the global average temperature of the Earth's surface to 1.5 degrees Celsius (United Nations Climate Change, 2022). Increasingly frequent and severe climate-related catastrophes around the world, including the recent disastrous flooding in Pakistan, were fresh in everybody's minds. Pioneering systems thinker Donella Meadows defines a system as "a set of elements or parts that is coherently organized and inter-connected in a pattern or structure that produces a characteristic set of behaviours, often classified as its 'function' or 'purpose'" (2008, p. 188). The sense of community I felt at COP27 was because most of the participants understood that they are part of a global social-economic-political-technological-environmental-cultural system that is producing a dangerous set of behaviours and that they need to collaborate with diverse others to change these behaviours.

I call this first drive *love*. I am using this word as it was defined by theologian Paul Tillich, who wrote: "Love is the drive towards the unity of the separated" (1954, p. 25). Everyone is driven by such love–although they have different understandings of what it is that needs to be reunited (often they're focused on reuniting the smaller circles of their family or organisation or community). As fragmentation increases across many social systems, re-uniting the separated becomes both more difficult and more important. The participants in COP27, for example, had come together to heal the separations—to bridge the differences—between people and planet, between the Global North and South, between the U.S. and China, and between governments, civil society, and business. Love arises from the reality of interconnection and interdependence: that we are part of larger wholes. If one dimension of social systems is such "partness," then love is the drive that enables us to move "side to side" between the extremes of the system being completely fragmented and completely connected (see Figure 2).

Love is the essence of collaboration inasmuch as collaboration involves people coming together into relationship. When the members of the Mont Fleur team came together in 1991 from across their apartheid separateness (the Afrikaans word *apartheid* simply means "apartness") to look for ways that South Africa could heal its brokenness, they were, in this sense, driven by love.

It was not until 1997, however, that I grasped the deeper potential of love for social transformation. My colleagues and I were facilitating a workshop in Guatemala one year after the signing of the peace accords that ended the 36-year genocidal civil war between the government, military, and urban elite on one hand, and the guerrilla groups and rural Indigenous people on the other (Díez Pinto, 2004). The workshop was the beginning of a project that brought together leaders from across these societal divisions to contribute to implementing the accords. These leaders had been on different sides of the war and the room was thick with suspicion. Ronalth Ochaeta, a human rights investigator, told the story of having gone to an Indigenous village to observe the exhumation of a mass grave from a wartime massacre. When the earth had been removed from the grave, Ochaeta noticed a lot of small bones, and he asked the forensic scientist supervising the exhumation what had happened. The scientist replied that the massacre had included pregnant women, and the small bones were of their foetuses.

After Ochaeta told this story in the workshop, the room fell silent for a long time. Then the team took a break and afterwards continued with their work. In the years that followed, they collaborated on many national initiatives, including five presidential campaigns; contributions to the Commission for Historical Clarification, the Fiscal Agreement Commission, and the Peace Accords Monitoring Commission; work on municipal development strategies, a national antipoverty strategy, a new university curriculum; and many spin-off dialogues (Kahane, 2012). Through these efforts the Guatemalan team contributed, against powerful countervailing forces, to the uneven, halting, fragile transformation of Guatemala.

When researchers associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology later interviewed the members of this team, several of them said that it was the moment of silence that had enabled them to make these collective contributions One of them said, "In giving his testimony, Ochaeta was sincere, calm, and serene, without a trace of hate in his voice. This gave way to the moment of silence that, I would say, lasted at least one minute. It was horrible! It was a very moving experience for all of us. If you ask any of us, we would say that this moment was like a large communion." Another said, "After listening to Ochaeta's story, I understood and felt in my heart all that had happened. And there was a feeling that we must struggle to prevent this from happening again" (Díez Pinto, 2004). In the context of Roman Catholic Guatemala, "a moment of communion" means that the participants experienced themselves to be, literally, part of one body. Ochaeta's storytelling enabled the team to connect to one another, to their situation, and to what they needed to do.

This Guatemalan experience focused my attention on working with love as the essence of collaborating and provided the climactic end to my first book, "Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities" (Kahane, 2004, which drew on Käufer, 2004, and the draft text of Scharmer, 2005). When I shared this experience with facilitator Laura Chasin, she commented:

> Your story reminds me of something I learned when my husband had a terrible accident. He was swimming in a lake and a motor boat ran over him. The propeller cut a gaping gash in his leg. We rushed him to the hospital, but the doctor said that the wound was too large to be sewn up. The only thing we could do was keep the area clean and dry. "The two sides of the wound will reach out to each other," the doctor said. "The wound wants to be whole. (Kahane, 2004, p. 127)

"The dialogues you and I are involved in are like that," Chasin continued. "The participants and the human systems they are part of want to be whole. Our job as facilitators is simply to help create a clean, safe space. Then the healing will occur" (Kahane, 2004, p. 127).

Radical collaboration employs love by bringing stakeholders together in a clean, safe space and a structured, open process that enable them to meet, connect, talk, share, and unite. This dimension of radical collaboration is central to many multi-stakeholder social transformation practices (see, for example, brown, 2017; Owen, 2008; Weisbord & Janoff, 2010).

Two of the seven practices in the Radical Collaboration Guidebook are practical ways to work with love. The first *"do"* is *Play Your Role*, which means working out your specific part or contribution to the transformation of a given system. This is crucial for effective action on climate and other complex challenges because many types of actors are taking many types of actions, and no one actor needs to or can do everything. The corresponding "*don't*" is *Ignore Interdependencies*, which means doing what we want to do regardless of what others are doing and what is needed.

The second "*do*" is *Find Necessary Allies*, which means searching out the people with whom we need to collaborate to be able to play our role. Working only with the people we are comfortable with won't get us far. To be able to act with speed, scale, and justice, we need to work with different and disruptive others (often including people we might see as opponents or even enemies) and to centre marginalized and impacted people. The "*don't*" is *Stay Comfortable*, which means just working with the people we like and are like.

Radical collaboration must work with love. To avoid working with love is to ignore the reality of interdependence. Collaboration that does not tap into love will not transform social systems. But working with love is not straightforward. If love is "*the drive towards the unity of the separated*," then what is the whole that is being reunited? There is no such thing as "the whole," except in some irrelevant cosmic sense: poet Leonard Cohen wrote "Though it all may be one in the higher

eye, down here where we live it is two" (2012). Arthur Koestler's idea of 'holarchy' is useful here: "every part (holon) of a larger whole looks, Janus-like, in two directions: it has a tendency both towards integration and towards autonomy" (Koestler, 1967, p. 48, as cited in Leicester, 2020, p. 30). For example, I am a holon in myself, and also part of the larger holons of my family, Reos Partners, Quebec society, and the readership of this journal. One of the reasons it is not straightforward to address climate change is that the drive towards the unity of the separated is taking place in contradictory ways in many different holons at the same time: not only the holons of all life on Earth or all humanity, but also those of individual countries, alliances, and organizations.

We need to work with love, but this is not easy.

Power

And working only with love is not enough to be able to transform social systems. The Beatles were incorrect when they sang, "All You Need is Love" (Lennon, 1967). The theory and practice I outlined in "Solving Tough Problems" (Kahane, 2004) were inadequate: I was missing something.

Ten years after the Guatemalan workshop in which Ocheata had told his story, I met with one of the members of that team, researcher Clara Arenas, who challenged the emphasis I had given in my book to love. "Do you know," she asked me, that last week, the coalition of civil society organizations I am part of took out a full-page advertisement in the main newspaper here, saying that we would no longer participate in dialogues with the government? The government has said that a precondition for us participating in their dialogues is that we refrain from marching and demonstrating in the streets. But these actions are the main way we mobilize and manifest our power, and if dialoguing requires us to surrender our power, then we are not interested. (Kahane, 2021, p. 149)

What I was missing was *power*. Radical collaboration depends on the individual and collective power of the participating stakeholders who want to transform a system to prevail over those who want to maintain the status quo. Collaboration that does not harness power can not transform social systems.

At COP27, power was the second driving force. The bazaar-like cacophony I experienced was the sound of thousands of individuals, organizations, and countries each expressing their power through presenting, proposing, pushing, pitching, and protesting, and through doing this making agreements and deals with others to be able to make larger contributions collectively than they could separately.

Tillich defined power as "the drive of everything living to realise itself, with increasing intensity and extensity" (Tillich, 1954, p. 36). The essence of such power is power-to. The most common understanding of power, by contrast, is power-over, and when Stephen Lukes wrote his classic "Power: A Radical View" in 1974, he equated power with domination. But thirty years later, in the second edition, he revised his view: "It was a mistake to define power by saying that 'A

exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests.' Power as domination is only one species of power" (Lukes, 2005, p. 12). Power-over is a subset of power-to.

Everyone is driven by power—although they have different understandings of what power needs to be used to do (often they're focused on their own power-to or that of their family or organization or community). Power arises from the reality of the identity, purpose, autonomy, ambition, and agency—the wholeness—of each and every holon. If a second dimension of social systems is such wholeness, then power is the drive that enables us to move "up and down" between the extremes of holons being completely impotent and completely agential (Figure 2). (Note that in this context "partness" refers to the fact that each holon is part of larger holons, and "wholeness" to the fact that each holon is a whole in itself.)

Philosopher and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his doctoral dissertation on the work of Tillich (King, 1955). King later said, building on Tillich's definitions of love and power:

> Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change. And one of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites—polar opposites—so that love is identified with the resignation of power, and power with the denial of love. Now we've got to get this thing right. What we need to realise is that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. It is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our time. (King, 2002, pp. 185–187)

This statement by King inspired me to write my second book, "Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change" (Kahane, 2010).

Radical collaboration employs power when stakeholders are each able to assert their own animated and agential wholeness. The third "*do*" of radical collaboration is *Build Collective Power*, which means working together with other stakeholders to discover and enact ways to transform the system. This requires recognizing and bringing together the different types of assets that each of us can contribute—authority, money, technologies, ideas, followers—to grow our individual and collective capacities. The corresponding "*don't*" is *Force Your Way*, which means trying to get everyone else to do what we want them to do. When some powerful allies use their power over others—forcing things to be the way they want them to be, whether through imposition, exclusion, co-option, or divide and rule—they undermine the collaboration; if we push people around, they will be resentful and angry and will push back, and we will get slowed down or stuck.

Radical collaboration must tap into power. To avoid working with power is to ignore the obviously-important reality of self-realisation, self-centeredness, and self-interest. To avoid falling into the common do-good trap that produces results

that are merely "sentimental" and "anaemic," systems change efforts must acknowledge and engage with—not deny or shy away from—this reality.

But working with power is not straightforward. When different people and organizations, each with their own purpose and perspective, try to collaborate, they usually—not exceptionally—produce competition and conflict. This is true in all social systems, including families, communities, nations, and globally. The practice required to work with power is the fourth one, *Work Your Differences*, which means working through or around differences. Our collaborators face different realities, opportunities, and constraints, and so have different positions, perspectives, and powers. This diversity can help us see more clearly and navigate better through complex and confusing terrain. The opposite is *Demand Agreement*, which assumes, incorrectly, that progress requires agreement.

We need to work with power, but this is not easy.

Justice

And working with love and power are also not enough to be able to transform social systems. The theory and practice I outlined in "Power and Love*"* (Kahane, 2010) were also inadequate: again I was missing something. And again it was Arenas who pointed this out to me when she told me:

> I see a certain naïveté in your vision of a balance between power and love, in which things can be improved leaving everyone satisfied. How can that be? In a context of great imbalance or inequity, as in Guatemala, how can poverty be uprooted without some sectors of society being very dissatisfied? It is their economic interests which will be affected. I think that balance and satisfaction for all are possible in the realm of discourse, but not when you go down to 'real' politics in a context of enormous inequality. (Kahane, 2021, p. 153)

What I was missing was *justice*. Philosopher Nancy Fraser says: "Justice is never actually encountered directly. By contrast, we do experience injustice and it is through this that we form an idea of justice" (Fraser, 2012, p. 43). Justice, then, is the drive to reduce injustice: to increase fairness.

At COP27, justice was the third driving force. The people who are suffering and will suffer most from climate change—especially in the Global South, as well as marginalized and young people everywhere—are not the people who caused most of the change and have the greatest capacity to adapt to the change. This injustice has been at the center of climate negotiations since the 1992 signing of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which recognised the "common but differentiated responsibilities" of different countries (UNFCCC, 1992). Many stakeholders in the Global South are unwilling to collaborate with those in the Global North unless this injustice is properly addressed. The most difficult negotiations and the most important breakthroughs at COP27 were the agreements to bridge this gap by providing funds from the North to the South to

compensate for historical loss and damage due to climate change, and to enable "just transitions" away from fossil fuels to mitigate additional climate change (United Nations Climate Change, 2022).

Justice is required for collaboration to be able to transform social systems. Scholar-practitioner Rebecca Freeth sees justice as "both about how we navigate our way through social change processes (being conscious of unequal degrees of privilege, seeking parity of participation, and being willing to engage with our own outrage and that of others) and the direction in which we point our social change efforts (toward greater justice)" (Grillo, 2012). Transforming systems effectively requires key stakeholders to be comfortable with both the how and the direction of the collaboration. Stakeholders who think that they are being treated unfairly will not participate: they will not contribute their power to effecting transformation, or they will use their power to try to block transformation. Collaboration that does not tap into justice will not transform social systems.

Everyone is driven by justice—although they have different understandings of who is being treated unfairly (often they're focused on how they or their organization or community is being treated unfairly). In 2010, I started a project in Thailand to deal with the violent political conflict between pro- and anti-government forces aligned to different political, economic, and regional interests. The organizers of the project had set up a series of meetings for me with leaders from politics, business, the military, the media, the aristocracy, and civil society. For three full days I sat in a bright windowless hotel meeting room and talked with these people one after another. I was bewildered by this experience of listening to a series of strong-minded persons giving me their views of this complicated conflict in a context and culture that were unfamiliar to me. But later I realised that what I had been hearing was simple: every single person had been trying to get me on their side by convincing me that they were right and their opponents were wrong—and, more specifically, that they were being treated unfairly and were the victims of injustice. They were not simply complaining to me: they were appealing to our common concern for fairness. This project inspired and is reported in my fourth book, "Collaborating with the Enemy: How to Work with People You Don't Agree with or Like or Trust" (Kahane, 2017).

Justice arises from the reality that an unfair social system prevents people from participating as peers and that such unfairness produces a drive to transform that system. Futurist Willis Harman said that this drive is activated when people shift from seeing a situation as "unfortunate" to seeing it as "unacceptable" (personal communication, 1990). If a third dimension of social systems is the character of the relatedness among the holons, then justice is the drive that enables us to move *back and forth* between the extremes of being completely characterised by "I-It" relations and completely characterised by "I-Thou" relations (Buber, 2000).

Justice transforms systems so that more people can employ more of their power and more of their love. Tillich defines justice as "the form in which the power of being activates itself" (1954, p. 56) and "through which love performs its

work" (p. 71.). Justice does this through cultural recognition, economic redistribution, and political representation (Fraser et al., 2004, pp. 374–382). In moving from apartheid to democracy in South Africa, for example, the change in the social system included—albeit imperfectly—all three of these: recognition of the humanity and therefore the human rights of Black people, redistribution of economic opportunities to include them, and their representation in government.

Radical collaboration must work with justice. To avoid working with justice is to ignore the reality and consequences of injustice. But working with justice is not straightforward. Different people often have incommensurately different ideas of how to assess fairness and who is being treated unfairly. And it is difficult to transform social structures when the people who are benefiting from the status quo fight to maintain their power, positions, and privileges.

We need to work with justice, but this is not easy.

Integrating Love, Power, and Justice

Transforming social systems collaboratively therefore requires working with love and power and justice. All three of these drives are present in all social systems: they are ubiquitous, not rare or rarefied. Every day I feel all three of these drives within myself and see them throughout my news feed. If we're trying to transform a social system and aren't able to tap into and work with all of these drives, then we will find ourselves confused and frustrated. Trying to move through social space while ignoring some of these drives is like trying to move through physical space while ignoring gravity: we won't get where we are trying to go and will probably fall down and hurt ourselves. To be effective, systems change efforts therefore must include both the awareness of and the ability to work with love, power, and justice.

All of the collaborative social transformation processes I have been involved in over the last 30 years have engaged all three drives. The Mont Fleur process in South Africa, for example, was driven by love to overcome apartheid separation, power to engage a broad group of leaders in realising the national transformation, and justice to rectify racial discrimination. The COP process, and the thousands of other climate change efforts to which it is connected, is also working with these three drives. This does not mean that these processes will succeed in transforming their systems, but only that this is the three-dimensional space within which collaborative (as contrasted to coercive) change efforts must navigate.

My colleagues and I presented the Radical Collaboration guidebook at COP27 to help collaborative change efforts on climate and related challenges work more intentionally and effectively with love, power, and justice. In a typical Reos systems transformation project, we create spaces and processes that engage love through convening and connecting actors from across the whole system, power through helping these actors learn-through-acting how to grow their individual and collective capacities to influence the system, and justice through creating

structures and agreements within which the actors can relate as fellow humans and peers (Kahane, 2021, pp. 149, 152, 155).

Working with love, power, and justice together is never easy because these three drives are in permanent tension. We can work towards greater love, power, and justice, but need to recognize that no neat, agreed, stable, ideal state is possible; in the *best* of all possible worlds, we have to live with plurality, volatility, conflict, and compromise. This was philosopher Isaiah Berlin's central proposition, which he summarized by quoting Immanuel Kant: "Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made" (Berlin, 1990, ii).

The fifth "*do*" of radical collaboration is *Care For Yourselves*, which means attending to the human joys and tragedies of systems-transforming work. The corresponding "*don't*" is *Keep Pushing*, which means continuously demanding more of ourselves and others. A healthy movement towards a healthy future requires healthy people, and the way we show up affects what we can do. The journey is long and hard and we must acknowledge the uphill: many of our fellow travelers—especially those with less power and privilege—are suffering, traumatized, and frightened, torn between resignation and rage. We need to collaborate empathetically and fairly, recognizing that different collaborators face different realities and have different resources and constraints.

Because there is no static point of balance among love, power, and justice, we must create a dynamic balance. We need to move back and forth among these drives and to discover our way forward through trial and error. Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping offered an image for such movement when he described the transformation of the Chinese economy towards "socialism with Chinese characteristics" by saying, "We are crossing the river feeling for stones" (Heinzen, 2006).

The sixth "*do*" is *Discover Ways Forward*, which means employing love, power, and justice as each is needed, taking one step at a time, learning and adjusting as we go. In playing our roles, the way forward will rarely be clear or straightforward: it is not a highway, and we can't clear away the obstacles and make a straight road before we start. We must be prepared for confusion, crisis, failure, frustration, setbacks, and disappointment, and when these occur, pause, sense, and try something new. The "*don't*" is *Drive Straight Ahead*, which means deciding on a course of action and continuing on this course regardless of the results it is producing.

How do we create the love, power, and justice required to transform social systems? The good news is that we do not have to: every person has within themselves all three of these drives, and so we don't need to create them but only to unblock them. This crucial insight was given to me in 2017 by Jesuit priest Francisco de Roux, just after he had been appointed chairman of the Colombian Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition. My colleagues and I were facilitating a workshop of Colombian stakeholders who were working to transform their region through addressing its long-running violent conflicts. On the morning of the first day of the workshop, the participants

were tense: they had major disagreements about what had happened and what needed to happen. Some of them were enemies, many of them had strong prejudices, and most of them felt at risk in being there. But they had come anyway because they wanted to make a difference.

By the end of the day, the participants had begun to relax and to hope that they could do something worthwhile together. Then, when we all got up to go to dinner, de Roux rushed up to me, overflowing with excitement. "Now I see what you are doing!" he said. "You are removing the obstacles to the expression of the mystery!" De Roux was saying that enabling social transformation does not require creating love, power, and justice: it only requires removing the obstacles to the expression of these innate universal drives. De Roux's perspective echoes approaches to personal and system development that focus on "capacity release" rather than "capacity building" (Stuteley & Stead, 2018, p. 112). The challenge these approaches present is how to release these drives and capacities not only in peaceful classroom or workshop settings, but also in the hurly-burly of COP events and ordinary business, political, and community life (Palmer, 2001).

The last of the seven "*dos*" of radical collaboration is *Share Hopeful Stories*. This means offering images of what is possible that help people find their way to move forward together. (The "*don't*" is *Assume Common Language*, which means dictating to others how they must understand their reality and act on it.) People won't move forward together without shared stories of realistic hope: they need narratives and maps about where they are, where they are trying to get to, and why it is important that they move (Wilkinson & Flowers, 2018). I can now see, in retrospect, that one role I have been playing in systems transformation is through telling such stories, both through reporting on my experiences and learnings from tough collaborations (as in this article) and through facilitating the co-creation of scenarios of better possible futures—the subject of my third book, "Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future" (Kahane, 2012).

The set of seven practices of radical collaboration provides an integrated approach to tapping into—to removing obstacles to the expression of—love, power, and justice. The seven "don'ts" are a recipe for an insular, competitive, rigid approach to addressing social challenges that cannot adequately address super-wicked challenges. The seven "dos," by contrast, are a recipe for an inclusive, cooperative, responsive approach that has the potential to move far enough, fast enough, and fairly enough to adequately address these challenges.

Here, then, is the short version of my hopeful story. It is possible to transform social systems through radical collaboration. We do this through unblocking love and power and justice, and through feeling our way forward, towards a world with more love and more power and more justice. Making progress in this way is not straightforward or neat or easy, but it can be done. And it must be done: this is what it takes to address the daunting challenges of our time.

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Peer Review Article

The Map to Compassion:

A Systems-Based Model of Human Needs

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Abstract

This article introduces the Human Needs Map—a sense-making tool that helps orient our minds to human needs that drive and trigger us, disrupting relationships and creating conflict. Initially inspired from fieldwork of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the Human Needs Map has developed into a systems model that reveals the interior landscape of our Protective body/mind with needs and emotions in dynamic flux. The model provides a language to speak about the interconnectivity of needs through their synergies and tensions. Naming this emerging and coherent inter-dependency between needs and emotions offers a way to understand emotions as reasonable and provides more vectors to heal, dislodge or re-write narratives and beliefs, which perpetuate conflict. The implication lies not only at the individual level but also at the level of systems change to support the design of social and cultural structures more capable of taking needs and emotions into account. The present article traces the iterative process conceptualizing the model and discovering its internal patterns, followed by a discussion about the Needs system's adaptive qualities and its role in creating and perpetuating Conflict, concluding with insights for Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding.

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Keywords
human needs map, conflict, adaptive, embodiment, self-awareness, trauma, sensitivities, needs matrix

> There is much to be gained . . . by opening up the black box and asking, for example, whether imperative needs are expressions of a libidinal drive, as Freud (1930/1989) thought, whether they emerge in the course of human development, as Erikson (1963) and others believed . . . it is likely to provide fuller and more accurate answers to the major question posed by John Burton and his colleagues: How can the basic needs that, unsatisfied, generate destructive social conflict be identified, described, and satisfied?
>
> —Richard E. Rubenstein, "Basic Human Needs: The Next Steps in Theory Development"

In 1998, during a joint meeting of Israeli and Palestinian security forces near the Palestinian town of Tulkarem,[1] the Israeli commanders justified setting up spontaneous security checkpoints along the road leading to Palestinian villages even if it meant stopping and checking a village leader. They argued that checkpoints were a legitimate and agreed upon security measure consistent with the rules and protocols of the Oslo Accords.[2] The Palestinian commander complained that at one recent checkpoint, a village leader was stopped and made to stand near the street while his villagers drove by, humiliating him. I was there as a Ph.D. student when Nabil, the Palestinian commander, came up to me after the meeting, shaking his head: I just don't understand Israelis. Israelis think without feeling. What did Nabil perceive about the consequences that his Israeli counterparts were missing?

As I finished writing this article, it was only weeks since October 7, when Hamas, the Palestinian organization elected to govern Gaza, had declared war on Israel by invading, massacring, raping, burning, and kidnapping Israelis and foreigners. The scale of the tragedy rekindled Israel's and the Jewish people's

[1] Tulkarem is located along the "Green Line" where a District Coordinating Office (DCO) had been established by the Oslo Agreements to manage security cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian security forces. The relationship was one of "non-mediated peacekeeping," where the enemy fighters were their own peacekeeping force without third-party mediation.

[2] The Israeli-Palestinian Joint Patrols were created by the Oslo Accords to "ensure free, unimpeded, and secure movement along the roads and in other areas." (Oslo II – Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Washington, D.C., September 28, 1995. p. 38).

traumatic memory of the Holocaust. Tragically, Israel's predictable reaction has led to the massive suffering and killing of thousands of our Palestinian cousins in Gaza. How is it possible to "think with feeling" in matters of life or death? How might we gain the required perspective to facilitate long-term thought integrated with emotional intelligence?

The impulse to create the Human Needs Map that I describe in this article came from my peacebuilding research to help transform conflicts of any size by more deeply understanding our own reactions and those of "the other." I sought to design a model that explains how human needs could support political and military strategic thinking as well as a wide range of personal and social challenges through a profound awareness of human needs and emotions. The result is a sensemaking tool developed through an iterative process over 28 years during my work as a mediator, university lecturer, facilitator, coach, and student of conflict and needs theories. My training and certification in Somatic Experiencing also contributed to formulating the conceptual model.[3]

The Scope and Structure of this Article

The debate over whether human beings are motivated by self-interest and/or higher motives is not engaged here. What I posit in this article is that conflict results from one's self-interest in getting one's own unmet needs met and that both self-interest and our beliefs about our own needs serve one goal: to ensure our survival. I refer to this part of our psyche as the *protective body-mind*, defined as an innate human system that keeps the organism safe by integrating its thoughts, images, emotions, body sensations, and movement in self-defense.

As I describe in more detail later, our survival mechanisms are dependent on a close interaction between body and mind. This system triggers our defense response when danger is perceived. The model provides a map to make conscious the often-unconscious drivers and beliefs that fuel this needs system. My aim here is twofold: to present the Human Needs Map as a systems model that integrates human needs and emotions in a matrix; second, to describe the internal dynamics through which this system adapts to its environment.

In part 1, I recount my journey in developing this model, which led to the development of the Human Needs Map. Part 2 offers a concise overview of the model's components. In part 3 focuses on the internal logic of the Human Needs Map, exploring the interconnectedness of its elements and its deep ties to fundamental human emotions. Part 4 draws attention to the unique role of the survival needs—physical aliveness and safety—within the *protective body-mind* system. Part 5 examines the ways in which the *protective body-mind* system adapts to its surroundings, particularly during childhood, and the potential

[3] Somatic Experiencing is a trauma healing modality developed by Peter Levine (1997).

challenges this adaptation can pose later in life. Part 6 provides an in-depth analysis of the need for identity, including the influence of narratives, values, and beliefs on the emergence and perpetuation of conflict dynamics. Part 7 summarizes the insights and findings presented.

Part 1. Brief Review of Human Needs Models: An Epistemological Journey

The Human Needs Map emerged from my doctoral research in the social anthropology of Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation, which culminated in the the Oslo Accords of 1995–2000. The model was strongly influenced by my movement background in dance ethnology and more specifically by the experiential and mental framework of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), a method and language for interpreting human movement. Movement philosopher and choreographer Rudolf von Laban (1879–1958), together with Warren Lamb and others, conceptualized body, effort, shape, and space as a system of the human body moving in and interacting with space, whereby any one part impacts the whole. The tetrahedron formed through the ongoing dynamic interaction between body-effort-shape-space represents the human being's expressive movement as an adaptive response to the environment. This framework underlies how I perceive and witness human needs interacting and adapting as an interdependent dynamic system in response to the environment.

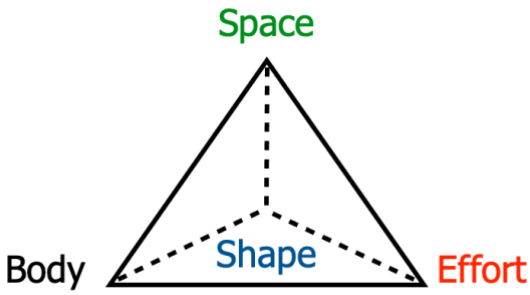

Figure 1. Laban Movement Analysis Represents Four Aspects of Human Movement (Laban/Bartinieff Institute of Movement Studies [LIMS], 1978).

With an awareness of nonverbal behavior in general and skilled training in LMA, I entered the West Bank and Gaza Strip/Palestine in 1996 to research the negotiation of relations on the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Patrols. I witnessed a fluid system reflecting the embodiment of change (Heifetz-Yahav, 2005) where military men, members of the PLO, and Israeli security forces, who had been enemy fighters, became their own nonmediated peacekeeping force, which required them to change their expressive behavior and communication to make peacebuilding possible.

My prior training in nonviolent communication (NVC) with Marshall Rosenberg brought another dimension to my fieldwork and subsequent activities

in teaching and mediating. NVC makes explicit the relationship between emotions and human needs: namely that conflict involves emotions as a currency. One of my key findings was the crucial importance that emotions play in the negotiation of relationships, the building of trust, and the transition from fighters to peacekeepers (Heifetz-Yahav, 2002).

The next epistemological benchmark occurred in the years 2002–2005 when I was involved in Track II negotiations,[4] teaching graduate students, and serving as an advisory member of the Israeli security forces' Crisis Management Team. Experimenting with the language of "needs" vs. "interests," I noted that explicitly using the term "needs" elicited a wide range of unexpected emotions and a deeper sense of understanding. Inquiring about needs rather than interests resulted in the other party feeling more heard and understood, thus bringing more "peace into the room" (Bowling & Hoffman, 2000). In contrast, discussions that used the term "interests" lacked the emotion-rich expression (including anger) that communicates "I understand you, what is important to you, and why"-sentiments more conducive to building trust.

By 2009 the model began to take concrete form. My graduate students in the International Conflict Resolution and Mediation Program at Tel Aviv University were assigned fieldwork to map the conflict in a mixed Muslim, Jewish, and Christian neighborhood in Haifa. Their research results and later my own workshops in expressive movement and leadership development gave me more insight into ways of mapping human needs that could provide a coherent structure for understanding and helping to resolve human conflict interpersonally and at the societal level. To help my students make sense of the needs dynamics in the field, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy provided an entry point.

American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–1970), perhaps the best-known theorist of human needs, created a pyramid to graphically describe the movement of individual motivation toward self-actualization and well-being. Maslow's two-dimensional hierarchy represents needs that sequence upward toward the next level after the need at any given level is satisfied. The problem with Maslow's theory, in the context of conflict, is that we do not satisfy one need and proceed to the next because there are situations where we may give up our "lower" needs for our "higher" needs. For example, Maslow's pyramid-shaped hierarchy does not explain why people sacrifice their own life or the lives of their children (survival = lower need) for a cause (self-actualization = higher need), or why busy executives sacrifice family life (love = lower need) for success (esteem = higher need). Maslow's model is designed for human potential, not for explaining the dynamics of conflict.

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[4] Track II negotiation or diplomacy refers to mediation between nongovernmental, unofficial, and informal stakeholders, such as university professors, lawyers, and private citizens and groups.

An ample literature on conflict and conflict resolution recognizes many factors beyond scarcity of physical resources as motivation for conflict. Identity-based conflict is well established in the literature on war and peace (Rothman, 1997; Sen, 2007; Smyth, 2002). Others note identity and emotions (Shapiro, 2010), pride (De Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003), and humiliation (Lindner, 2006). It was the sociologists who created Human Needs Theory (Avruch, 2013; Burton, 1990, 1998; ; Lederer et al., 1980; Sites, 1973). They brought the focus to human needs and the deprivation of those needs as the cause of conflict. These theorists identified various needs that, when unmet, are the source of conflict. The prominent sociologist and diplomat John Burton created a list consistent with and inspired by others, such as Paul Sites, a contemporary of Burton's. Another influencer in the field of human needs is the "father of peace studies," Johan Galtung (1969), who proposed four groups of basic human needs: well-being, survival, identity, and freedom.

Chilean-born economist Manfred Max-Neef (1991) created a unique systems perspective of human needs. He designed a two-dimensional Human Needs Matrix as a "taxonomy of human needs" that identifies nine fundamental needs and their relationship to four existential categories: being, having, doing, and interacting. Years later, Harvard negotiators and peace scholars Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro (2005) developed their Core Concerns Framework, which is based on five key human motivations: appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status, and role.

HUMAN NEEDS THEORISTS

MASLOW 1908-1970 1908-1970	GALTUNG 1930	MAX-NEEF 1932-2019 1932-2019	SITES 20th C.	BURTON 1915-2010 1915-2010	ROSENBERG 1934-2015 1934 - 2015
Self Actualisation		Understanding	Meaning	Personal Fulfillment	Spiritual Communion
Esteem		Creation	Recognition	Recognition	Creation
Love/Belonging	Well Being Needs	Affection	Emotional Stimulation	Belonging	Love/Integrity
Safety/Security		Protection	Control	Safety/Security	Interdependence
Physiological	Survival Needs	Subsistance	Justice	Distributive Justice	Physical Nurturance
	Identity Needs	Identity	Rational Stimulation	Identity/Culture	Autonomy
		Participation	Participation	Self-Esteem	Play
	Freedom Needs	Freedom			Freedom
		Idleness/Leisure			

Table 1. A Summary of the Needs Identified by Human Needs Theorists (Deborah Heifetz, 2018).

First Iteration of a Needs Map

To build my own model, I initially used specific needs identified by Maslow and Burton, according to what seemed most salient from preliminary fieldwork I had conducted. My first Human Needs Map included four interrelated human needs: three from Maslow and Burton (belonging/attachment, safety/security, and self-esteem), the fourth (fairness/justice) from Burton. I excluded Maslow's self-actualization because I discerned that conflicts which people kill and die for do not involve that need. And I mistakenly assumed at the time that Maslow's "physiological needs" would drive conflict only when there is an unfair distribution of scarce resources. Thus my initial Human Needs Map consisted of the following four needs:

1. Safety/Security: the need for predictability, control, stability, and freedom from fear and anxiety.
2. Belongingness/Attachment: the need for inclusion in relationships, to be accepted by others, and to have strong personal ties with one's family, friends, and identity groups.
3. Self-esteem: the need to be recognized by oneself and others as strong, competent, and capable; the need to know that one can impact one's environment.
4. Fairness/Justice: the need for the fair allocation of resources among all of one's community members.

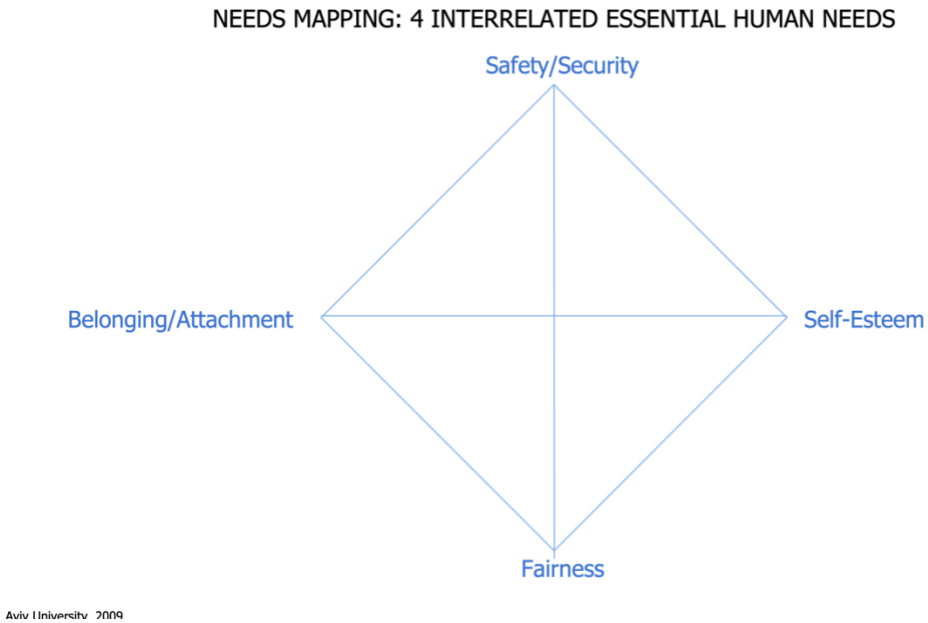


Figure 2. First Iteration of the Human Needs Map (Deborah Heifetz, 2009).

Field research soon revealed that this model was insufficient. I revised the diagram to include six points, adding identity and culture, which are contended issues in Israel. The need for Identity reflects the struggle for culture, cultural

values, and historical narratives—for meaning-making. That is why, in the revised model, I bundled the need for identity with Galtung's and Sites's needs for meaning. And as my students' fieldwork in Haifa also surfaced the struggle over equal voice and resources as a core theme, I added Max-Neef's need for freedom as a sixth need.

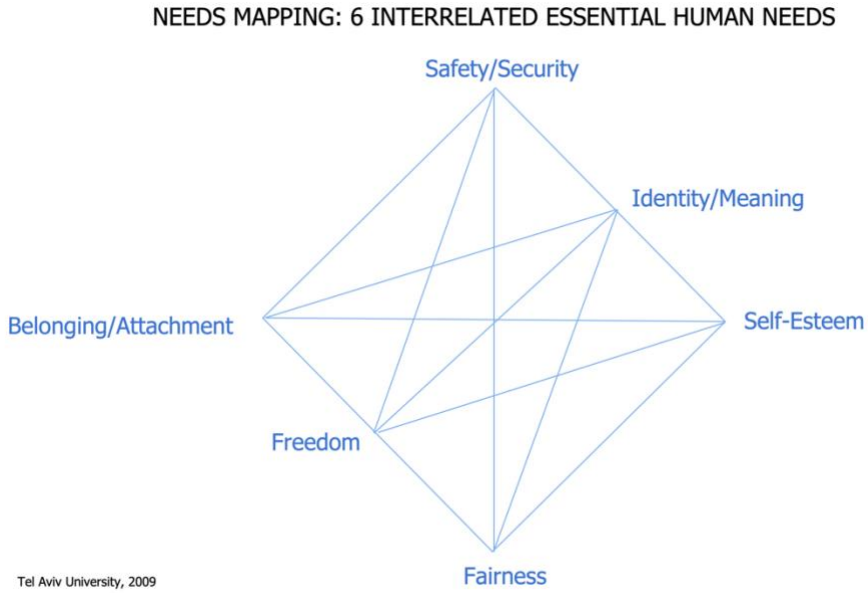


Figure 3. Second Iteration of the Human Needs Map (Deborah Heifetz, 2012).

Physical Aliveness, Repositioning the Needs, and Creating the Hungers

The next set of insights arose in 2014–2018 while I was developing and leading a series of Embodied Leadership Training (ELT) workshops with movement expert Judy Gantz. The workshops drew on the body as a resource; from this, I created a mental framework to include physical aliveness as a human need, a need I had sensed earlier when co-teaching a course on gender and terrorism in 2005 at the Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Herzliya, Israel. At that time, I had been struck that the role of sexual desire in suicide terrorism—the embodied pleasurable experience awaiting "martyrs" in paradise (Berko, 2009)—was in principle no different from its role in the common practice of raping women since the beginning of warfare (Alison, 2007). Our embodiment as sensual and sexual beings driven by pleasure and avoidance of pain is a motivation that should be included in any discussion about human needs and conflict. Thus I included physical aliveness as a central driving force among all human needs and initially placed it in the middle of the Human Needs Map.

Simultaneously, influenced by nonacademic models such as the Jungian-inspired shadow work, I grouped needs into energetic archetypical qualities that I named "hungers." In the process, I integrated a central concept from macro-

theories of conflict—i.e., the use and exercise of power in its many forms, including group competition, control, and access to resources (Robbins & Leibowitz, 2021). Thus power is included as a hunger within the model that includes the need for fairness.

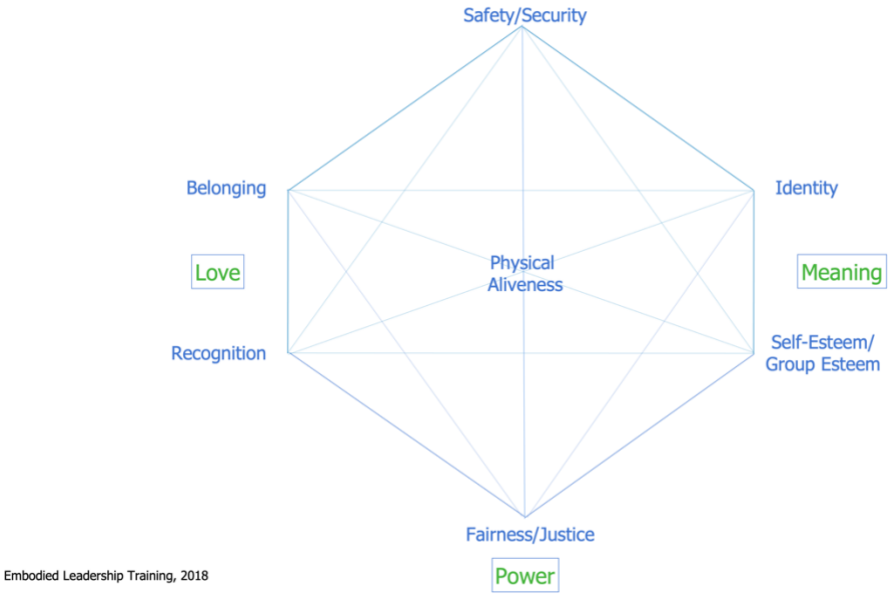


Figure 4. Third Iteration of the Human Needs Map (Deborah Heifetz, 2017).

Fairness, Autonomy, and the Four Hungers

Exposing the model to numerous people of varied backgrounds elicited consistent responses regarding the position of safety/security in the model. Aligning the map visually with Maslow's hierarchy helped people better understand the model. Further, I chose to focus on fairness over justice because the terms tend to elicit different reactions. For example, when "fairness" was used during a Track II negotiation, the conversation opened for subjective perspectives and feelings such as: "I feel angry and unfairly treated." Communicating with ideas of fairness in mind can lead to constructive, revealing, and "feelingful" inquiries that are conducive to naming the repair to the harm done, a core topic for mediation and restorative justice (Zehr, 2015) in contrast to legal punishment and retribution.

I then combined fairness with autonomy to form a needs pair for hunger *power*, integrating the common strains between autonomy and belonging on which peace scholar and negotiator Dan Shapiro (2017) had elaborated. Drawing from training in trauma healing, I recognized that physical aliveness and safety create a needs pair for *survival*, and thus the model took its present form—a circular matrix consisting of four hungers and eight needs grouped into four needs pairs (see Figure 5) and positioned around the circle in a very specific way:

Figure 5. Fourth Iteration of the Human Needs Map (Deborah Heifetz, 2019).

Part 2. The Hungers and Their Associated Needs Pairs

This section briefly describes the four hungers and their associated needs pairs using the following working definitions of needs and hungers:

1. Needs: Needs are human requirements that call for a response. I draw from Masini's definition of needs where "Needs can be understood abstractly to refer to those human requirements calling for a response that makes human survival and development possible in a given society" (Masini, 1980, p. 227, as cited in Sites, 1990, p. 10).
2. Hungers: A hunger is "an inner drive to attain a certain quality, a certain state"[5] of being with sensate qualities that the human being strives to feel and experience and where one finds unique variations of pleasurable sensations.

[5] Jerome Kagan, personal communication. Professor Kagan helped formulate the definition of the *hungers* during a discussion of the Human Needs Map in 2019.

The Hunger for SURVIVAL: Staying Alive

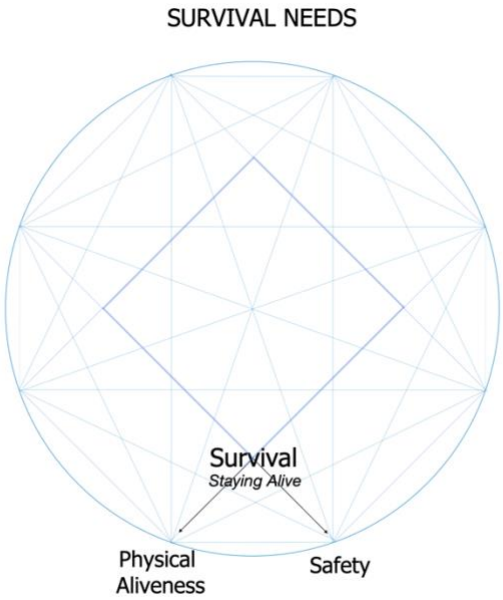


Figure 6. The Hunger for Survival with the Needs Pair (Deborah Heifetz, 2019).

The *hunger for survival* is the drive to stay alive as an individual and as a tribe (i.e., one's group or community) by seeking pleasure and avoiding harm. Survival involves actions and reactions such as searching for opportunities or guarding against or retreating from dangers in the environment. The survival needs are *physical aliveness* and *safety*. Humans expand, release, and open toward sensual, emotional, and intellectual delight, and contract, tighten, and close when facing or even anticipating pain. These foundations of our internal and external tracking response, which we are made aware of by focusing on the "felt sense" (Gendlin, 1998) for enjoyable and uncomfortable feelings, are grounded in the hedonic tones of pleasure and pain (Fogel, 2009, p. 39). The two needs permeate all other needs through the ongoing expansive drive for growth and gratification restrained by the protective responses from perceived harm and unbearable pain.

The Hunger for LOVE: Feeling Cared For and Cared About

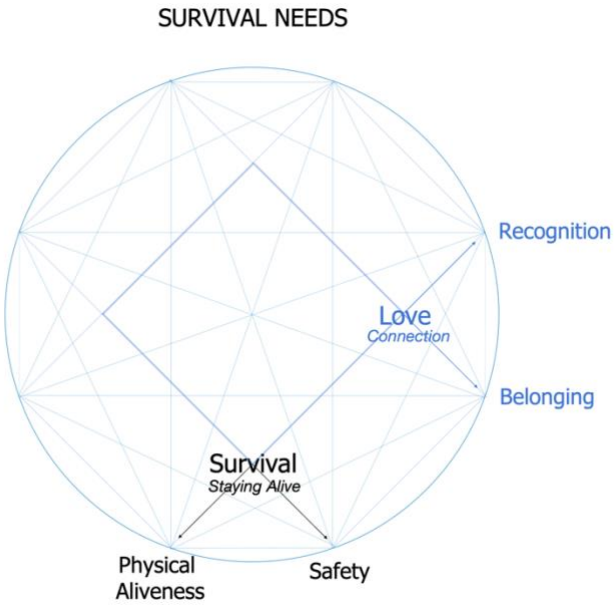


Figure 7. Including the Hunger for Love with Its Needs Pair (Deborah Heifetz, 2019).

The hunger for love is the drive for the warm feeling, tender touch, secure embrace, and vulnerable trust—an experience captured in German term *Geborgenheit*—achieved through caring relationships and personal connection. For human beings, safety is inseparable from social engagement. Over the past decades, neuroscience has confirmed that we are wired to find security through human connection (Porgas, 2001; Siegel, 1999). The love needs are *belonging* and *recognition*. *Belonging* mobilizes us to find care and stability through relationships and group inclusion. *Recognition* provides the calming ease and reassurance we feel when we are seen and understood by others, when we sense that our needs and feelings matter. "Active listening" or telling one's story during conferencing sessions for restorative justice (Zehr, 2015) can generate feelings that one's "story" matters, and that being understood is a valuable use of time spent, healing the wounded need of the victim.

The Hunger for POWER: My Ability to Exert Impact

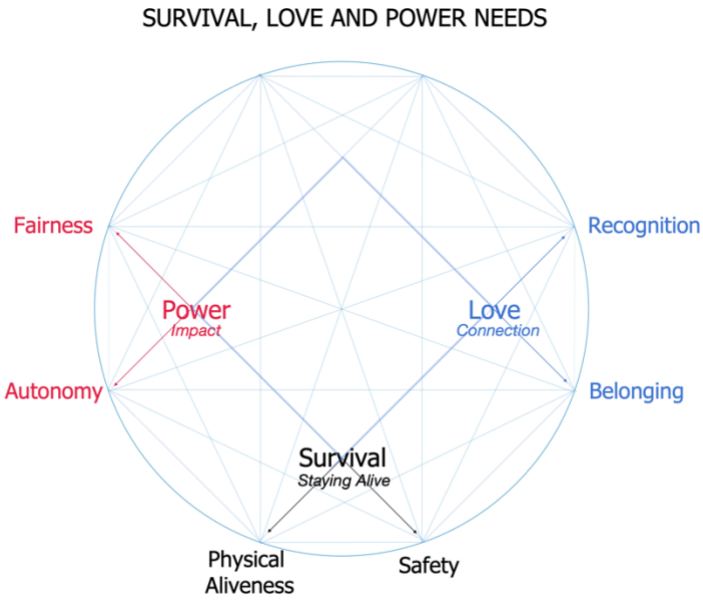


Figure 8. Including the Hunger for Power with Its Needs Pair (Deborah Heifetz, 2019).

The hunger for power is the mobilizing force to impact other people and direct our own lives. *Power* is an expressive energetic potency to exercise agency. It channels our determination to both express our will and ensure access to resources. Our drive for *power* mobilizes our needs for *autonomy* and *fairness* and gives us the inner capacity to set boundaries and stand up for ourselves when we perceive unfair treatment. There can be immense hedonic pleasure in exerting our will; the shadow side is the seductive pleasure of overpowering others (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017) or even killing others if the urge is not held in check.

The Hunger for MEANING: My Values and Value

Figure 9. Including the Hunger for Meaning with Its Needs Pair (Deborah Heifetz, 2019).

The hunger for meaning directs our passion to make sense of ourselves and the world. It mobilizes us to find direction in our lives, to know what we stand for, and clarify how to live in integrity with our values through the innate capacity for identification—i.e., internalizing our group's value system (see, e.g., Brown, 2000, on Social Identity Theory). . The needs for *esteem* and *identity* satisfy our *hunger for meaning*. Our *identity* orients our path toward *the* "true way." Our beliefs, ideals, and morals define who we are and who we are not. The *esteem* need is the motivating force to build and preserve our personal self-worth and value, gaining both self-respect and the respect of others. Our esteem need often aligns with our social position within a community and family, thus making us vulnerable to insult and risk, with practical and potentially destructive consequences.

Part 3. The Iterative Journey Continues to Uncover the Map's Internal Logic

To explain the Human Needs Map as a structured system of human needs and emotions, I found

an invaluable resource in my spouse, Frieder Krups.[6] Our synergy unearthed a compelling internal logic for how and why these needs interact with each other, and how specific needs and emotions are connected.

The Axes: Tensions Between the Hungers

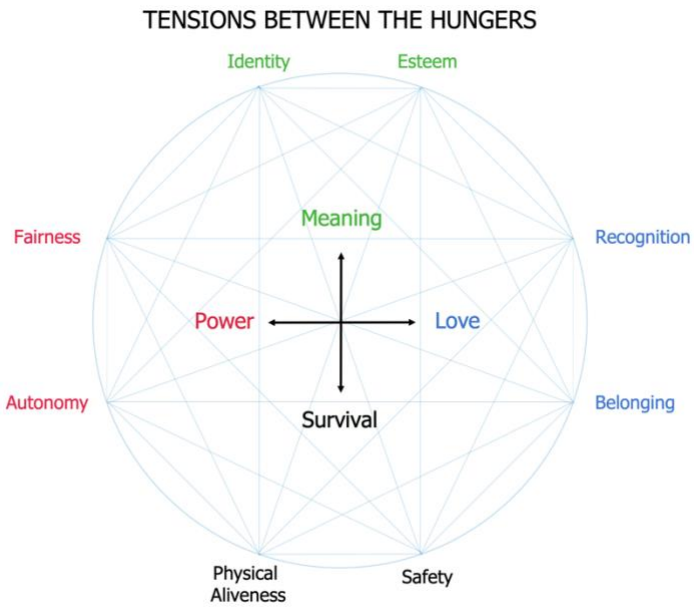


Figure 10. Tension Patterns and the Four Hungers (Deborah Heifetz, 2020).

The model intentionally positions the hunger categories—*love & power* and *survival & meaning*—along horizontal and vertical axes, respectively, to represent the common stresses found in everyday life. One often sees the struggle between *love* and *power* in troubled relationships when couples negotiate between standing up for themselves and their desire for intimacy and connection. On a societal level, countries that aspire to membership in a regional group such as the European Union (EU) must find ways to compromise when

[6] Frieder Krups has been my creative thinking partner in developing tools relevant for coaching that deepen self-awareness. He holds an engineering degree from MIT and an MBA from Stanford. He is a former business leader, has been active in leadership coaching and group facilitation for more than 20 years, and is extensively trained in a broad range of inner work methodologies.

their own needs and the needs of their potential EU partners do not perfectly align.

Similar strains also become apparent on the vertical axis between *survival* and *meaning*. Abandoning one's values in order to survive or to save a business is consistent with Maslow's hierarchy; however, sacrificing one's own life or the lives of loved ones for an idea or belief subverts the priority to *survive*. On a societal level, governments have gone to war to reclaim their lost honor. Having been humiliated by the Allies after the First World War, Hitler mobilized Germany to regain Germany's national honor (*esteem*).

Tribal and Individual Needs

Another layer of discernment is the distinction between needs that strengthen the group—i.e., one's "tribe"—and needs that reinforce the individual in the tribe. Borrowing from Shapiro (2010), I use "tribe" to refer to a "socially and psychologically constructed [group] . . . whose members see themselves as (a) like-kinded, (b) kinlike in their relational connection, and (c) emotionally invested in their group's enhancement" (p. 638). Being part of a strong tribe is crucial to human survival; thus there are needs that bolster the coherence of the tribe, ensure reciprocity between tribe members, and strengthen the tribe's identity. In contrast, other needs strengthen an individual's personal sense of vitality and empowerment, their feelings of connection, and their position or status as a tribe member. The natural tensions between "tribal" needs and "individual" needs creates a dynamic system in flux that is striving and adapting to ensure the survival of both the individual and the tribe.

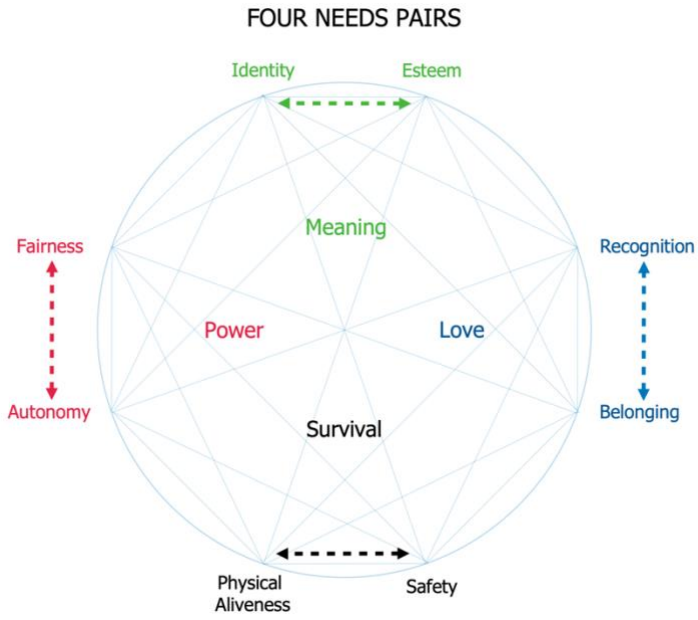


Figure 11. The Four Needs Pairs (Deborah Heifetz, 2020).

The Tensions Between Needs Pairs

Belonging (Tribal Need) and Recognition (Individual Need)

Our need for *belonging* ensures that we seek relationships and membership through connection and inclusion. At the same time, our individual well-being is safeguarded when our personal yearnings and demands are acknowledged and others consider our needs through the underlying quality of connection and care (*recognition*). We feel that we belong when our individual needs, emotions, viewpoints, and concerns are respected by the tribe, and that we are seen and appreciated for who we are as individuals.

Autonomy (Individual Need) and Fairness (Tribal Need)

The need for *autonomy* compels us to express our will, our voice, and point of view to others, to stand up alone and direct our own lives. The need for *fairness* generates the energy to react when someone attempts to take advantage of us. Rules of *fairness* provide moderating pressure on self-interest while structured agreements formalize reciprocity (Fehr & Gächter, 2000).

Esteem (Individual Need) and Identity (Tribal Need)

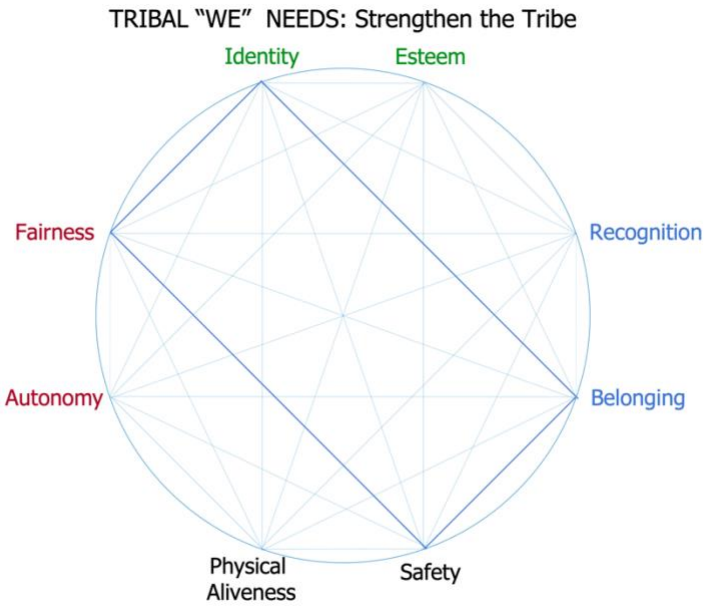
Our need for *esteem* drives us to feel and be valued and to attain a position of stature within our group. What constitutes value, though, and what values we need to adhere to, is defined by our *identity*. It is our need for *identity* that compels us to adhere to the values and rules of our group. Were we to violate the group's values, we would lose status and respect.

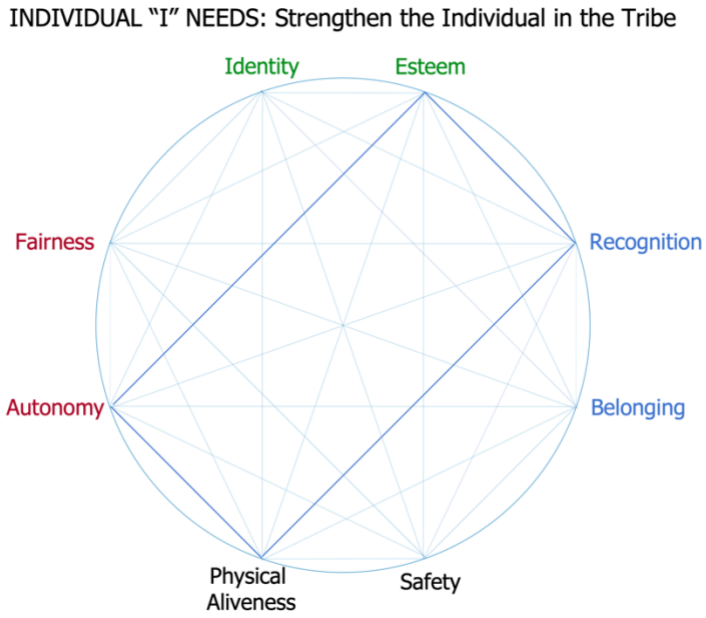
Physical Aliveness (Individual Need) and Safety (Tribal Need)

The need for physical *aliveness* is an internal expansive force that pushes us toward pleasure and away from unpleasantness in all areas of life. The need is attenuated by the restraining need for *safety*, the need to be alert and ready to react to external signs of danger that might threaten our lives or create unbearable pain or harm.

The Diagonals: Representing Synergies Within Individual and Tribal Needs

An elegant internal geometry emerges when the individual needs and the tribal needs are combined. In lieu of tensions, their interactions create synergies.





Figures 12 and 13. The Diagonals Group the Tribal and Individual Needs into Patterns of Synergy (Deborah Heifetz, 2020).

Tribal Needs

Tribal needs strengthen the coherence and robustness of the group. A group's sociocultural identity is based on beliefs, values, rules, rituals, and practices that set the parameters for a shared inclusive experience of belonging. A strong sense of belonging bolsters the cohesion of the group, and as more people join, safety increases in an inclusive, cohesive group. Furthermore, a group's values dictate the rules of fairness that clarify agreements to secure reciprocity; those agreements conribute to the tribe's legitimacy and its members' trust in it. Rules of fairness create an atmosphere of security, which in turn creates a desire to be part of the group.

Individual Needs

Individual needs strengthen the individual in the tribe. Physical aliveness is the source of vitality, mobilizing our inner will to assert our autonomy, to stand up for ourselves, and to exercise personal agency. When we can direct these internal energies with the force of determination, we become more capable of responding to inner and external resistance, which empowers us to excel and increase our worth and stature in areas we value and that are valued by our tribe. We gain both self-esteem and respect from those in our tribe. And when we feel self-respect and earn social respect, our voice is more likely to be heard; when that happens, we feel seen, appreciated, and considered (recognition).

Hungers and Emotions: Foundational Emergence of the Self

The claim that core emotions are aligned with human needs is consistent with arguments made by Marshall Rosenberg as well as many scholars of Human Needs Theory. As noted by Sites: "Because needs cannot be directly observed, all we can do is to conceptualize a need as existing when certain emotions are observed or reported since, as indicated, needs are tied to emotions" (1990, p. 10). While there is a robust literature on emotions and conflict (Halperin & Schwartz, 2010) and emotions in groups, whereby emotions are felt by the collective (Barbalet, 1998; De Rivera et al., 2007), no framework specifically and explicitly integrates the relationship between emotions and needs as a total system. Drawing a direct connection between hungers and core emotions may help fill this gap. Studying very young children offers a window of opportunity for insights before acculturation has socialized their expression of emotions (Lutz & White, 1986).

Emotions are recognized as universally human expressive experiences (Darwin, 2009; Ekman et al., 1969). Children communicate *fear, sadness, anger,* and *shame* in their raw uncivilized or untrained expression—four primary human emotions that are observable cross-culturally and in people who are blind (Barkow et al., 1973; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1973). Over the first four years of life these

emotions become visible; they are exhibited in the face and also expressed in body movements (Melzer et al., 2019).

I define emotions as human energy—"energies in motion"—that mobilizes the body into action and communicates both to ourselves and to others when something is right and when something is wrong (one's needs are unmet). Emotions create an expressive energy that affects the people around us and compels others to react. Emotions can be described by their internally felt "energy" intensity and, like *physical aliveness*, their hedonic tone of pleasure and pain (Brackett, 2019). Yet, if emotions express the status of our needs and communicate information to the people around us, is there a direct connection between specific emotions and specific needs?

My initial inspiration to investigate whether a direct connection exists came from shadow work, a personal development model based on principles of Jungian psychology.[7] The shadow work method works with four Jungian archetypes, each of which can be accessed through a specific emotion: magician (fear); lover (sadness); warrior (anger); and sovereign (shame/joy). Because these archetypes seem to be consistent with the four *hungers* from the Human Needs Map, it sparked the idea that if the archetypes are aligned to emotions, perhaps the *hungers* are as well. Might these four core emotions serve both to create an awareness that a specific *hunger* is at risk and provide the appropriate response (McLaren, 2010) as "energies in motion" to help achieve that *hunger's* unique qualitative state.

- Fear mobilizes an alert awareness, making the body ready to meet impending dangers to a person's *survival*.
- Sadness softens personal boundaries, attracting and drawing other people's attention to care. It is a call for *love*.
- Anger fuels inner- and outward-directed energy, connecting us to our forceful determination and *power*, enabling us to stand up for ourselves and set clear boundaries.
- Shame is an inward-directed energy that invites humbling self-reflection about whether our actions conform to our values—whether our actions have *meaning*.

Although the arguments for such direct connections seem compelling, emotions are not static. They are highly dependent on culture, disposition, and learning. I found the link with early childhood development to be persuasive, which could more solidly ground these claims.

[7] See also https://shadowwork.com/.

Hungers and Child Development

Theories of psychosocial development describe different stages of child development (see the work of Erik Erikson, John Bowlby, Jerome Kagan, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and Robert Kegan). As a child grows from full dependency on its caregiver to successively greater levels of independence over the first four years of life, different sets of needs seem to emerge sequentially. These stages correspond with the capacity for the child to verbally and nonverbally express core emotions.

These theoretical arguments were consistent with my own experience as an actively engaged mother and avid student of child development raising three sons. When I consulted with the renowned child development scholar Jerome Kagan and walked him through my conceptual model, he confirmed that, indeed, the emergence of the *hungers* is consistent with the developmental stages of early childhood development presented by Freud (1905/1953) and Erikson (1963).

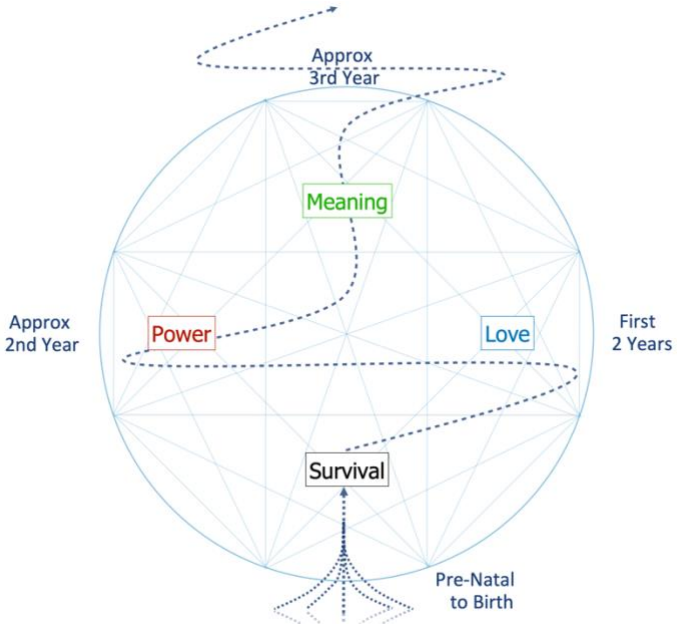


Figure 14. The Hungers Emerge in a Developmental Sequence Through the Life Force (Deborah Heifetz, 2020).

Aligning Emotions and Hungers

The four hungers and their related emotions seem to emerge as milestones in early childhood because emotions express important building blocks in awareness and individuation (Izard, 2009). They help guide our perceptions and motivate us to learn and discern what and whom to trust, where to place our

attention, and what conclusions to reach about life, other people, and ourselves. The development of each emotion also goes through stages of maturation.[8]

The hypothesis stated here is that a synergistic connection exists between specific hungers and emotions and that the maturation of conscious awareness and individuation is consistent with specific hungers "coming online" in child development and with the ability for children to clearly express the corresponding core emotion verbally and nonverbally.

Fear and the Hunger for Survival

Fear is an emotion already present at birth and observable in the Moro reflex, which induces heightened visual and auditory scanning to notice sensory cues of potential harm. Fear is part of the defense response—i.e., the physical reaction to perceived danger that mobilizes the body to fight, flight, freeze, or collapse as it seeks safety through attack or protection. Fear triggers alertness in the eyes and ears to seek out external danger, and readiness in our extremities to defend against or run away from danger. Our body prepares physically to engage our autonomic nervous system once the threat is located. During early development, fear mobilizes the infant to locate and reach out for arms that will hold and protect it.

Sadness and the Hunger for Love

A newborn infant is fully dependent on a caretaker for survival. When a baby's physical discomfort or pain is not assuaged, the baby cries. During the first year of life, the infant begins to shed tears, consistent with its growing awareness of separation. Crying is a call for love, a call to be attuned to with a rhythmicity of connection and understanding. The emotion of sadness softly invites other people to notice and care. Sadness softens boundaries, making the sad person vulnerable and receptive.

Anger and the Hunger for Power

By the age of approximately two and a half, the child enters the "terrible twos"—the developmental stage that captivates our blossoming urges to experience power. The two-to-three-year-old is aware of being separate and capable of exerting their own will. Awareness of separateness fuels the child's energy to

[8] The infant's cry can have numerous meanings, including immature expressions of sadness, anger, frustration, and pain. Even emotions that express moral conscience can be seen in babies as young as 17 months old (Barrett, 2005). However, the argument being made is that core emotions identify, and support four early stages as presented here.

experiment. The child watches and tests how people respond to their behavior, discovering their own capacity to create cause and effect. We strengthen ourselves by doing things alone, discovering the boundaries of our will and its impact on relationships. When deprived of power, we get mad. During this developmental phase, we begin to master the word "no" and test whether our "no" risks losing significant connections.

Shame and the Hunger for Meaning

By roughly age three and a half, the child can clearly express shame and guilt. Decades of research have revealed that preschoolers reliably express self-conscious emotions (Thompson & Newton, 2010); even toddlers already show a range of "guilt-like" and "shame-like" behaviors (Barrett, 2005; Lagattuta & Thompson, 2007). Feeling shame ensures that the family's and community's values are kept safe, and that we behave within the bounds of these norms. Shame dares us to self-reflect in humility, to ask ourselves what we value and what we do not (Brown, 2012).

Happiness, Ease, and Emotions of Well-Being

Happiness is the core pleasurable emotion that arises when we feel secure (survival), loved (love), empowered (power), and valued (meaning).

In summary, the detour into human emotions reveals that:

1. The relationship between emotions and needs supports human survival because emotions can support the satisfaction of human needs.
2. Hungers arise developmentally with core human emotions that serve the specific developmental stage.
3. There exists a fundamental relationship between human emotions and needs before culture and memory create high variability in the expression, perception, and alignment of needs and emotions.

Part 4. The Special Role of the Survival Needs: Safety and Physical Aliveness

The survival needs of *physical aliveness* and *safety* play a special role in the *protective body-mind* because they permeate all other needs. In the case of our need for *safety*, when our senses signal a perceived threat to any of our needs, such as feeling criticized (*identity*), demeaned (*esteem*), misunderstood (*recognition*), unfairly treated (*fairness*), forced (*autonomy*), excluded (*belonging*), or unsafe (*safety*), we can be triggered to act in self-defense. In those moments, our physical aliveness is activated to constrict, collapse, freeze, or explode in an exertion of force to protect ourselves as if our survival is at stake. Human

resources researchers Patterson and colleagues (2011), studied thousands of organizations and found that when people are triggered, they tend to exhibit what they call "violence or silence."

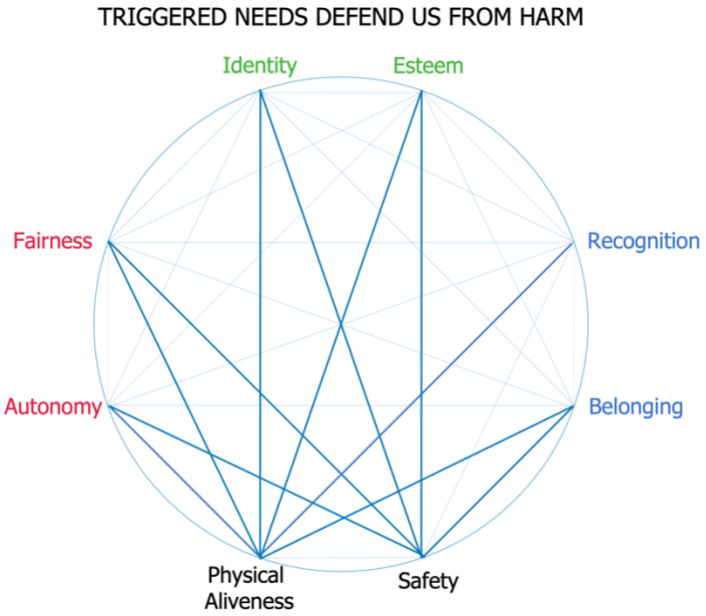


Figure 15. Defending all Needs Through Triggered Physical Aliveness and Safety (Deborah Heifetz, 2020).

The challenge in reactive situations is to regulate the initial defense response to anger (fight) or fear (flight/freeze). When the mind is overtaken by emotions and physical reactions, our ability to think clearly or with curiosity is compromised. For example, when feeling criticized, "people may have fears that self-esteem will be damaged . . . or people may become angry when self-esteem is threatened" (Sites, 1990, p. 22) rather than curious about the cause or legitimacy of the criticism.

Self-regulation restores the capacity to "think with feeling" by engaging embodied self-awareness (Fogel, 2013), to notice and name the triggered moment as such, to pause and to follow that with "breathing in and out" (Hanh, 1987). It restores a state of *presence*, which mediators can also bring into the room (Bowling & Hoffman, 2000). Neuroscience confirms that modulating the bodily symptoms of the overwhelm can regulate the hijacked brain (Siegel, 1999; van der Kolk, 2014) and restore our minds and bodies to relaxed alertness (Eddy, 2016). With access to our conscious mind we are better able to evaluate a situation, find the needs at risk, and allow the effective emotional energies to emerge.

Like the need for safety, the need for physical aliveness permeates all other needs. We feel pleasurable sensations whenever any of our needs are especially satisfied. Different qualities of "feeling good" arise when we win a match (power/esteem) or feel fully understood (recognition). In contrast, varying

unpleasant sensations stir when our projects do not move (esteem) or when intimacy is missing (belonging).

Regularly witnessing our body's internal landscapes builds our capacity to recognize variations of pleasure and discomfort, enabling greater access to our curiosity and integrated mind. Without self-regulation and self-reflection, our emotional reactions can easily be destructive. Getting angry at our spouse for arriving home late will not bring us the intimacy we seek; expressing our sadness, our loneliness, and our wish for closeness might.

Part 5. Adapting to Our Environment Through Beliefs

Infants and small children depend on their protective needs system until their conscious minds mature. According to the principle of adaptation, as we grow and encounter resistence, disconnection, or inadequate responses to our requests (despite our emotional appeals, nonverbal cues, or verbal communication), the protective body-mind "concludes" that our survival is at stake. Through the adaptive process, the child integrates its experiences and forms beliefs in reaction to the direct and indirect messages from its environment. These beliefs cause the threatened needs to feel especially important. For example: "If I don't succeed, then they won't love me" is a belief that would mobilize me to strive harder to ensure that I am loved. We then react sensitively to situations where that need might feel at risk, such as by becoming anxious before an exam: "If I fail, I will lose their love." If we make several failed attemts and the pain gets too uncomfortable, another mechanism may take over: the protective body-mind, which adapts by creating beliefs that numb the needand make us insensitive to whether the need is fulfilled. The fear of failure might adapt and become: "No matter how hard I try, I won't succeed, so I won't even try to succeed. I don't need their love."

We may skew the way we take in and respond to reality because our protective body-mind remembers and either translates a situation as overly threatening or does not sufficiently recognize the real danger of a situation. As a result, we may either overreact or neglect to react.

A person with a need sensitivity tends to be more easily triggered by a sign that a need is at risk. For example, a person with a sensitive esteem need may be inclined to react defensively when their opinion is challenged or criticized, especially in public. Likewise, a person with a numbed need for safety who believes "there's nothing to be afraid of" might underestimate the danger of a situation and act recklessly.

Individuals who have numbed their need for safety may have difficulty appreciating the fear of someone who has experienced a personal trauma or who is sensitive around risk and physical danger. This raises another challenge of having over- or undersensitive needs: the tendency to judge those who are especially sensitive to a need that we have numbed in ourselves.

In summary, the values, beliefs, and automatic reaction patterns of our protective body-mind create sensitivities around certain needs and numb others. They provide us with important skills for tackling the challenges of childhood and youth, skills that may be the key to success as adults. At the same time, the resulting imbalances in sensitivities often become the reason for our challenges.

Part 6. The Need for Identity and Its Role in Creating and Perpetuating Conflict

The goal of this section is twofold: to show the important role that the need for identity plays in our defensive reactions and the function it serves in shaping the emotions and narratives that perpetuate conflict from generation to generation.

Identity is one of eight needs in a dynamic needs system and is recognized here not as a "thing" or a static entity but as a socially constructed experience of the self that comprises values, beliefs, practices, language, rituals, and all products of culture (Handelman & Lindquist, 2004; Mead, 2001; Turner, 1966). Our Identity gives meaning to our lives. It clarifies where we belong, how we should behave, and what roles we should play. These may be openly defined or subtly embedded in religious beliefs, rituals, or cultural norms that classify certain things, thoughts, and acts as clean or dirty (Douglas, 2002), from the food we eat to the clothes we wear, the sexual behavior we enjoy, and the ways we celebrate life and commemorate death. In this way, our values not only affect the *identity* need but also influence the relative importance we give to all of our needs and the acceptable ways of satisfying them. Beliefs such as "you have to work hard," "education is everything," and "you should never show weakness" are part of our identity, moral standards, and culture. They are often passed down from one generation to the next.

Changing such values or beliefs can be extremely difficult. From the perspective of our *protective body-mind*, letting go of beliefs that once ensured our survival feels dangerous. They are the basis of our identity and determine how we make sense of the world and our place in it. When we shift our belief system, we lose the orientation that makes our beliefs resistant to change. Thus we tend to pass down our values and identities from generation to generation, including our sensitivities, traumatic memories, and stories that perpetuate conflict.

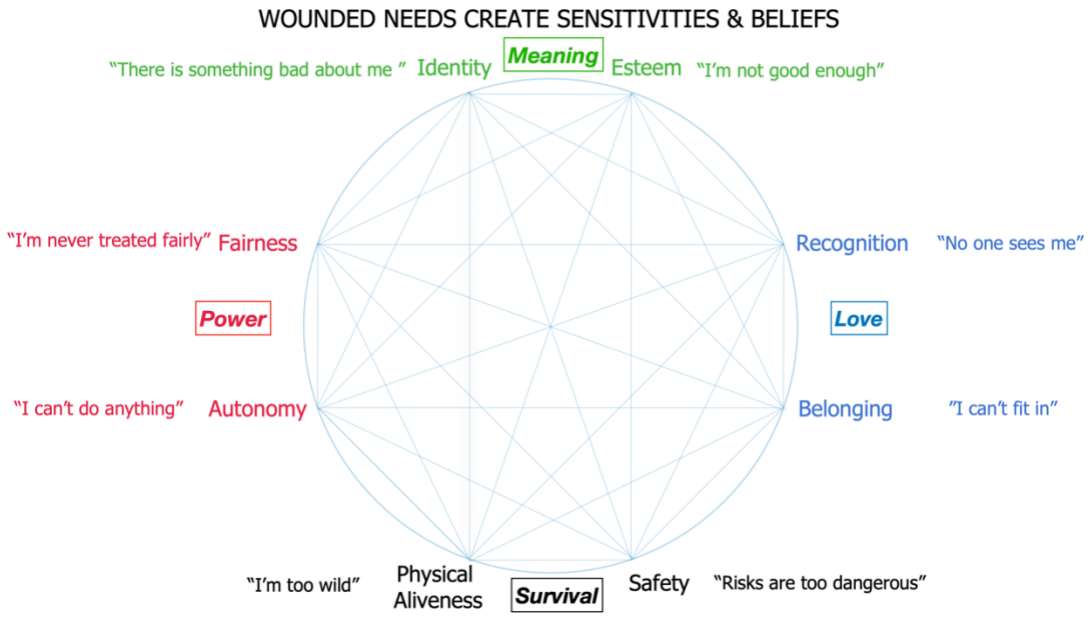


Figure 16. Beliefs That Arise from the Pain of Unmet Needs (Deborah Heifetz, 2023).

Recall the example I presented at the beginning of this article, of the Palestinian commander's perception that "Israelis think without feeling" during their peacebuilding encounter. What light can the Human Needs Map framework shed on that comment? How might insights into sensitivities and numbing needs provide a mental framework to describe the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship during the Oslo period and be helpful for designing future peacebuilding?

I resist tackling this question in the midst of the present Hamas-Israeli war in Gaza because there is so much more complexity to the conflict than can be discussed here. It is possible, however, to examine the relative priority both sides assign to different needs based on their traumatic histories—histories in which they encountered inescapable danger to their needs and created narratives that made sense of their realities, which then became embedded in their respective identities. To illustrate this point, I draw from my experience in peace work.

The Jewish people have known slavery, diaspora, Inquisition, pogroms, Holocaust, expulsions, and racism spanning 2,000 years, compounded by the experience of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[9] Beliefs such as "they are out to kill us" and "if I lower my guard, I will be attacked" existed among many Israeli soldiers I encountered during my research. As an army, their needs and role to ensure safety took priority; they aimed to control the situation through

[9] These include the 1929 Hebron massacre; wars in 1947, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982; Intifada 1; the Oslo Accords; Intifada 2, suicide terrorism; general terrorism fueled by the narrative that Israel has no right to exist as a foreign non-native colonial project, and more.

checkpoints, house raids, and various security-based measures, which continued during the Oslo period. Military control (*autonomy*) mobilized in service of survival compounded a sensitized need for safety. At the same time—stemming from an Israeli cultural rebellion by the early pioneers against European aristocracy—Israeli culture places a low value on formality that is perceived as a "false" etiquette (numbed *esteem*) (Griefat & Katriel, 1989). Politeness and saving face hold little value when measured against saving life. How could Israelis dare to be flexible with their security procedures if Palestinians are unpredictable, dangerous, and ultimately unwilling to accept Israel as a legitimate "native" state (Qleibo, 1992)?

Let us return to Nabil, the Palestinian officer, to whom the situation looked different. Peacebuilding involved shifting power dynamics to create a semblance of equivalence between Israeli and Palestinian security forces. Great value had been placed on equality (fairness), respect (esteem) and affirmation of Palestinian identity (Griefat & Katriel, 1989) among the peacekeeping soldiers. Nabil was puzzled by Israelis' fear for their security (safety), given their superior military and economic power. To him, it made no sense to make a Palestinian elder stand by the fence waiting for an Israeli soldier to finish checking a car for hidden weapons or explosives. Treating an elder without concern for the humiliation it might cause was an unwise action because it ignored the social fabric and structures that reaffirm Palestinian identity, protect Palestinian dignity, and reinforce community stability for a village to transition into stability and independence (*autonomy*). If it is true, as historian Amit Varshizky (2023) writes of Palestinians in Gaza, that "Hamas is in the heart," then how would "thinking with feeling" suggest a third way?

Nabil seems to believe that it is in Israeli's own security interest for Palestinian villages to have a strong leadership structure so that people can be held accountable, village elders can mediate their own conflicts, and the community leader can represent hope by remaining dignified in the eyes of their constituents. These are needs that constitute the hungers of power, survival, and meaning. He might argue that when Palestinians feel respected and live in dignity with autonomy over daily life, being mobilized to regain lost honor would be less likely.

Nabil saw the elder's personal humiliation as rekindling collective humiliation, which for the Palestinians extends back to the Crusades, the defeat of the Moors, European colonialism, the Nakba, multiple defeats by Israel of Arab countries at war, and persistent suffering under post-1967 occupation. The history of a postcolonial wound—of being a conquered and disrespected "other"—is a trigger point (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1963; Said, 1978). The felt humiliation from Jewish or Christian sovereignty over land deemed "Muslim" is a common refrain (Euben, 2015). Hamas leader Khaled Meshal counters the feeling with the intent to humiliate Israel in return, written on signs during the October–

November 2023 Free Palestine demonstrations: "Before Israel dies, it must be humiliated and degraded."[10]

Taking Meshal's comment further through the Human Needs Map may provide insight. Might it be that Meshal is calling for an equivalence of pain—revenge by equalizing the unfairness through humiliation and degradation? Feeling humiliated and publicly shamed sequences within the matrix of needs, igniting memories of the unfair use of power. In other words, destroying Israel and gaining autonomy would not be sufficient. By reclaiming the Palestinian land and humiliating and debasing Israelis in the process, they would achieve balance. The Palestinian experience of humiliation and of feeling unfairly treated has created rage. The question is, what are the available options to address Meshal's anger and frustration and the support by others for his words?

In communities, mediation and restorative justice practices reveal the restorative impact of being seen (recognition) when accountability for harm done is acknowledged. One aspect represented in the Human Needs Map is to rebuild relationships through the *fairness-recognition* dynamic. When harm is inflicted (*fairness*), the victim's pain must be seen (*recognition*), whether through legal justice or community-based practices, to bring about resolution. In the process the victimizer either is deemed legally accountable or claims accountability. Herein lies the difficult question and the opportunity to transition into a co-creative future. Namely, in the Israeli-Palestinian dyad, both sides feel themselves victims of the other. In this case, resolving their respective recognition needs through mutual accountability is a barrier.

"Thinking with feeling" requires taking in the other side's pain. It involves acknowledging harm inflicted by each side on the other—reconstructing narratives in order to name the unnameable and build upon common values. It involves making the 'Other" more like "us" to avoid the common conclusion that those who are not "us", are not like 'us' and therefore endanger us (Ahmed, 2014).

Identifying the shared values and core sensitivities at play, and thereby gaining a deeper understanding of what motivates people to react, may help support this process.

It is neither obvious nor easy. Having compassion for the other side's sensitivity demands taking risks. Engaging directly with the sensitivity requires making peace with the past by becoming accountable, by facing oneself as both victim and victimizer. It requires slowly and stepwise taking more risks to counter one's sensitivity and false perceptions of safety and truth—the truths of our beliefs, beliefs upon which our identities are built. We may locate inspiration

[10] This excerpt is from an address given in Damascus and aired on Al-Jazeera TV on February 3, 2006 (https://www.memri.org/tv/hamas-leader-khaled-mashal-damascus-mosque-nation-islam-will-sit-throne-world-and-west-will-be).

from the Parents Circle—Families Forum (PCFF) where bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families gather to share their grief, and find relief, determination, and a common narrative experience for peace.[11] Healing—peacebuilding from the inside out to restore and rebuild relationships—involves both courage and compassion to break out of the loop of the cycle of violence. Unless we challenge our beliefs, we risk losing our values in order to survive, and we risk staying alive with values not worth living for.

Summary

The conceptual framework presented here is designed to assist people in navigating conflicts with the help of a map to guide a "feelingful" understanding of human motivation. The logic of the model builds on the premise that, to ensure survival, humans have a protective body-mind that is equipped with a dynamic needs system. Because as humans we are dependent on our relationships to survive, the system is designed in such a way that "Individual"and "tribal" needs are ingeniously resilient and balanced. Emotions play a crucial role in maintaining this balance through their energetic and expressive qualities, mobilizing us into action and eliciting responses from others. Human needs are emotional, and our emotions respond to our needs.

To adapt to the specific environment we are born into, the protective body-mind adjusts the expression of emotions and the relative importance of needs. This adjustment helps us survive and build our strengths but often becomes the cause of challenges and conflict in adult life. The Human Needs Map is a tool for unraveling this pattern. It supports bringing awareness and compassion for the wounds and beliefs both to ourselves and others, opening the possibility for both healing and reconstructing our stories and the defensive habits that fuel cycles of violence. It provides a language for understanding the triggers that tell us something is wrong— triggers that may not only wake us up but also risk hijacking our minds, preventing us from fully thinking about or feeling complexity.

The model has implications for a variety of lines of work, from individual coaching to conflict resolution and peacemaking. It can be used to design organizational cultures and businesses where people feel included, safe, empowered, and purposeful, and to bring attention to cultural narratives that perpetuate conflict and suffering. It can also support systems for human security in service of relationships and well-being. That is the model's benefit and what makes it an apt awareness-based tool for systemic change.

[11] https://www.theparentscircle.org/en/pcff-home-page-en/.

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Peer Review Article

Social Poetry:

Introduction to Foundations and Tools

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Abstract

The day-to-day intellectual consciousness perceives a world of independent phenomena (including social phenomena, as any evening news program will reveal) at stages of rest. In order to bring these same phenomena into dynamic relationship not only with one another but also with the time-scale of their own growth and development, one needs to have organs of perception which can perceive the fluid process of transformation itself. Working with and thinking in metaphors, and consciously striving to perceive the images working in social and other phenomena, can help to develop such organs of perception. This can be done individually and this can be done as individuals in a collective. In doing so, not only can one's own thinking and perceiving grow more aligned to the dimensions of life at work in social and natural phenomena, but so too can language, which can then in turn help others to experience and see the more complete reality working in natural or in this case social phenomena, and to choose, if one so wished, to take responsibility for their future development—the future development of, ultimately, civilization, the Earth, and ourselves.

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Keywords
social poetry, social arts, awareness-based system change, phenomenology, systems transformation

Introduction

Social Poetry is a term which I have been using since 2010 to frame my work within what is now becoming known as awareness-based systems change. Fundamentally, Social Poetry, as I shall use the term here, involves the individual or collective creation of metaphors, images, or pictures in relation to social and systems phenomena. It seeks to bring the often 'static' or disconnected social observations perceived by the intellect into a more dynamic, fluid, and complete relationship through the use of the human capacity of imagination.

The term poetry derives from the Greek poiesis, which means to make or to create—to bring forth into the world something that did not exist before (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). As the German poet and scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1994, 2004, 2008) and the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (2003)—and those who have followed their approaches—have emphasized in their work, poiesis need not be a purely subjective phenomenon. This article will explore how the imagination itself—individual and collective—can become an organ of perception for social realities, both ones that currently exist, as well as potential future forms that are waiting for human beings to make them (and that can reveal themselves, in part or at first, through images).

To make this shift towards perceiving current social reality in its interrelated wholeness, and creating—poeticizing—an objective social future that is 'not yet', requires a change of awareness. English philosopher and literary figure Owen Barfield has described such moments of changed awareness as "poetic" (1962, p. 48). For Barfield, this is the difference between poetic form and poetic effect; poetic form is, he argued, the appearance in verse form of black and white space on a piece of paper, while poetic effect involves, as experiential reality, a "felt change in consciousness" (1962, p. 48). While Barfield articulated such experiences primarily in relation to nature, Social Poetry focuses on social phenomena.[1]

In this sense the imagination and poetry—individual and collective—can be used as both a tool for (social) scientific investigation, as well as for artistic creation. In this way there exists a further method (together with other similar, emerging social art forms) by which social systems can "see and sense themselves" (Scharmer, 2009, p. 39); that is, through activating the imagination in social scientific and artistic processes. Social Poetry thereby sees itself not as a

[1] It is important to note that one does not 'lose oneself' in some sort of vague mysticism in such processes, as we shall see through the practical examples below.

means in and of itself, but as part of the larger artwork of the transformation or renewal of society/civilization or, as the German artist Joseph Beuys puts it, as part of a larger "Social Sculpture," in which the social organism is seen as a work of art, and within which every human being is seen as an artist (Beuys, 1993). In this sense, as I am using the terms here, it could also be said that the renewal of civilization is a creative—a poetic—act; a grand poem relying on poetic effect, in which every human being is a poet. Social Poetry, as outlined in brief below, has, I believe, much to offer in this direction.

This article therefore seeks to contribute to the languaging and conceptualizing—indeed, the imagining—of the work of Awareness-Based Systems Change in relation to the human capacity of imagination. It will do so by exploring the epistemological foundations for Social Poetry as I will be using the term here; it will trace the biography and evolution of Social Poetry as I and others have been practicing it; it will outline the archetypal process of Social Poetry and its application; it will give examples of Social Poetry methods and tools as applied in one systems change process; and it will offer a preliminary conclusion as well as some next steps to develop this work collaboratively. But first, a further word on what is meant here by Social Poetry.

What Is Social Poetry?

To the general question 'What is Social Poetry?' it is possible to say that, from one direction, it is the attempt at a phenomenological process whereby the imagination (individual or collective) is able to perceive an image of an objective social reality (current and emerging) and then express this through the word, be it in written or oral form.[2]

Whereas philosophy aims at the perception of new ideas and thoughts, poetics has to do with the perception of new images. When perceived, these images/ pictures can be expressed as metaphors through the word. Social Poetry has to do with this process in terms of individual imaginative perception but also collective imaginative perception. The imagination, in this way, is therefore treated as an "organ of perception" (von Goethe, 1988, p. 39).

By *painting with words* the images perceived, and by trusting and staying with the images themselves, one is better able to perceive and express the current social reality. The poetic images created can contain a great deal of perceived data—the phrase *an image contains a thousand words* is also true of poetic images. By then seeing where images wish to lead—or how they wish to continue—it is also possible to learn more about future, potential, or emerging reality.

[2] In particular a Goethean phenomenological process. See, for instance, Seamon & Zajonc (1998).

In this way, Social Poetry can, as touched on above, be seen as a research methodology—one that is able to perceive as well as articulate social realities that are often difficult to observe and articulate in other ways, especially given the often overwhelming, and 'scattered' amount of data contained in social systems.

Figure 1. An example of Collective Poetics in the making during the Ecosystem Leadership Program (ELP), Berlin—More on this below. By workshop participants, 2019.

Epistemological Foundations

This conscious application of the imagination and poetry in social contexts—where the imagination can act as an organ of perception for the essential nature of objective social realities (both current and emerging)—is what differentiates this application of the term Social Poetry from that used by others, whether they use the term Social Poetry, Social Poetics or similar. Regardless of the field of application—be it organizational management, therapy or elsewhere—these other approaches generally tend to see meaning as solely created between human beings, and/or are concerned with predetermined themes or conversational cues. Specifically, such approaches:

- situate the meaning-making process solely within the (inter)subjective (dialogic) space that exists in the speaking/writing process between human beings (Aldridge & Stevenson, 2001; Cunliffe, 2002; Katz & Shotter, 1996, 2012; Larsen & Madsen 2010, 2016; Ramsey, 2008, 2018; White & Epston, 1990; etc.);

- listen in dialogue for something considered to be "poetic" (Katz & Shotter, 1996, 2012);
- listen out for other predetermined dialogic signs and cues that appear in (usually therapeutic) conversations (White & Epston, 1990 [though they use the term "Narrative Therapy"], Katz & Shotter, 1996, 2012);[3]
- listen out for the use of dialect (seen to be "poetic") in language (Wesling, 1993);
- are concerned with "the creative presentation of the individual self" in relation to a "formal image of a national or collective self" (Herzfeld, 2004);
- or else are concerned with other (predetermined) content, including political (Limón, 1992) and social ideologies such as socialism or themes related to social justice (Daydí-Tolson, 1983; Hughes, 1947; Nowak, 2020, 2021[4]).

Seeing the (socially) creative process as solely (inter)subjectively constructed—through "postmodern, poststructural and social constructionist ideas" (Cunliffe, 2002, p. 129)—as many of the above approaches do, means that any such approach risks falling out of contact with an (often larger or more contextual) objective current social reality that is at the same time deeply related to the human being, as well as a future that waits for human beings to consciously put themselves in service of its creation. At the same time, entering any social process with predetermined cues and signs in mind has the inherent potential to limit the range and depth of social phenomena that can be perceived.

Essentially, Social Poetry, as I use the term here, not only attempts to put aside categorizations based on pre-existing or pre-determined political ideology or a listening out for other dialogic 'cues,' but also fundamentally seeks to find the middle space between treating social phenomena as if they were something purely external to human beings (solely objective and perceivable to the senses), and, on the other hand, treating social realities as if they were purely (co)created by

[3] This approach perhaps comes close to one tool outlined below—Poetic Mirroring—though Katz and Shotter usually restrict their approach to therapy and with a single client, and practice it on constructionist foundations built with mostly [inter]subjective concepts of meaning making.

[4] For a look at the development of the term "Social Poetry" (especially from the perspective of social justice and socialism) see Nowak, 2021. This work includes references to usage of the term Social Poetry—by poets, publishers, writers and editors such as Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois, Horace Gregory and others – which predate those referenced on the 'Social Poetry' page on Wikipedia.

human beings themselves (solely [inter]subjective), including through dialogue.[5] Instead, the way that I use the term treats objective social phenomena (current and potential/emerging) as something observable to the individual or collective imagination (i.e. an objective reality appearing on the stage of the subjective self/selves—a kind of "objective [inter]subjectivity," if you like). In so doing, a more complete or holistic understanding of the unity of social phenomena can be perceived (and created) by individuals as well as by individuals in collectives.

Fundamentally, therefore, Social Poetry has to do with a way of perceiving the phenomena of the world in such a way that the objective lawfulness/essential nature/theories of phenomena can become perceptible to the thinking/awareness/consciousness of the observing individual or collective. It therefore relates to the Goethean phenomenological worldview in which theories are not considered as something to be thought up in separation from or in addition to the actual phenomena under observation (or where theories are simply seen as agreed-upon social norms); instead, theories are perceived as the phenomena themselves when approached by a thinking consciousness that can 'perceive' these theories within phenomena: "There is a delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory" (von Goethe, 1988, p. 307). In the sense that I am talking about it here, this level of thinking/awareness/consciousness (experienced as [at least the beginnings of] a "felt change" [Barfield, 1962, p. 48] thereof) can be described as imagination, or as imaginative awareness. In this sense, the imagination can be seen as an organ of perception for the essential nature of phenomena—which, in the case of poetics, expresses itself primarily in image form.[6]

As to how this essential poetic process is experienced by human consciousness, one would do well to recall Barfield's distinction between poetic form and poetic effect (Barfield, 1962). That is, one is here not so much concerned with the final products or form of poetry, but rather with the process resulting in and relying upon experiences (poetic effects) in consciousness—and, in the case of Social Poetry, what these experiences (had by both individuals and individuals in groups) reveal about current social phenomena as well as their potential or emerging futures.

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[5] The Poetic Mirroring tool outlined below does attempt to listen out for poetic language with a kind of poetic listening. But this kind of listening should be understood in terms of Barfield's "poetic effect," experienced or observed first-hand in the moment and not based on any predetermined ideas of what poetry or poetic language might entail (or other predetermined ideas about anything else, including social or political ideologies).

[6] The danger, as in any art or science, is, of course, that purely personal, irrelevant subjective phenomena mix themselves up in the act of perceiving. We can therefore also get a sense for the ongoing path of development required to continually make "cleaner" our organs of poetic perception.

When looking for those who've pursued such ideas concretely in social life, especially as they relate to the artistic process more broadly, it is important to take note of the work of Joseph Beuys. As touched on above, Beuys argued for an "'enlarged understanding of art' that has to do with the theory of Social Sculpture, the radical transformation of the world" (Beuys, 1993, p. 61):

> I am searching for field character…Only on condition of a widening of definition will it be possible for art and activities related to art to provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deathline: to dismantle in order to build A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART. (Beuys,1993, p. 21, emphasis in original)

Whereas Beuys was interested in an enlarged artistic effect relating especially to sculpture, the work outlined in this article is concerned with how this relates to poetry—that is, to images articulated in the written and spoken word.

Needless to say, this way of seeing and perceiving the world is not necessarily new. All Indigenous traditions are familiar with similar experiences. Even in the Western world such ways of experiencing reality have been clearly articulated on a systemic level all the way up to the Greeks who still perceived the world with an imaginative consciousness, as expressed in their mythology (Kornberger, 2008, 2017), and as articulated to them via their muse or, sometimes, goddess: "Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless falls upon the Acheans" (Homer, 1952, p. 3); "Tell me, O muse, of the ingenious hero who travelled far and wide" (Homer, 1952, p. 183). The blindness of the physical eyes of the poet Homer was in sharp contrast to the penetrating vision of his inner eye and what was given to it. With the fading of this widespread vision amongst the Greeks, however, as their own myths foretold (Kornberger, 2006, 2008, 2017), and as was articulated in the decline of the myths and the rise of philosophy, one can see the beginnings of humanity's more thorough penetration into the physical world through sense perceptions coupled with intellectual consciousness, and the subsequent fading of the inherited imaginative faculty. One could also say that, as a gradual consequence of this process, science began to take the place of (what is now called) art.

What is therefore seen in Goethe is what one can perhaps call the bridge between the ancient and the new. He himself embodied this. Goethe had both an imaginative and intellectual consciousness. He was both artist and scientist (as well as statesman). He put the intellectual and imaginative levels of consciousness in service of understanding phenomena (see, for example, von Goethe, 2004, 2008). Though he made many important discoveries in the natural sciences (including the intermaxillary/premaxilla bone in human beings), it was his methodology that was most important. The most effective of his scientific instruments were, ultimately, his powers of observation combined with his

consciousness or inner life; and these were employed, as Bortoft (2018) and others have noted, as part of a multi-phase pattern: Observe phenomena thoroughly using all the senses using active seeing (Bortoft, 2018) or "exact sensorial perception" (Brook, 1998, p. 53); this was then followed by the employment of "exact sensory imagination" (von Goethe, 1988, p. 46) in which the different aspects of the phenomena under observation were recreated from memory as mental pictures and brought together in time and space through the mobility of the inner life of the human being. As part of their landscape studies, Colquhoun (1997) and Brook (1998), (connecting also to work by Bockemühl, 1992) have articulated further Goethean phases as "seeing in beholding" (Brook, 1998, p. 53), and then a "becoming one with" (Brook, 1998, p. 53) the phenomena, which essentially means that one is able to perceive and experience the "archetype" (von Goethe, 1988, p. 69), "idea" (Schiller in Goethe, 1988, p. 20), "law" (Bortoft, 2018, p. 21), or "theory" (von Goethe, 1988, p. 307) of the phenomena under observation, in a way, from the "inside"—that is, it is perceived inwardly.[7] Goethe thus laid out a direction for the modern path of investigation that calls upon both the scientist and the artist to perceive the full reality of phenomena. This is what has resonated in those who came after him, including Emerson, Novalis, Steiner, Barfield and Beuys, as well as Bockemühl, Bortoft, Colquhoun, Brook, Holdrege, and others.[8] Goethe applied this methodology primarily to the phenomena of the natural world. In Social Poetry, again, one is concerned with social phenomena, but the imagination is utilized in a similar way as it is in relation to nature. As Goethe perceived and articulated, the theory or archetype, it can be said that through Social Poetry, one can apprehend the images in which the essential ideas, beingness, lawfulness, theory, and archetypes of social phenomena (current and emerging) may clothe themselves, facilitating more holistic and complete understandings of such phenomena.

The Biography and Evolution of Social Poetry

To trace the development of Social Poetry, I will necessarily need to weave in personal biographical elements.

My first experience of using creative writing/poetry in this way was through the work of Horst and Jennifer Kornberger. The phenomena under observation ranged from cultural epochs (Kornberger, 2008), to biographical writing, to the

[7] These phases are articulated by biologist Craig Holdrege as "Into the Phenomena," followed by "Exact Picture Building," then "Seeing the Whole." He prefaces these phases with what he calls "The Riddle" in which "I've met something in the world that I want to attend to" (2005, pp. 48–50).

[8] The first to thoroughly articulate a Goethean phenomenological epistemology was Rudolf Steiner, who was the first person to edit and introduce all of Goethe's scientific works. Steiner in this way elaborated Goethe's work, but also later articulated his own, original, epistemology in his work Philosophy of Freedom (2011), as well as other books and lectures.

natural world.[9] A thorough exploration of social phenomena was not approached directly, per se, at that time. I do recall one exercise as part of a biographical writing course in which we worked in pairs, with person A sharing a story/memory from their biography while person B first listened and then mirrored back an image that potentially related to a possible next step for (or revaluation of) the particular story/memory that was shared. Looking back, I probably began to see the potential for working collectively/in a social manner with poetics at this point. The Kornbergers have since gone on to develop their creative writing and other work, including projects involving individual and collective creative writing research using the imagination (e.g. Kornberger, 2017).

At this time, I was completing a PhD in literature and creative writing in which I attempted to implement a phenomenological reflection on the process of writing a novel, which was itself a series of biographically-informed images (Stubley, 2008). I was also working with my now wife and others around this time co-creating events that strove for a renewal of social conditions through social-artistic activity. My wife and I encountered *Theory U* (Scharmer, 2009) during this time—a social technology developed by Otto Scharmer in which participants in social transformation processes are invited to work with an emerging future (rather than with a continuation of past conditions), primarily through personal transformation processes related to open mindedness, open heartedness and an open will (more on this below). We recognized this to be a socially-scientific articulation of systems transformation processes that we were also trying to put in place.

A year or so later, while working in a team that supported a global network of social entrepreneurs, I often introduced imaginative processes during our meetings, workshops, and events to aid us in achieving our goals. I aimed to integrate imaginative work and creative writing into our larger social projects. Our work being in the field of social enterprise or social and systems change necessarily meant that this was often the theme or phenomenon under observation. It also became clear that working collectively through the individual creation of images, the mirroring of images, the continuation of images, the co-creation of collective images and other methods (explained more below) helped us to better articulate the reality of what we were attempting to understand and to express. (It was also around this time that I started to use the term Social Poetry.) At that time, we often used aspects of what is now becoming known as "Awareness-Based Systems Change" (Senge cited in Schuyler, 2018; Scharmer,

[9] See, for instance, https://www.horstkornberger.com/workshops-and-courses

2018), but we also used any other processes that we believed would help us achieve our overall intentions and support the intentions of others.[10]

As a consequence, all of my work that has intersected what is becoming known as Awareness-Based Systems Change has always been deeply rooted in imaginative and poetic processes. This has also been the case while working with those seeking to restore and regenerate ecosystems, both natural and social (including the Dutch-based NGO Commonland, which is working to regenerate landscapes around the world by using, in part, Awareness-Based Systems Change approaches).[11] Some of the general contexts in which Social Poetry has been employed include, but are not limited to, the following: systems education programs, organizational systems awareness, systems change projects, systems change events and conferences, systems labs and systems research. (Please see the end of this article for a table offering specific examples in each of these areas.) In all of these cases Social Poetry has been used in ways which have attempted to serve the bigger artwork of the systems transformation process as a whole. I will go into more detail about specific tools and methods in a moment. But first, an additional word on process.

The Archetypal Socio-Poetic Process

Briefly, the archetypal foundational Social Poetry process I have been using creates the conditions by which a "felt change of consciousness" (Barfield, 1962, p. 48) can reveal a more holistic perception of social phenomena—a wholeness which is contained within all parts of a system—as well as how these same phenomena may wish to change/continue. The process is usually done in silence,[12] and involves actively observing the necessary primary (social) data, be it quantitative or qualitative.[13] This data can then be re-created as mental images in the mind from different viewpoints or perspectives. This step can be likened to a kind of thinking *with* (as opposed to *about*) the phenomena. The next step involves a letting go of this primary data, and seeing what can be perceived with one's feeling through a kind of feeling *with* (rather than *about)* the

[10] In 2010 I also started something called The Centre for Social Poetry, which has primarily served as a place where I can offer images/imaginations that emerge in contemplating global news events, especially those with themes of a social nature (see https://socialpoetry.net). These were initially expressed in the form of feature articles and essays, but later also morphed into more poetic (or prose-poetic) form, as well as videos.

[11] See https://commonland.com/

[12] This is slightly different in the Poetic Mirroring tool—see below—but the final act of writing is, usually, still created in, or out of, silence.

[13] E.g. reports, articles, conversations, stories, lectures, interviews, facts and figures, learning journeys, shadowing, finances, event plans, organizational observations, news items, mapping, artwork, etc.

phenomena. The next step is to let this feeling perception go and see if an image (or particular words and phrases) become perceptive to a willing *with*.[14] It is then possible either to speak or write the words and images, trusting the hands or mouth in doing so to the guidance of the image and not one's own abstract thoughts, until the poetic picture feels complete, or complete enough for the moment.

Application

In terms of its application in social and systems change processes, Social Poetry can be used at any stage in a systems change process, or also more independently to achieve a particular purpose. Social Poetry can thereby help in the process of the system being able to observe and, importantly, have an objective feeling for itself as a system—a process which, essentially, involves an imaginative capacity of those within a social system to collectively observe the phenomenon of the system (within which they exist) from "the outside."[15] This activity and experience corresponds to what Scharmer calls "see and sense'" (Scharmer, 2009, p. 39), which he places schematically as follows:

1. You cannot understand a system unless you change it (Kurt Lewin).
2. You cannot change a system unless you transform consciousness.
3. You cannot transform consciousness unless you make a system see and sense itself.[16]

[14] While these steps correspond more or less to steps contained in the language of "open mind, open heart and open will" (Scharmer, 2009, p. 4) in Scharmer's work, the essential concepts of thinking, feeling and willing—especially the relating of the capacities of thinking, feeling, and willing to physiological areas of the human organism—can also be traced back to the work of Goethe, Steiner and others (see, for example, Goethe 1988; Steiner, 2002, 2008; Brook, 1998).

[15] This aspect of being outside of one's own day-to-day story – of hearing it told back to you in order to own it, before being able to continue with and complete one's journey – has been recognized by Kornberger (2006, pp. 2–7) as being an archetypal motif within stories themselves, especially grand stories and myths, such as, for example, but not at all limited to, *The Odyssey* and *Parsifal*. In a sense, the experience is of being "outside" our usual, day-to-day experience of a phenomenon (e.g. the system) —in that we can see (or hear) it more completely from the outside—but then also of being 'inside' the archetype/reality/beingness of the system as a whole—in that we can sense it from within.

[16] See, for example, presentation by Otto Scharmer: https://eupha.org/repository/conference/2019/Plenary_presentations/1_Otto_Scharmer_Presentation1_002.pdf

To which I would add, *you cannot help a system to see and sense itself without imagination and the social arts*.[17]

Attempting to quantify and qualify all the data in a system can easily become overwhelming and lead to paralysis. Through imagination and the social arts it is possible to form a human connection to the data which can then generate an individual and collective confidence (and, perhaps, feeling of responsibility) to act.

Social Poetry Methods and Tools[18]

A selection of some foundational tools as used within one particular context will be given below to help provide a more concrete idea of the processes involved, while keeping in mind such tools need to be individually tailored to specific situations. Likewise, new tools can also be developed that relate to the archetypal process of inquiry outlined above, while taking note of the specific context in which they take place.

The Context

For ease of discussion and for continuity of context, all of the following examples of Social Poetry methods and tools provided below will be discussed in relation to the same program. This program was called the Ecosystem Leadership Program (ELP)—an advanced, year-long systems-education program based on Theory U for Awareness-Based Systems Change practitioners from around the world (many of whom spoke languages other than English as their first language). The program was run by the Presencing Institute, which is responsible for the development of the theory and practice of Theory U-related awareness-based systems change. The program took place over three in-person modules near Berlin in 2019.

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[17] To the objection that there are several ways to facilitate a system seeing and sensing itself, we can reply as follows: the way in which we are using the term 'sensing' here is similar to the way in which Scharmer employs it, and that is as a kind of "feeling with," as mentioned above. It can be argued that anything which enables a feeling with (in addition to "thinking with" which can be more connected to the "seeing" part of "seeing and sensing") has an artistic quality, aspect and process to it. To do this as part of a process with others, or in relation to social themes, requires social art.

[18] For those looking for a more step-by-step process of how to apply these methods and tools, this information will be found at https://socialpoetry.net The section on tools here is, however, not intended to be so much of a how-to manual for the different tools but, rather, an introduction to the foundational methods of each tool in relation to the work of social poetry as a whole, and in the context of a specific example, in order that an understanding of each tool's foundational (and contextual) application may become clearer.

Social Picturing

This foundational Social Poetry tool has, essentially, to do with the observation of social phenomena in such a way that after observing these phenomena from multiple perspectives one is then able to reflect on these phenomena using the process mentioned above until a picture/image/metaphor emerges.

This process can be applied by individuals or by individuals within groups. The initial data for this process can be quantitative or qualitative; taken from conversations, interviews, learning journeys, news, figures, reports and so on, or even from other forms of social art such as Generative Scribing (a visual-arts-based methodology for social change developed by Kelvy Bird, [2018]), Social Presencing Theater (a movement- and theatre-based methodology for social change developed by Arawana Hayashi [2021] and Otto Scharmer), or other emerging forms.

The Social Picturing tool can be especially helpful in trying to see and sense—essentially, come to *know*—what can be otherwise complex or 'distant' (both spatially and temporally) phenomena.[19]

Example: The poem below was written after various lectures and other input sessions on social and awareness-based systems change, ecosystem leadership and global social phenomena (including news items) at that time. It was written towards the beginning of the ELP program. Participants were asked to reflect on the various sessions already experienced that day, as well as throughout the program as a whole. They were then invited into the archetypal process/methodology outlined above, including being open to any metaphor or metaphors that may emerge, and then, if so, to trust such images and write them down. That is, participants were not "asked to" write a "poem" per se, but were invited, if they so wished, to think, feel, and will with the previous input and explorations related to current global social phenomena and the theory of Awareness-Based Systems Change and ecosystem leadership, and then to see what pictures might emerge.

[19] Such as the 'biographical' development of a social phenomenon.

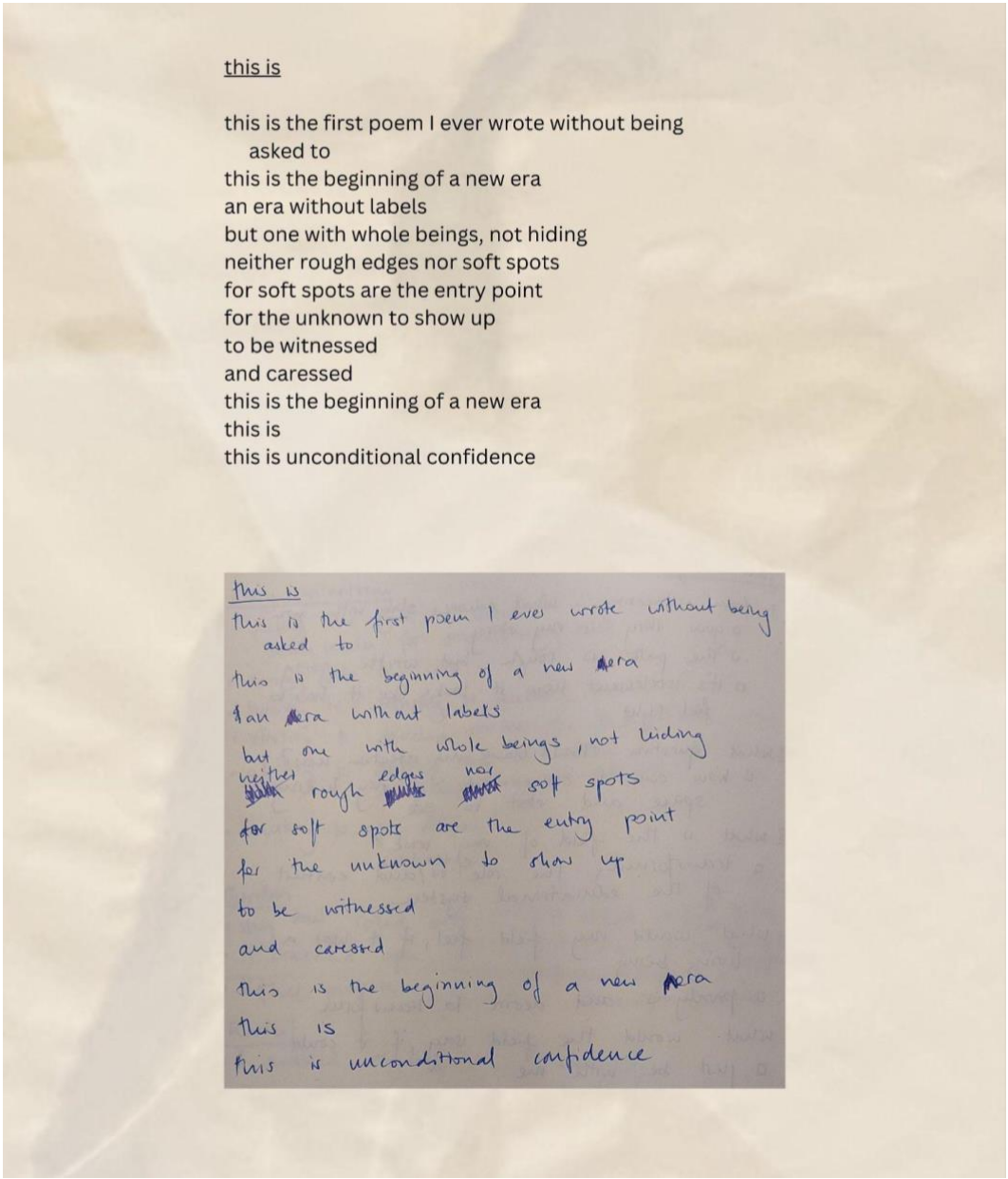


Figure 2. An example of a poem created using the Social Picturing method/tool. By ELP participant Babette Pfander, 2019.

On first reading of this piece, the use of the "I" in the first line makes it tempting to assume that the rest of the piece relates only to this same "I." However, after another reading, one may ask oneself whether it is the individual "I" that the rest of the poem refers to, or some larger system or "era," or both (or "unconditional confidence" itself). It is also possible to consider in what way these phenomena—the "I", the larger system or "era," and "unconditional confidence"—are related, which, as argued above, is the essential starting point for what has now become known as Awareness-Based Systems Change (as well as ecosystem leadership). This piece is therefore also reflective of the stage of the program journey at that time. The piece raises the question as to where the future, or the

as-yet "unknown" actually "shows up" (in the world, or ourselves, or both), and what may be necessary for this process to be perceived ("witnessed") and developed ("caressed")—i.e. "unconditional confidence." But before "reading" too much into such a piece (I will look more at reading processes below), let us first continue our exploration of Social Poetry methodologies.

Shifting Pictures

This is a process whereby an imagination of a current social situation is created as per the process above for Social Picturing. This initial image is itself then reflected upon by thinking with, feeling with, and willing with it. In this way, one can get a sense for how the picture itself may wish to continue; if one is able to stay with the picture itself and not force upon it one's own will for how it *should* continue, the imagination itself can be the source from which next steps can appear.

Again, this process can be used by individuals or by individuals within groups. Initial imaginations of primary phenomena can be created by one individual and then read to the group as per the process above. These initial imaginations can be continued by the same 'author' who created them, or they can be passed on to others in the group for them to continue the image. If different parts of the group are focusing on slightly different primary data, it can be useful for those continuing the initial picture to have been also working from the same primary data, but this is not a hard and fast rule; indeed, there are no rigid rules in this work, and one can be creative in its application, as long as there remains a clear eye to the point of doing the work and to the archetypal methodology, as well as a groundedness in the primary phenomena.

This tool's principal function is to live into the reality of social phenomena in order to perceive how they may wish to continue, and potentially do this also with others, who may be able to perceive phenomena from different directions. From this, a wealth of new data can appear.

Below there is an example(s) which is an adaptation of the foundational process, tailor made for the specific larger process the tool was in service of at that time. Again, many other adaptations are possible depending on the specific context.

Example: The below image is also from PI's Ecosystem Leadership Program (ELP) Module 1, Berlin, March, 2019 (see program explanation above). The initial data was from a brief talk on the content, followed by a Social Presencing Theater demonstration of the concepts of "seeing," "holding," and "supporting," combined with Generative Scribing following the same, as well as personal recollections of actual moments in people's lives when they had felt seen, held, and supported. This process was an adaptation on the basic Shifting Pictures process. The poems that follow on "supporting/supported" are the result of Social Picturing created by individuals in a group of three, with each person then writing one resonant line from their individual poem at the top of their page. The pages were then handed

around the group, with each person building on the previous line(s). (As such, this process also moved towards the Collective Poetics process discussed below.) This form of process was chosen because of its close association with the subject matter/ social phenomenon: "supporting/supported." A deepened observation and experience of the objective idea "supported" (grounded, again, in primary data that included actual experiences people had had in their lives of being supported)—enhanced through the perception of images by the imagination—then became possible for this workshop group and the larger program group as a whole, once it was shared with them.

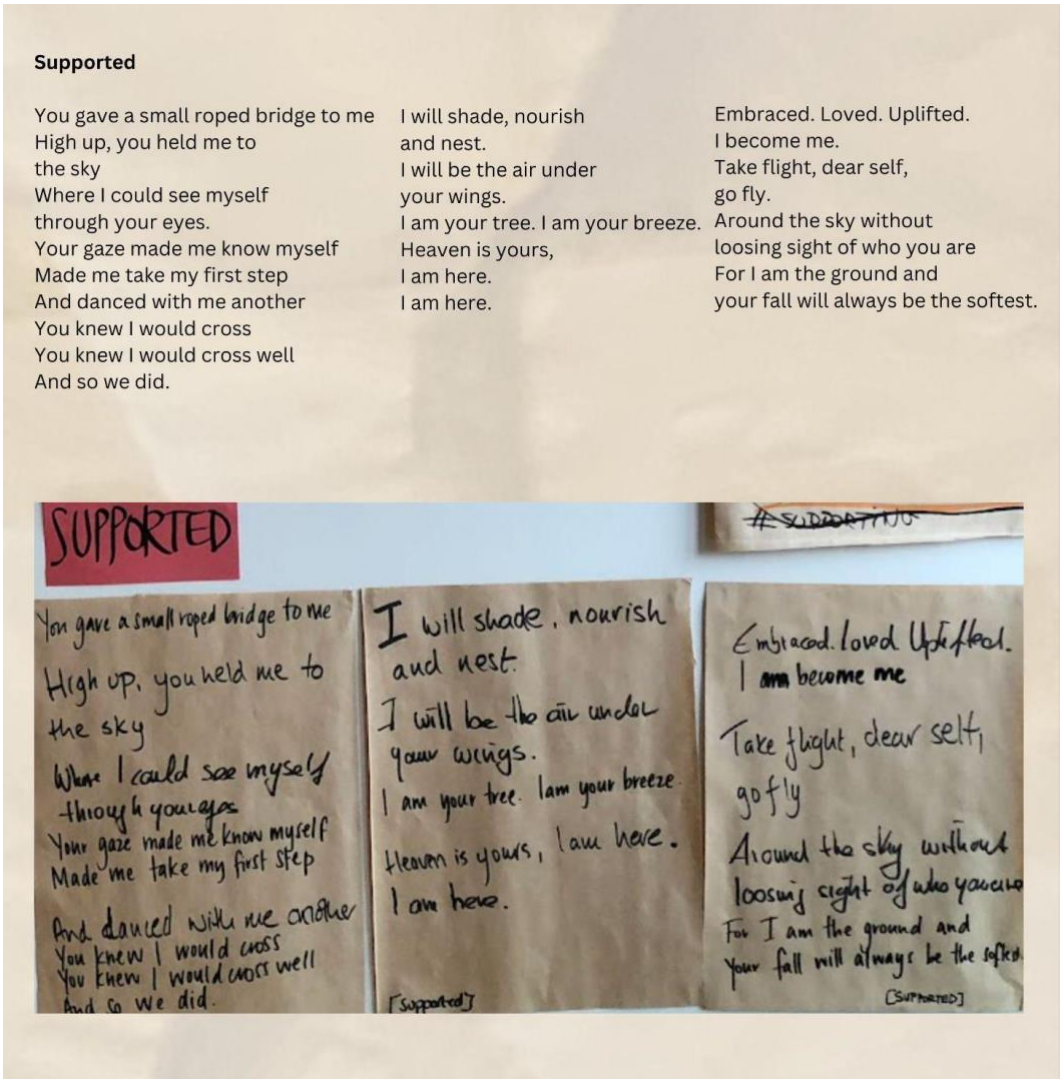


Figure 3. An example of a poem / poems created using the shifting pictures method/tool. By group participants of the ELP (see above), Berlin, 2019.

It may help at this stage to ask ourselves whether I feel I have a deeper understanding of the experience and idea of "supported" (than I might have had by just considering the concept in abstraction and isolation) through encountering these poems—images in which the line between the self and the other is crossed

("Where I could see myself / through your eyes / your gaze made me know myself"); where the line between self and nature is crossed ("I will be the air under / your wings. I am your tree. I am your breeze) apparently all for the sake of the other ("heaven is yours"), but also where the self still remains present ("I am here. I am here"); and where the line between self and "self" is also crossed ("I become me") but again, "without / loosing sight of who you are." Again, do such images open onto a more complete (supported?) understanding of the experience of "Supported"—a process of understanding in which the distinction between the supporter and the one supported also seems to blur, but where, again, the experience of self does not dissolve? That is, one can ask: "Do I/we now know the experience of 'Supported' by also crossing, through the images provided above, some kind of line (in similar ways as the content of the poems themselves reveal) between myself and the social reality of 'Support/Supported'?"

Through raising such questions here it is possible to sense the necessity for a methodology for how one reads such pictures after the fact (more on this below), including how one can then use such images as further material for reflective processes by thinking, feeling, and willing with the images.

Collective Poetics

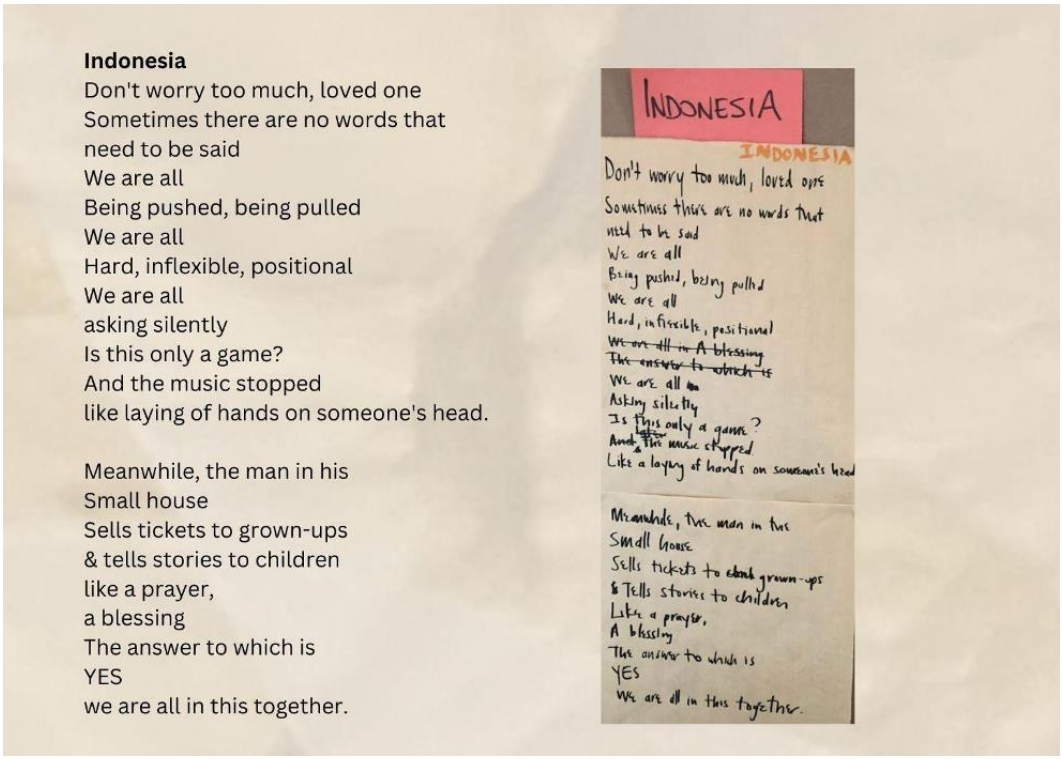
Individuals (or groups within the group focusing on separate primary data) may also wish to condense their images into one or two lines, and then arrange their collective lines (either randomly or deliberately) into a single piece/poem.

This kind of group poem is usually created from the initial imaginations of current reality (Social Picturing), but could also be created from the continuation of these images (Shifting Pictures).

One of the primary advantages of the Collective Poetics created in this way (but, essentially, all Social Poetry methods and tools make this possible) is that they provide data which can be relatively easily reflected upon by the whole group, as well as shared with other groups, including larger systems. This is especially helpful in terms of the system being able to observe and have an objective feeling for itself, as well as provide data that can help lead from current realities to preferred futures.

Examples: While the content of the previous poem looked at the experience of the social phenomenon of being supported, what follows looks at the social phenomena of nations and states. The four poems below are from ELP module one, Berlin, March, 2019. At this stage in the program, participants were sharing systems data from their own countries with others. The specific primary data was from an oral sharing of then current social (and natural) phenomena about four places by locals of those places: Indonesia, Switzerland, Western Australia, and Puerto Rico. This introduction was followed by a 4D mapping (a Social Presencing Theater tool involving movement and physical gesture in systems mapping) of key

stakeholders in these places.[20] The Social Poetry process that followed this stage was, essentially, as follows: using the data from the verbal introductions about social phenomena in these places, as well as the 4D mapping, individuals created their own poems as per the Social Picturing process. They then worked with others in small groups related to each particular place. In these groups, individuals underlined the most resonant lines from their individual poems and worked with/arranged these in their small groups to create a collective small-group poem. The collective nature of the content (nations and states) called for a more collective form of writing.



Figures 4a-d. Examples of poems created using the collective poetics method/tool. By group participants of the ELP (see above), 2019.

[20] See https://www.u-school.org/4d-mapping

Switzerland
We're waiting, I don't move
I am here, can you see me?
Welcome all the tension and the question
Who sees me and me them?
I would like to rest
feeling the earth holding my back
I will settle for others to try and lead
the way.
I will feel seen when you, you let yourself arrive.
The path meets the traveler.
Is it me or them?
Every step I take
is another path I forsake.
I must help others see the wider field...
It is my heaven sent mission
Where to? Where to? the [heart] leads the way!
I feel the fullness of the void.
In common roots, invisible ties,
favourable winds.
We're landing, I feel warmer in me.
Can I be the messenger of something
I cannoy completely fathom...yet?

Figure 4b.

Western Australia
We are all in
this together
flames like whispers
hot, wild.

Resistance
I'm your waters, your soil,
Your constant guidance and

Reminders
Let spirit sing,
let spirit sing,
like feathers
floating on the wing.
Here, eyes open.
Unafraid.

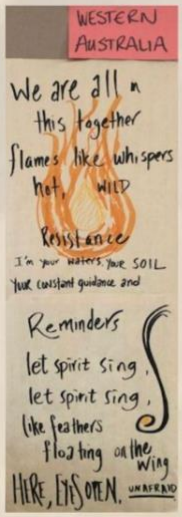


Figure 4c.

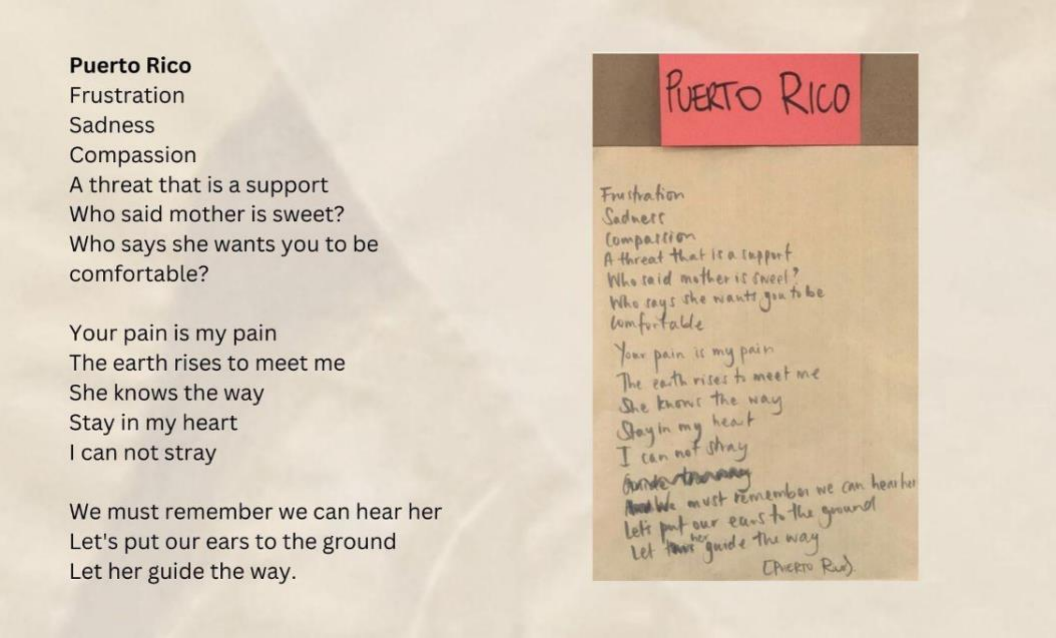


Figure 4d.

Reading Pictures

It may be helpful to insert here a further word about methodology (also phenomenological in nature) for "reading" pictures, which is something that can be done if it is felt it might be useful as part of a larger process in which a group (or else just the holding group) is engaged in, and which I have begun to explore in relation to the pieces above. I have not often used this as a tool with participants in the processes we have done. But the fact that poems (as forms) remain as process artefacts requires that we say something about the subsequent reading of pictures that people might do following a process, including the way we are doing so within this article. If it is decided that it might be helpful to read further into the images that arise, they too can be treated as primary data and approached in the same/similar way used to perceive the images in the first place; that is, by observing and thinking with, feeling with, and willing with the images in order to see what further insights might emerge.[21] There is also scope to do this with the results of any Social Poetry tools. The dangers at this stage, as in all imaginative research, are that either one stays with images in such a way that one runs the risk of disconnecting from primary social phenomena and reality, or else one returns to a purely intellectual and potentially abstract and

[21] The important point here is that the reading of pictures needs to be approached in a similar way in which they have been created. This is because whenever one approaches poetic form it needs to again be brought to poetic effect (Barfield, 1962, p. 48) in order to be seen and understood in its wholeness. (Here we also touch on a framing for the reading of the world as a whole.)

literal reading of the pictures, devoid of context or life.[22] Instead, one must follow slowly and carefully along *with* the images to see what further data they might wish to reveal.[23] For the sake of brevity, though it is possible to do so with all the pieces, an example of this process is provided here in relation to just one of the poems above.[24]

The Swiss piece goes immediately into the gesture of the space holder, the neutral place or platform (country) ("We're waiting / I don't move / I am here / Can you see me? / Welcome all the tension and the question / Who sees me and me them?"). The ground and earthly terrain of the country is referenced, its preparedness to allow others to lead the way, its nature as a host; as are pathways, which open up onto a questioning of the inner condition of the social encounter ("the path meets the traveller. / Is it me or them?"). This is followed by a sense of responsibility ("I must help others see the wider field…it is my heaven sent mission") and the method for doing so ("Where to? Where to? The [heart] leads the way!"). This "lands" both in the nation and the body ("I feel warmer in me") and (un)resolves into the overall primary questioning gesture of the poet, as well as the questioning gesture of the host of both others and the future: "Can I be the messenger of something / I cannot completely fathom…yet?"

In all of the above poems, the imagery (and reading thereof, including using these images for further contemplation by thinking, feeling, and willing with) can bring one closer to the beingness of the phenomena under observation—to a "seeing in beholding" (Brook, 1998, p. 53), a "becoming one with" (Brook, 1998, p. 53) or "seeing the whole" of (Holdrege, 2005, p. 50) these particular places on Earth, which all uniquely express something of a larger global social reality.

Poetic Mirroring

This is the final tool I shall mention here. It is a slightly different tool from the ones mentioned above. Poetic Mirroring has to do with the capturing and reflecting back of language used by participants in a social process. This tool—as I have been using it—emerged following a request from Commonland's Dieter Van den Broeck for a "slam poem" to come at the end of a day-long event[25]—but a poem which would summarize the essence of the day's proceedings.

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[22] All imaginative findings should still, however, be understandable to the intellect.

[23] The difference here is also one of reading *with* rather than reading *about* or *of*.

[24] It may be helpful to move back and forward between the poem above and these observations.

[25] 'Healthy Soils, Healthy Communities', Fremantle, Western Australia, 2018. See, for example, https://www.perthnrm.com/blog/2018/03/13/healthy-soils-healthy-communities/

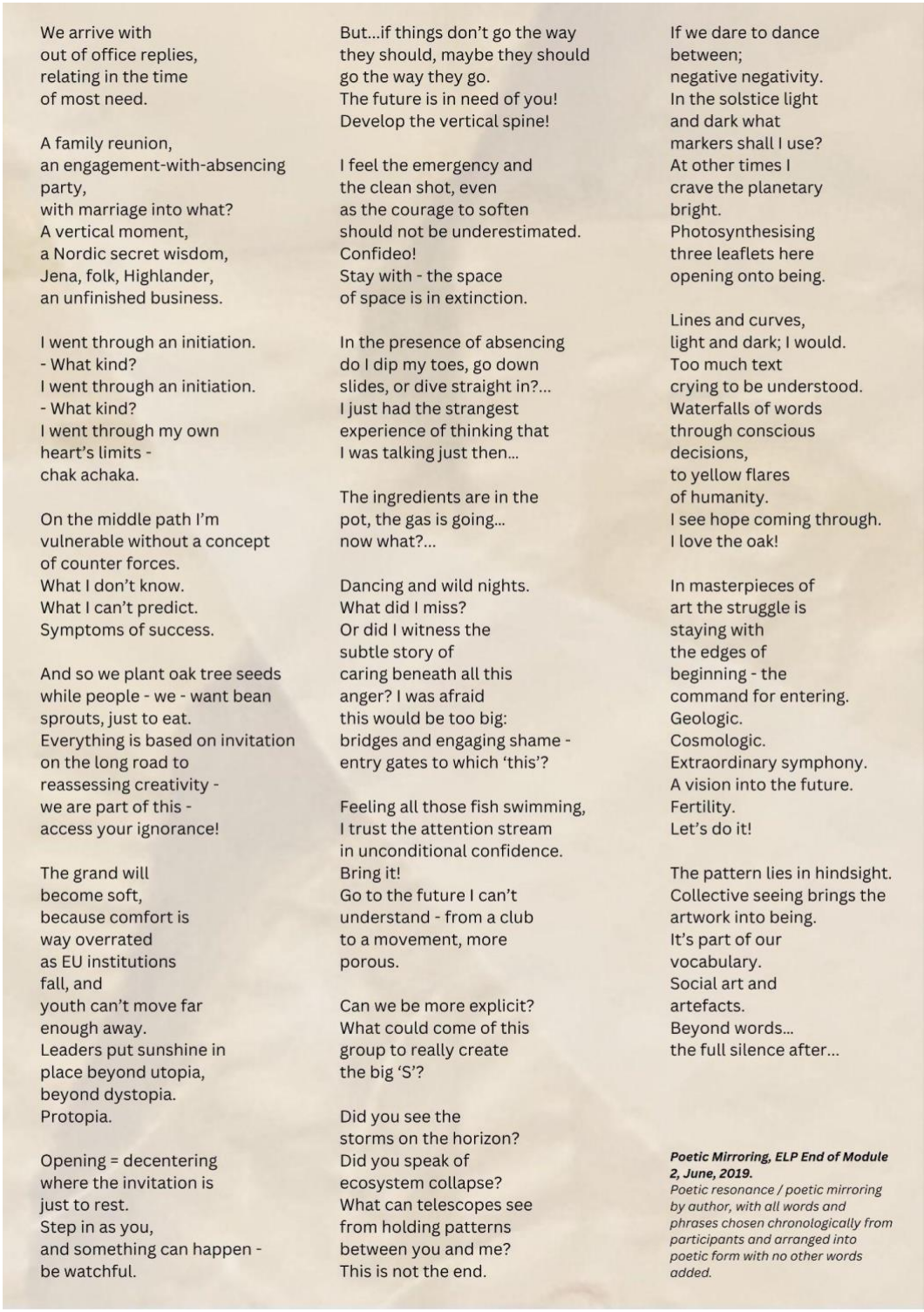
The tool has to do with the capturing of "resonant" words and phrases spoken by many participants throughout a social process, workshop or other event. Often, many of these words and phrases are metaphoric or imaginative. It is possible to draw here from different levels of listening—a kind of poetic or imaginative listening is required alongside a more prosaic or intellectual one. Towards the end of the social process, time is taken to sit with all the words and phrases that have been noted down. The primary level of reading/listening at this point switches completely to imaginative or poetic (through thinking, feeling and willing with, as mentioned above) in order to see if there is any organizing image or theory/archetype/law/wholeness/beingness within the words/phrases themselves that seeks to arrange them into a holistic and united poem/piece. (Attention to the inner musicality and lawfulness of the language itself can give rise to interesting arrangements of rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance and so on, but this need not and should not be a primary goal, but more a consequence of listening/reading in the way mentioned.) Working chronologically in this way allows for a sharing experience which can trigger a collective "resonance" or re*membering* (in consciousness) process in the listening group, corresponding to the order in which these moments initially occurred. Experience has shown it is good for such a piece to contain not only the serious but also the playful moments of the social process—that it is representative of the initial data/experience. In this tool, generally no (or very few) additional words are necessary beyond those spoken/written/shared by participants within the social process itself. The piece is then usually read back to the group as a whole (or shared later in written form, or both).

This tool has a certain power when read at the end of a program, though it has also been used at the end of earlier days within a multi-day process (during Presencing Institute's Research Summer School in Berlin in 2018; during the sensing phase of the inaugural IDEAS Asia Pacific program), as well at the beginning of following days (Cambodia Futures Lab). On several occasions it has also been used to communicate previous event proceedings to others who were not present at the initial event (events in Western Australia in 2021; the Bioregional Weaving Labs in the Netherlands in 2022). It has also been used to summarize events as part of documentation (IDEAS Asia Pacific, etc.). This process, like the ones previously mentioned, speaks directly to awareness-based systems change's aspiration of allowing the system to see and sense (Scharmer, 2009, p. 39) / have an objective feeling of itself in order for consciousness and systems change to occur. This tool can be practiced by single or multiple practitioners in a group.

Example: the following example was created during module two of the ELP, and shared with participants at the end of that module. This was the first occasion the tool was used during the ELP program. It therefore reflects the

language and the situation of that time,[26] but also of what had come before and, perhaps, some of what was to come later, not only for the program group but for the world as a whole (the social systems of which the program group was exploring): “Did you see the / storms on the horizon? / Did you speak of ecosystem collapse?” (Note that this module took place in June of 2019; COVID was only to appear in November of that same year, and one can ask whether there is any connection between these images to what followed. One can also note that the poem asks the question / makes the statement: “What can telescopes see / from holding patterns between you and me? / This is not the end.”)

[26] Some language was therefore used that was specific to that particular group at that time, but which we can attempt to move with (by thinking, feeling, and willing with) upon reading it, and thereby create an experience for ourselves of the process/moment, even if we were not present.



We arrive with
out of office replies,
relating in the time
of most need.

A family reunion,
an engagement-with-absencing
party,
with marriage into what?
A vertical moment,
a Nordic secret wisdom,
Jena, folk, Highlander,
an unfinished business.

I went through an initiation.
- What kind?
I went through an initiation.
- What kind?
I went through my own
heart's limits -
chak achaka.

On the middle path I'm
vulnerable without a concept
of counter forces.
What I don't know.
What I can't predict.
Symptoms of success.

And so we plant oak tree seeds
while people - we - want bean
sprouts, just to eat.
Everything is based on invitation
on the long road to
reassessing creativity -
we are part of this -
access your ignorance!

The grand will
become soft,
because comfort is
way overrated
as EU institutions
fall, and
youth can't move far
enough away.
Leaders put sunshine in
place beyond utopia,
beyond dystopia.
Protopia.

Opening = decentering
where the invitation is
just to rest.
Step in as you,
and something can happen -
be watchful.

But...if things don't go the way
they should, maybe they should
go the way they go.
The future is in need of you!
Develop the vertical spine!

I feel the emergency and
the clean shot, even
as the courage to soften
should not be underestimated.
Confideo!
Stay with - the space
of space is in extinction.

In the presence of absencing
do I dip my toes, go down
slides, or dive straight in?...
I just had the strangest
experience of thinking that
I was talking just then...

The ingredients are in the
pot, the gas is going...
now what?...

Dancing and wild nights.
What did I miss?
Or did I witness the
subtle story of
caring beneath all this
anger? I was afraid
this would be too big:
bridges and engaging shame -
entry gates to which 'this'?

Feeling all those fish swimming,
I trust the attention stream
in unconditional confidence.
Bring it!
Go to the future I can't
understand - from a club
to a movement, more
porous.

Can we be more explicit?
What could come of this
group to really create
the big 'S'?

Did you see the
storms on the horizon?
Did you speak of
ecosystem collapse?
What can telescopes see
from holding patterns
between you and me?
This is not the end.

If we dare to dance
between;
negative negativity.
In the solstice light
and dark what
markers shall I use?
At other times I
crave the planetary
bright.
Photosynthesising
three leaflets here
opening onto being.

Lines and curves,
light and dark; I would.
Too much text
crying to be understood.
Waterfalls of words
through conscious
decisions,
to yellow flares
of humanity.
I see hope coming through.
I love the oak!

In masterpieces of
art the struggle is
staying with
the edges of
beginning - the
command for entering.
Geologic.
Cosmologic.
Extraordinary symphony.
A vision into the future.
Fertility.
Let's do it!

The pattern lies in hindsight.
Collective seeing brings the
artwork into being.
It's part of our
vocabulary.
Social art and
artefacts.
Beyond words...
the full silence after...

Poetic Mirroring, ELP End of Module 2, June, 2019.
Poetic resonance / poetic mirroring by author, with all words and phrases chosen chronologically from participants and arranged into poetic form with no other words added.

Figure 5. Poetic mirroring from end of ELP Module 2, June, 2019. All words and phrases chosen chronologically from participants and arranged into poetic form by author with no words added.

The final movement of this piece touches on social art as effect, experience and co-creation—as Barfield's "felt change of consciousness" (1962, p. 48)—beginning with an imaginative awareness which can grow and develop further "Beyond words…" when images are also let go of and individuals or groups step

more deliberately into levels of consciousness beyond imagination—where it is possible to stand even more fully with or inside social phenomena in "the full silence after…".[27]

Adaptions

There are other Social Poetry tools, and adaptations on existing tools. For instance, we have been using the chat feature in online video meetings to gather line and word entries from participants at the end of social processes in order to form Collective Poetics; similarly, some of my co-faculty are using rapid Poetic Mirroring processes to almost immediately reflect back words and phrases from closing circles or other sessions as part of tri-sector education programs. Additionally, on a few occasions, I have created Poetic Mirroring pieces by using global news headlines as the primary data. An ongoing and readily applicable adaptation to be used with all tools is to ask what the image would say if it could speak—this question and resulting activity can have the effect of drawing one closer to (as well as being able to articulate from) a place of "becoming one with" (Brook, 1998, p. 53) the social phenomenon under observation. Indeed, Social Poetry tools are constantly growing depending on the specific context in which imaginative processes may be useful as part of the larger social and systems transformation (art)work taking place.

Preliminary Conclusion

This article has now offered a preliminary look at Social Poetry as I and colleagues have been using the term, its epistemological foundations, its biographical development, its archetypal process, and some methods and tools with examples provided from a specific context. In doing so, I have attempted to show in what way the use of the human faculty of individual (and collective) imagination can help to perceive and understand more complete social systems phenomena—allowing the system, thereby, to see and sense itself / have an objective feeling for itself. As a consequence, human beings can also increase their feeling of responsibility for how such social phenomena continue. A final word (for the moment) now on the interrelated nature of the processes of transformation, imagination, consciousness and language, based on actual experience, before offering an invitation towards next steps.

While co-facilitating a reflective stage of the inaugural MIT UID IDEAS program in Bali in November, 2022, I took part in a process of journaling and solo

[27] See again, for instance, the phases of "seeing in beholding" (Brook, 1998, p. 53) and a "becoming one with" (Brook, 1998, p. 53), as well as Steiner's articulation of the levels of Inspiration and Intuition (2002).

time in nature. During the solo time, the following words came to me in the form of what could be described as flaming golden letters: *The language of transformation is imagination*.

The day-to-day intellectual consciousness perceives a world of independent phenomena (including social phenomena, as any evening news program will reveal), at stages of rest.[28] In order to bring these same phenomena into dynamic relationship not only with one another but also with the time-scale of their own growth and development, one needs to have organs of perception which can perceive the fluid process of transformation itself. Working with and thinking in metaphors, and consciously striving to perceive the images working in social and other phenomena, can help to develop such organs of perception. (This can then help open up onto further levels of perception if one wished to listen further into what the images themselves wished to convey.) It is possible to do this individually and it is possible to do this as individuals in a collective. In doing so, not only can one's own thinking (and feeling and willing) and perceiving grow more aligned to the dimensions of life at work in social and natural phenomena, but so too can one's language, which can then in turn help others to also experience and see the more complete reality working in natural or in this case social phenomena, and to choose, if one so wished, to take responsibility for their future development—the future development of, ultimately, civilization, the Earth, and ourselves.

Next Steps

This article is also intended to offer a starting point for those wishing to put this work into practice, and as a further discussion point for those already working with these or similar methods and tools. If you are interested in or have been applying some of the above or similar—including developing methods and tools further—and would like to discuss such work, you can reach me via my email at the top of this article.

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks must go to all the individuals mentioned above in relation to this work (as well as the many who have not been mentioned), without whom this work would not be possible.

[28] By “stages of rest” we mean that phenomena (including social phenomena) are usually perceived by the intellect (via the physical senses) in such a way that they are removed from the larger context in which they find themselves, including the context of other phenomena, as well as their own development as a phenomenon over time.

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Appendix

Some of the general contexts in which Social Poetry has been used:

Systems education programs	• Presencing Foundation Program, 2018[29] • ELIAS Western Australia Program, 2018-19[30] • MIT UID IDEAS Asia Pacific Program, 2022[31] • u-lab Western Australia Hub, 2015[32] • Ecosystem Leadership Program, 2019[33]
Organisational systems awareness	• Community Impact Team in the Centre for Social Impact at the University of Western Australia (UWA), 2018-21[34] • YouthSection at the Goetheanum, 2008-10[35]
Systems change projects	• Projects bringing together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Western Australia, 2018-21 • Holistic landscape regeneration in the Asia Pacific 2018-current[36]
Systems change events and conferences	• Social Impact Festival at UWA, 2016-18[37] • Presencing Institute's (PI's) GAIA Program, 2020-21[38] • Presencing Institute's Global Forum, 2021-22[39] • Biogregional Weaving Labs Learning Summit, 2022[40] • Focus International Initiative Forum, 2010[41] • Coming into Conversation Vconference, 2009[42]
Systems labs	• Cambodia Futures Lab, 2022[43] • United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Leadership Lab (Kenya), 2023[44]
Systems research	• Presencing Institute's Research Summer School, 2019[45] • Social Arts Studio Mexico, 2019[46] • Research inherent in all the above[47]

[29] A capacity building program in the practices and methodology of Theory U, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2018.

[30] A tri-sector leadership lab co-hosted by the Presencing Institute (PI), the Academy for Systems Change and UWA, Western Australia, commencing 2018. See https://www.eliasprogram.com/copy-of-western-australia-2

[31] A year-long SDG Leadership Lab for 40 Asia Pacific leaders across business, government and civil society, commencing in 2022 and co-hosted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the Indonesian NGO United in Diversity (UID). See https://mitsloan.mit.edu/global-programs/ideas-asia-pacific

[32] A global Theory U based capacity building program hosted on the MIT EdX online platform. See https://www.edx.org/course/ulab-leading-from-the-emerging-future

[33] An advanced year-long, Theory U-based program for awareness-based systems change practitioners from around the world, Berlin, 2019.

[34] A team which focused on community engagement in relation to social impact. I was involved from 2018-2021. See https://www.uwa.edu.au/schools/research/UWA-Centre-for-Social-Impact

[35] A place for younger (18-35 years) awareness-based systems changemakers and social entrepreneurs from around the world. I was involved from 2008-2010.

[36] Ongoing landscape regeneration as part of intersecting work between Commonland, UID and PI.

[37] The world's largest social impact festival; running until 2019.

[38] The Global Activation of Intention in Action program, taking place largely as a sense-making process during COVID times, 2020 & 2021.

[39] Online public global forums for people interested in awareness-based systems change, 2021 & 2022.

[40] A regional landscape learning summit for those working in landscape regeneration, co-hosted by PI, Commonland and Ashoka (an international changemaker network).

[41] An international changemaker and social enterprise initiative forum primarily for people under 36 years of age, Switzerland, 2010.

[42] An international social sculpture conference focusing on the role of conversation in social change, Switzerland, 2009.

[43] A UN-convened lab for tri-sector leaders in Cambodia, 2022.

[44] A tri-sector UN-convened lab in Kenya as part of the UN SDG Leadership Labs, 2023.

[45] PI's inaugural Research Summer School in Berlin, 2019.

[46] An interdisciplinary social arts studio in the Yucatan, Mexico, 2019.

[47] All of these usages of Social Poetry have contained, by virtue of the method inherent in it, research activity and insights.

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Peer Review Article

Advancing the Field of Presencing:

Five Principles to Inform the Development of Emerging Presencing Approaches

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Abstract

This article makes a case for developing emerging presencing approaches (EPAs) that build from, grow alongside of, and in some cases depart from Theory U-based approaches to presencing. Drawing from the work of Dynamic Presencing, five principles are introduced to support new EPAs as a way of advancing the greater field of presencing research. Given the focus of Theory U as a change and knowledge-making practice, for some time there has been a need for alternative presencing approaches that explore epistemological, ontological, and teleological framings of presencing practices, as well as deeper embodied and consciousness approaches to the subject of presencing mastery. Toward these ends, this article is intended as a reference to catalyze new thinking and visioning for the field of presencing research.

Keywords

EPAs, emerging presencing approaches, dynamic presencing, presencing, presencing awareness, ontological, epistemological

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Introductory Remarks

> The phenomenon of presencing is diverse: it is experienced and described differently by different people in different communities.
> —*Peter Senge in conversation with George Hall (Hall, 2008)*

As stated elsewhere (Gunnlaugson, 2020), the roots of presencing can be traced back to different Eastern (Goldman-Schuyler et al., 2017), Indigenous (Nxumalo & Bozalek, 2021), and global wisdom traditions (Bockler, 2021), including the early Greek practice of becoming fully present to the wisdom dimensions of our human nature as an emerging phenomenon that is revealed through self-awareness and inquiry (Macdonald, 2012). Presencing also has roots in contemporary Western philosophical tradition (Hernández, 2011), with Martin Heidegger's disclosing the true, unmediated primordial experience of our being itself, as a means for presencing our essence into our immediate world and uncovering an existential way of being. In the early 2000s, organizational consultants Peter Senge, Joseph Jaworski, Otto Scharmer, and colleagues continued to develop the term in their books *Presence* (Senge et al., 2004) and *Theory U* (Scharmer, 2020, 2018, 2007, 2001), bringing the practice of presencing to mainstream awareness. Framed as an integrative leadership approach and method for learning from the emerging future, over the past several decades exposure and interest in presencing has continued to grow significantly through Scharmer and colleagues' more recent work with Theory U and u-lab.

In recent years, my cross-sectoral as well as inter- and cross-disciplinary research with colleagues internationally has focused on advancing the emerging field through the publication of several anthologies on presencing (Gunnlaugson et al., 2013; Gunnlaugson & Brendel, 2021, 2020, 2019). These peer-reviewed scholarly books have introduced an array of contributions that focus on the legitimization and application of presencing across diverse practitioner contexts, including leadership, coaching, therapy, education, and other domains. Raising questions, developing new distinctions, and broadly applying Theory U-based scholarship, these offerings as well as a growing number of peer-reviewed journals have generated extensive academic sources of presencing-related research.[1]

[1] Among the growing body of presencing research in recent years, germane themes include expanding thematic lines of presencing in the context of collective wisdom, group, and team development: see Bockler (2022); Cox (2014); Guenther (2022); Gunnlaugson, (2011); Guttenstein, Lindsay, and Baron (2014); Hartley (2014); Hays (2014); Peschl et. al. (2019); Rajagopalan (2021); Rodriguez and Carrillo (2021). The theme of relational thinking has also been applied in the context of presencing: see Fitch Lynam (2019); Goodchild (2021); Lehner (2022); Southern (2014); Westoby (2021). Presencing research and thinking has been applied within the framework of the

Taken as a whole, this body of work and related contributions reflect a continued application of Theory U-based presencing scholarship. Alongside this growing collection of peer-reviewed research, I believe we have reached a critical moment in this emerging field where there is a need to diversify the current scope of presencing research to help bring new perspectives into the conversation that question prevailing epistemological assumptions, ontological processes, teleological framings, and current embodiment methods, among other important considerations. As existing research in the field to date has been largely shaped by the aims and overall application of Theory U-based presencing perspectives, this article makes a case for stimulating new thinking and opening new horizons of research and practice that support alternative approaches.

Addressing the Growing Need for Emerging Presencing Approaches

In response to the current situation in the field, this article makes a case for developing what I call emerging presencing approaches (EPAs). EPAs by definition are new forms, models, practices, and ways of approaching presencing that exist outside the existing thinking circumscribed by the Theory U paradigm of presencing. As an EPA, Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2021a, 2021b, 2020a, 2020b, 2019, 2015), joins the aforementioned Theory U-based scholarship with the aim of offering an in-depth apprenticeship for transforming the deeper capacity, function, and purpose of existing Theory U-based presencing practice. By opening up new interior pathways to cultivating a more embodied presencing awareness that grows to become an orienting way of being, the main focus of Dynamic Presencing is to develop presencing mastery in one's life and work. As an EPA, Dynamic Presencing joins Theory U in setting out from the *near shore* of one's existing presencing practice. Through a series of five apprenticeship journeys (*primary presence, primary knowing, primary perceiving, primary communicating,* and *primary leading*), each contains a guiding core movement and core method that forms an overall path and process, eventually reaching the *far shore* milestone of presencing mastery as an experiential accolade. Dynamic Presencing integrates presencing with our core

social field by: Gunnlaugson (2021); Hayashi (2021); Oliver et al. (2021); Pomeroy and Bernardi (2021); Versteegen and Versteegen (2021); Wilson (2021); as well as the bottom of the U: Moodley (2019); Karp & Lægreid (2014); Peschl & Fundneider (2014); Peschl (2020); Saggurthi & Thakur (2020); Scott (2021); and Springborg (2020). Presencing has been further developed in the context of presence: Gunnlaugson (2019); Gunnlaugson (2020); Korthagen et al. (2014);and Noon (2018); in the context of presencing leadership: Darsø (2014); Gunnlaugson (2020); Karp & Lægreid (2014); Stacey & Dow (2019); Reams (2010); Reams, Gunnlaugson & Reams (2014); and Schratz (2019); in the context of the arts and creativity: Becker (2019); Bird (2019); Darso & Meltzer (2020); Hayo & Hays (2020); Ricketts (2020); and in the context of social change: Karp (2020); Loudon & Deininger (2020); Versteegen & Jakimetz (2020); and coaching: Gunnlaugson & Walker (2014); Simmons Strong & Shewchuk (2020); and Train (2020).

faculties through each of the five journeys. The overarching aim is to develop skill, discernment, and embodied capacity for transforming presencing from a knowledge-making practice into a generative, foundational way of being.

For the purposes of this article, I draw primarily from the insights and discoveries unearthed from stewarding the lineage of Dynamic Presencing with students, clients, and colleagues across different global communities of practice. I distill five key principles for developing EPAs that support presencing as an ontological, embodied, relational, and consciousness-based transformative practice. In addition, I raise questions and outline specific criteria for building EPAs in new directions that I have identified as potentially promising for the evolution of future presencing research and the practice as a whole. My intent is that this theoretical discussion will serve as a catalyst in inspiring new thinking for stewarding the development and evolution of future EPAs, and the emerging field of presencing research as a whole.

By extending Scharmer's (2007) metaphor of bending the beam of collective awareness back to help the field of presencing become more aware of itself, my intent here is to help open a new space for presencing horizons to grow and support future research and ensure that the greater viability and objectivity of this emerging field are kept in focus. In bringing to light critical perspectives of Theory U-based presencing, practitioners and researchers can work with bending the field-reflexive beam of collective awareness to inform new paths of research that draw from views, critiques, and advances that might otherwise remain unaddressed. In opening up the breadth of theoretical reflexivity and awareness of our current conceptualizations of presencing and the assumptions that inform this work, future inquiry and research that address both Theory U-based and EPA-based research can be explored. As a theoretical point, clarifying the underlying assumptions, omissions, linkages, and possibly blurred distinctions between Theory U-based and EPA-based presencing theory will bring forth more in-depth comparisons of the scope and effectiveness of the overall theory with greater precision and care. Going forward, it will be necessary to explore new theoretical insights and innovations that help presencing practitioners become more reflexively aware of how certain tacit assumptions, framings, and habits of meaning-making may have inadvertently limited or conditioned our understanding of the full potential of presencing.

Aside from the work of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2021a, 2021b, 2020a, 2020b, 2019, 2015), there is an absence of explicit EPAs in the emerging field of presencing scholarship. Working with adjacent fields of research to better understand presencing is a kind of EPA project that lies outside the scope of this article. Embracing presencing terminology or attempting to map out and integrate other presencing-based terminology that may be related to presencing is yet another type of EPA project that holds merit. There are many. My hope is that this article will inspire the development of new EPAs, which in turn will legitimate new forms of presencing practice going forward. I will now circle back to my main project in this article: introducing key discoveries and insights

gleaned from my specific research with Dynamic Presencing by outlining five guiding principles for the development of future EPAs.

Guiding Principle #1: Expanding the *Epistemological* Scope to Include an *Ontological* Focus

Following Scharmer (2020), a number of accounts to date have continued the development of epistemological framings of presencing (Lehner, 2022; Saldana, 2019; Lewis, 2017; Peschl & Fundneider, 2014;). Alongside these contributions, there has been a longstanding need for in-depth approaches that build our deeper presencing capacity at the bottom of the U. Where the framing of presencing within Theory U is predominantly epistemological as a presenced way of knowing, future EPAs extending this journey into the ontological dimensions of being, embodied states of consciousness, and other ways of knowing will be positioned to build from its current focus as a social technology or practice for accessing the emerging future through the social field.

Clarifying his positioning of Theory U, Scharmer (2020, p. 331) has commented more recently that "Theory U is an attention-based view that is grounded in [Francisco] Varela's later work, i.e., in an epistemological turn." In his theory of knowledge creation, Scharmer's contribution as an action researcher lies in disrupting the traditional focus of "stepping back to focus on the abstract whole" to "stepping forward to connect with the concrete particulars" (p. 331). While Theory U and other contributions have advanced a path of actionable embodied knowing, to date Scharmer's focus has not been on developing either the ontological or onto-epistemological dimensions of presencing. When presencing is taken up as an epistemological practice (Scharmer, 2020, 2012, 2007), as illustrated in the imagery of *stepping forward to connect with the concrete particulars*, this sets a specific scope and set of parameters that gives rise to a focus of applying presencing to support practical projects and tangible ways of materializing the emerging future.

As I see it, herein lies the possibility for future EPAs to explore different modalities of *stepping forward.* In the work of Dynamic Presencing, this has led to exploring the *subtle* upstream particulars within embodied, interior, wisdom-based processes of *being* presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020a). Such approaches require broadening and deepening the cultivation of presencing knowledge. As we learn how to make the formidable ontological shift from *doing* to *being* presencing, a greater capacity of embodied presencing awareness is needed to work effectively with the subtle dimensions of consciousness that are germane to the presencing process. In addressing the subtle interior dimensions of our presencing experience, future EPAs will be well positioned to uncover insights that clarify and legitimate these deeper forms of presencing, aspects of which have been the longstanding focus of the world's wisdom and esoteric traditions. Having these inner paths of presencing mastery cultivation grow to be valued alongside outer paths that prioritize actionable interventions in the world will also help open pathways to EPAs that integrate the ontological depths of inner

seeing with our action *and* being in the world, which has been the main focus of Theory U.

In Dynamic Presencing, building from the epistemological focus of *connecting to source* in Theory U (Scharmer, 2007), there is a deepened exploration of an ontologically-informed, embodied path of presence towards *being source*. In other words, the shift to *being source* invites the cultivation of a deeper inner form of presencing mastery that unites us interiorly with source at the very level of our perception and embodiment. Learning to sustain and interiorly support *being source* as a dynamic way of being then becomes one of the aims of the method of primary presence (figure 1). Here source is contacted as the fourth and final ground of presence that is explored through a guided phenomenological process. Personal and collective practices are then introduced to help practitioners make the gradual inner discoveries of learning to see, contact, and then embody source as a foundational way of presenced being.

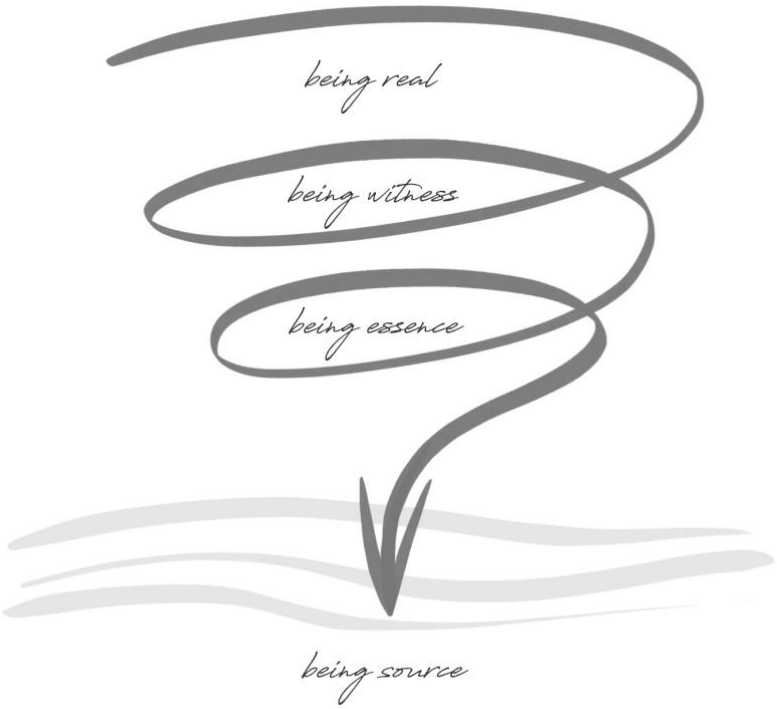

Figure 1. The Dynamic Presencing method of primary presence (Gunnlaugson, 2020a). Image by Reilly Dow.

In primary presence, the phenomenological journey through the four lifeworlds of *being real, being witness, being essence*, and *being source* facilitates a deepening and integration of the four ontological depths of presence. Here the intent is to uncover an inner movement of presence that deepens and begins to flow forth as a *subtle action from being*. Inside primary presence, for some practitioners, this involves the beginning of an apprenticeship into presenced being, where the focus of the inner work shifts to becoming more receptive to the

subtle embodied movements and felt promptings of one's presencing nature, which are gradually uncovered through each of the four lifeworlds. For others, discovering how each form of presence connects us to an essential dimension of our presencing nature opens up a deeper experience of realization and integration. Still for others, journeying through the four stages of being presence (Figure 1) illuminates the possibility of reclaiming a personal sense of being at home in presence, of learning to abide in and from each form of presence as an interface with our deeper presencing nature. On the whole, these four ontological depths of presence, when journeyed into, uncover an embodied inner movement of presencing that allows direct access to each form of presence as a new site for engaging presencing. Such possibilities inspire and produce a dynamic flowing presencing awareness, building from the Theory U approach of *accessing* or *connecting* to source at the bottom of the U (Scharmer, 2007) to embodying and integrating source more seamlessly into our core presence, identity, and presencing self.

From this brief illustration of expanding the epistemological scope to include an ontological focus, we can see a significantly different approach to working with presencing. By inviting a first-hand exploration of these ontological regions of presencing, especially sustained contact with source to help make the deeper critical shift to *being source*, practitioners can begin to establish the inner means for an ontologically supported presencing practice. Future EPAs exploring this modality of presencing may uncover other ontological regions of presence, as well as other ways of exploring those regions that help practitioners embody and master presencing as a way of being. Occasionally in the work there is a stumbling into or finding oneself on a *presencing plateau* (Gunnlaugson, 2020a), a stage in one's presencing practice where growth has leveled off, stopped developing, sometimes with the feeling of being unable to progress. In these moments, the north star of our deepest sense of what is possible with presencing can fade or become inaccessible to us. It is my experience that ontologically supported forms of presencing practice as illustrated above in the journey of primary presence can help revive the inner means to help us move through such periods. Better understanding why this is so through research with EPAs will further uncover the skillful means for exploring new ways of engaging the different ontological depth dimensions of presencing at the bottom of the U, as well as inspire renewed interest and enthusiasm for doing so.

Guiding Principle #2: Graduating from *Single* to *Multiple Presencing Interfaces* at the Bottom of the U

The main practice of presencing itself has been advanced through Francisco Varela's phenomenological method of the epoché (Depraz, 2003), where he introduces the movements of *letting go* and *letting come*. Theory U draws chiefly from Varela's gestures at the bottom of the U as the principal means for accessing source individually and collectively in the social field. *Letting go* is essential in helping release us from whatever is blocking our contact with source,

and *letting come* facilitates conditions for becoming receptive to learning from the emerging future. The *letting go* into *letting come* practice of presencing is the culminating stage of the overall U movement, offering an interface that we connect with in order to experience source in Theory U.

In my early stages of my research with Dynamic Presencing, it became apparent that the space between *letting go* and *letting come* merits a third gesture, what I call *letting be* (Gunnlaugson, 2020a). *Letting be* is needed for a number of reasons: to help presencing practitioners acclimate to the liminal experience of the bottom of the U, to learn an inner posture that can help support the embodiment of essential wisdom and insight that may not be immediately apparent or accessible to us otherwise. The gesture of *letting be* slows us down and gives us access to a deeper dimension of the U that tends to be overlooked. Building from Jaworski's (2012) account of presencing as indwelling, the intent was to provide a phenomenological gesture that could be useful in stabilizing our presencing awareness at the bottom of the U from the ground and depths of presence directly. As a stabilizing gesture, *letting be* offers the means to ground, grow, and embody crucial presencing awareness from direct contact with the inner dimensions of our presencing self. In this sense, gestures like *letting be* are needed from future EPAs to offer new phenomenological discernment (Mata, 2016), examination, and excavation of the territory at the bottom of the U that builds on what has been articulated through the methods of Theory U to date.

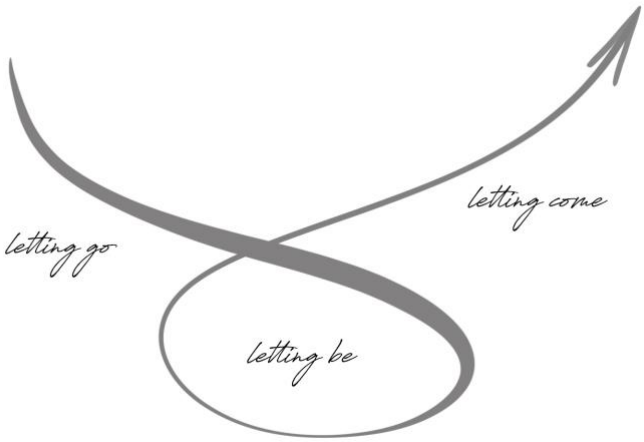

Figure 2. The Dynamic Presencing method of primary knowing (Gunnlaugson, 2020a). Image by Reilly Dow.

With sufficient practice, *letting be* helps presencing become actionable in any context by supporting practitioners in making the transition from *doing presencing* to a more subtle way of *being presencing* through the method of primary knowing (Figure 2). In the work of Dynamic Presencing, the gesture of *letting be* provides embodied access to four distinct ontological depth levels of presence (*immediate, expansive, core*, and *originating*) (Gunnlaugson, 2020a), which in turn support presencing practitioners in coming to know their presencing experience from the grounds of being and presence directly.

This phenomenological re-rerouting of a presencing *knowing through being* serves a key function in shifting the emphasis to the ground of where practitioners are coming from (i.e., their ontological locations) from what is emerging or where their attention is directed (i.e., their epistemological destination, *the emerging future*). This figure/ground reversal of focus initiates practitioners into the experience of *being presencing*, establishing preconditions for cultivating a contemplatively oriented, present-resourced, ontologically directed presencing process. Designed to complement the Theory U emphasis on an epistemologically directed presencing and learning from the emerging future, in Dynamic Presencing the emerging future is reframed in phenomenological terms as *the arising new* (Gunnlaugson, 2020a). *Letting be* helps stabilize our presencing seeing at the granular levels of our felt embodied perception of the *arising new*. With the third gesture of *letting be,* we open a generative space to establish contact with a sufficient depth of embodied presence, which helps establish preconditions for sustaining a presenced seeing from source. Here the four ontological depth levels of presence serve as resources for supporting practitioners in a presenced seeing of the *arising new*.

In the transition from *letting go* to *letting be*, practitioners are immersed with their deeper presencing nature and discover through direct experience how *being* offers an alternative order, form, and basis for presenced action. In learning to *let be* in the ground state experience of embodied receptivity at the bottom of the U, practitioners explore indwelling and suspending their presencing awareness in new embodied ways, resisting the temptation to prematurely shift to *letting come*. In learning to ground our presencing awareness inside the generative holding environment of *letting be,* this gesture supports the realization and overall development of our presencing self from each of the four depth locations of presence that constitute our presencing nature in the journey of primary knowing (Figure 2).

As a point of contrast, Theory U-based presencing practice typically emphasizes connecting to source in the transcendent space of the presencing field. Dynamic presencing, on the other hand, proceeds differently by activating one's deeper presencing nature inside the gesture of *letting be* as the principal interface to connecting to the presencing field. Without this additional inner step, practitioners tend to be future-focused, which risks displacing the present moment and their embodied ability to center and become immersed in it as the locus of presencing emergence. In reclaiming our presencing nature through *letting be*, presencing practitioners learn to be receptive to *letting come* from the rooting ground of *letting be*, not from the transitional gesture of *letting go*. *Letting be* offers access to the deeper ontological source ground of presence and source stillness.

In considering different interfaces through which to access presencing, future EPAs will benefit from exploring presencing through a wider and deeper range of access points in our perception and consciousness, as has been articulated by a number of authors to date: (Bockler, 2021; Brendel, 2019;

Skipper, 2019; Fitch & O'Fallon, 2014; Hardman & Hardman, 2014; Nicolaides & McCallum, 2014). With Dynamic Presencing, each of the four forms of presence—*immediate, expansive, core*, and *originating* (Gunnlaugson, 2020a) becomes an embodied interface through which we engage presencing as a dynamic way of being. Each embodied interface affords a presenced seeing from different ontological depths of our presencing nature, in turn facilitating new insights, realizations, and discoveries as each form becomes more seamlessly embodied in practice.

EPAs that address different ontological depth levels of presence open up new interfaces to engage presencing at the bottom of the U. By recentralizing the process of presencing in the phenomenological terrain of presence itself, EPAs that introduce methods for integrating presencing awareness at the level of our embodied perception and consciousness set forth new conditions for learning to engage presencing principally as a way of being. With practice, more integrative and unitive expressions of presencing can begin to take root in one's overall approach to presencing as new interfaces become embodied, integrated, and eventually mastered. From the initial focus of *letting go* into *letting come* to a dynamic integration of our presencing awareness across multiple presencing interfaces via *letting be*, this depth shift gives rise to unique and unprecedented formulations that offer new insight into the EPA project of fostering advanced approaches to presencing mastery.

Guiding Principle #3: Rethinking *Where, When,* and *How* the Journey of Presencing Begins

In Theory U (Scharmer, 2007) presencing is positioned to be the culminating gesture between sensing and crystallizing, where mind, heart, and will have opened into connecting to source at the bottom of the U. Building from the second principle of expanding into multiple presencing interfaces, there is a need for EPAs that explore multiple catalysts (Koskela et al., 2016) for activating our deeper presencing nature to allow for the possibility of accessing presencing regardless of the situation we may be in the middle of.

Let us begin with the first condition, *where.* Exploring a breadth of flexible and fluid access points to source opens new EPA paths to actionable alternatives for engaging presencing directly in our work and lives. Typically Theory U-based accounts follow a sequencing of steps to access presencing at the bottom of the U (from *downloading* to *seeing, sensing, presencing, crystallizing, prototyping, and performing*). Future EPAs that explore new access and embodiment routes to source, generated by different catalysts that activate an overall presenced way of being, in turn will bring fresh insight into how to attain advanced levels of presencing mastery. In a related way, EPAs that incorporate first-, second- and third- person phenomenological perspectives of different liminal thresholds that are passed through enroute to presencing will shed new light on the proverbial eye-of-the-needle threshold at the bottom of the U in Theory U. In the work of Dynamic Presencing, there are multiple liminal thresholds at the bottom of the U

that are crossed enroute to activating deeper levels of presence within the presencing field. Going forward, understanding how to effectively access, pass through, and master one's individual and collective movements through these depth thresholds needs to be better accounted for and more clearly delineated by EPAs.

Regarding the next condition, *when*, future EPAs that begin interiorly, spontaneously, and actionably from the state of presencing awareness itself will in turn be more adaptive to everyday conditions of practice. In this way, EPAs are freed to explore new distinctions and a new language for learning how to live and orient from presencing more fluidly as a way of being in one's daily work and life. By exploring ways of living and residing in one's presencing experience in the world as home, one acquires a sense of support and ground through which it becomes possible to engage presencing in the world as *essential*, *integrated*, and *accessible* rather than as a *special, peak*, *or rarified* part of one's professional and personal life. Building from the Theory U journey location of learning to lead from the emerging future, what shifts take place with new temporal locations? What changes when we reroute our presencing orientation to the *present*, *past*, or *eternal* orders of time? What is discovered while exploring presencing in *kairos* orders of deep holistic time in contrast to *chronos* orders of everyday chronological time? These and other shifts in our temporal horizon are needed to integrate presencing more fully into the actual life conditions and concerns of everyday practitioner experience. EPA methods such as Dynamic Presencing that explore and expand these temporal horizons benefit leaders and practitioners by opening new contexts for applying presencing in ways that build from the Theory U focus of gaining future knowledge to cultivating an overall way of life by exploring presencing in the moment (present and eternal), in reflection (past), and in the emerging future. This extends the actual existential grounds for being in and living with, *from* and *as* the unknown directly, in turn re-orienting our sense and sensibility of time, duration, and personhood. By reconsidering how different temporal orders of presencing are engaged as a practice, we can more effectively address our deeper human longing for ontological rootedness and grounding in our actual experience, which includes each of these modalities of time.

Building from the contributions of Theory U, future EPAs that expand the final condition of *how* we access presencing to include the felt sense (Gioacchino, 2019; Iikemi, 2005) and inner body (Núñez-Pacheco & Loke, 2018) as gateways to presencing awareness offer potentially promising inroads into new presencing territory. In the work of Dynamic Presencing, resting from the depths of stillness within one's inner body as a felt sensing instrument provides a distinct inner foundation for presencing that compels further inquiry. Following from this, EPAs that expand on existing conceptions of generativity that are resourced in well-being, inner wisdom, spiritual, soulful, and other related contexts (Bockler, 2021) contain the promise of new theorizing spaces. By being led into and from the unknown as a venue for wisdom knowing to flourish, such EPAs can serve as

a gateway to transmitting this inner richness of being in the pursuit of new knowledge and innovation.

Rethinking the final condition of *how* the journey of presencing begins shifts the possible ways of rendering the presencing field. In Theory U, presencing is regarded as a single social field. In the work of Dynamic Presencing, the presencing field consists of four distinct yet interconnected presencing locations or generative spaces for engagement (figure 3).

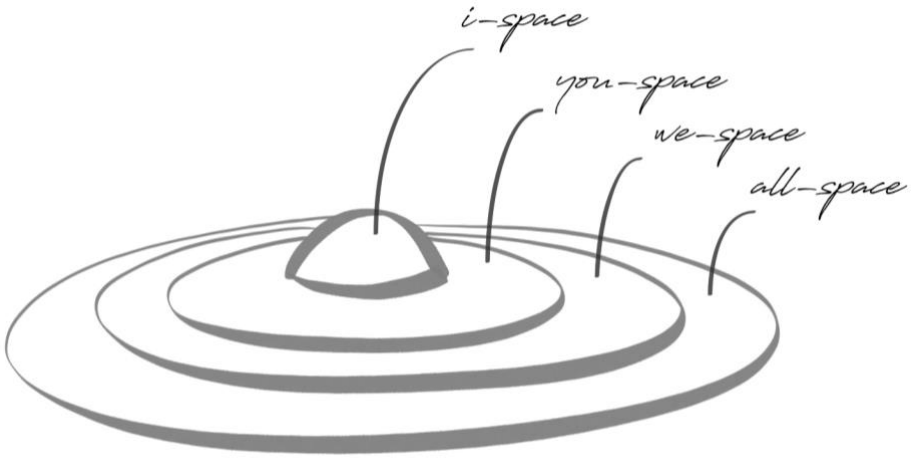

Figure 3. The Dynamic Presencing method of primary communicating (Gunnlaugson, 2020a). Image by Reilly Dow.

Each presencing space in figure 3 represents a phenomenological location and specific geography within the presencing field. Experientially, each location helps us engage a particular field dynamics of presencing at the subtle felt-sensemaking level of our experience. Within this new presencing field geography, we are introduced to an individual field location or *i-space* and three collective field locations of presencing: *you-space*, *we-space*, and *all-space*. By learning to access and participate in these four new locations in the presencing field, practitioners can engage a more situationally precise mode of presencing in their daily work and lives. This precision fosters a more differentiated presencing field dynamics and a new presencing field awareness that can be explored in different ways and contexts.

Each presencing field location connects us to a region in the presencing field where we can develop a more relationally precise and contextually aligned presencing process. As practitioners learn to engage presencing in unique and varied ways across each field horizon, this increases our overall awareness and capacity for a fluid engagement of presencing inside and across workplace and life situations. Because life in the twenty-first century increasingly asks for our participation in these four locations, there is a growing need to develop EPAs that explore presencing field mastery distinctions in new and related ways. As each field location contains a set of spatial and relational reference points for

engaging presencing in context, EPAs that explore different presencing field locations may offer insight into how to develop an increased field acuity and capacity for working with presencing in different situations. In this way, EPAs that address the four field locations (and perhaps others not yet identified) in turn help presencing practitioners foster greater awareness of how our emerging presencing self interfaces with the particular presencing field we are engaging.

Guiding Principle #4: Shifting from a *Single to Multiple* Source Perspectives

As established, there is merit in addressing the ontological role of *being* as the core integrating context and holding environment through which it is possible to develop our presence and presencing capacity (Westoby, 2021; Gunnlaugson 2020a; Sokolowski, 2017). How might future EPAs emphasize a relational ground of connectedness with the *inner* gestalt of one's presencing self and *inter*-connectedness with the co-extensive presencing field? What I am suggesting here is a process metaphysics that differentiates yet also integrates the presencing self with the presencing field. Earlier thinking from *Theory U* (Scharmer, 2007) suggests that the emerging future lies beyond our self or in the social field, with the place from which we operate moving not only in the arc from the center (downloading) to the periphery (seeing) and from there to beyond the boundary of our own organization (sensing), but progressing on to the surrounding sphere—that is, to "the beings who surround us." (p. 166). Emphasizing a movement of our perception away from our center to the periphery, rather than inviting paths that deepen into our center before contacting the periphery, can in some instances lead to a projection of authority placed on the social field surrounding us. For some practitioners, this move risks mystifying and reifying the transcendent transpersonal dimensions of our presencing experience. The initial Theory U assigning of an anthropocentric interpretation to the social field(s) (i.e., to the beings who surround us), introduces a narrative that may not resonate for some practitioners and may even be problematic for others.

Going forward, what is needed are EPAs that engage with an ongoing rethinking of the metaphysical, teleological, and spiritual worldview of presencing. By encouraging different interpretations concerning how and where presencing is sourced from, we can invite paths for new EPAs that prioritize different phenomenological interpretations and ways of engaging social fields. By shedding fresh light on the nature of the relationship between the presencing self and field, EPA pathways can be encouraged that emphasize a grounding movement into and through the deep center of our presencing nature, not away from it. In exploring the depths of presence that constitute our presencing nature, we can in turn address both the ontological and consciousness dimensions of the presencing self in the presencing field. EPAs that explore this intersection are well positioned to restore a deepened trust and empowerment of the otherwise dormant regions of sensemaking from the presencing self as potentially integrated, co-extensive, and unified with the presencing field. These

and other variations of relatedness and situatedness open up new possibilities for recontextualizing the presencing process in ways that offer alternative complementary routes to the prevailing Theory U *center-to-periphery* movement.

In the work of Dynamic Presencing, a more integrated framing of source opens up a new pathway to source as outlined above. With a first-person re-acclimation to source from our being, deeper essence, or soul (Gunnlaugson, 2020a), as well as a second-person communion with source as connected and intrinsic to who we are (Gunnlaugson, 2020a), there is also a third-person neutral awareness that is capable of a more dispassionate seeing of source. Each of these perspectives inform the Dynamic Presencing path to source. From the first-person experience of source, *as source* can be experienced through enactment practices such as being source, with the *inner* interface of source contacted within us. From the second-person, an I-thou relatedness via a communion with source with others collectively can unfold by exploring ways of *being with source* together, in contact with the *shared* interface of source. And from the third-person, a reflective viewpoint can be explored *about source* where we aspire to witness source from the *outer* interface of a more neutral, outsider meta-view.

These and other possibilities for an integrated source-based embodied seeing fill out how source is engaged, in turn raising the question: how might future EPAs integrate source from the respective depth locations of our being and in a more comprehensive fashion via the above three perspectives? How can we outgrow tendencies toward idealizations of the authentic, ideal, or true self to a phenomenology of experiencing our deeper essence and soul as an emergent process that is simultaneously aware of the problematic or limiting aspects of mental and psychological identification? To develop these and other possibilities, further inquiry and research needs to address how EPAs can connect to source through immanent and subtly embodied pathways of realization (Ludevig, 2016) rather than through transcendent leaning paths that risk engaging a spiritual bypassing (Welwood, 1984) of our presencing nature and self in favor of connecting with the presencing field.

There is also a need for further inquiry into how we relate with source, addressing how the subject-object, dualistic sense of separation we ordinarily experience in day-to-day life is softened, dissolved, or reconciled through deeper forms of the presencing process. Scharmer's initial focus on the social field as the chief domain of presencing tended to overlook the subtle, somatic dimensions of our experience. These are accounted for in his more recent work (Scharmer, 2015), and I expect we will continue to see updates on this front. As such, exploring alternative ways of connecting to the presencing field somatically offers potentially fruitful avenues of research. Further, where *Theory U* focuses on the dichotomy between the old self and *highest*, *authentic*, *future self*, very little has been written about the philosophical, spiritual, existential, and psychological sense of our presencing self and presencing awareness to date (Gunnlaugson, 2020a). Future EPAs that examine the relationship between the presencing self

and presencing field will open fertile new inquiries into the role of source in reconciling these deeper dimensions of our presencing experience.

Guiding Principle #5: Deepening the *Processes* and *Forms* of Presencing Embodiment

In the context of helping presencing become a more embodied process, the Theory U focus has been on physically directed *processes* as well as *forms* of body movement and approaches to embodiment through the work of Social Presencing Theater (Hayashi, 2021, 2017). Continuing in this vein, future EPAs will benefit from extending the scope of their embodiment research to include a more in-depth inquiry into subtle interior *processes* and *forms* of embodied movement that are not directed by or mediated through physical movement. Redirecting attention to these two aspects of subtle embodiment in future EPAs is needed since neither physical process nor physical forms of movement are required to access subtle levels of embodiment. For some presencing practitioners the physical dimensions of movement can be a distraction from attending to the nuances of inner movement. Given that we are not physically moving when communicating or leading, to establish presencing as a way of being, a more interior approach to embodiment is needed to help ground and stabilize our presencing awareness. As such, there is a need for EPAs that work exclusively on a subtle interior level of embodiment. To effectively embody the depth dimensions of presencing at the bottom of the U, which is alive with presence and deeper wisdom, further research should attempt to clarify and elucidate subtle and stillness-based approaches to embodiment while communicating and leading. Following this line of inquiry, a broader array of EPAs that explore subtle and inner-directed as well as nonphysical movement-directed forms of embodiment will change how embodiment is currently thought about, practiced, and researched within the emerging field of presencing. This is a long-awaited and much-needed update.

Regarding deepening the *process of embodiment*, as an EPA case illustration, the journey of primary perceiving (figure 4) in Dynamic Presencing offers an effective subtle interior method that integrates our presencing awareness at the embodied level of our perception.

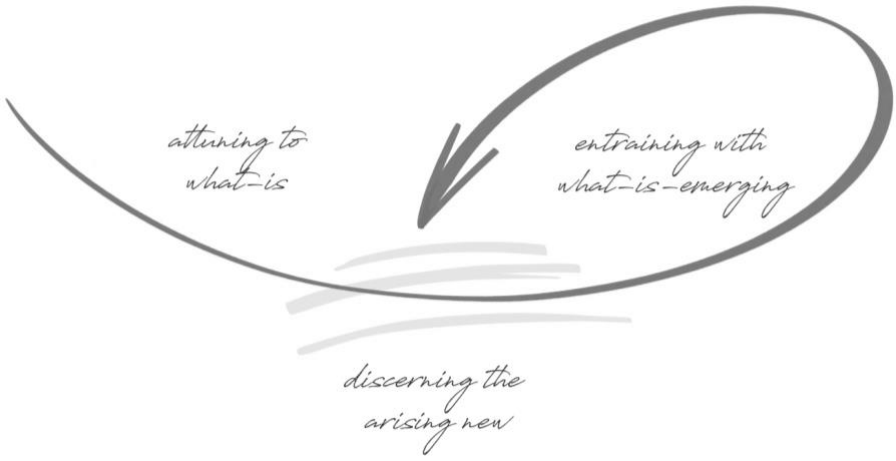

Figure 4. The Dynamic Presencing method of primary perceiving Gunnlaugson (2020a). Image by Reilly Dow.

Primary perceiving reveals a subtle embodied path that uncovers a new way of engaging presencing at the level of our direct perception from the initial movement of *attuning to what-is,* to then *entraining to what-is-emerging*, to finally *discerning the arising new*. A typical challenge for many presencing practitioners is keeping our perception sufficiently embodied and adequately resourced from our presence. In *primary perceiving*, we work to deepen our existing presencing practice in the flow zone where our embodied perception meets the inner dimensions of creative emergence and not-yet-manifested reality. *Primary perceiving* offers us valuable scaffolding in the flow zone by stabilizing our presencing perception at the granular levels of our felt embodied experience. Moving down a level from the second Dynamic Presencing journey of *primary knowing*, in the transition from *letting be* to *letting come*, we explore the core movement of *primary perceiving*, a fluid process that draws us into felt perceptual contact with the *arising new*. This helps make the emerging future more accessible and immediate, phenomenologically speaking, at the level of our felt embodied perception. By introducing a subtly embodied process to connect with and sustain our connection with presencing perceptually, *primary perceiving* gradually reveals an embodied presencing way of seeing. Each of the three phases in figure 4 brings our perception into a felt contact with *what-is*, *what-is-emerging*, and the source ground of emergence. From this process comes forth a new subtle embodied mode of presencing.

Where Theory U works with bringing about the future that already wants to emerge, (Scharmer, 2007), EPAs that explore dynamic and subtle abiding, rooting, indwelling, and orienting from embodied presencing awareness will invariably shift the locus of the presencing process. Returning presencing to the deep present helps recalibrate any emphasis on an emerging future and ensures that projective tendencies are mitigated in favor of actual phenomenological discovery. Having an authenticating way of being from inside the emerging present may make it possible for the emerging future to find a different role in

the overall presencing process and, for some practitioners and researchers, to assume less of a teleological role. By shifting to cultivating an embodied process of presencing, the future is no longer sought but paradoxically encountered through other aforementioned embodied orders of time. Pivoting to exploring subtle inner processes of embodiment facilitates this and other related realizations.

Regarding deepening the *forms of embodiment*, the second aspect of this fifth EPA principle, a more in-depth look at the nature of the presencing self and how to work with embodied process has been needed for some time. In Theory U, one's *authentic self* is sought as a means of connecting with the emerging future. What directions await EPAs that address different presencing identity structures and senses of self as a means of engaging more interior embodied ways of leading and sensemaking? By bracketing and setting aside construct-based presencing-self ideals (Spinelli, 2005) (i.e., higher self, authentic self, best self, etc.), we can shift into experiencing our presencing nature in a more process-directed language that better reflects the actual experiential territory of presence. Through the process of being embodied, presence can be accessed through a fluid inner movement that helps practitioners experience the essential qualities that dwell in our presencing awareness and nature. Experiencing presencing at different depths of presence or altitudes of our being, as is the focus of the work of Dynamic Presencing, has a significant influence on the qualitative nature of what we see, interpret, and make meaning from in these respective ontological locations. The embodied depth locations of presence are phenomenologically rich contexts of enacted wisdom that offer valuable resourcing and assistance for leaders to ground, deepen, and mature their perception inside the process of creative emergence.

In generative moments, our presencing nature is connected to the actualizing stream of emergence, listening to, speaking from, and orienting from what is arising. In Dynamic Presencing, this is all possible because multiple flowing pathways to an inner embodied state of *being presencing* are actively cultivated. Consequently, there is a need for EPAs to explore alternative routings from positing a discrete *authentic, higher, best self*, which unnecessarily engages the mind and thought as an ideal. Arguably, such framings are part of the epistemological tradition of emphasizing or privileging past knowledge over our arising experience as Ferrer (2011) and others have pointed out. Varela's thinking (Scharmer, 2000a) signaled the possibility of framing the virtuality of the self, which suggests the apparent reality of the self, not as a given conditioned structure. This signals a paradoxical territory that is at once let go of, though not fully given up. In other words, it is learning to occupy a sense of self that is process-constituted. By inviting the possibility of a lateral shift from being *self-identified* to being *process-aware*, the simultaneous shift into our presencing nature takes place in a new self-sense, again as emergent *unfolding*. A fixed self-sense then gives way to an emerging process-mediated self-sense, opening new possibilities for EPAs to explore more in depth.

By developing a receptivity to a breadth of subtle embodied states of being and inner directed movements, future EPAs can prepare key conditions for more process-based work (Mindel, 1991), meaning there is a suspension and releasing of reified and construct-based *mental* representations of the presencing self to open space for establishing *embodied* process contact with our deeper presencing nature, to then becoming more process-aware of the underlying dynamism of the presencing process itself. As in the EPA case example of Dynamic Presencing, by exploring subtle and inner embodiment movements in each of the five journeys that (let go) of our construct-based identified presencing self, to being embodied in our essential presencing nature (letting be), to then being more process-aware of the unfolding nature of presencing awareness (letting come). This and other formulations help cultivate fluid inner-directed forms of embodiment that emerge from the inside-out as well as the outside-in.

Closing Remarks

Informed by my research into Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson 2021a, 2021b, 2020a, 2020b, 2019), the five guiding principles for developing future EPAs introduce a constellation of elements for catalyzing advances in the practice of presencing and its emerging field of research. As a whole, this article makes a case for the continued evolution of the practice of presencing through the development of EPAs that build from and extend the scope of presencing beyond the Theory U lineage. In support of this undertaking, there is a growing role for EPAs that attempt to carve out new territory to optimally serve the evolving needs of our local as well as greater global communities of presencing. Building on efforts with colleagues internationally to advance the field of presencing has set the stage for EPAs that are integrative, disruptive, and transformative. For those theorists and scholar practitioners who are called to the project, I invite you to do your part to help bend the beam of collective awareness back to grow the field of presencing by introducing, developing, critiquing and applying EPAs going forward.

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A Deep Dive into Social Field Shifts:

Examining Field Autonomy and Malleability During an Awareness-based Change Program Design

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Abstract

Social fields have garnered increasing interest among practitioners and researchers, particularly due to the need to address multiple intersecting crises and their societal and organizational impacts. A recent conceptualization by Pomeroy and Herrmann (2023) proposes that social fields have a degree of autonomy that perpetuates phenomena like interaction patterns. The study adopts this lens to empirically examine the shifts at three schools during a longitudinal awareness-based change program. In-depth interviews with school professionals provide insights into the potential of relational awareness to "dive below the vortex" of autonomous and de-generative interaction cycles, facilitating a transition towards responsive and generative cycles. However, while field autonomy was transformed across the entire organization in some cases, persistent patterns were observed in others, indicating variations in the malleability of social fields. The implications of these findings for promoting organizational change are discussed.

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Keywords
social field, awareness-based systems change, organizational development, organizational culture, relational awareness, systems sensing

Introduction

From all observable indicators, the period ahead will be challenging. The intersecting crises of our time—climate, ecological, equity, technological, geopolitical, and beyond—are pressure tests for existing structures, calling for wide-ranging systemic transformations from *micro* to *mundo*-levels. But as phrases such as "systems change" risk becoming buzzwords, it is imperative to understand the enabling conditions for genuine transformation. Systems change scholars and practitioners have argued that it is insufficient to exclusively focus on the outer, visible aspects of a system (Scharmer, 2016). Crucially, these aspects are entangled with the collective interior, the lived experience and relational quality within the system. More often than not, change efforts are bound to fail unless there is a shift in this interior dimension, referred to as the "social field" (Scharmer, 2016; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013; Boell & Senge, 2016). Practitioners involved in change work are familiar with the concept that the social field of each organization or team appears to have a "life of its own," and the same intervention produces very different results in different settings. This phenomenon is captured by the notion of "field autonomy," recently proposed as a fundamental property of social fields (Pomeroy & Herrmann, 2023). Thus, improving our conceptual and practical knowledge about the dynamics of shifting social fields is critical.

While social systems can be observed, social fields are lived and known to us by feeling their resonance in our being. Therefore, the notion of the social field is associated with the assumption that change processes are crucially enabled by a deepening quality of *awareness*—often conceptualized as "presencing" (Scharmer, 2016), "generative mindfulness" (Schuyler et al., 2022), or "systems awareness" (Senge et al., 2019). Given the centrality of these concepts within *awareness*-based systems change, there is a need to thoroughly investigate the precise role that awareness may play in bringing about field shifts.

To provide insights into these matters, this study zeroes in on empirical case examples from the education sector which, at large, illustrates the necessity of working with the social field. Put bluntly, Western education systems are failing to adequately prepare the next generation for the multiple challenges ahead. While the OECD (2019) emphasizes the need to develop transformation capabilities, schools are ill-equipped to address this task, lacking the capacity to shift from conventional curriculum-based to transformative learning. Like many other sectors, the difficulties with producing the desired outcomes exhibited by these organizations arguably originate, to a large degree, in their social fields. In order to examine social field shifts, the study analyzes the empirical case of the change processes at three schools during a capacity building program aiming at the cultivation of *relational awareness*.

Based on the idea that social fields possess a degree of autonomy, but are also malleable for change, the study aims at examining the social field shifts that occurred at these schools, and the role of *relational awareness* in these shifts.

Conceptually, the study draws from the recent work of Pomeroy and Herrmann (2023) which articulates the fundamental properties of social fields, elaborated upon in the following section. Thereafter, the concept of *relational awareness* will be introduced, along with a description of the capacity building program.

The Properties of Social Fields

Pomeroy and Herrmann (2023) posit that social fields are composed of three dynamic and interrelated properties: intercorporeality, autonomy, and affordance.

Firstly, social fields are founded in the reciprocal intertwining and resonance between one's own body and the body of another. This intertwining, coined by French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty as *intercorporeality,* involves a dynamic and circular process of bodily expression and impression (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). One's own gestures and experiences reflect and intertwine with those of another person, forming the foundation for intersubjectivity and mutual understanding. Usually, intercorporeality goes unnoticed, like a fish in the water not noticing its wetness (Pomeroy & Herrmann, 2023). Nevertheless, its impact is felt as the atmosphere within a social group.

Intercorporeality gives rise to the *autonomy* of social fields. Autonomy refers to the phenomenon where the interaction process itself can "take the lead," overriding individual intentions and leading to behaviors that individuals may not fully understand (de Jaegher & di Paolo, 2007). If intercorporeality is the substance of the field, the water we swim in, one can think of autonomy as patterns in the water like waves, vortices, and aggregate states. These autonomous interaction patterns were "foregrounded" in pioneering ways by early proponents of family therapy (Bowen, 1966). Their self-replicating nature can be illustrated by the phenomenon that often individuals can switch roles while perpetuating the same pattern (Tomm et al., 2014). For example, Person A may in one situation interact as "criticizer" of the other and Person B as "defender," while they readily exchange roles in another situation. This demonstrates the autonomous nature of the field and its influence on behaviors, impacting the well-being of individuals, their relationships, and the larger systems they operate in.

Autonomy can indeed manifest both generative qualities conducive to the well-being and flourishing of everyone involved, and de-generative qualities furthering pathologizing (Tomm et al., 2014) and "absencing" (Scharmer, 2016) dynamics that lead to negative symptoms in the actors and their contexts. It has been emphasized that the generativity of a field depends on its capacity for "integration" (Siegel, 2020, inspired by Bowen, 1966), comprising the individuals'

ability to differentiate their own feelings and actions from those of others and maintain their own values and perspectives, while simultaneously establishing compassionate and attuned connections with others. Concepts such as group and organizational dynamics (Bion, 1952; Hopper, 2009) and organizational culture (Schein, 1996) have elaborated on the phenomenon of autonomy, highlighting that it exerts a strong and stable influence on organizational functioning. Importantly, autonomy may also reproduce foundational social issues such as power imbalances. In fact, the concept of social fields has been widely used within sociology to describe these power dynamics (Bourdieu, 1987/1990), which are an important facet of field autonomy.

However, field autonomy does not compel actors to engage in these patterns. Rather, it "invites" them, as suggested by Maturana and Varela (1980), leaving room for emancipatory action. These invitations are the third property of social fields, their *affordance*.

Affordance refers to the "action possibility" presented to an organism by its environment, such as the sitability of a chair, the edibility of an apple, or the openability of a door (Gibson, 1979; Fuchs, 2000, 2013, 2016). In line with Lewin's (1943; 1951) concept of force vectors in a social field, affordance either encourages or discourages specific action and feeling tendencies. If the autonomy of a field is likened to the aggregate state of water and stable patterns like waves, then affordance is akin to the felt sense of being pulled by the current. Affordances involve responsivities within individuals, including bodily, affective, and cognitive tendencies. For example, a hostile atmosphere may evoke the bodily inclination to shrink and withdraw, heightened alertness, and the tendency to view others as dangerous. Depending on the actors' positions of power, whether structurally, culturally, or personally sourced (Boonstra & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 1998), the field appears to encourage different action strategies.

These properties—intercorporeality, autonomy, and affordance—are interrelated within a dynamic feedback loop. Social fields emerge as autonomous entities through intercorporeality, with their quality determined by affordance. By actively working with affordances, it becomes possible to shift the autonomous patterns and overall quality of social fields.

Cultivating Relational Awareness

Experiencing social fields is a pervasive and vibrant undercurrent of our lives. This discernment and knowing can be developed into a refined skill, as emphasized by practitioners working deliberately with the field (Brabant & DiPerna, 2016). Congruently, Pomeroy and Herrmann (2023) state, "we can build our capacity to know the field with a degree of accuracy—that is, we can interpret our own sensing of the field in a way that is resonant with the social reality collectively experienced" (p. 17).

For example, imagine two school faculties: one where educators and the principal have an open conversation about their challenges with some students, listening attentively to one another as they share how they feel in the situation and encouraging each other to also take the students' perspective, and another where educators join in blaming the students for the misbehavior, concealing their difficulties from their colleagues and the principal. Each situation evokes a distinct resonance.

Along those lines, Nielsen and Petersen (2021) developed the concept of "relational awareness" which they define as,

> an embodied and mediated awareness of the extended intercorporeal affectivity and resonance. It can be experienced as an immediate response and as an embodied reflection perceived as an impulse, affectivity, a mood, an emotion or a conscious reflective line of thought. (p. 147)

The definition highlights that a field is known by resonating with it and by becoming conscious of the experienced resonance. This is referred to as "responsivity" which is the object of relational awareness. Responsivities are evoked by the affordances of the field, its invitations, pushes, and pulls on individuals. Being aware of these often unconscious responsivities requires active practice and cultivation. Nielsen and Petersen (2021) describe it as an "embodied activity mediated by methods of behaviour, motives and social means of language and discourse" (p. 141) such as attending to one's own breathing, guiding attention, and using inner speech to calm oneself.

There is a counterintuitive dynamic involved in relational awareness which is that a considerable portion of the activity involves sensing 'inside' oneself rather than 'outside,' because the field permeates one's body where it manifests as responsivities. As Foulkes, an early social fields scholar, noted, "what we traditionally look upon as our innermost self, the intrapsychic as against the external world is thus not only shareable, but is in fact already shared" (Foulkes, 1975, p. 62).

The conceptualization of relational awareness was developed during an embedded and longitudinal research process, during which the researchers participated in a training for educators. This training was a precursor of the awareness-based program under examination in this study, called here, "Relational Awareness for School Professionals" (RASP). Helle Jensen, the Danish psychologist who initiated and lead both programs, describes the conditions and competencies required for social field awareness (interviewed in Boell & Senge, 2016):

> The really deep training is to take care of oneself as well as of the community and social relations. This is a refined balance that needs to be practiced all the time. Everybody has to take responsibility for themselves at all times in every moment. From that position, it becomes clear how the energy is moving through the field—right here, right now. (p. 27)

This awareness is particularly necessary in schools. As Juul and Jensen (2002/2017) convincingly argue, those in positions of power within a social field hold greater responsibility for its quality. This principle is exacerbated in the education system which positions its most vulnerable members, children, at the receiving end of a chain of asymmetrical relationships and nested hierarchies. In fact, decades of research have underscored that providing children with attuned relationships is of paramount importance for their learning, development, and well-being (Cornelius-White, 2007; Martin & Dowson 2009; Murray & Pianta, 2007; Wubbels et al., 2016). Strangely enough, this body of knowledge has been largely ignored in the professional training of educators.

Therefore, RASP was launched as an awareness-based program aiming to provide school professionals with the necessary competences to cultivate more generative social fields in the whole school, and particularly in the classroom. Its approach will be presented in the methods section.

Research Aims and Objectives

The goal of this study is to explore the social field shifts within three organizations participating in an awareness-based change program, with a particular focus on the fields' autonomy and their malleability as well as the role of awareness in bringing about field shifts.

Methods

Study Design

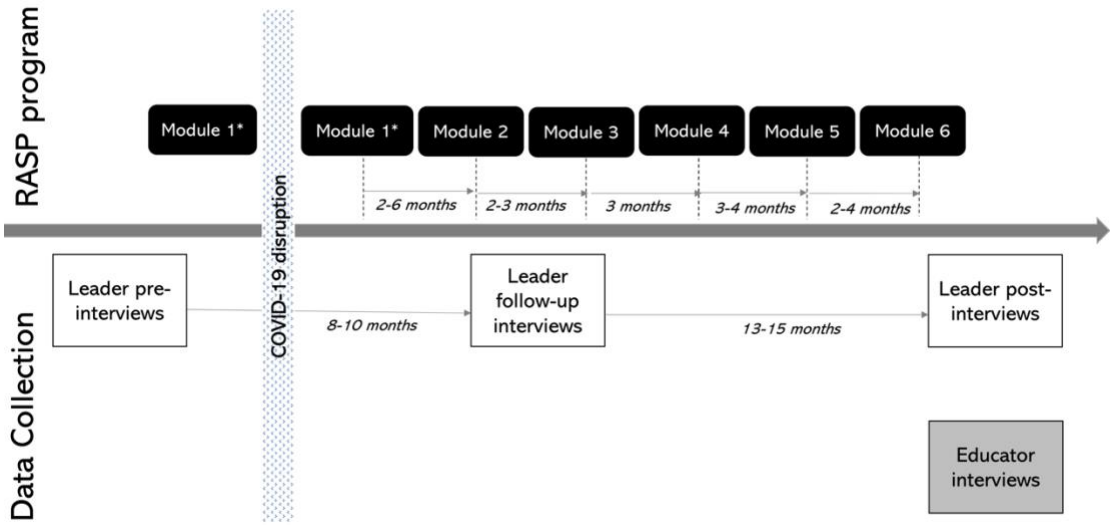

Figure 1. Study Design.

The study was part of a research project by the Institute for Medical Psychology at the University Hospital Heidelberg focusing on the RASP program. The project adopted a converging explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2017) evaluating the program effects on students and educators using quantitative pre- and post-assessments (Control Group Pre-Post-Design) alongside the collection of qualitative data to explore the processes in-depth and over time. Using a qualitative approach, this study explored the lived experience of field shifts enacted by the educators and school leaders within the faculties' social fields, collecting longitudinal data from school leaders and post-hoc data from educators directly after the completion of their capacity building program. Note that the focus of this study is on the social field among school professionals, rather than on students. The field of school professionals is an aspect that has rarely been studied despite being a central factor for the well-being of both adults and children (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, Mahfouz et al., 2019).

The study and intervention required several adjustments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These are comprehensively described elsewhere (Herrmann et al., 2021), along with the effect of the pandemic on the social fields of the three schools.

An Awareness-Based Whole School Approach

The training was developed by Danish school psychologist Helle Jensen in collaboration with Jesper Juul and the Danish Society for the Promotion of Life Wisdom in children (Juul et al., 2012/2016; Juul & Jensen, 2002/2017; Jensen, 2014), based on the conviction that an emancipatory shift towards a responsibility-based culture at schools is due (Juul & Jensen, 2002/2017). To support the school professionals in shaping more generative fields, the training aimed at cultivating their relational awareness. This involved, firstly, an awareness of self, including the ability to feel responsivities evoked in an interaction, knowing one's own needs and boundaries and caring for them, and, secondly, an awareness of the other, i.e., the ability to take the students' perspective, for instance by understanding their attachment needs and responding to them, and, thirdly, an awareness of the process between self and other and the ability to shape this process in positive ways, e.g., by expressing oneself in a personal and authentic manner without devaluing others. To support these abilities, the so-called 'innate competences' were cultivated, involving contact with the heart, body, breath, creativity, and consciousness (Juul et al., 2012/2016). While bearing some similarities with mindfulness, the program framed these aspects not primarily as a goal in and of themselves but in service of the competence to shape more empathic relationships.

The capacity building was carried out in six three-day modules, focusing on the themes of well-being, relational competence (Juul & Jensen, 2002/2017), relating with children experienced as challenging or burdened, grief and loss, parental collaboration, and collegial reflection. The modules were attended by training groups of max. 23 participants, composed of teachers, other pedagogical

professions, and administrative staff from all three schools. Simultaneously, multiple training sessions (ca. 3 hour per session) were held with the school leaders (principals, co-principals, and after-school leaders). Notably, a significant portion of the time allocated for school leader training had to be used for organizational matters due to the pandemic. After completing the six modules, the educators participated in a supervision process to support implementation sustainability which, due to time constrictions, is not covered in the data collection of this study.

The methodology of the capacity-building was based on an experiential learning approach, using exercises to work with the specific challenges and examples from educators' work life. A wide array of tools and practices were used, including guided dialogue formats, contemplative dyads (Kok & Singer, 2017), role play with educators taking students' or parents' position, supervised collegial reflection, along with presentations about the core concepts. Moreover, meditations, group games, and physical exercises were introduced that educators could directly employ in the classroom. Importantly, the modules aimed at creating a generative social field, providing the participants with empathy and attunement without coercing them into any activity.

RASP was led by Helle Jensen and co-facilitated by a team of psychologists, family therapists, and supervisors (including the author of this study) who had completed at least three years of training in the method.

Sample

The participating schools comprised three elementary schools situated in socioeconomically diverse urban districts in Germany and recruited by means of various communication channels. The district schools were similar in size with a sum total of ca. 1,200 students (ca. 400 per school) and ca. 130 faculty members (ca. 43 per school). The schools obtained a majority vote of the faculty in favor of participation in the project.

Interviews for this study were conducted with N = 14 school professionals. They participated in the first of two RASP cohorts, taking place between March 2020 - November 2021 with a total of 88 faculty members from the three schools. The sampling was influenced by the consideration that reconstructing social fields shifts required rich and nuanced data from multiple viewpoints. Given schools' hierarchical and multiprofessional structure, sampling was based on the criterion of profession (Patton, 2014), collecting data at each school from school leaders, teachers, and other pedagogical professionals. Informants were recruited by e-mailing all members of the first RASP cohort. Interviews were conducted with the educators who responded and were willing to participate (convenience sampling).

Participation in the study was voluntary for all informants, was not counted as working time, nor rewarded with financial or similar incentives, and could be terminated at any time without personal or professional disadvantages. All

participants were informed in writing and verbally about the course and purpose of the study and data protection guidelines. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the Medical Faculty of Heidelberg University prior to the data collection.

Data Collection

This study employed qualitative interviews suitable for investigating the lived experience within social fields. Interviews followed a semi-structured format (see Figure 1) with open questions inviting participants to freely express their perceptions and opinions about the social field. Educators were interviewed after completing their capacity building, and sequential interviews were conducted with school leaders, before, during, and after the first cohorts' training. In the first interview with the school leaders, they were asked to build a systems map of their school using diverse artifacts to facilitate more detailed reflections. Follow-up interviews involved member checking to ensure communicative validity. The first and third rounds of interviews were conducted in person, while the second round was conducted virtually. Detailed notes were taken after each interview, and interviews were recorded and transcribed, including observations of loudness of voice and gestures when these factors seemed relevant to capture participants' embodied knowing.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019), a well-established approach within qualitative research coherent with the study's interpretivist and phenomenological paradigm. The analysis followed a process that has been outlined in six steps, even though it is in fact iterative rather than strictly linear (Braun & Clarke, 2006), starting with data familiarization, reviewing transcripts for errors, recalling the interview situations, and taking preliminary notes. Subsequently, data was systematically coded using the MAXQDA software, encompassing both semantic and latent coding based on the research aims. Initial themes were generated from the coded and collated data, considering salient and meaningful aspects of the text. Themes and sub-themes were generated by triangulating between the situated reflections by the educators and school leaders from the same school about their school's social field (Patton, 2014), identifying the contrasts and points of convergence among these perspectives. In particular, shifts in the field over time were constructed by comparing data from the offset of RASP (pre-interviews with school leaders) with data collected after the educators' RASP training (post-interviews with school leaders and educators). The patterns of interactions indicated by several informants from one school were closely analyzed. Illustrations of these patterns were created, inspired by Tomm et al. (2014). These initial themes were then reviewed in collaboration with the co-supervisor,

aiming for distinctiveness and a reduction of overlap. They were further refined, defined, and named. Finally, the results section was written.

Limitations

The phenomena of interest in this study, shifts in the social fields among the professionals, pertain to the social field of a particular school. Hence, we present examples that characterize processes in each of the three case schools, acknowledging the situatedness of the data. However, the following themes should not be interpreted as representations or exhaustive portrayals of the respective schools' social fields, given the small sample size and the multi-layered nature of social fields. Rather, the reconstructed social field shifts are based on a deliberate focus on the tensions and points of convergence between the school leaders' and educators' perspectives. Additional and different field shifts may very well have been constructed by expanding the sample size. For example, by identifying and interviewing educators with stronger criticisms of the RASP training. It must also be acknowledged that the findings from this sample of motivated educators willing to be interviewed cannot be readily generalized to the whole population of RASP participants.

Therefore, the themes can only describe a limited set of aspects within a much more complex development. For instance, some of the interaction patterns illustrated in the examples might also be found in other schools, albeit to different degrees and "phenotypes." The following results must be read with these caveats in mind.

Findings

There are several examples of the quality of each school's social field in the process of being changed, and also examples of how difficult this development can be. Some of the de-generative autonomous patterns were portrayed as malleable, serving as starting points for the development of the faculty climate. Others appeared as transient indicators of the change process itself, while still others were found to be persistent and particularly challenging to address. Overall, the examples below demonstrate that the persistence and malleability of autonomy varies from field to field.

Shifts and Stabilities in Social Field Autonomy

In the sections that follow, major themes are exemplified under three subthemes, each originating in one of the three schools (here named school 1, 2, and 3), and formulated with a quote from a school leader:

- "It costs a lot of sweat to find togetherness"
- "We are well on our way on this change process"
- "Constantly under attack"

Malleable Autonomy: "It cost us a lot of sweat to find togetherness"

Pre-training: Contagious Negative Affect and Cynicism

The first example concerns a faculty's social field characterized by contagious negative affect that turned out to be malleable over the course of 1.5 years. The principal and the co-principal of school 2 articulated their impression that prior to the training, faculty members were engaged, motivated, and supported each other. However, the atmosphere was also portrayed as unstable, at times giving rise to strong negative affectivity and polarizing cynicism. The school leaders describe how they had over several years worked on the social field, shifting it from initial mistrust (e.g. "no one believes me", "cloud of distrust") into a more trusting atmosphere. Before the school started RASP, the school leaders stated that they were shocked that some faculty members began to again demonstrate harsh negativity and cynicism: "We were completely shocked as we noticed … that old behaviors break free of which we had thought. … It cost us a lot of sweat to find a certain culture and togetherness" (Toni, principal, school 1).

The negative affectivity of a few educators was described as propagating, leading to negative affect and polarization throughout the entire social field. Moreover, it was seen as an obstacle to collaboration because many educators were scared of the "strong" and "loud" criticism. The school leaders also felt attacked themselves. Claire, co-principal at school 1, articulated that "every sentence implies pointing the finger." Hence, the display of strong negativity invited a tense and charged bodily and affective responsivity of fear or aggression in the interactors. This tense responsivity shaped their (spontaneous) reactions which thereby further propagated the negativity. The social field's autonomy propagated phenomena like negative affectivity and cynicism by coupling the expression of negativity with *catching* it in a mutually reinforcing pattern. It is worth mentioning that the pattern was described to propagate further, affecting the social fields in the classroom and increasing educators' irritability towards children. As Toni elucidated, "this mood … gets transferred, and this stance towards children … hence, one also doesn't agree with the students. … [saying] 'They are now also doing all this to annoy me.'" Importantly, the school leaders regarded this pattern as transient rather than as an enduring and predominant feature of the social field.

Shift from Affect Contagion to Embodied Presence

After 1.5 years (post-training), the school leaders highlighted that the educators who earlier had demonstrated strong negativity continued doing so, and they had not participated in the RASP program's first cohort. However, the impact of their negativity on the whole field was mitigated. While before RASP, the negativity reportedly propagated throughout the faculty, after the training the school

leaders described it as "curbed." Moreover, the school leaders stated that educators demonstrating the negativity in their behavior "somehow get carried along and held" by their colleagues (Claire, co-principal, school 1). Hence, the autonomous pattern of affect contagion turned out to be malleable—a shift attributed by the interviewees to RASP.

Figure 2. "Condensing" Field Shift: From Affect Contagion Loop to Embodied Presence Loop.

As indicated by reflections from school leaders and educators, changing the field's autonomy was crucially enabled by the increased relational awareness of the affordances that reinforced the autonomous pattern, and the ability to shape a different response. The changed attitude of these educators was described as more balanced. Claire, the co-principal of school 1, stated, "they are grounded," do not react "immediately to everything," but first let things "sink in." Accordingly, two of the educators spoke of disentangling from other's negativity, along with a greater sense of centeredness and capacity for self-regulation:

> When I look after myself, then the quality of the relationship changes. And that does not only concern the children here at school, it concerns my colleagues, too … . When I take a breath [breathes out], things are never as bad as they seem. (Franziska, educator, school 1)

Here, the educator employed a German saying (literally: "You don't eat things as hot as you cook them"), expressing equanimity in the face of others' excessively negative outlook.

The same learning process was reported by the school leaders. Facing others' negativity, they consciously grounded themselves. As Toni stated,

> It did not cause me to react in such a confused and so-to-say spontaneous way. Instead, I could calm down, recollect what was significant for me and report that back. I was not affected by it. (Toni, principal, school 1)

The use of breathing was highlighted as a means to self-regulate the bodily responsivity evoked by the field affordance:

> I had somehow a couple of seconds for myself. I can only describe it with … 'Vmmmm' [interviewee breathes out slowly and makes a downward movement with the hand in front of the body] … Getting a posture, and standing facing the person. (Toni, principal, school 1)

The bodily gesture serves as a reminder that the field is founded in intercorporeality. Since autonomous patterns are based on interbodily resonance, shifting the field has an embodied quality to it. Relational awareness of the felt bodily resonance enhances the degrees of freedom of shaping the field. This is a key mechanism for shifting social fields. Toni described its effect as the capacity to speak calmly with the educator and set boundaries "without bursting out against her … Before [RASP], I had not been able to do this" (Toni, principal, school 1).

Summing up, the dynamic in this faculty seems to illustrate a malleable field autonomy. The pattern could be effectively changed by responding to its affordance in a more grounded way. While the field previously propagated negativity, the educators' increased relational awareness co-shaped a more conscious and centered quality in the social field that was able to "hold" the negativity. Notably, the school leaders provided an example where they were able to enact such a shift in an interaction with an educator. The malleability may be facilitated by their 'role-modeling' as powerful actors within the field.

For each field shift reconstructed in this study, a metaphor will be presented alluding to its resonance morphology. These analogies are to be taken as a hint that fields are known by resonating, requiring a 'sensing' awareness. In this case, the shift's morphology can be compared to water condensing from steam to liquid. By becoming aware of the felt responsivity and breathing into the tense and hot thundercloud of affect contagion, it cooled down and condensed like rain drops.

Shift from Cynicism to Compassion

The educators described an additional shift in the social field from cynicism towards compassion, exemplifying once again the malleability of certain autonomous patterns. In essence, the changes affected how vulnerability was dealt with. Rolf, educator at school 1, spoke of "a grim sense of humor" that had marked the social field prior to RASP, creating distance from emotional aspects of school life and inviting actors to collectively harden themselves against their own and each other's vulnerabilities. For instance, Rolf described a widespread tendency to make "rough" remarks, expecting from colleagues to "brush it off like nothing". It was emphasized by all interviewees that the field shifted towards greater connectedness and "trust" due to RASP. Rolf mentioned that "the tone among us" changed, in the sense that "one listens more carefully and also watches the nonverbal language." The act of listening empathically to colleagues during the training and thereby experiencing their vulnerability may have been instrumental. Rolf stated that "what is certain is that every colleague probably has something like that [vulnerability], and it sits within everyone. Hence, one approaches certain things with more sensitivity" (Rolf, educator, school 1).

A new, virtuous loop in the field seemed to have been established, coupling the display of vulnerability with compassion, encouraging educators to soften,

allowing themselves and others to appear more personally, including vulnerable sides. To provide another metaphor, the shift's morphology may be compared to a melting of cynicism into a connected and fluid quality.

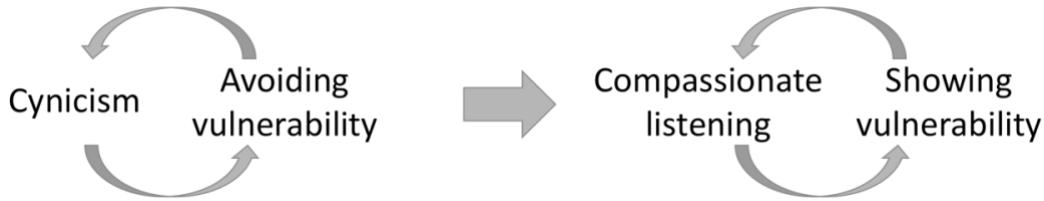

Figure 3. "Melting" Field Shift: From Cynicism Loop to Compassion Loop.

The school leaders highlighted that the shift was tangible, yet difficult to describe. Claire, the co-principal of school 1 stated, "you feel it. It is like a bond." Further, she articulated, "these are vibrations and hard to put into words." Interestingly, when inquiring further into its phenomenology, Toni, the school leader, spoke of field-like properties ("nonverbal wave, a nonverbal web, a knowing bond", [Claire, co-principal, school 1]) supporting their work. Toni stated, "it's like a dovetailed network which, in its wave-like form, possibly made us here more flexible. So that we could respond very differently to certain situations" (Toni, principal, school 1).

It is worth mentioning that neither RASP nor the interview process explicitly introduced the concept of a social field. Hence, the finding suggests that field awareness may indeed be a natural capacity (Brabant & DiPerna, 2016).

Unfreezing Autonomy: "We are well on our way in this change process, not yet in the middle of it. Maybe in the first third of it"

Pre-training: Appreciative Atmosphere, but Under-Differentiated

The second example concerns a pattern within a school's social field with a positive atmosphere and collective efficacy, along with the tendency to avoid conflict. As Mika, the principal of school 2 stated, "There are many that think together, … and manage things together." Similarly, the interviewed educators portrayed the faculty as "very, very friendly among each other and very helpful" (Linda, educator, school 2) and as "a pleasant faculty which together masters many challenges" (Jaden, educator, school 2).

However, the school leaders also mentioned challenges. Mika spoke of the difficulty of "clearly articulating expectations" with "a clarity that one is the leader" and initiating difficult conversations. This pattern can be illustrated with a phrase that Mika referenced as the school leaders' "favorite" one at school: "Here we don't talk like this … . Not with parents, not with children, not with one another." On one hand, the phrase asserts the obligation to communicate in an appreciative manner, which was a core value for these school leaders.

However, on the other hand, it may also discourage open discussion of conflicting views and difficult truths.

Accordingly, Jean, the co-principal of school 2, expressed suspicion that things may appear "rosy when, in fact, they are not rosy … Possibly, it is not the way one thinks." The field autonomy seemed to emphasize appreciation and invite conflict avoidance. Using Siegel's (2020) concept of 'integration,' the social field autonomy overemphasized linkage among the members of the field at the cost of their differentiation from each other, thus causing homogenization of expression and a reduced capacity to deal constructively with their differences.

Pattern "Shaken up," Entering Intense Liminality

The developments in the faculty during RASP interfered with the social field's pattern of creating cohesion, pushing it into a liminal zone. Jean, the co-principal of school 2, stated, "I believe that [RASP] has shaken things up" and "redefined the word relationship in school. But the … new definition has not yet been written down for me up until now." This quote suggests that changing persistent autonomous patterns can be a lengthy process. Specifically, nurturing the integration of a social field is easier said than done, as it requires acknowledging conflicting views and learning to foster a sense of belonging without sacrificing individual differences.

Throughout the interviews, the professionals from this school continued to emphasize the positive atmosphere among the faculty. However, the perception of homogeneity was questioned and de-constructed, leading into a challenging state of liminality. For instance, the school leaders spoke of difficult confrontations with their faculty. Mika stated, "I was standing there and thought: Is this still our faculty? … Where are our people, our nice people?" Describing these confrontations, Jean tweaked their "favorite phrase" in a way that might indicate the trajectory of the change process: "This is simply not how we talk to each other. And also not to me, right? … I don't think it's nice, when one talks to me like that." In line with this shift from 'we' to 'I', one educator described that the faculty members' differences from each other were exposed because of RASP:

> Because all had thought: 'We are all SO similar.' And we are not. And this has been revealed now … In fact, all had thought … MANY—of course not everyone—that it is a big homogenous mass … This is noticeable in faculty conferences. Everyone is convinced of their ability to speak for everyone else. They do not speak about themselves. They always speak for ALL others at the same time. And everyone else is nodding, too. And now it has become clear: 'No … we do not think all the same, right?' And I see this is as big advantage but at the moment it feels like a disappointment … like a detected fraud. (Jaden, educator, school 2)

The passage highlights how the social field had strongly favored homogeneity, indicating the persistence of this pattern. Additionally, it underscores that when a deeply ingrained pattern undergoes a shift, it can evoke emotional reactions, such as disappointment. This is not an easy process. Given that the field's autonomy shapes the affective resonance among its members, it somewhat channels and binds their emotions, as well as their need for a sense of belonging or individuality. Consequently, changing a pattern can release the emotional charge previously held within it.

Shift from Homogeneity to Integration

For example, the school leaders spoke of a supervision during RASP that, in providing such a 'holding space' for a portion of the faculty, facilitated the social field's integration:

> One goes in[to the supervision] with aggression, with grudge, … And you leave and it is different. It flows into a positive thought, that I want to work again with these people. FEEL like collaborating with them again. (Mika, principal, school 2)

Delving further into the effects, Mika asserted that the social field between the conflict parties once again felt "solid." Mika stated, "I did not worry, Oh, what will happen now again? But I really felt that this is solid." This sense of solidity was associated with the field's integration, specifically, the perception that the conflict parties had improved their ability to acknowledge and address differences and challenges early on, preventing them from escalating into severe conflict. Mika described this as the capacity to "name … when something is off, so that we don't even reach that [claps both hands]." This would indicate that a persistent autonomous pattern in a social field can still be modified for a portion of the field, provided there is an appropriate 'holding space' such as a supervision setting.

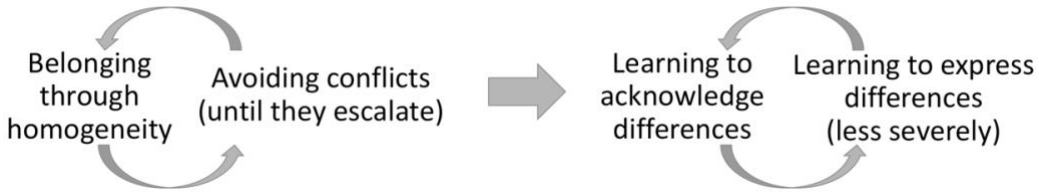

Figure 4. "Solidifying/Sharpening" Field Shift: From Homogenizing Loop to Integrating Loop.

The morphology of this shift can be likened to the solidification of the "rosy" homogenous cloud into a sharper recognition of differences. In this process, the social field matures, fostering greater integration and the capacity to hold conflicting viewpoints in a constructive way.

Persistent Autonomy: "Constantly under attack"

Pre-training: Blaming and Defending

The example from the third school was formulated to address a pattern of blaming and defending which, despite the introduction of RASP, was perceived to persist over time. In the pre-interview, Sasha, the principal of school 3, stated,

> This is also occasionally reported to me by a few colleagues who may supposedly be a bit lower in the employee hierarchy, that the relationship between teachers, educators and social workers is often shaped by begrudging each other … between groups. Spiteful talking about each other, alleging the others were not working enough, respectively. With me, everyone is actually always friendly. But that may be because of the role of the school principal. (Sasha, principal, school 3)

The quote suggests that the pattern of blaming was deeply entrenched in the social field. Moreover, it implies that the position in the hierarchy shaped the perception and quality of the field. Importantly, blaming was not the only option in this field, a "fair and appreciative" atmosphere was also mentioned. However, the persistence and intensity of the blaming were evident in how widely it had spread within and beyond the faculty. Moreover, the pattern propagated over time. While in the pre-interview quote presented above, others' friendliness towards the principal was mentioned, in the follow-up interview, Sasha stated, "in my role one is constantly under attack."

Both school leaders and faculty members spoke independently of the risk of becoming targets of accusations. This affordance invited the interviewees to adopt a defensive stance as they sought to protect themselves from anticipated attacks. Thus, the pattern impaired collaboration among the actors, giving rise to additional reasons for blame.

Pattern Persists, Despite Attempts to Promote Change

Blaming and defending persisted despite the implementation of RASP. 1.5 years into the training, the school leader explicitly confirmed that the respective statements made in the pre-interview at the offset of the program were still valid, indicating a lack of perceived change. Sasha, the principal of school 3, stated, "I find it very tough how some people treat each other."

Congruently, Marianne, an interviewed educator also reported that the field affordance still invited a defensive stance, asking, "Do I have to justify myself?"

Three processes were described through which the field's autonomy may have resisted change. Firstly, the pattern assimilated attempts to promote empathy. Specifically, the perceived low level of RASP commitment became new material for mutual blame, reinforcing the existing pattern. For example, the

actors discussed others displaying avoidant behavior or having "pulled out of RASP, which contributed to the ongoing blame dynamics. Secondly, when the field at times escalated into a state of emergency, its capacity for learning was impaired. Jill, an educator at school 3, stated, "during the last [RASP] module, there were again many irritations concerning the whole school … Actually, I want to engage in RASP and now my brain is busy with completely different things, it is occupied."

A third process preventing change may be a perceived mismatch between the program and the culture and values enacted by the school leaders and the faculty in the field. In the pre-interview, the school leaders expressed a lack of clarity about the program goals, which may have impaired the field's malleability. Sasha, for example, used the phrase of having "bought the pig in the poke." By contrast, the school leaders from the other two schools highlighted their alignment with the program, providing numerous examples of specific measures implemented already before RASP to support trust and appreciative communication at their school. However, these differences may be about more than individual school leader behavior, and factors such as the school's systemic context may also have been more or less favorable for the intervention.

In conclusion, this example highlights the social field's ability to perpetuate de-generative patterns.

Shift from Defending to Listening

The persistence of this pattern can be likened to a frozen field, compelling the actors to harden and react in defensive ways. However, there were instances presented where it was possible to temporarily set aside these defensive reactions and respond to blame with active listening rather than immediate justification.

For example, Sasha, the principal of school 3, spoke about learning to respond differently to educators' dissatisfaction: "it's not about explaining and justifying everything … but giving the other a chance to express and give a voice to his unwillingness, his disappointment, his sadness or … the alleged injustice" (Sasha, principal, school 3).

Figure 5. "Evaporating" Field Shift: From Defending Loop to Listening Loop.

Here, the school leader described being aware of the impulses to justify oneself and suspending these reactions by focusing on body sensations and

breath. It is worth noting that the shift may not have resulted in a noticeable change in the frozen morphology of the pattern at this point, but it holds the potential to eventually 'evaporate' some layers of the frozenness. This example underscores the possibility of altering even highly persistent autonomous patterns, at least temporarily.

Implications for Conceptualizing and Navigating Social Field Shifts

The Fields' Autonomy Varies in Persistence

The findings from the three schools over 1.5 years suggest that field autonomy exhibits varying levels of persistence and intensity. This variation is illustrated in the figure as two movements, represented by arrows, that delineate the degrees of malleability and persistence.

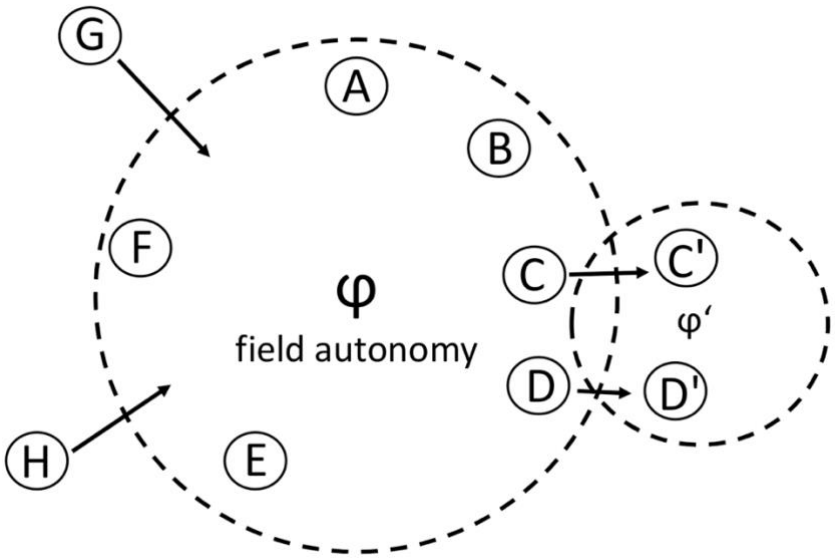

Figure 6. Field autonomy propagates by drawing actors in, shifts by creating new attractor field.

The first movement illustrates how actors are drawn into the field autonomy, as depicted by actors H and G being pulled into the field. This means that they start to reproduce in their interactions the same patterns seen within the field autonomy (indicated by the Greek letter ϕ). For instance, in two schools, patterns like blaming/defending and affect contagion were observed on various systems levels, such as interactions between students and teachers, among colleagues, with parents, and between faculty and school leaders. The extent to which a particular quality or pattern of interaction has propagated among the actors in a system indicates the strength of field autonomy.

The other movement depicted in the figure represents the 'metamorphosis' of field autonomy into a new version (ϕ'), a field shift proper. This movement is

indicated by actors C and D crossing the threshold from re-enacting pattern ϕ towards enacting a new pattern ϕ'. The new pattern (ϕ') can function as a new 'attractor' for the other actors in the field, infusing the field with different resonance qualities such as compassion, embodied presence, and a capacity to hold differences, 'pulling' towards new types of interpersonal interactions. Importantly, the emerging autonomous pattern may initially not possess the same strength throughout the entire field; hence, its Venn circle has a smaller diameter. In the findings, variations in the strength of the new pattern were evident. While the example of compassion for vulnerability was a rather strong and stable pattern, the responding to critique with listening was more of a fleeting phenomenon.

In the figure, there is a transition zone between two patterns ϕ and ϕ', as indicated by the overlapping Venn diagrams. Within this liminal space, the old and habitual ways of interacting have been *"*shaken up*,"* but the new patterns have not yet fully formed and are, in essence, unpredictable. Every shift reported in this study was lived in this liminal, unpredictable way. Given the complex autonomy of the field, any intervention impulse will be molded and changed, defying simplistic linear approaches. Only in hindsight, the emerging pattern was known. Field shifts can release an affective charge that was previously bound up in the old pattern and now needs to be addressed. If this transitional phase is prolonged, as in the example of school 2, the field can build intensity that can be disorienting for the actors involved.

Both movements are influenced by the actors' power within the field. For example, enacting a new response to the negativity displayed by one of the educators, the school leader set the tone for the entire field enhancing its malleability. By contrast, at a school where the school leader was less informed about the intervention, the field in general appeared to be less malleable. In short, field autonomy is more readily influenced by those who hold power to draw actors in. This has been well documented, for example, in the literature on the role of leadership in changing culture and climate (Boell & Senge, 2016; Schein, 1996; Mahfouz et al., 2019).

The malleability can be compared to the different aggregate states, such as being liquid, gaseous, or solid, with shifts occurring from one state to another. Examples springing from the data include 'condensing' affect contagion into embodied presence, 'evaporating' defensiveness into active listening, 'melting' cynicism into compassion, and 'solidifying' the field by addressing conflictive issues.

The findings suggest that the shifts were crucially facilitated by relational awareness, which will be explored in more detail subsequently.

Diving Below the Vortex: Relational Awareness Decouples Affordance and Autonomy

The findings provide insights into the role of relational awareness in social field shifts, suggesting that it has the capacity to 'decouple' affordance and autonomy. Given that a field's autonomous and self-reproducing patterns are sustained by its affordance (Pomeroy & Herrmann, 2023), this decoupling process paves the way for the emergence of new patterns. This process is particularly important for shifting pathologizing patterns that usually appear to be marked by reduced resonance with and awareness of self or other. In essence, all the examples of field shifts in this study were based on this process, which can therefore be likened to a generic "field shift archetype" (Gonçalves & Hayashi, 2021), akin to the concept of systems archetypes (Senge, 1990). This archetype is illustrated in Figure 7 below.

For instance, consider the shift from affect contagion to embodied presence. In this scenario, the affordance of others' intense display of negative emotionality evoked equally emotional reactions such as out-bursts among educators, leading to self-reproducing propagation of negative affect and polarization within the field. As shown by the reactive loop in the figure, the actors' reactivity was high, while their attunement and presence were low. However, with relational awareness, the actors allowed the affordance to "sink in," becoming more attuned to intra- and inter-bodily resonances. This process opened up a new realm of possibilities for enacting a responsive loop.

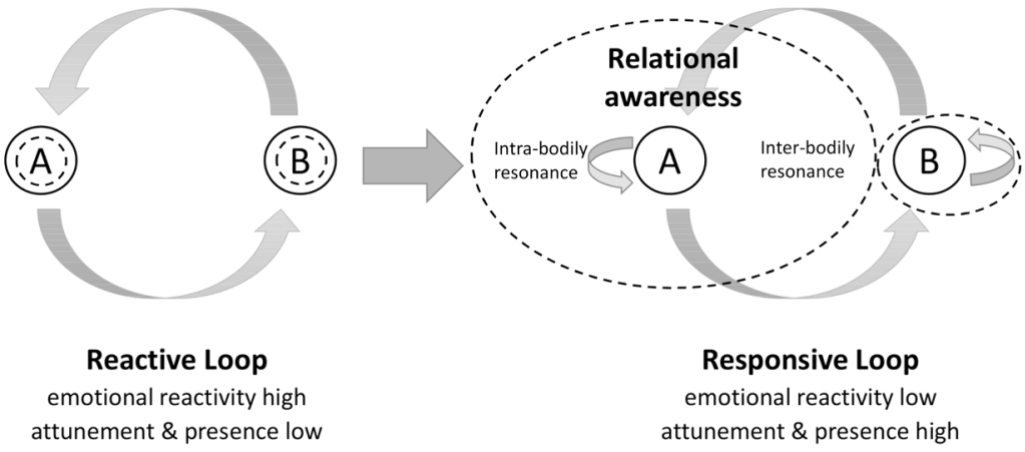

Figure 7. Field Shift Archetype: From Reactive Loop to Responsive Loop.

The role of relational awareness in shifting the field can again be likened to the dynamics of water. In a river, when two converging currents create a whirlpool, it can draw in objects like kayaks or people and pull them beneath the water's surface. The instinctive survival reaction might be to attempt to push back up to the surface to gasp for air. However, this can be dangerous and quickly lead to exhaustion. Interestingly, the way to escape a whirlpool is by diving down to its bottom, where the vortex loses its power. Allowing oneself to

sink opens up new possibilities for navigation and action. Likewise, in the context of a social field, when individuals experience the pull of the field and sense the bodily responsivities it evokes, relational awareness enables them to dive below the field's vortex. Instead of immediately reacting to the felt responsivities, relational awareness provides access to new levels of freedom and a broader array of response options. Consequently, actors can respond in ways that improve the quality of the field and invite others to engage in more constructive interactions. Moreover, fields appear to possess a core self-corrective tendency towards wholeness that can be activated by bringing awareness to their affordance, thus increasing their generativity. This highlights the role of relational awareness in promoting field shifts with an inherently emancipatory and integrative trajectory.

Implications for Organizational Change

The findings of this study hold implications that can be highly relevant for practitioners working with social fields. There is a prevailing sense that social fields offer significant leverage for driving organizational change, often referred to as "shifting the field." While this article acknowledges the excitement around this notion, it also highlights the inherent challenges in achieving such shifts, contributing to our understanding of what it takes to promote sustainable changes.

Considerations for practitioners working with social fields:

Mind the Field's Malleability: Longitudinal findings emphasize the importance of detecting the variations in an organization's field autonomy when aiming to facilitate social field shifts. Some patterns may be more readily shifted, while others persist. Assessing the spread of a pattern across the system can serve as an indicator of malleability. It is essential to shift gears if the autonomous pattern assimilates interventions in counterproductive ways, for example, turning it into material for blame. Assessing the persistence enables adaptations in process design. For instance, the RASP was a capacity-building program. However, the persistent de-generative patterns at the faculty level would have called for an intensified organizational change process, addressing these conflicts directly.

Activate Relational Awareness: Relational awareness promotes the individual and collective embodied capacity to shift from de-generative to generative fields. Activating and cultivating relational awareness is recommended as an integral part of sustainably improving an organization's social fields. Providing holding spaces where professionals can become aware of their bodily responsivities, including difficult ones, and are met with interest, attunement, and compassion is vital. These spaces may

involve group practices, dialogue fostering mutual attunement among colleagues, and practices supporting self-compassion and mindfulness. However, promoting relational awareness alone may not transform deeply entrenched patterns in a field, leading to the next implication.

Create Pockets That Serve as Alternative Attractor Fields: When an organization's social field persistently reproduces de-generative patterns, smaller 'pockets' within the field may still be malleable and provide leverage. These pockets can be spaces where sufficient holding and awareness are promoted, allowing the actors to sense the field's affordance, rather than being captured by it. Examples of such pockets from this study include training modules, supervision processes, and the training with school leaders. Particularly in hierarchical organizations like schools, working with the school leaders on their relational awareness can be a starting point that sets an example and prepares the field (Boell & Senge, 2016). Thereby, an alternative attractor field can be created that promotes and sustains desired qualities and eventually attracts more actors.

Navigate the Liminal Zone beyond 'We' and 'Me': The examples from this study remind us that organizations' social fields are arenas where not only power relationships but also fundamental human needs such as value, belonging, and autonomy, are being negotiated and routinized. Thus, the actors participate in the autonomous field patterns with their bodies, hearts, and minds, and when a pattern dissipates, it can release the affective energies previously bound up in it. It is important for facilitators to navigate this liminal zone with an understanding for both power dynamics and underlying needs and tensions. For example, supporting processes that surface and hold the individual differences in an organization, and creating compassionate linkages between them (Siegel, 2020; Guenther, 2022; Bockler, 2022), can facilitate the field's maturation towards greater flexibility, integration and thriving, marrying power with care.

Conclusion

To investigate the dynamics of change in organizations, this study took a social fields perspective recently proposed by Pomeroy and Herrmann (2023) on the organizational fields of three schools participating in a longitudinal program cultivating relational awareness. The findings demonstrate that relational awareness *dives below the vortex* of a field's autonomous and de-generative loops and enables shifts towards responsive and generative loops. However, while in some cases, de-generative autonomous patterns were transformed throughout

the organization's social field, in others they persisted, suggesting that social fields vary in their malleability. It is my hope in writing this article that it contributes to the collective awareness of social fields, so that their power can be fully harnessed to support transformative systems change.

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Peer Review Article

Nurturing Activism:

Addressing Relational Tensions through the Social Field

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Abstract

This article will explore evolving thoughts on how the *social field* can be an effective lens to address *relational tensions* within activist groups. Gobby (2020) defines relational tensions as the ideological and social tensions that emerge in an activist group due to power inequalities, which are significant internal barriers for these groups to achieve their goals. I will draw on social movement literature and Scharmer's (2018) concept of social fields to show how the *source conditions* of the various individuals that make up these groups affect the quality of how they relate to each other, which give birth to practices and results that either align with their values or create conflictual tensions that can hold these groups back. Through a personal case study, I intend to show how, by shifting an activist group's social field towards one that places relationality at the forefront, these groups can improve how they work together and ultimately avoid breaking apart.

Keywords

social field, group process, activism, relational tensions, nurturing

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Introduction

In David Graeber's (2009) ethnographic study of North American social movements in the late 1990s and early 2000s, he details the particular interactions of a tension-filled meeting among members of the Direct Action Network[1]. In this meeting, the group attempted to discuss key issues related to gender inequalities and harassment; however two male members used the procedures to co-opt and block decisions that aimed at addressing this problem. Confusion ensued, frustrations kicked in, differences of opinion turned into chasms, and the key issues remained intact. The meeting was based on a *consensus* model, and despite the value-laden nature of the process as a more inclusive and democratic form of decision-making, people were left frustrated, angry with each other, and feeling unresolved (Gelderloos, 2006). He ends his ethnographic description with a quote from a meeting participant who notes, "The fault lines were in full display" (Graeber, 2009, p. 336).

Even though everyone in that meeting found themselves there with a similar purpose for change, of their voluntary nature, and with a desire to maintain a process that reflects their values, the results were frustrating, introducing friction between the group members and fracturing relationships. Graeber's experience is similar to my own working within activist groups (Starnino, 2021), which led me to a desire to explore and make sense of this contradiction and how to address it. It is here where the literature of the *social field* can act as an important theoretical and practical framework to add to our current understanding of activist group process.

Activism and Relational Tensions

What Do We Mean by Activist Groups?

I define activist groups as sustained and organized groups of individuals that come together under a common cause and use *direct action* as the main vehicle for generating social change. Direct actions often exist outside established institutional processes and aim to pressure stakeholders in positions of power to enact their desired outcomes.[2] These actions can take the form of protests,

[1] A coalition of anti-capitalist and anti-corporate activist groups emerged after the 1999 direct action, which shut down a meeting of World Trade Organization delegates.

[2] While in this paper I will not go into depth into the literature on activist group "outcomes," authors such as Gobby (2020), Tarrow (2011), and Gamson (1975) have identified social movement outcomes as varied, indirect, and unpredictable. They can range from creating and adopting new government policy, changes in institutional positions, shifts in public sensibilities around a particular issue, and the establishment of new interpersonal relationships and networks that may go onto form new groups.

blockades, and encampments (Alinsky, 1971; McAdam, 1997; Bobo et al., 2001; Ganz, 2010; Kauffman, 2017; Tarrow, 2011; Tilly et al., 2018). As journalist and activist, Kauffman states that, while direct action does not implicitly align with a political orientation, it is more commonly found in leftist activist groups whose organizing practices reject hierarchical structures, and traditional forms of top-down leadership, while seeking to embrace diversity of people and perspectives. In this article, I also draw upon Martin's (2007) differentiation between activist groups and social movements, to define activist groups as the individual organizations that form part of broader social movements (i.e., climate justice, animal rights, anti-racism, labour rights, 2SLGBTQIA+ rights). Thus, in focusing on activist groups, I seek to delineate entities that have established boundaries through an explicit *collective identity*, desired outcome of change, and/or set of practices but are not within themselves legally registered institutions with formalized and fixed organizational structures (as with the case of non-profit organizations[3] for instance) (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). This last point is important as it means that active groups can break apart or disappear at any given time as there is nothing formalized that is holding them together.

These groups' voluntary, non-institutional *and* contentious nature introduces dynamics different from traditional organizations (Ganz, 2010). They are sustained over time by *organizational structures* and *internal processes* that mobilize members towards desired actions and shape infrastructure. Tarrow (2011) defines these processes as *connective structures* that "link together members and leaders of a movement to permit coordination and aggregation, even in the face of a lack of formal organization" (p. 124). These connective structures tend to reflect the values and sensibilities of the group members, often shifting towards more decentralized and horizontal structures defined by consensus-based models (Engler & Engler, 2016). The level of influence activist group members often have over the shape and focus of the group process requires a way to agree on collective decisions to sustain them toward their desired goals. Thus, communication plays a key coordinating function within these groups to ensure all members are informed (Bobo et al., 2001; Graeber, 2009). In explicitly non-hierarchical groups, this coordination is key to ensure that unequal power dynamics do not form and that decision-making power is shared among the group (Berglund & Schmidt, 2020).

What Can Get in the Way? The Process of Relational Tensions

Multiple social movements scholars have shown relationships to be the foundation of any source of collective power (Alinsky, 1971; Bergman &

3 This delineation is not to say that the dynamics non-profits face may not resembles those I describe in this paper, it is only to establish a clear boundary on the type of group I am focusing on in my research.

Montgomery, 2018; Engler & Engler, 2016; Ganz, 2010; Gobby, 2020; Han et al., 2021; Tarrow, 2011). In particular, Han, Mckenna, & Oyakawa (2021) have shown that the most successful outcomes result from the relational strength of a group's *constituency*, allowing for the flexibility to shift strategies, targets, and tactics when needed. The authors recognize power as relational, shifting as a group's relationship with its target evolves, requiring a sustained solidarity within activist groups to adapt to these circumstances. Thus, when imagining what can "get in the way" of these relationships, I draw on research from activist and scholar Jen Gobby (2020). In interviewing climate justice activists and indigenous land defenders on movement building, she identified *relational tensions* as the biggest internal barrier to achieving their desired outcomes.[4] Relational tensions emerge when differences of opinion become unresolved and ideological. This creates what she describes as an "us vs. them" dynamic where divisions are drawn. Bushe and Coetzer (2007) have shown that groups where members have specific and clear task roles can avoid conflictual dynamics at the outset. This may explain why some larger activist groups can unite a mass of people around specific goals without explicit relationship-building activities, as shown by authors such as Engler & Engler (2016). However, as the group persists, questions and needs arise that invite uncertainty and ambiguity, introducing the potential for differences of opinion and conflict. Kauffman's (2017) historical account of American left movements of the 1970s, 80s, 90s and 2000s shows several instances of groups who fell to conflictual dynamics and tensions as diverse individual perspectives and needs began to emerge (i.e., issues of social identity, inclusion, and differences of opinion on strategy or tactics). Over time, these conflicts can eventually dissolve a group, a mechanism Tarrow (2011) calls *exhaustion*, where a group *runs out of steam* and becomes splintered with breakdowns in their connective structures, making them more difficult to sustain over time. Compounding this is that activist groups are sometimes reluctant to admit that these inequalities exist in their movement, leading to defensiveness and tensions when exposed (Gelderloos, 2006; Kauffman, 2017). Groups that lack established conflict resolution strategies have few ways to address these tensions, meaning they will go unresolved, leading to sustained interpersonal conflicts that eventually fracture a group (Roy et al., 2010).

Another element that differentiates activist groups and which can contribute to relational tensions is their *emotional energy*. The work of Jasper (2011) has made important contributions to our understanding of social movements and the various reflexive emotions and moods that motivate individuals and generate a

4 It is important to note that while these relational tensions impact the group internally, they can emerge due to external challenges a group can face, whether that be new threats from opponents, shifts in external contexts, or a lack of resources.

sense of *affective commitment* within these groups. These emotions can foster collectivity as people find resonance in their share fear, anger, or shock around a particular issue. This emotional energy also holds a strong influence on a group's dynamics. We can see how these emotions may come into play to generate and sustain relational tensions through the work of Bergman and Montgomery (2018), who introduce the phenomenon of *rigid radicalism*. They describe rigid radicalism as a force which finds itself within a group in which its members become "closed off" to each other by adopting a fixed or "rigid" set of morals, principles, or ideological tenets. Here differences become less about different needs or interests, and more about who is "radical enough." Authors describe this phenomenon as paradoxical as many of these behaviors stem from the same oppressive societal forces that activists are trying to fight against. The tensions that arise through paradoxical forces is further explored in a 2021 paper I wrote, in which I aimed to establish the relationship between activist group process and Smith and Berg's (1997) concept of *group paradoxes*. They view paradoxes as an inherent part of group life as members work through simultaneously being a *part* of a group and also within a *whole* group with a collective purpose. If unmanaged these paradoxes can produce *splitting* as the groups aim to contain the tensions often by choosing one "side" of the paradox over another. A common paradoxical dynamic found within activist groups is further echoed by Kahane's (2010) concept of "Power and Love", in which he speaks to "power" as the drive moving change forward and "love" as the drive keeping people together. These drives can be generative or degenerative. Generatively, within activist groups, they can motivate effective direct actions that help create successful outcomes for the group while also maintaining internal connective structures that sustain a group in order to realize these outcomes. Degenerative forces of power can look like groups prioritizing the need and urgency for direct actions over interpersonal relationships, creating conflict or, in the other extreme, degenerative love can look like being so concerned with internal matters that they become "anemic" and introspective, leading to a lack of actions or *stuckness* and fostering inequalities in the group. Jo Freeman (1972) further describes the impact of this degenerative dynamic in her seminal essay, "Tyranny of the Structurelessness." She describes how a lack or aversion to clear structure in a group, often out of desire to mitigate power imbalances, can result in the opposite. These groups become very inward, with processes or ways of doing things hidden from the broader group and only known to an established subset of members. In turn this ensures those who have formed stronger ties exert greater influence on decisions made.

In speaking to how to address relational tensions Gobby (2020) also provides us with a broader ethos and vision which draws on the work of Collins (2008), Escobar (2020), Kimmerer (2013), Macy and Brown (2014), and brown (2017) to envision movements that shift beyond oppressive practices, dualistic thinking, and disconnection, toward a *life-giving* movement of interdependence and reciprocity to each other and the environment. It is important to note at this point that not all activist groups suffer from the relational tensions as described

in this article. Escobar (2020) has shown that indigenous-led movements, which are often based upon relational ontologies, can act as an inspiration for Western-based and white-dominated activist groups. Thus, while I hope to give a clearer picture of what might influence and generate relational tensions, what is missing in the literature is a model for shifting towards Gobby's (2020) vision, particularly for activist groups in which relationality does not actively form part of the base of their *source conditions*.

Social Field as a Lens for Understanding Activist Groups

Scharmer et al. (2022) describe the *social field* as "the entirety of the social system with an emphasis on the source conditions that give rise to patterns of thinking, conversing, and organizing, which in turn produce practical results" (p. 5). Figure 1 shows the three key levels of a social field that exist with visible and invisible dimensions. When applied to activist groups, the "visible layer" can be seen through the results of their work, including direct actions, tools and artifacts, such as public messaging and, visible to a certain extent, the patterns of relating that give the field its quality, including decision-making processes, group rituals, and organizational structures. Given that they are directly visible, they tend to be the focus of much of the current literature on social movements and activism. What is not visible is the evolving "source conditions," or the level and quality of awareness from which these activist social systems form and that give rise to their quality of relating to one another. Scharmer et al. (2022) describe these as the interior conditions of individuals and the collective interior condition that influences and shapes a social field. This invisible dimension is often missing in social movement literature, as it relates to what is happening "in-between" group members, which is not fully perceptible until it is brought into awareness.

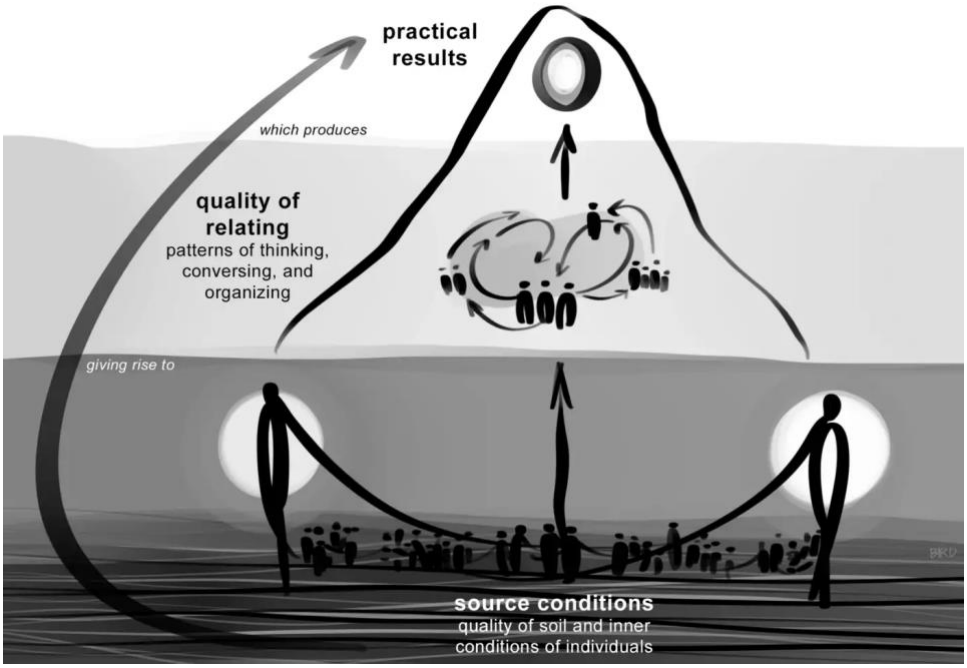

Figure 1. Visual representation of the social field's key dimensions shows how a group's source conditions act as part of the invisible layer that gives rise to the more visible patterns of thinking, conversing, and organizing, producing practical results (Image by Kelvy Bird in Scharmer et al., 2022, p. 635).

Pomeroy and Herrmann (2023) define three interrelated properties of social fields—*intercorporeality*, *autonomy*, and *affordance*. Intercorporality refers to the collective affective and bodily experiences of a group as they come into dynamic interaction with one another to form a *social body*. Through this intercorporeality, ways of relating arise which take on their own autonomy, leading to patterns of interaction beyond the intentionality of any single individual. Lastly, the affordance of a social field gives these interactions their "quality," reinforcing certain patterns of interaction and holding back other patterns. Looking at these properties through an activist group context, we can see this intercorporeality emerge in the various protests, meetings, and gatherings where activists join to plan or fight for change. As these "bodies" of activists come together to form a collective identity, an autonomous social field emerges, creating patterns of interactions which can either facilitate conflict and fragmentation or strengthen relationships. As established by social movement literature, as these relationships strengthen, so too does the possibility of the group sustaining through the various external or internal challenges they face (Ganz, 2010; Gobby, 2020; Han et al., 2021).

The social field becomes an effective theory through which to analyze activist groups, given its ability to adapt to the emergent and ephemeral nature of these collectives whose boundaries and membership are porous (Ganz, 2010, 2014). This lens aligns with the work of Fuchs (2006), who applies concepts from complex adaptive systems literature to social movements. Seeking to go beyond the limitations of traditional social movement literature, he defines activist

groups as dynamic self-organized systems, constantly shaping new structures that constrain or enable actors within that movement. Looking at movements through this perspective means interventions that solely target individuals without considering the collective may not be sustainable as members of these groups rarely remain fixed. Thus, intervening at the level of the social field may be more effective due to its autonomous nature and focus on collective and emergent processes of change (Pomeroy & Herrmann, 2023).

The term "social field" also echoes similar concepts within social movement literature. Siméant-Germanos (2021) highlights the various ways in which the relational contexts of activist social spaces are defined through terms such as "social movement space", "organizational field", "strategic action field", "sectors", and "arenas". However, even though these terms draw on the notion of relationality, they often are used to define activist group actions through a more structural view. For instance "arena" looks at activism through the lens of a "game," with players, rules, and strategies. In contrast, the concept of the social field adds a more experiential dimension to our understanding of activist groups. A key tenet of the social field is that it requires us to look from "within" to fully understand it through what is called, a *first-person perspective*. This perspective allows us to get a sense of the quality of relating within a group, defined as a *second-person* or inter-subjective *perspective,* and how that quality produces the objective results we see and can study, also called the *third-person* perspective (Scharmer et al., 2022). That you can only "shift from within" is a relevant dimension for non-hierarchal activist groups whose members are often given more agency to enact change. Thus, social field theory can help these activists who form part of groups to better understand what might be producing relational tensions they are affected by and be more intentional in the ways of collectively addressing these challenges.

Applying the Social Field to a Climate Activist Case Study

In an effort to bring added tangibility and further connect some of the key principles of the social field to activist groups, I will present a case study from a *process consultation intervention* in which I drew upon *action research* to intervene in a climate activist group (Schein, 1999). In that spirit, this case study is written in a *first-person form*, bringing my experience and awareness of group dynamics into action in order to further advance the application of social field theory.

> In 2019, I was asked to partner with a local Canadian chapter of an international climate action group. This group did not have a specific environmental cause they solely advocated for, seeking to be a space for multiple causes. However, they aimed to directly influence local and national government policies towards adopting more radical commitments to eliminate climate emissions. While the group's members held a diversity of identities, most members were white, university-educated and ranged between the ages of

20 to 30 years old. This group was organized using a decentralized affinity group model and had successfully achieved direct actions that attracted the interest of news media and, as a result, had seen a growth in new members.[5] Many communication materials, digital tools, and tactics had been copied from the broader international activist group, including an organizational model with specific and defined decision-making processes.

I was initially contracted to work with issues that had emerged due to efforts in scaling their membership. However, as I began the project and observed their meetings, I noticed an apparent desire to prioritize actions and achievements over relationships, leading to persistent tensions. After an initial contracting period, the focus of my intervention switched to the coordination group whose function was to act as a space for spokespeople from the various affinity groups to share updates and discuss chapter wide issues. Given the diversity of perspectives and needs the conflictual dynamics of the group became the most apparent here. Meetings consistently exceeded time and often included many agenda items, and tightly controlled talking turns. The length of meetings meant they had to follow a strict pre-established structure that allowed for little space to address the numerous challenges that had emerged, such as power inequalities between the various affinity groups, a growing phenomenon of burnout amongst members, and sexual harassment issues that had gone ignored by the group as a whole, despite female members continuous interventions on this dynamic. As these issues remained unaddressed, tensions would find their way into the meeting through outbursts but would quickly be stopped and controlled by adding them as an "agenda item." As a result, rather than dealing with them as a collective, they would be discussed informally, leading to gossip and bad-mouthing of certain members and affinity groups.

As a consultant, I could feel this rigidity myself. I began feeling bored and uninspired while observing the coordination group. Their fluidity of membership made it difficult to establish any clear relationship with group members while also introducing challenges in terms of my boundaries as an external consultant

[5] Affinity groups are a self-governing model comprising sub-groups of broader activist organizations. These groups are composed of members who have an affinity with each other (for instance, geographic location) and are often autonomous in their decision-making. Affinity groups coordinate using "spokespeople" within a "spokes council."

and where it was 'my place' to intervene. As a result, I found myself forming stronger relationships to a few of the more stable members, repeating the patterns of informal power dynamics within an explicitly non-hierarchal group.

As the project moved past the data gathering phase I presented my initial findings in a facilitated feedback session to a subset of the coordination group who had been most active in my project. My rigidity made me hesitant to speak directly to the conflictual dynamics I witnessed, instead presenting them as two high level "themes" drawing on the theories of Kahane's (2010) "Power and Love". My hope was that engaging in an unstructured and open conversation would create the conditions for these deeper conflictual issues to emerge. However, as I began to facilitate the meeting, I quickly realized that without the strict structures that the group had been used to, holding space for this type of dialogue would be increasingly difficult. While the group did not disagree with my themes, they could not come to an understanding amongst each other on how to move forward. Members began to speak over each other, moving the conversation in multiple directions and jumping to solutions without engaging in any meaningful dialogue. I became increasingly anxious, and forceful in my own facilitation, interrupting members myself and attempting to introduce questions to better direct (or in this case steer) the conversation. While we had identified power and leadership as key areas to address, the conversation remained high-level and amorphous with the meeting ending without any resolution or concrete action plan defined. I left feeling a sense of incompetence and overall stuckness. I had begun seriously considering whether what I witnessed could be changed or if I would be better off quitting the project altogether, leaving the group with my findings as a "result."

Through critical self-reflective journaling, alongside various coaching conversations with practitioners that were not part of the project, I became aware of how the dynamics of unexpressed emotion and prioritization of solutions over understanding were also present within the broader activist group. Thus, by attempting to maintain 'distance' and not expressing my own underlying feelings and concerns I was reproducing this broader dynamic. This forced me to challenge my role as an "external consultant" by recognizing that the fluid nature of the group's membership meant that no matter what my intentions were, I was also part of the system. I decided to be more proactive and to share my perspectives openly and directly. We convened again, where I presented my realizations in the form of a visual, I had designed,

(drawing on my previous background as a graphic designer) which illustrated this pattern. Expressing and visualizing my perspectives and feelings prompted a deeper and more productive dialogue, as members began openly disclosing unexpressed challenges they faced within the movement. Recognizing my role as part of the group I also contributed to the conversation by proposing possible solutions. This caused a personal tension and vulnerability. As a facilitator I felt I was not "supposed" to intervene in content, however shedding those beliefs together with the group we moved past our previous stuckness towards the co-design of a workshop for all members of the local chapter. It aimed at changing the way the broader chapter understood and dealt with power, leadership, and emotions – topics that were seen as a root-cause dynamic producing the more symptomatic issues they were experiencing. Recognizing a need to change the way these conversations were typically held, the workshop was based on theories and practices that drew on spirituality, relationality, ritual, and collective leadership.

The final workshop invited members of the entire activist group chapter and contained a good mix of participants of all affinity groups. Based on our learnings from the feedback session, it was designed to balance experiential learning activities on leadership and power, a desire for solutions, and the need to express emotion and naming of tensions that were collectively felt but never openly expressed. This led to the development of new practices and personal commitments by those who attended. In speaking to some members afterwards, they noted how despite the lack of agreed-upon group-wide policies, the workshop had created space for a new type of expression and introduced a language that ran counter to their task-based focus. The workshop was received positively and led to new internal actions that sought to bring these ritual practices within the day-to-day activities of the group. However, despite this the group would continue to face unresolved and unaddressed challenges with their internal dynamics, leading to their dissolution as the COVID pandemic arrived. (Starnino, 2021)

Understanding My Experience Through the Social Field

From the outside, this group had seemed successful, primarily through media-attracting direct actions and the implementation of non-hierarchical structures and principles intended to foster a more equitable group dynamic. However, once I was within the group, I witnessed how those same structures would hold them back from being able to express themselves, leading to relational tensions. If we draw upon the language of the social field, these structures led to "ways of relating" that continuously prioritized short-term solutions to the deeper,

complex challenges affecting the group. This in turn produced burnout, conflict, and a lack of engagement. In speaking about the social field and its relation to racial justice, Cunningham (2021) draws on Scharmer's (2018) metaphor of the "farmers' field" to say:

> In a farmer's field, there are weeds and rocks and roots and bugs. And what is cultivated is what grows. Understanding that we exist within a field and that we can cultivate it toward more generative or more violent outcomes is a powerful leadership tool in racial justice work. (p. 11)

Cunningham's quote reminds us that the social field as a concept does not inherently describe generative forms of relating, but rather is a way of seeing how social systems produce the results they do. The social field of this group was not "cultivated," despite the intentions to do so through their principles and practices, producing relational tensions. Similar points are also described by Seneque et al. (2021) in their article "Striving for Justice." Drawing on a process of co-inquiry, they highlight the concept of *contradictory convictions*:

> And we have all witnessed that once you get to that point of polarization, people become entrenched. And because they cannot challenge each other lovingly, they cannot live out that living with contradictory convictions. They're not able to articulate that. (Seneque et al., 2021, p. 131)

These "contradictory convictions" resembles Kahane's (2010) notion of power and love mentioned earlier, presenting a dynamic that particularly affects activist groups. However, despite recognizing those dynamics in my observation of the group, my own incapacity to live within contradictory convictions emerged. I experienced how my inability to name the issues I was experiencing replicated many of those internal dynamics I witnessed in my initial observations of the group. As I experienced the tensions, I felt myself becoming rigid. I initially saw my role as "apart" from the social field, so I assumed that rigidity was mine. I felt incapable of intervening in it to communicate what I was seeing and witnessing. As the project evolved and I presented my results, the impact of that lack of openness came to a front. Despite being a "facilitator," I could not create space for a productive conversation. This, in turn, generated a belief that this was due to my lack of capacity as a practitioner. We eventually got stuck as we attempted to move forward without addressing our difficulties. Thus, once I allowed myself to "join" the group's social field and reflected on my own experience as a part of the group, I gained a deeper clarity of the dynamic affecting us. This experience speaks to the importance of recognizing the difference between first, second, and third-person perspectives. My first-person perspective allowed me to connect to the third-person observational data collected previously. This in turn prompted a change at the intersubjective level by bringing into the room this dynamic and prompting a dialogue that allowed for a deepening of collective awareness.

Shifting the Social Field

I recognize now that I was attempting to create a shift in the current social field of the activist group by naming not just the challenges of the group but the quality of *attention* the group was paying to these challenges. Scharmer (2019) states "stepping into" a social field requires "action" to uncover the knowledge hidden within it. In my own context it was by stepping within the social field that I could reflect on my own first-person experiences recognizing the ways I already formed part of it. Pomeroy et al. (2021) speak to recognizing and naming the social field as key to creating collective awareness of it. By visualizing it and presenting back, we were able to engage in a deeper dialogue that allowed the group to "sense itself" in the moment, something Scharmer (2018) describes as *presencing*. I see this "stepping within" as not just psychological but profoundly embodied, speaking to the inter-corporeal property of social fields, in which collective awareness was generated around our way of being together (Pomeroy & Herrmann, 2023).

This was, in fact, a stark contrast to the more individually focused and more cognitive approach I used in the first feedback session. As I joined by extending myself toward others, I could sense I was more open and vulnerable in sharing perspectives and feelings. After doing so, I noticed a shift in our interactions. The *atmosphere* of the session had changed, echoing a term used by Pomeroy and Herrmann (2023) to describe the way we experience social fields. The conversation slowed and deepened as members began to speak more about their own felt experiences, expressing feelings they had been withholding. Rather than jumping to solutions they explored the conditions that caused these issues, discussing their challenges at the level of the dynamic. This "shift" in the quality of talking and listening can be described by what Kahane (2017) calls *enacting new realities*. The quality of the conversation moved from a factual one, in which we were attempting to find a single "right" answer to our problems, to one that placed empathy and reflection at the center. This experiential shift opened space for new possibilities, something that Kahane (2007) states is needed in situations where opposing perspectives have to work together in order to *experiment a way forward*.

The experience also exposed me to the limitations caused by my assumptions of neutrality. As I changed my stance, I believe that the power and privilege of my position as facilitator supported a new form of resonance within the group. In doing so, I had to challenge the logic of my positionality as a white, male, university-educated individual who, within this group, found shared comfort in embracing behaviors that got in the way of our capacity to *be* together. This *critical self-reflexivity* and self-development that breeds broader change is spoken to by Udoewa and Gress (2023) and Guenther (2022) as essential for facilitators in order to hold spaces for groups to shift towards relationality. Thus, as the social field shifted, so did new possibilities to tend to it.

Nurturing the Social Field

Echoing similar sentiments to Cunningham's (2021) farmers field, Pomeroy (2022) states, "The social field, once born, can be thought of as a living entity. To become a generative source, it needs to be consciously supported and nurtured" (para. 22). This quote directly references the autonomous nature of social fields. It was not enough that this climate activist group had written principles and norms for interacting and organizing—the actual patterns of interactions emerged independent of these desires, creating the "practical results" of burnout, conflict, and disconnection. Recognizing social fields as autonomous entities requires us to "nurture" it to keep the social field generative. In activist contexts, nurturing might be found through practices such as the "solidarity circles" described in the article *Striving for Justice*:

> So, these solidarity circles that Charity's talking about where people share struggles, the listening through lived experience that Jill's talking about, that you all refer to, it is actually about opening ourselves up. (Seneque et al., 2021, p. 137)

Jasper (2011) describes these moments as *interaction rituals* used in activist group gatherings to infuse emotional energy, instill confidence and reinforce a group's identity. Here, we recognize the property of affordance within social fields. Whereas the social field of the climate action group afforded an orientation towards task, productivity, and emotional suppression, these interaction rituals aimed to nurture a social field that afforded relationality, expression, and openness. Our dialogue led to the co-design of a workshop to address relational tensions within the group by radically shifting the established patterns of interactions towards ones that can be described as nurturing. This is similar to what is described by Pomeroy and Herrmann (2023) when speaking to social field interventions,

> Framed through the lens of the social field, participants could understand that experimenting with new patterns of interaction held the potential to effect change beyond the individual due to the deep inter-affect and interrelatedness of members of the field. (p. 14)

The workshop allowed the space to express emotions while productively looking for ways to build the capacity to have conflictual conversations about power and collective leadership. This was done in an attempt to challenge the dominant *ways of relating* of rigid agenda-based meetings and to replace them with more relationally based practices. Drawing on the group process rituals of Starhawk (1986, 2011) and Macy and Brown's (2014) spiritual practices of the Work that Reconnects, there was an attempt to introduce a relational ontology exposing the group to, as Chilisia (2019) describes, their own "*web of connections*" (p. 108, emphasis added).

Ultimately my intervention did not prevent the broader chapter from experiencing its dissolution. Similar to wanting to save an unwatered plant that,

despite attempts to care for it, still dies, the difficulties of shifting autonomous social fields with entrenched patterns of interactions proved too much for my intervention. However, the felt experiences that emerged both in the development and implementation of the workshops point to the possibilities of *nurturing* the social field to address and move through relational tensions.

Concluding Thoughts

My intention with this article was to introduce the implications of the social field as a way of addressing relational tensions within activist groups. While social movement studies provide us with a lens to explain why relational tensions might come about, what is missing is an understanding of how to shift these tensions from within these groups. Through my case study I aimed to show this in practice as it was only by acknowledging my first-person perspective that we were able to generate collective awareness around the dynamics influencing our relational tensions. Then by introducing new patterns of interactions that focused on nurturing the group's source conditions, I witnessed a qualitative shift in their atmosphere. In this way I view the social field not just as an explanatory framework but as an embodied and practical one, that acknowledges these groups emergent, collective, and ever-changing nature. Perhaps most importantly, it points to the need of cultivating a field of awareness that goes deeper than the "visible" and seeks to understand the source conditions these groups are working from.

Beyond becoming a relevant theory for both activists or practitioners working with and within activist groups, the social field can be a powerful lens for social movement researchers who work in a more embedded and participatory way within these communities. This builds upon the work of movement-relevant scholars which seek to center the voices and needs of the activists they work with (Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Valocchi, 2010; Gobby, 2020). While the case study postulates the implications of the social field, more research on how we might nurture social fields in activist spaces will be needed. What are possible methods, tools, and practices that bring out collective awareness to social fields and help us nurture them? Which ones might be more effective within activist groups? This area of future study can be seen in the work of Gonçalvez and Hayashi (2021), who conceptualize a *pattern language* for social field shifts by drawing on art-based theater methods and awareness-based design prompts. In addition, Pomeroy and Herrmann (2023) also highlight various intervention strategies aimed at the three interrelated properties of the social field. By experimenting and documenting these strategies, we can more intentionally measure their impacts and effectiveness in activist groups. Through this research, we contribute not just to the theoretical understanding of activism but to the ways activists, and those who aim to support them, might be able to affect systems-based change through a deeper awareness of themselves and the collectives they form a part of.

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Peer Review Article

Dismantling Structural Racism in Organisational Systems

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Abstract

Globally, our societies are riddled with racism and so are our organisations. While there are many excellent "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" (DEI) practitioners tackling racism and promoting racial equity in organisations, we contend that the language of "diversity" and "inclusion" risks diluting the impact of this work. Something stronger may be required to address racism's tenacious structural character. We propose thinking about this work in organisational systems as more fundamentally "dismantling structural racism." The dismantling process can be enabled by having a fuller understanding of what structural racism is, and how it affects people working in organisations, as well as by having a deeper appreciation of the history of racism, rooted in colonialism, and serving the ends of economic exploitation. With this greater awareness of how racism is built into, and manifests, in organisational systems, we are better equipped to act in more systemic ways towards dismantling it. In this article, we share some of what we are learning about convening and engaging in organisational systems with the purpose of navigating both structural and cultural change.

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Keywords
colonialism, organisational culture, white supremacy, Black and Indigenous people, people of colour, white people, whiteness

Introduction

Structural racism is embedded in the fabric of our societies, intertwined with our intergenerational family histories, as well as dominant cultural narratives (Menakem, 2015; Saad, 2020; Andrews, 2021). Organisations—as part of the social fabric—are significant sites of structural racism (Lopes & Thomas, 2007; Daniels, 2022;). In our experience as systems change practitioners who work to support change in a wide range of systems, including organisational systems, we find that structural racism creates stuckness, polarisation, and alienation. This is problematic for any organisation. But for the social purpose and social justice organisations we often work with, these dynamics of stuckness, polarisation, and alienation caused by unaddressed structural racism can put at risk their core vision of creating "good" in the world. The aim of this article is therefore to contribute to a better understanding of structural racism in organisations and share what we are learning about dismantling structural racism.

We are writing as three colleagues within an organisation called Reos Partners. Our colleague Adam Kahane, writing in this same edition of JASC, describes Reos' work as "facilitat[ing] collaborations among diverse stakeholders who are trying to transform the social systems of which they are part" (2023, p. 2). While we are not organisational development or management specialists, our approach to systems change has meant that we have gained experience working to dismantle structural racism in organisational systems. At the same time, we have been addressing the challenges of structural racism as it manifests in our own organisation.

As authors, we are all currently located in the South African context, where the colonial and apartheid past creates particularly pernicious and pervasive forms of racism. However, we consider structural racism to be a global problem, creating dynamics of stuckness, polarisation, and alienation in a wide range of geographical contexts. To make this personal, we (Mahmood, Akanimo, and Rebecca) open this article with personal introductions to position ourselves and our experiences of growing up in different country contexts.

Mahmood writes: Born in apartheid South Africa, my social consciousness as a young boy and teenager was shaped by palpable uncertainty and political transition. I am the son of an Indian immigrant father and Indian-Malay mother, who had experienced first-hand dispossession, forced removals, and legislated exclusion. I grew up, schooled, and worked with my parents and siblings in community schools and shops, in segregated Indian areas and neighbouring mixed-race and Black communities. My early memories include direct racial insults and exclusion from white spaces, as well as a sense of community and solidarity with people of colour. As a young adult and professional, my exposure

to white dominant spaces grew. While I often felt peripheral, I also began to reckon with my own privilege. My racial identity developed alongside my religious identity, particularly in my later years as a university student. In my affiliation with a West African Sufi path, I was attracted to the Sufi impulse towards resistance of colonial enterprise, alongside the pursuit of spiritual emancipation. I see myself as being a part of a wider African story of struggle and triumph, of brokenness and healing, as well as disappointment and hope.

Akanimo writes: I was born and raised in Nigeria, a predominantly Black country. As a young boy, it was clear to me from the everyday affirmations of names, beauty, and success standards that whiteness had a pervasive character that infused almost all societal norms even though white individuals were not a significant demographic presence. I was praised for being as beautiful as a white boy because of my fair complexion. My upbringing was characterized by the coexistence of two distinct worlds—one defined by my Black identity and the other by the aspirational ideals of whiteness. The "white world" represented an ideal to emulate, encompassing linguistic and educational pursuits, philosophical adherence, and religious adoption. In the last decade, I have undertaken a continuous process of self-unsuturing and self-decolonization.

Rebecca writes: I am a white woman, born in England to British parents. When I was seven, my father's work in the Anglican church saw us relocating to apartheid South Africa. In that work, he was exposed to racial injustice in a very immediate way. I have a visceral memory of sitting at the supper table as a 10-year-old, hearing him share experiences of witnessing police brutality in a nearby informal settlement. These stories never made the mainstream media and awoke a fierce awareness in me about dual and hidden realities in a deeply polarised society. My teenage years were an immersion in the more hidden realities of South Africa, where I received an education that seemed more significant to me than my school education. It wasn't until my 30s that I awoke to the extent to which I was part of the problem in a post-apartheid society that remained polarised. My failure to understand and take responsibility for my intact white power and privilege rendered me untrustworthy in co-creating a shared future. The last 15 years have involved a major re-orientation in terms of how I show up as a white person.

Our distinct positionalities afford us unique perspectives on the issue of structural racism, but we find common ground in our shared recognition of the profound injustices that underpin the phenomenon of structural racism. These manifestations have been palpable not only in our personal experiences but also within our organisation, and the broader social systems within which we operate.

Any writing about race and racism must tangle with language. Throughout this article, we talk about Black and Indigenous people, and people of colour, avoiding the acronym BIPOC because it seems to us another way in which being more "efficient" with language can diminish people's identities and lived experiences (see for example Okun [2001] on white supremacy culture in organisations). We recognise that different people use different terms, and that

certain terms are more appropriate in certain contexts. Also, we use the term "structural racism" instead of "institutional racism" to indicate how racism is built into social, economic, and political systems, including organisational systems. This article examines the ways in which structural racism manifests in organisations and the implications this has for thinking about belonging, relationships, and boundaries as we seek to become more aware of, and to contribute towards dismantling, structural racism.

This article proceeds as follows. In section 2, we identify seven pointers that serve to describe structural racism and illuminate how structural racism works in practice in organisations. In section 3, we offer an analysis of why and how structural racism manifests in organisations. Section 4 focuses on what we are learning about ways of tackling structural racism, primarily based on our own ongoing process of internal change at Reos, before ending with some final words of encouragement for doing this important work in section 5.

Describing Structural Racism in Organisational Systems

In our work to dismantle structural racism, we are often asked to explain what "structural racism" means. In our experience, standard definitions of structural racism are often difficult for people to hold onto, especially those who benefit from structural racism. It is likely that the idea triggers defence mechanisms, such as denial or avoidance. For white people with power and privilege it can be hard to accept that one's own positive organisational experiences of belonging, acceptance, and recognition are experienced very differently by colleagues who are Black, Indigenous or people of color, and that one is complicit, whether consciously or unconsciously, in sustaining structural racism (Lopes & Thomas, 2007).

As a result, we realised that we needed to offer a textured and jargon-free description of structural racism that could go beyond technical definitions. Something that could stick and that could address some of the areas of confusion. For example, there is often confusion about the relationship between structural racism and white people's individual responsibility in relation to unearned white privilege. Among white people, there is often a lack of understanding about how the everyday and implicit aspects of structural racism in an organisation negatively impact their colleagues who are Black, Indigenous or people of colour, while generally benefiting themselves (DiAngelo, 2011). We worked on a description that would also assist people in organisations to think about what needs to change at a more practical level. We hope that this explanation will support you, the reader, as you reflect on structural racism in your own organisation.

In the description of structural racism below, points 1 and 2 serve as a working definition. Points 3 to 7 are intended to help people in organisations understand how structural racism works in practice, so that the aspects that are less visible (especially to white people) can be addressed, with the intention of dismantling structural racism.

1. Structural racism in organisations refers to ways of thinking, feeling, being, and doing that are deeply woven into the fabric of an organisation and that advantage white people and disadvantage Black and Indigenous people and people of colour.
2. Structural racism in organisations can be expressed through policies (e.g., HR policies), practices (e.g., promotion practices or exposure to opportunities), or procedures (e.g., how budgeting or business decisions are made). It might be embedded in the mission and vision of the organisation as well as its strategic plans and resource allocations. Institutional racism tends to refer to more formal and explicit manifestations whereas structural racism can also be informal and implicit, maintained for example in the ways in which people interact socially.
3. Whether implicit or explicit, structural racism routinely creates unearned benefits for white people or provides immunity from undesirable experiences and outcomes. For example, new white members of staff tend to be treated as if they were recruited based on merit, whereas newly hired Black and Indigenous people and people of colour may be subject to assumptions that they were affirmative action candidates, or gained entry because of a quota system, which sets them at an immediate disadvantage of having to prove their skills and value to the organisation.
4. As a result of these structural disadvantages, it is more difficult for Black and Indigenous people and people of colour to enter an organisation, feel that they belong, can advance, and get recognised and rewarded for their work. Structural racism creates myriad exclusions from opportunity, access, and power. The outcome of these exclusions tends to be most visible at the senior levels of organisational hierarchies.
5. The structural nature of racism means that it is often inconvenient or difficult (for white people especially) to see these impacts, and hard (for Black and Indigenous people and people of colour especially) to raise or report experiences for discussion and accountability in a productive and concrete way.
6. The implicit nature of structural racism means it can persist even under Black leadership. Therefore, a change of leadership doesn't imply that structural racism is automatically "fixed."
7. While structural racism needs to be addressed by the organisation, there is also inner work to be done at the individual and sub-group level. For white people this means an

> understanding of power and doing inner work around whiteness and white fragility, especially towards creating personal and collective awareness and readiness for conversations about racism. For people on the receiving end of structural racism, there is also work to be done, especially towards personal and collective healing.

In testing this description with organisational groups, we have heard that it resonates and is useful. It helps with recognising the "what" of structural racism. However, it does not explain "why" our organisations are structurally racist. Therefore, in the next section, we provide a more comprehensive analytic lens.

Analytic Lens

The previous section described structural racism. That description indicated that structural racism is often hardwired into an organisation's DNA in ways that can make it difficult to recognise and address. This section goes further by analysing the genesis and pervasive expression of racism, so that people in organisational systems can better understand its structural character and, hence, work more effectively to interrupt and dismantle it.

In spelling out how structural racism works, we argue that it shows up along three dimensions: namely in the systemic roots, purpose, and culture of an organisation. Reflecting on an organisation's "systemic roots" calls for us to recognise and situate structural racism within the Western project of slavery, modernity, and colonisation that helped the West accumulate economic, epistemic, and political power. Understanding the systemic roots helps us to more clearly see how organisations have been shaped by these historic legacies. The systemic roots can shape the "purpose" of an organisation—i.e., the fundamental reason for its existence. Organisational purpose is usually expressed in vision and mission statements, which tend to be framed in politically correct language, sometimes obscuring the organisation's *deep* purpose. We delineate between the "good," "bad," and "ugly" expressions of deep purpose. An organisation's purpose might motivate the culture of that organisation. "Culture" shows the manifestation of power in an organisation by exposing how people are organised and how people experience the organisation. A prima facie manifestation of structural racism is often seen in the lack of racial diversity in the organisation, asymmetrical power relations in the structures of the organisation, and the roles people hold. Our concerns about the terminology of DEI pertain here—specifically in relation to the dimensions of diversity and inclusion. For example, an organisation can embrace "diversity" in its widest sense while leaving structurally racist norms and values unchallenged. Moreover, "inclusion" in DEI can be inferred to mean including racial minorities into normative white spaces—that is, inviting them to assimilate. Therefore, the analytic lens we apply is designed to take us beyond the limitations of DEI. The three dimensions, offer outward-gazing and inward-looking perspectives to help cultivate ever-deepening awareness of the systemic nature of structural racism.

Systemic Roots

The systemic roots of structural racism speak to the *epistemic* dimension of an organisational system. To understand structural racism whether in the world or in organisations is to have an appreciation of the West not merely as a geographical place but as a project. As a project, the West is built on the idea of white supremacy that has been used to exploit brown and Black bodies (Andrews, 2021). Racism is born out of the ideology that legitimates oppression and violence of all kinds. Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) poetically makes this point when he writes that, "Race is the child of racism, not the father." (p. 7)

The systemic roots of racism lie in the idea of white supremacy that has shaped Western modernity and enabled a new moral order of society. Gurminder Bhambra (2007, p. 1) argues that "modernity is the dominant frame for social and political thought, not just in the West, but across the world." Charles Taylor makes clear the features of Western modernity by arguing that the West is characterised by the market economy, the public sphere, and by self-governing people. He writes that Western modernity is:

> … that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality); and of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution). (Taylor, 2004, p. 1)

Undoubtedly, different cultures had various institutional forms that existed before Western modernity. The problem, however, is that Western culture's institutional form gained a hegemonic status and was underpinned by the conception of the human person as a machine.[1] Taylor's analysis illuminates the pervasiveness of Western modernity in our world today and how it continues to shape norms and values governing our social realities.

The systemic roots of structural racism are expressed in the legacies of what norms and values shape the organisation. Part of the Western imperial project was to proliferate its values to all parts of the world and in the process provincialize the parts of the world that are not the West. Western modernity became the standard for modernity in other parts of the world. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2007, p. 27) makes this point when he writes that "'Europe'

[1] Many Western "Enlightenment" thinkers whose thinking shaped Western modernity like René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, and Isaac Newton held a mechanistic view of the world. Descartes, for example, compared the human body to an automaton, a mechanical device that operates on physical laws. Newton, on his part, espoused the idea of a clockwork universe, where celestial bodies are governed by precise mathematical laws. This mechanistic view of the world led to immense innovations in science and medicine but also allowed the human person to be reduced to a cog in the economic wheel whose primary value is to produce or make things.

remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian,' 'Chinese,' 'Kenyan,' and so on." In short, Europe/the West has long been the reference point and the centre in discourses on development, democracy, and economy. This centre-place has been almost self-evident given the West's apparent success in these areas even though a lot of what informs these successes, often defined in Western terms, is the continuous accumulation of epistemic, political, and economic power that happens on the backs of non-dominantly situated people.

Dismantling the systemic roots involves advancing three aims. First, to recognise and interrogate the source of our norms, behaviours, and practices in an organisational system. Second, to recognise that European thought, norms, and standards are of a particular geographical location and not an objective view from nowhere, which infers a global status. Third, to "move the centre" (following Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o). The Kenyan writer argues for a dual sense of 'moving the centre' "from its assumed location in the West to a multiplicity of spheres in all cultures of the world" and from the "dominant social stratum" or male bourgeois minority (wa Thiong'o, 1993, pp. xvi–xvii).

It is important to state that while we hold an intersectional view of oppression and marginalisation, we however give analytic priority to racism over the harms of sexism, classism, homophobia, and nationalism. Race represents a vital prism to understand the world because it is the "fundamental basis of the political and economic system and therefore infects all interactions, institutions and ideals" (Andrews, 2021, p. xxi). While differentiating factors other than race are also responsible for how benefits and burdens are distributed in various societies, race (advanced through the supremacy of whiteness) continues to shape norms of sociality, knowing, and being even in places where white bodies are absent.

Kehinde Andrews recognises the intersectionality of violence by arguing that the West is built on white supremacy but is practised through patriarchy, classism, and nationalism. Johar Schueller (2005) argues that white feminists tend to conflate oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation despite the fact that certain oppressions are "quantitatively more widespread and, arguably, qualitatively worse than others" (Ali, 2014, p. 31).

We do not have space to spell out this argument in full but suffice to say that while we give primacy to moving the centre from the West, it is important to move other centres if the goal is to achieve a more just world for all people. In our practice, talk of racism is never purely about racism. Other dimensions of oppression and marginalisation often surface that merit attention. In working to transform our organisations, the call is to centre structural racism because racism continues to structure both societal and organisational norms, while being attentive to its manifestations in gender, class, and other organising principles.

Purpose

The purpose dimension of our analysis of structural racism relates to the *political* dimension of an organisational system. We distinguish between purpose as an organisation's publicly stated vision, mission and goals, and the deep purpose of an organisation. Deep purpose lies in the organisation's origin story, which may be strongly shaped by the "systemic roots" dimension. An organisation's deep purpose may remain unstated, acting as an invisible, and often unconscious, force that drives an organisation in particular directions (Dostal et al., 2005).

An organisation's deep purpose is structurally racist when it aligns with what we have dubbed the "good," "bad," and "ugly" deep purposes. The good is the purpose that drives ideas of white saviourism under the guise of development. The bad is the purpose that feeds into the obsessively extractive, exploitative paradigm that seeks to maximise profit at all costs. The ugly is the purpose that aims to make inferior all that is not white and by extension drives the idea of white superiority. These three dimensions are not mutually exclusive but often function to reinforce one another. Organisations have learned to obscure the good, bad, and ugly deep purposes in their enterprises while at the same time publicly abhorring these drives. We will explore each of these dimensions in more detail below.

The "good" happens under the guise of development, cooperation, and solidarity. One way that the "good" purpose expresses itself is through the white-saviour complex. Coined by Teju Cole, the "White-Saviour Industrial Complex" describes the pattern of privileged white people who seek to liberate, save, or civilise underprivileged people of colour. He writes that white saviourism is a cathartic experience of "having a big emotional experience that validates privilege" (Cole, 2012). At the organisational level, white saviourism is common among many development and religious institutions that further white dominance under the pretext of solidarity. The "good" purpose is not limited to non-profit organisations; big corporations could also advance the aims of hite saviourism. For example, Facebook's launch of the Free Basics internet in developing markets allowed users access to data-light websites and services as an "on-ramp" and a taster to the internet. Facebook was accused of harvesting huge amounts of users' data, violating privacy, only delivering mostly Western content to users, and engaging in digital colonialism (Solon, 2017). Facebook responded that they were engaging in the good of "connecting the unconnected" (Gibbs, 2017, para 2). This dimension of purpose is difficult to dismantle given that it often comes with practical benefits—offering connectivity to people who otherwise would not have been connected to the internet while disregarding local norms of sociality in the name of progress.

The "bad" deep purpose expresses itself in racial capitalism whose logic is to extract and exploit as much as possible for maximum profit. This is the continuity of the dehumanising logic of the plantation. Andrews (2021) argues that racism is so intertwined with racial capitalism that it is often difficult to tell

one apart from the other. The manifestations of the bad are myriad. It shows up in cheap and exploitative labour in Africa and Asia that fundamentally benefits big businesses. It shows up where people might be paid fairly for their labour but are nonetheless required to work under conditions that do not care for their overall wellbeing. It also expresses itself in prioritising profit and business interests over the good of the community. For example, "The Genome Revolution" report by Goldman Sachs analysts asks the question: “Is curing patients a sustainable business model?” (Kim, 2018). A company that withholds cures for diseases so that they can keep selling their products maintains the colonial logic of profit over all else.

The “ugly” deep purpose is the demeaning of racially minoritized people. Take for example an INGO set up to “civilise” Indigenous people and bring them to “enlightenment.” Institutions like schools and universities which centre Western knowledge and language are implicated in this ugly purpose. The ugly purpose continues the narrative of colonisation as a “civilising mission” which goes hand in hand with the theft of resources, the smothering of the cultures of Indigenous people, the killing of their knowledge system (epistemicide; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) and the continued inferiorisation of the people. Often, a few local people drawn from the population of the marginalised people are selected and groomed as acolytes in this dehumanising enterprise. The presence of these acolytes can obscure the dangers such entities circulate and maintain.

At the heart of the colonial project—which is the source of structural racism —is the exercise of power over others. This power continues to be exercised in almost all aspects of our lives—in how bodies are constructed and understood, how we do business, how we are with each other, and how we know. In defining and setting the norms around bodies, commerce, and knowledge, Europe claimed the centre-position. The deep purpose of the organisation motivates the culture, demonstrated in how power is distributed and wielded by those who have it.

Culture

The culture dimension in our analysis is about the *social* dimension of the organisational system. Organisational culture reveals how an entity is organised and how people experience the organisation. We use culture in a broader sense, not just to signify the “collection of values, expectations, and practices that guide and inform the actions of all team members” (Wong, 2020, para. 3) but to include issues of diversity, representation, and equity. This relates primarily to people internal to the organisation but can also include other parties like clients and service providers.

Organisational culture is visible in how power is distributed, wielded, and experienced. For example, the culture of the International NGO (INGO) sector shows that the West almost exclusively holds the power to define standards and norms around risk, monitoring and evaluation, and resource flows. An inquiry process conducted by participants in the Re-Imagining INGOs (RINGO) project

found that, "White people and white ways of doing things are considered more professional, more expert, more reliable/valid" (Rights CoLab, 2021, p. 7).[2]

Doug Reeler (2022) argues that the culture of an organisation is apparent in the subconscious messages conveyed among individuals about what is deemed acceptable or not. These messages are frequently transformed into habits that are replicated through either action or inaction, often unknowingly. Several people have likened modern institutions and organisations to following the logic of a slave plantation (Andrews, 2021; Johnson, 2020; Wilder, 2013). The plantation, among other things, sends a subconscious message that human beings are machines whose use is to drive profitability for shareholders.

The plantation is geared towards maximum efficiency and productivity, fuelled by certain norms and ways of being. We find Tema Okun's characteristics of white supremacy culture helpful in this regard. These characteristics are a set of values that shape the norms of an organisation and perpetuate structural racism. The list includes perfectionism, a sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, paternalism, either/or thinking, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, individualism, progress defined as more, objectivity, and the right to comfort (Okun, 2001). Other characteristics to add might include control and surveillance of bodies, adversarial competition, and the lack of value that organisations give to rest, connection, and individual self-expression. Okun cautions against weaponizing these characteristics or using them in a check-list fashion. Instead, the invitation is to listen to their deep encultured patterns in our organisation and find healthy alternatives to our ways of being together.

"Culture" as a dimension of structural racism in an organisation also shows up in the diversity among organisational staff and leadership; how tasks are allocated, on whose back profit is made, and how people are compensated for their work. In organisations that are racially mixed, we see that the top positions are disproportionately occupied by white people and low-paying jobs are filled by Black and Indigenous people, and people of colour. Sometimes the standards of recruitment for these jobs vary—people who are Black, Indigenous or people of colour generally face stricter scrutiny than white people.

The consequence of a racist organisational culture is that people of colour and Black and Indigenous people do not feel at ease and lack a proper sense of belonging in the organisation. Such culture does not give room for people to express what matters to them. This makes the workplace psychologically unsafe and has material consequences in remuneration, roles, promotions and cultural expressions in language, food, music. The effect is the pain of exclusion and

[2] For more information about the RINGO project, please see https://rightscolab.org/ringo/ and https://reospartners.com/blog/ringo.

alienation among marginalised groups. Talking about diversity and inclusion may not get to the root of that pain.

Within this logic, particularly in racially mixed organisations, there is a risk of pursuing diversity and inclusion in instrumental ways to drive the standing of the organisation whether in terms of reputation or to drive profit. Consider an organisation that has a Black CEO who has all the powers and privileges that her white counterpart might have but is working within a white supremacy culture of perfectionism, control, and the hegemony of a singular perspective. Here again, diversity and inclusion can be achieved without dismantling structural racism.

To sum up this section, an advantage of looking at the manifestations of structural racism along these three dimensions—source, culture, and purpose—is that it centres whiteness and white supremacy without the need for white people. For example, a data mining company in Nigeria whose core function is the "extraction" of data from the populace might be structurally racist given its business function and operation—even though the company is run by Black women, the culture in the workplace is representative of the Nigerian culture, and employees are paid well for their work. The work of dismantling structural racism calls on us to not only address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion embedded in the organisational culture, but also norms and values (epistemic) and the deep purpose that form the structural foundations of the organisation (political). In dismantling structural racism in organisational systems, the epistemic, political, and social dimensions all deserve keen attention. The following section considers what this means in practice.

What We Are Learning: Implications for the Work of Dismantling Structural Racism

In this section, we present what we are learning about the difficult work of trying to dismantle structural racism. Much of our experiential learning has been from trial and error, but we are fortunate to be learning alongside other practitioners and thought leaders in this field of systems change (e.g., Lopes & Thomas, 2007; Magee, 2019; DiAngelo & Burtaine, 2022). There is no fixed recipe; each context requires different approaches. This is messy work. There will be failures. These call for humility and a commitment to ongoing learning. Sometimes failure is exactly what is needed to crack things open, including ourselves.

Following from our analysis in section 3, we know that the work of dismantling structural racism involves courageously uncovering the systemic roots and origin stories of an organisation, towards co-creating a healthy deep purpose, using power with growing awareness, working to redistribute power in meaningful ways, and unleashing creative expressions of an organisational culture where everyone finds belonging.

We consider four elements as necessary to set organisational systems on this path towards dismantling structural racism. This section is structured according

to these four elements: 1. Convening and enrolling members of an organisation into active commitment to change; 2. Engaging people in compelling processes to build awareness; 3. Institutionalising structural change; and 4. Navigating cultural change. There is a certain logic to presenting them in this sequence. However, in practice all four aspects are interconnected and woven into the overall experience in a non-linear fashion that welcomes emergence and adaptation. These four elements are based primarily on our own experiences, but also broadly align with emerging evidence about what works in organisational systems (e.g., Daniels, 2022). We include vignettes, largely from experiences within our own organisational system, to address issues of structural racism, and what we are learning from that ongoing work. Our intention in doing so is to be transparent and accountable as we learn.

Convening and Enrolling

Convening involves setting an ambition for change, bringing people together around that ambition, and starting to create the conditions to realise that ambition. In our work to dismantle structural racism in client organisations, we find it valuable to establish an internal convening group that can start to lay the ground before enrolling the rest of the organisation. Organisational leaders and decision makers are often obvious conveners, well-placed to articulate a commitment to change and create an agenda for change, but it can be useful for others to join them in the convening team. If the convening team is seen to be a diverse and credible group of people, from across different parts of the organisational system, this is likely to increase the legitimacy of the overall endeavour to address structural racism. When they are ready to put out a collective convening invitation to the rest of the organisation, this can be more effective than if it had come from the top leadership structures only.

Convening team members need to have the agency, capacity, and support to speak candidly, name difficult issues, challenge each other, and be willing to listen. This helps to set the terms for the ensuing process, into which they are enrolling the wider organisation. The convenors remain directly engaged and visible throughout the process and can often help to model interpersonal risk-taking and vulnerability. We sometimes find it valuable to provide coaching that supports convening team members to play this modelling role.

One of the sticky issues a convening team is likely to encounter early on is whether participation should be voluntary or mandatory. Given the unintended consequences of requiring staff to attend workshops on structural racism, convening teams tend to opt for voluntary engagement of all current staff. One organisation we worked with made it mandatory for all new staff to engage with issues of structural racism during their onboarding process (see section 4.3 below for more).

Looking back at our experiences of internal convening and enrolling within Reos Partners, we see that isolated conversations about race and racism since the organisation's inception in 2007 coalesced in 2020 into powerful momentum

for change in the raw aftermath of George Floyd's murder. Two directors—a man of colour and a white woman— led convening efforts over the subsequent three years to enrol staff and associates from across the organisation into four structures to drive awareness-based systems change. Each of these structures established their own internal convening teams.

The first structure was a racial equity group comprising one representative from each Reos office. This group produced a racial equity commitment statement to galvanise organisational culture change, and a series of recommendations to promote structural change. In their report, the racial equity group recognised the limitations of the language of "diversity, equity and inclusion" (DEI) and instead proposed a commitment to "dignity, justice and belonging" (DJB). This influenced the creation of a DJB structure to guide internal learning and build our capacity for also doing this work with client systems. The DJB structure produced, for example, a model called "decolonising our Reos practice." A third structure, namely race-based affinity groups, met in parallel to the Reos-wide conversations convened by the DJB coordinator. The purpose of affinity groups was to create separate spaces for Black and Indigenous people and people of colour to have the conversations they needed to have, and for white people to have the conversations they needed to have, including about conscious use of power. A fourth internal structure, the Sounding Board, was formed in 2021 to provide formalised, measurable feedback, assessment, and recommendations to each of the four Reos offices and the global leadership on progress and thus promote accountability for change.

Engaging

It is vital to take the time to create safe-enough conditions for uncomfortable conversations, bearing in mind that safety is not the same as comfort. Similarly, discomfort does not equate to danger. We have learned the value of offering some language and frameworks to understand these differences. For example, we introduce groups to concepts and practices that help with individually and collectively tracking discomfort levels and building tolerance for staying with discomfort long enough to learn something new, but not so long to trigger underlying trauma (Freeth & Caniglia, 2019). We work to strengthen individual and collective skills in inquiry and dialogue, encouraging curiosity and openness over defensive or attacking ways of engaging. We offer ways of thinking about power and privilege, recognising the impact of differential access to power and privilege on processes of engagement.

Another important part of creating safe-enough conditions for engagement is to establish group agreements. There are existing resources for creating agreements to draw on. For example, Singleton and Linton (2006) propose four basic agreements for having courageous conversations on race: 1. Stay engaged; 2. Expect to experience discomfort; 3. Speak your truth; and 4. Expect and accept a lack of closure. We find it useful to start with these, unpack what they mean for the specific group we are working with, and invite discussion about any other

agreements the group wants to add. It can be helpful to create nuance that is meaningful to the group. For example, if the group wishes to add "respect" to the list of agreements, find out what respect looks and feels like for this group and add some of these words to the crafting of the agreement. It is worth capping the agreements at a manageable number that are potent and alive for the organisation, and to which they can collectively agree before continuing.

Engagement involves a combination of inner work, identity work in racial identity-based "affinity groups,"[3] and gatherings in larger, diverse groups. The exact sequencing depends on the organisational context and degree of readiness of participants. A single workshop could include all three ways of engaging, or there may need to be considerable investment in inner work and affinity group work before convening larger conversations in the organisation.

All three ways of engaging are strongly supported by awareness-based practices. Inner work can be conducted at the individual level even while gathered as a group and allows for personal processing and settling in the body (e.g., breathwork while sitting in a group circle). Inner work ranges from personal reflection and journaling (e.g., the "Me and White Supremacy" [Saad, 2020] workbook offers a series of journaling prompts in each section) to mindfulness and body work (e.g., exercises in "The Inner Work of Racial Justice" [Magee, 2019] or "My Grandmother's Hands" [Menakem, 2015]) and can also include creative work with the hands (e.g. clay modelling). Affinity groups create a place for people who share a particular racial identity to do collective inner work. Awareness-based practices in affinity groups can be supported by providing a series of provocations for reflection and prompts for conversation (e.g., Lopes & Thomas, 2007; DiAngelo & Burtaine, 2022). Larger organisational gatherings bring together people of different racial identities. Awareness-based practices in such gatherings can include dialogue and storytelling (e.g., Mindell, 1995, 2008). Throughout all these practices, the intention is for awareness to deepen into understanding as a basis for navigating structural and cultural change.

Awareness-based practices extend beyond self-awareness to system-awareness. Among white people, racism, and the fear of being exposed as racist, can produce many blind spots and areas of self-delusion. Black and Indigenous people and people of colour may have developed self-protective mechanisms that hinder self-awareness, such as assimilating strategies. Together, members of an organisational system can avoid acknowledging racism and its true impact.

[3] According to the Justice Unbound website (2020, para 2), the rationale for convening race-based affinity groups includes the following: "People of colour need to drive, lament, mourn, and share their emotions in community away from white people"; the work of dismantling white supremacy is primarily white people's work to do; and affinity groups create opportunities to learn how to stay in uncomfortable conversations.

Effective engagement with self, racial identity groups, and racially diverse groups can peel away layers of denial towards healthy awareness. Inner work can help to connect with one's own experiences, and with information lodged in the body. Affinity groups can be spaces for truth-telling, risk-taking and vulnerability—expressing feelings or ideas that are not yet ready to be aired elsewhere. They offer opportunities for building solidarity, as well as accountability. Racially diverse groups can unlock understanding and insight through listening to the stories of people whose life experiences are different to one's own. They can also be places of great heat, "sitting in the fire" (Mindell, 1995, p. 99) of anger, charged interactions, and racial conflict.

In Reos, we are learning about the structure and pacing of engagement. We are a relatively small organisation of about 70 people distributed across diverse geographic and cultural contexts, each with locally based regional leaders who have high levels of autonomy. This organising structure necessitates pacing the work to cater to the needs, contexts, and nuances of various "parts" of the organisational system, while also recognising the existence of the whole. The work needs to ebb and flow between the global whole and the local parts. We learned, viscerally, that the moments when larger "wholes" gather can be powerful for "sitting in the fire," to reckon, bear witness, and hold each other to account while strengthening a sense of shared organisational culture. These moments of strong shared engagement can then be taken into smaller office-based or affinity-based groups for further meaning-making and integration.

To sum up this section on engagement, all three ways of engaging are relational and involve bridging divides. Inner work supports a healthy relationship with oneself, working with internal dynamics such as shame and internalised oppression. Furthermore, inner work helps to reintegrate the body, which is the wellspring of information and wisdom, and where trauma resides. According to Micky ScottBey Jones (2021), "One of the ways we confront oppression is to do the concentrated work of bravely facing what needs healing on the inside … as we are doing the work of dismantling the larger systems of oppression. It is a both-and proposition" (p. 81). This takes us to the question of structural change.

Institutionalising Structural Change

Structural change means making material changes to organisational practices, policies, and procedures, alongside changing who occupies positions of power. This work of transforming organisations cannot be left for Black people to do; white people have even greater responsibility to lead material change efforts: "White supremacy won't die until White people see it as a White issue they need to solve rather than a Black issue they need to empathize with" (Reed, 2020).

In Reos, a powerful driver towards institutional change was when younger members of the team who are Black, Indigenous, or people of colour spoke about their experiences of Reos as being a "white organisation." This meant revisiting our origin story and galvanised white people in the organisation into a new level

of commitment to institutionalise structural change. In the process, the organisation learned the importance of following three key principles: adequate resourcing, transparency, and accountability. It was necessary to resource each established structure with people and funds to fulfil its purpose. Recognising that transparency would help to keep driving the agenda for change, reports such as the Sounding Board report, were made visible to everyone in Reos. Members of the global leadership team led Reos-wide online calls to engage with the Sounding Board's findings and recommendations, and to use the report to catalyse the next cycle of conversations about structural and cultural change. Accountability mechanisms were woven into the process—for example, in the original racial equity commitment statement and the terms of reference for the Sounding Board.

Another example of moving beyond convening, enrolling, and engaging into institutionalising change is to be found in a client organisation that has committed to five areas of structural change, called "game changers." Each of these game changers is led by a senior person in the organisation, who is accountable for ensuring progress:

1. developing an Anti-Racism policy and reviewing all existing policies to ensure that they are anti-racist;
2. defusing white fragility so that white people in the organisation are more likely to engage constructively and robustly in the work of dismantling structural racism. This included a series of "courageous conversations" in a white affinity group as well as the compilation of multimedia resources to support ongoing awareness;
3. ensuring mandatory participation so that all staff engage with the work of dismantling structural racism at key points (e.g., during onboarding);
4. establishing a leadership accelerator programme for staff members who are Black, Indigenous or people of colour to prepare them for senior leadership roles; and
5. demanding accountability for progress from senior leaders, which means that leaders report regularly to the organisation on the ongoing process of dismantling structural racism.

Structural change was further enhanced when this organisation created, resourced, and staffed a three-person unit to support the implementation of the game changers, and to track the ongoing work of dismantling structural racism.

In some instances, the work of dismantling structural racism might be to help an organisation to close well. A recent example of an organisation choosing to give away its endowment and close as the only way to escape its racist colonial legacy is Lankelly Chase, a charitable foundation in the UK (Butler, 2023). Some INGOs have recognized the limits of transformation. For example, EveryChild, a

midsized INGO has closed its doors upon realising that "[r)ather than inventing initiatives to tinker, tailor, or transform themselves, INGOs can relinquish power, resources, and space and enable communities and local organisations to realise their own power, on their own terms, to their own agenda" (Griffith, 2023, para. 15).

The process of driving structural change can help to shift culture. For example, the organisation that devised the game changers convened regular organisation-wide gatherings to keep the conversation alive, while also tracking progress on each game changer. This process enabled a culture of openness and ease in talking about racism. It has now become commonplace for people, at various levels of the organisation, to inquire if new processes and rules are anti-racist. This has been an early indicator of success.

Navigating Cultural Change

Structural and cultural change are both necessary and complement each other. Our approach to cultural change is about staying in conversation, focusing on awareness, relationships, and trust in ways that address experiences of exclusion while the structural work continues.

We are learning that taking responsibility for mistakes, demonstrating the capacity to accept feedback and staying in difficult conversations does enable shifts to occur. It helps others feel that they too can make mistakes (an antidote to the White supremacy principle of *perfectionism*) when they are part of enabling and bringing about structural and cultural transformation.

Transforming organisational culture cannot be done in a rush; it takes time, resources, and genuine commitment from everyone, not just from senior leaders. Within an organisational context, where there is hierarchy and executive decision-making authority, there are skills to learn about doing this work with integrity and holding clean lines. On the one hand, people must feel heard. On the other hand, they must recognise that their truths would not always be "the truth." Holding this tension, and working with power asymmetries inherent in organisational structures, requires a high level of awareness and integrity by process designers, facilitators, and leaders.

While the goal of structural change is to enable equity and justice, the goal of cultural change is to enable a sense of belonging, dignity, and ease in the organisation. Cultural changes ensure that people express themselves in ways that matter to them in the values, norms, expectations, and practices that shape dignified experiences.

Culture change is hard to measure and different people in an organisation are likely to have different assessments of the change process. It can be useful to ask questions in organisational gatherings such as: Is what we are doing satisfactory? Are you experiencing change? Invite stories and suggestions. Unless the process can hold these different experiences and assessments in a coherent

way, where meaning can be made together, there is a risk of fragmented narratives about what is being achieved.

In our own internal organisational change process in Reos, we are learning about the importance of language. We started by talking about *racial equity* which we came to recognise as too limiting. Luckily, language, as a powerful carrier of culture, can evolve. Through structured convening and enrolling, and as the engagement work and awareness deepened, our initial framing evolved from racial equity to *dignity, justice and belonging* to naming the need to *decolonise and dismantle white supremacy culture*. Ultimately, the precipitating conditions and the extent of senior leadership's recognition of the need to transform will shape the framing of the issues.

Concluding Remarks

The work of dismantling structural racism is not new and will not end with our generation. This is both inspiring and daunting—inspiring because we can take heart from the tremendous shifts demonstrated by the abolition of slavery, the African struggle against imperial hegemony, the civil rights movement in the US, and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Daunting because we are coming to understand just how difficult it is to bring about fundamental and lasting change due to the structural nature of racism.

Although mainstream organisational norms are shaped by white supremacy culture, the radical call is to imagine new practices, institutional forms and new ways of living that are wholesome and just for all people and the planet we live on. While we cannot do much to change the systemic roots of structural racism, we can indeed change the purpose and culture that drive and guide our organisations. This is possible. In the process, there is much potential to kindle meaning, joy, and connection, re-membering those parts of ourselves (individually and collectively) that have been made to feel unwelcome. We warmly encourage your work towards greater wholeness and justice in your organisations.

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In the Making

Adaptive Humanism:

Moving From Limiting to Quantum Narratives to Connect with the Emerging Future

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Abstract

We believe that while humanity is experiencing a time of transition and transformation, it is "stuck" within limiting narratives. Those narratives prevent individuals and societies from exploring new options and from acting upon those alternatives; that is, from co-creating a future. We propose the concept of Adaptive Humanism, a process of moving from limiting to quantum narratives through conscious (that is, self-aware) and continuous adaptation to a new situation, as well as critical examination of both challenges and opportunities offered by that new environment. We briefly explore limiting narratives from the perspectives of psychology, philosophy, and sociology and present real-life examples, compiled during interviews conducted by the authors. Further, we propose that the theoretical framework and practices of Theory U create a non-judgmental open space to get "unstuck" and to move from limiting to quantum narratives, meaning self-correcting narratives oriented to and emerging from the future.

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Keywords
adaptive humanism, Theory U, limiting narratives, quantum narratives, transformation

Origins and Context of This Research

After three decades of interacting with local communities in Colorado—Francisco in Metro Denver and Herlinda in the Western Slope of Colorado—we met in 2022 through online meetings focused on the needs and challenges of the Hispanic population in those two geographic areas after the COVID-19 pandemic.

We communicated frequently to talk about the reasons why, despite the resources and help available, many Latinos were not accessing those resources. Among other reasons (language barriers, cultural differences, limited formal education, fear of deportation), we found that the pandemic's negative impact caused many Hispanics (and many non-Hispanics too) to firmly adhere to "old" stories and narratives that prevented them from changing and improving their lives. Perhaps this was a mental and emotional defense mechanism. More generically, we wondered what internal stories we are telling ourselves that keep us "stuck" in the past? We soon discovered that those "old" stories, which we call "limiting narratives," deserved proper and deeper research to understand their origins and impacts, as did finding a way of transforming them from maladaptive beliefs to narratives connected with the emerging future.

In parallel, we both took part in u-lab,[1] an online-to-offline program based on a framework and process for transformational change called Theory U (Scharmer, 2016), offered by the Presencing Institute[2] in partnership with MIT. Francisco attended u-lab for the first time in 2015, as part of a small group at a coffee shop in Denver. Then, starting in 2016 and every year thereafter, he organized a hub (Emerging Future Denver Group), initially in person and then moving online in 2020. In the second half of 2022, Herlinda attended u-lab 1x as well, giving us a common framework of reference for understanding change and transformation as well as a lived experience of seeing narratives shift from limiting to quantum.

This paper emerges from our investigation into restrictive (limiting) narratives together with our firsthand observations of the transformation of such narratives into quantum narratives.

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[1] u-lab is a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) offered by MITx Online that provides an introduction to the framework Theory U (Scharmer 2016) and how it can be applied for leading change in business, government, and civil society contexts worldwide. https://www.u-school.org/

[2] See https://presencinginstitute.org/

Initial Thoughts

We are experiencing a moment of disruption and a time of transition on a global scale. In fact, Tillich (1963) already expressed this decades ago when he stated, “we are living in a historical period characterized by profound and revolutionary transformations as we pass from one historical era to another. No one can seriously doubt it” (p. 65). From a different, contemporary perspective, Spanish philosopher José Martínez Hernández (2023) states that we are living at a time of “crisis, fate, and catastrophe,” understanding “crisis” not only as “deep changes in everyday beliefs,” but also as a “historical moment” when “the path does not appear open because the horizon has been clouded” (p. 47).

At times of disruption, individuals, societies, and civilizations must decide if they will adhere to the same ideas and paradigms they followed up to that point, or if they will connect with what is emerging in the context of the disruption. In the authors’ perspective, the first option confines individuals, collectives, and societies to an immutable world, promoting restrictive narratives. If we accept that the future emerges primarily in the context of a conscious and continuous adaptation alongside critical examination of challenges and opportunities, then any narrative that keeps us locked out of the field of possibilities—be it by repeating the past or by perpetuating the present—should be deemed a limiting narrative.

Conversely, the second option signifies a transition whereby individuals and groups move their cognitive and decision-making frameworks, as well as their self-perception, beyond the pre-existing world's boundaries to an emerging and not yet fully comprehensible reality.

Quantum narratives, reflecting a shift in consciousness, enable individual and group connection to a field of potentiality. These narratives, evolving in diverse existential contexts, are incompatible with limiting narratives, particularly during disruptive periods where transitioning to quantum narratives is essential to avoid stagnation. Because the ongoing transformation renders certain long-standing Western narratives related to Modernity (prevalence of individualism, rationality as calculation and control, progress and linear time, and even the role of grand narratives) are becoming obsolete, thus paving the way for emerging ones. Historically, such narrative shifts have occurred during disruptions, as exemplified by the post-Bronze Age transition, a period that eventually led to the "Axial Age" (Jaspers, 1968). However, this historical parallel is only partially applicable to contemporary changes, considering modern factors like global techno-science, population growth, and unsustainable living practices.

A new framework, tailored to contemporary times, is necessary to comprehend and transition from traditional to quantum narratives, requiring appropriate methodologies to facilitate this shift. Emerging narratives in transhumanism, artificial intelligence, and techno-science prompt the abandonment of outdated narratives, such as those depicted in techno-spiritual science fiction or the portrayal of artificial intelligence as either a panacea or a

threat to humanity. However, despite their apparent obsolescence, discarding these entrenched narratives remains challenging, especially due to their perpetuation and amplification through social media, which continues to influence individual and societal thoughts and actions.

Adaptive Humanism

In that context, we explored the need for a practical and theoretical framework to better understand the limiting narratives and the transition to new (not-limiting, self-correcting) narratives, as well as finding a practice to prompt and facilitate that transition. We also wanted a framework where the caring of humans as humans and the adaptability of humans to a new future could be both maintained at this kairotic time. We called this framework "Adaptive Humanism." We define Adaptive Humanism as a model for thought and action gestated by those on the margins of society, that is, those frequently excluded from the new future, that promotes critical analysis of the current reality with the intention of transforming limiting narratives into quantum narratives through a process of conscious change and dialogical cocreation.

At an initial level, "Humanism" could be defined as "meditating and caring that man be human and not inhumane" (Heidegger, 1993, p. 224), and, following Sartre (1946/2007), a sense of being responsible for all as he states, "I am responsible for myself and for everyone else" (pp. 24–25).

From a different perspective, "Humanism" has been understood by Riemen (in Myers, 2018) as an "inclusive worldview" based on accepting as a fact, "the dignity of every human being," as well as the dignity of the planet and of all living beings on the planet (p. 10). However, we do not accept Reimen's Eurocentric approach to humanism which views the histories and cultures of non-Western societies from a European or Western perspective. Instead, we follow Martínez Hernández (2023), who proposes to move beyond Modernity, which is understood as a "unified and Eurocentric understanding of the history of humanity towards a humanism" (p. 57) that "puts humans and their creative capacity in the center of reality" where "ethics and humanism are twinned" (pp. 321–322).

Meanwhile, we understand "Adaptive" as the wisdom to know when and how to implement personal, social, or business changes to function better in a constantly changing environment. In a stricter sense, "Adaptive," in this context, means the capacity to adjust, learn, and innovate in response to changing factors, conditions, or environments, with a focus on anticipating and preparing for future challenges and opportunities. We understand adaptation as being expressed as a novel reconfiguration of elements already present in the current environment to create a coherent space, where, through a shift in perspective, the connection with the source of wisdom is revealed.

Key to Adaptive Humanism is its emphasis on adaptability, that is, "the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances so as to survive with valued norms

and behaviors" (Bendell, 2020, p. 22). It recognizes that the world is in a constant state of change and, thus, solutions and ethical frameworks must evolve accordingly. This adaptability redresses rigid or dogmatic approaches to critical examination that may adhere to fixed ideologies (limiting narratives). In other words, Adaptive Humanism acknowledges the need for principles and actions to be applied differently in various cultural, environmental, and technological contexts, as opposed to "one-size-fits-all" approaches. This adaptable, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary approach also differentiates itself from other forms of critical examination that may be more rigid or fixed in their outlook. From that perspective, "adaptive" can be defined as the evolving ability of being attuned to the creative nature of nature.

To further express key elements of Adaptive Humanism, we draw on two additional sources. First, Heraclitus in his Fragment B119: ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων (*Ethos anthropoi daimon)* which Heidegger (1993) translates as "The familiar abode for man is the open region for the presencing of god (the unfamiliar one)" (p. 258). The second is Jung's famous expression: "the most important problems of life . . . can never be solved, but only outgrown" (Jung, 1967, p. 10). In the first case, openness to the unfamiliar has a transformative effect in the perception of self and world, thus allowing a person to connect with their deepest source of creativity. In the second case, there is a shift in consciousness from solving a problem to connect with a better version of oneself. Thus, two key elements of Adaptive Humanism are expressed: having an inclusive worldview and being attuned with the source of creativity.

The Existential Ground Where Narratives Emerge

To understand the shift and change in narratives—to see which narratives are becoming obsolete and, therefore, turning into limiting narratives—and to detect which new narratives are being told and who is telling them, requires analyzing all those elements in the existential context where those narratives take place.

Drawing on Heidegger's conceptualization of being (Heidegger, 1993), the authors suggest that the existential milieu from which narratives arise is characterized by three distinct modalities of existence within the "world" (in its existential connotation): (1) the condition of simply inhabiting the given ("always-already-there") world, (2) the process of altering this pre-established world to fit individual necessities, and (3) the act of conceptualizing a divergent world and actualizing that potentiality in the current milieu. Each of these ways of being in the world provides the ground for different narratives: limiting narratives, antenarrative (Boje, 2018, pp. 1–6), and quantum narrative (Boje & Sanchez, 2019, pp. 65–66).

For the first two decades or so of our lives, we all live in a world that is (has been) always already there. Then, we begin to modify that world to "dwell" there, meaning the transformed world becomes our "home" (oikos, in Greek), a "domicile," from "domus," a place to live. According to Heidegger, there is a third mode of living in the world: "Thinking," which, for the limited purposes of this

paper, we understand as "cognitive meditation" in the sense of openness and receptivity to new possibilities.

Becoming acritically attached to any narrative creates a limiting narrative, keeping that person "stuck" inside the (often) self-imposed limits of that narrative. From a psychological point of view, narratives that appear early in life (Piaget, 2000, pp. 84–91) and remain unchallenged later in life become limiting narratives. From this perspective, a limiting narrative is a pattern of thinking and acting that was downloaded, but not created, by the storyteller. "Limiting" can be connected with Fromm's (1976) analysis of a "nonproductive life" because in both cases there is a lack of agency to transform the world. "I do not experience myself as the acting subject of my activity," wrote Fromm (1976, p. 41), which thus limits the ability "to renew oneself, to grow, to flow out, to love, to transcend the prison of one's isolated ego" (Fromm, 1976, p. 40). Marita Svane (in Boje, 2018, pp. 153–182) explains that the limiting narrative is so because it lacks a proper "narrative," that is, there is no "beginning-middle-end" (as Aristotle in his *Poetics* required for all narratives), but just a "lived experience" with no plot.

Moving to "dwelling" (adapting the received world to our needs), this is the "world" built when people achieve a new level of cognition and awareness, of time, space, others, and themselves. It is here that people develop a non-limiting narrative. Boje (2018) describes it as an antenarrative or fore-caring, that is, a story that, while still connected to the past, is also simultaneously oriented towards the future, but lacks coherence and the "observer" remains unaware of the impact of their consciousness on the narrative. The antenarrative about the future, includes four steps: fore-having (preparations before the narrative fully develops), fore-structuring (preparations between prototypes and their iterations), fore-concepts (communications about advanced preparations), and fore-sight (connection with the possible future arriving) (Boje, 2018). The antenarrative, the narrative proper of "dwelling," reflects an "accommodation between people and their surroundings," including "cultivating and naturing," as noted by Valente and Silva (2019, p. 609).

While no longer being guided by a limiting narrative, the antenarrative can only take us to the threshold of the future, but not to the future itself. The reason is that the antenarrative still operates in the dimension of chronological time (past, present, future), but not in the dimension of *kairos*, that is, possibilities, appropriate moments, and opportunities. As Boje (2018) explains, "the quantum collapse is outside ordinary spacetime and is therefore transcendent" (p. 6). In other words, the antenarrative remains inside ordinary spacetime, while the quantum narrative is no longer restricted to ordinary spacetime. The future can be understood as an expansion of consciousness to become aware of opportunities and alternatives not yet explored, and of the multidimensionality of the futures (*kairos*). To quote Egan (2001), the future is an "unused option" (p. 306).

We propose that the quantum narrative is not chronological, but *kairological*. Being kairological, this narrative could allow us to overcome the

separation from ourselves, others, and nature and become aware of our oneness with ourselves, others, and nature. It could be said that there is a quantum leap from the present into the future, as if we "borrow" energy from the future to connect with the future, "tunneling" the "barriers" that otherwise would prevent such a "leap" (Hey & Walters, 2003, p. 73). When that happens, as Henderson suggests, a quantum narrative (perpetually self-correcting) is "assembled" (Boje, 2018, p. 66). But, once again, the results are not seen at the level of *chronos* (linear, mechanical time), but *kairos* (see Boje 2018, pp. 51–89, for full discussion). From this perspective, it could be said that in the same way that the limiting narrative is always enclosed inside the always-already-there world, the quantum narrative is always connected with the always-emerging-here future. The process of jumping from one narrative to the other is what we have previously presented as Adaptive Humanism.

Limiting Narratives

Narrative and Limiting Narrative in the Literature

In seeking a definition of "narrative" and then reviewing the literature about the "limiting" elements of the limiting narrative, two points surfaced that we will explore below. The first point is that all narratives in the context of Western Civilization can be considered limiting narratives, but not at the same level of limitation. The second is that limiting narratives can be detected by their results and consequences, and that such narratives remain mostly unseen and unrecognized by the tellers of those narratives.

Lowe (2000) points out that it is difficult to distinguish between "story," "text," and "narrative" (p. 17), and that "narrative" is "used in a number of competing senses" (p. 18). Having said that, Lowes (2000) defines "narrative" as a "voice outside and beyond" the characters of the story (p. 18). In other words, as we will see below, from a psychological point of view, the "voice" of the limiting narrative is "outside and beyond" the reach of the storyteller. Lowe (2000) continues, describing narrative as including four key elements: a reorganization of time (for example, the past is relived again and again), a "restricted point of view" (a key element in any limiting narrative), a series of "mental events" (rather than actual ones), and a sequential or linear understanding of the story told in the narrative, that is, the narrative offers a "definitive sequence" for the story (pp. 19–20). Lowe summarizes all those elements presenting the narrative as an "artificial universe inside our heads" (p. 29). That "artificial universe" (with the four elements mentioned above) provides the foundation for every Western narrative, beginning with the time of Homer and ending in the present day. What is more, Western narratives, Lowe proposes, impose "restrictions" or "game patterns," thus defining what should be accepted as possible or real (p. 55). From that point of view, it can be argued that all Western narratives are, therefore, limiting narratives.

But, in practical terms, what is a limiting narrative? For the purposes of this research, it is useful to understand that, according to Piaget (1977), when children in their "tenderest years" are exposed by their parents to an "atmosphere of laws" and, by the environment, to "external regularities," the children develop an awareness of "individual schemas" that they should follow and remember (p. 47). Eventually, children "begin to imitate the rules of others" and "refuse to alter those rules" (p. 47). Piaget asserts that by the age of ten, usually, but not always, children begin to explore their own schemas. In this context, a limiting narrative is a story (or schema) internalized at a certain age and still being followed by the individual at an age where that story is already obsolete (Piaget & Inhelder, 2000).

Erich Fromm provides another perspective about limiting narratives in his analysis of "nonproductive orientations" or negative character types such as exploitative, hoarding, and marketing types. They all share common elements: dependency on external factors and on others, deception and manipulation, and lack of authenticity. In contrast, the productive orientation is the "healthy, life-loving character orientation representing the ideal way of relating to the world and oneself" (Fromm, 1990, p. 59).

In this context, a limiting narrative is one, "in which human energy is canalized in the process of assimilation and socialization to less healthy ways of coping with conflicts" (Fromm, 1990, p. 10). From another perspective, while limiting narratives and irrational beliefs are not the same, irrational beliefs, as defined by Ellis (2001), illuminate some key elements of limiting narratives. Ellis defines irrational beliefs as "illogical, overgeneralizing, and awfulizing ideas" (p. 21). Those ideas create "illogical demands for certainty" (p. 373) in a "dogmatic and rigid" context (p. 101). Replacing "ideas" with "narratives" in the sentence above provides a solid definition of limiting narratives. Both irrational beliefs and limiting narratives can be described as pessimistic generalizations and as maladaptive reactions to obstacles or challenges. They are both incongruent with reality.

In the context of education, Freire (2000) describes "banking" education, where the "receptors" of information are passive participants in the process. In this case, the limits created by the limiting narrative are twofold: first, learning happens from a single perspective or interpretation, and second, the ability to think critically is not supported. In other words, "receptors" (students) are trapped inside one narrative without the opportunity or the ability to explore alternative viewpoints. In fact, as Freire writes, the banking model of education is "fundamentally narrative in character," (p. 71) which means that the student acquires the information "without perceiving ... or realizing the true significance" of that information (p. 71). Because of that, the oppressor dominates the narrative and the oppressed develops a distorted idea of their own humanity. Freire continues to state that the limiting narrative associated with the banking model of education "leads men and women to adjust to the world and inhibits their creative power" (p. 77).

Narratives, which control time (see Lowe, 2000), may lead to a reduced time horizon, influencing the breadth of future-oriented vision in decision-making or storytelling (Ebert & Piehl, 1973). Limiting narratives constrict event perception and causal comprehension. Lowe (2000) also recognizes narratives as innate cognitive frameworks established from infancy, suggesting a propensity for early-acquired narratives to impede the adoption of new ones.

We find there is confusion between "letting go," basically a journey of self-discovery leading to a higher level of consciousness, and "giving up" or "losing." From that perspective, a limiting narrative is any narrative that prevents a journey of self-discovery and, consequently, access to the full dimension of human life. We will revisit this topic later, from a different perspective.

Puig (2011) introduces another element: we can define a limiting narrative as a narrative which reduces (or nullifies) the ability to hold our attention on what is relevant, thus preventing a person from reinventing (adapting) themselves because that person becomes "blind to life opportunities" (Puig, 2011, p. 17).

In summary, limiting narratives, acquired at home or at school, in our infancy or as adults, are "artificial universes" inside our minds keeping us blind to our own potential. Those narratives present themselves in a wide variety of ways.

Examples from Interviews

Limiting narratives may or may not be based on actual, factual events, but on the interpretation given to an event at that time when it happened. Often this is during the early stages of the cognitive development of a child. However, in a real sense, it is irrelevant if the starting point of a limiting narrative was a real event or not. As Plato suggested in his famous Allegory of the Cave (*Republic*, 514a–520a), if the only thing we ever know is an illusion, then that illusion will be, for us, our whole reality.

To illustrate limiting narratives, we draw on our experience interviewing a total of 145 interviews from 2019–2023 in two different regions of Colorado, Metro Denver and the Western Slope, as consultants for two different organizations, Aurora Community Connection and AmeriCorps (see Appendix for additional information). We have selected examples from the interviews that illustrate limiting narratives.

One of the people we interviewed, a woman in her forties, expressed that when she was a teenager, she worked babysitting the children of a woman who had cancer. Seeing the suffering of those children, the interviewee decided to never marry or have children. She recalled the decision she made all those years ago, expressing that "the fears of repeating the past prevented me from having a future."

During another interview, a man in his fifties, shared that because he was "rejected by Harvard," he had to work in construction jobs. He later clarified that

he thought Harvard was a high school (not a university), and that he did not know where Harvard was located. He then said that, when he was a child, somebody in his family dissuaded him from going to school using the expression, "you will never go to Harvard, therefore, don't go to school." Four decades later, his life is still guided by the idea that he should not participate in any kind of formal education.

Another interviewee, a young woman, said she bought her first car rather "later in life," even when she had the means to buy a car many years earlier, because when she was a child, her father told her and her younger sister that women should not own cars. As an adult, she faced problems, such as being on time for work and missing social events, for not having a car. Yet, the "voice" of her father prevented her from buying one for many years.

One man shared that after attending a short presentation about personal development, he reacted by saying to the presenter: "I like everything you just said, but this is not what my grandmother taught me." It should be noted that the education he received from his grandmother happened decades ago when the interviewee was a child in Mexico. Now an adult living in the United States, this man was unable to adapt those old (and certainly good) teachings to his new cultural environment.

There are many other examples of limiting narratives we heard during our interviews, including a man in his fifties who said, "I am too old to change" or a woman in her thirties who told us, "I have to be always on good terms with everybody I know." These examples help to illustrate how limiting narratives restrict our idea of what is possible and prevent us from fully expressing ourselves or achieving our goals. The question then becomes: how do we move beyond limiting narratives? What is the alternative? Short answer: quantum narratives. Therefore, we turn to the radical existential reorientation from living "inside" a limiting narrative to existing in a quantum narrative oriented towards the future.

Quantum Narratives

Quantum Narratives in the Literature

While limiting narratives keep us "stuck" (frozen, trapped) in the always-already-there world, quantum narratives, described by Boje and Sanchez (2019) as quantum narratives, allow us to explore new alternatives and possibilities and, more importantly, to transform those possibilities into actions and realities. Quantum narratives, as their name indicates, are based on understanding reality as a quantum reality that is constantly changing, without a fixed outcome, as opposed to the classical physics and its mechanical understanding of reality. Boje (2018) points out that a quantum narrative is properly called so because it is a narrative where, "the observer has an effect on the experiment," that of "collapsing waves of possibilities," adding that "we also collapse different

ways of possibility" either by our actions or by our inactions, be it about personal, regional, and global issues (p. 1).

Ross (2018) explains that there are three key components in quantum physics: superposition, entanglement, and uncertainty. We can recontextualize those elements for quantum narratives.

Superposition: In quantum mechanics there is a "superposition of waves," which is "the wave formed by adding the disturbances of many (possibly infinite number of) waves with different wavelengths (frequencies)" (Ross, 2018, p. 94). Similarly, a quantum narrative could feature characters or events that exist in multiple states simultaneously, leading to complex and ambiguous storylines with no need to choose any single storyline or discard others. Contrary to what happens with limiting narratives, with superposition no prevalent narrative exists.

Entanglement: Quantum entanglement is "a state of two or more particles whose wavefunction cannot be expressed as the product of wavefunctions for the individual particles" (Ross. 2018, p. 90). Similarly, a quantum narrative incorporates the idea of "conscious entanglement," where the actions or decisions of one person or event affect others, even if they are physically separated. This is the opposite of the isolation or separation created by limiting narratives. A quantum narrative requires storytellers to transgress the separation between themselves, others, nature/the Universe and move toward a sense of meaningful connection with the dimensions of life mentioned above.

As Boje (2018) states, "Our destinies are intertwined and entangled," adding that "the alternative is for all of us to collapse fore-caring waves, rather than waves of ignorance, selfishness, and greed" (p. 2). Boje transfers to storytelling one of the key elements of quantum physics: the interconnection between all things. Given that the actualization of such connection depends on the consciousness of the observer, Boje invites us to focus our attention on "collapsing" the "fore-caring waves" (our connection with a future self or potential self), rather than remaining "stuck" inside a limiting narrative.

Uncertainty: The uncertainty principle states that "it is impossible to measure, simultaneously, the position and momentum of a particle to better than a certain accuracy" (Ross, 2018, p. 27). Similarly, a quantum narrative could explore themes of uncertainty and unpredictability, where the outcome of events or decisions cannot be determined with certainty, leading to unexpected plot twists or outcomes. This is contrary to the predetermined outcome proper of a limiting narrative.

It should be noted that Modernity (the last 500 years of Western and now global civilization) rejects ambiguity. *Denn was it elender als die Ungewissheit?* (What is more miserable than uncertainty?) asked Martin Luther in 1525 in his *De Servo Arbitrio / Vom unfreien Willen* (*On the Bondage of the Will*). Tillich (1955) discusses the negative impact of this statement by Luther in the modern world, indicating that "the power of certainty [is] never secure and never without

temptation" (1955, p. 78), and life is an "oscillation between ecstatic confidence and despairing doubt" (1955, p. 77).

Therefore, it can be said that, on a global scale, overcoming global limiting narratives (born out of classical, Newtonian physics) and enacting quantum narratives means to move beyond Modernity. That movement is needed because the element of uncertainty in quantum mechanics is directly connected with the future. While the future behavior of particles cannot be predicted with certainty, it can be thought.

This question has been researched by some theoretical physicists (for example, Hameroff & Penrose, 2014) who posit that consciousness might be intimately linked to the quantum world, even suggesting that the brain operates on quantum mechanical principles, potentially explaining the coherence of thought and the richness of conscious experience. At this moment, the Penrose-Hameroff model remains speculative and without definitive empirical support. Yet, its potential ramifications are tantalizing. Should consciousness be proven to have a quantum mechanical underpinning, it would revolutionize artificial intelligence, medicine, and even our understanding of time, potentially opening new ways of connection with the future.

If we accept that limiting narratives remain unknown to the storyteller of those narratives, thus "trapping" the storyteller inside that narrative, and if, at the same time, we accept that in quantum narratives the storyteller's consciousness plays a fundamental role in establishing the nature of reality, then consciousness is the key element to "jump" from a limiting narrative to a quantum narrative.

Boje (2018) has argued that human beings are not simply passive observers of the world but are actively engaged in projecting themselves towards future possibilities. "Quantum narratives" mean "preparing in advance to collapse waves of potential good into good events. By good, we mean the most positive ecosystem consequences" (Boje, 2018, p. 4). This projection is guided by our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world, as well as by our anticipations and expectations. Boje has argued that storytelling can be a powerful tool for projecting ourselves towards future possibilities and for shaping the course of human history (2018 pp. 5–8). By activating quantum narratives, we can cocreate new horizons of meaning and possibility that can guide our actions and shape our understanding of the world. As he described, quantum narratives allow the emergence of "intra-weaving modes of being-in-the-world toward future" (2018 p. 153). In other words, quantum narratives only emerge when we are open to the emergence of those narratives.

Storytelling is an anticipatory act. It projects a narrative into the future, and in so doing, opens new possibilities for action and understanding. By telling stories that reflect our deepest values and aspirations, we can create new horizons of meaning and possibility that can guide our actions and shape our understanding of the world. In this way, storytelling is intimately connected to

our anticipatory mode of being, and to our capacity to imagine and bring about a different future (Boje, 2018, p. 356).

Examples of Quantum Narratives in Real Life

While not as numerous as examples of limiting narratives, we would like to share two examples of shifting from limiting narratives to quantum narratives. These examples are taken from participants in a u-lab hub. As these two examples happened in the context of u-lab 1x 2022, they anticipate the topic of how Theory U could initiate the transformation of limiting narratives into quantum narratives.

To contextualize the examples, it is necessary to provide a brief description of the Theory U process (Scharmer 2016; 2018). The "U" represents a process and pathway that leaders and teams can move through to bring about profound systemic shifts. The journey includes several stages, including becoming aware of acting according to “downloaded” patterns, sensing (seeing the world with fresh eyes, gathering data, and empathizing with others), presencing (a pivotal point in the process: connecting with one’s deepest sources of intuition and inspiration, to one's authentic self, and to a higher, future potential), crystallizing (clarifying the vision and intention for the future to be co-created), prototyping (small-scale experiments or prototypes developed to explore and test new ideas and initiatives), and performing (the new ideas become part of the regular operations). (For details, see Scharmer, 2009, pp. 119–229.) By moving through the U-shaped journey, participants in the process become equipped to see and act from a deeper level of awareness, enabling more holistic, creative, and sustainable solutions to emerge. In short, Theory U is a versatile framework that can be adapted to various contexts and challenges, offering a cohesive methodology for profound personal and systemic change.

Both examples of quantum narratives are from participants in the Denver u-lab hub. Each completed all activities and were present in all sessions of the three-month u-lab transformational learning journey.

Example 1: Drawing upon the principles of quantum narrative as proposed by Boje, the transformative journey of the Latino business owner can be recast to illustrate the interconnected nature of his personal and professional evolution.

A Latino entrepreneur in his forties tapped into a u-lab1x hub in Denver, motivated to reshape his path after facing a difficult situation at home. He quickly put into practice the Theory U methods learned during the workshop, engaging in activities like coaching circles, shadowing, and stakeholder interviews. This initiative brought significant improvements to his and his family's lives, as he shared with Francisco. Despite these strides, as an immigrant and someone for whom English was a second language, he doubted his chances of climbing the management ladder in the commercial painting company where he worked.

Then, an opportunity arose when the owner of the company required him to manage a team of newly hired former inmates and parolees as a condition of employment. He agreed, with the understanding that he would teach them the techniques he had learned, aiming to guide them in transforming their lives. This strategy was effective and the former inmates and parolees, while becoming part of the painting crew, also learned the basics of Theory U and how to apply it to their own situation. In essence, the man managed to reshape his own life story and connect with a deep-seated desire to co-create a new future for himself and his team. This experience acted as a prototype of future endeavors, because this man went on to run his own small painting company, predominantly employing former inmates. He continued his relationship with his former employer, now as a subcontractor, exemplifying the quantum narrative principle of intertwined paths and mutual growth. This is also an example of Adaptive Humanism: this man accepted his responsibility for his own life and the present and future lives of those under his supervision, and, far from rejecting a new challenge, he adapted to his new situation by elevating himself to the level of the challenge.

Example 2: A young Latina immigrant engaged with an online u-lab 1x hub in 2021, reaching out to Herlinda with a determined goal to "change her life" and to secure a job that would offer financial stability and personal satisfaction. In the process of exploring Theory U within the u-lab 1x, she was introduced to the transformative concepts of "letting go" and "letting come."

Through this transformative learning, she realized that to create a new trajectory for her life, she needed to release limiting beliefs that had held her back. This included the fallacy of being too old to learn, the resignation to never seeking an office job, and overcoming the skepticism from peers who couldn't envision her stepping outside the service and hospitality industries that were familiar to her community. She decided to "let go" of these narratives, allowing her to enter a state of "becoming," where she actively pursued a position as an outreach program coordinator. She recalled that during the interview for the position she was raw and authentic, highlighting her lack of experience but underscoring her willingness to learn and grow—key components of quantum narratives where potentiality takes precedence over actuality. Her initiative and capacity to embrace new narratives paid off when she was hired and, within five months, had not only acquired the necessary computer skills but had also ascended to a leadership position as a team supervisor for 18 people. Her preexisting ambition to improve her life was certainly amplified by the principles of Theory U experienced in the u-lab 1x hub, which Boje's quantum narrative framework might suggest provided her with the storytelling tools to envision and enact a "positive story" for her future. This story was not a fixed narrative but an evolving journey toward broader ambitions like becoming a community leader—embodying the quantum narrative principle that our stories are dynamic, unfolding across both time and space, influenced by our interactions and entangled in the narratives of others. From the perspective of Adaptive Humanism, by being open to the unfamiliar, her awareness shifted and her perception and understanding of self and world was transformed.

Theory U and Quantum Storytelling

Both Theory U and quantum storytelling delve into understanding change, leadership, and organizational development, albeit from different angles, different academic traditions, and distinct areas of focus. Despite that, similarities and parallels emerge. For example, both approaches challenge linear, deterministic narratives. Theory U emphasizes the need to tap into emerging future possibilities, while quantum narratives underscores the unpredictable, emergent nature of stories that evolve in a nonlinear fashion (Boje & Henderson, 2014, pp. 2–3). Moreover, from another perspective, the presencing moment of the "U" in the graphic representation is represented as a gap. We view that "gap" as requiring a quantum leap. Thus, we see a new connection between Theory U and quantum narratives. We propose that finding the deeper story in conversation is a key element in the journey of personal and societal transformation, and perhaps provides the energy needed to "jump" into the future.

Moreover, Theory U underscores the importance of deep listening—to oneself, to others, and to what emerges from collective attention. Similarly, quantum narrative emphasizes being present and attentive to stories as they unfold, without clinging to pre-established narratives. In short, quantum narratives and Theory U challenge established ways of understanding and narrating organizational realities. The former pushes back against oversimplified, linear corporate narratives, while the latter encourages leaders to let go of old paradigms and operate from a deeper source of knowing. Time (both chronological and kairological) is a crucial element in both frameworks. Quantum storytelling, drawing from quantum physics, plays with the idea of entanglement and the non-linear nature of time. Theory U also works with time in a unique way, particularly in the journey from downloading past patterns to presencing, which Scharmer (2009) describes as "connecting with the Source of the highest future possibility to bring it to the now," (p. 163) and crystalizing, "clarifying vision an intention from our highest future possibility" (p. 192). Both theories are fundamentally about transformation—whether transforming narratives in organizations (quantum narratives) or transforming leadership consciousness and systemic structures (Theory U).

The interplay highlighted above demonstrates that an integrative approach between Theory U and quantum narratives could help people and organizations create open spaces for quantum narratives to emerge implementing the ideas and the methodologies of Theory U. In other words, integrating the principles and practices of Theory U with the field of quantum narratives can lead to innovative and transformative approaches to organizational change and leadership, facilitating the "letting go" of limiting narratives and the "letting come" of quantum narratives.

We believe the integration and interplay between Theory U and quantum narratives presented in this paper align with both Scharmer's and Boje's approaches. Consider the following, drawn from each author. Scharmer writes:

> The social field is not a thing, it's a social reality that emerges through the quality of our relationships, conversations, and actions. The social field of positivity is a space of possibility that emerges when we let go of our habitual ways of operating and open ourselves up to new perspectives and possibilities. It's a space of co-creation, innovation, and collective action, where we can work together to create a more just, sustainable, and equitable world. (2009, p. 233)

We are struck by the similarity to Boje's declaration:

> Storytelling is an anticipatory act. It projects a narrative into the future, and in so doing, opens new possibilities for action and understanding. By telling stories that reflect our deepest values and aspirations, we can create new horizons of meaning and possibility that can guide our actions and shape our understanding of the world. In this way, storytelling is intimately connected to our anticipatory mode of being, and to our capacity to imagine and bring about a different future. (2021, p. 6)

The interplay between these two quotes indicates that quantum narratives is the creative expression of meaning of the space of possibilities opened by the social field of positivity.

In addition, Boje's emphasis on storytelling (quantum narrative) as a tool for leadership could be connected to Scharmer's idea of leading from the future. Storytelling is a powerful means of creating a shared vision of the future, and of inspiring individuals and organizations to align and act in pursuit of that vision. By telling stories that reflect our deepest values and aspirations, we can create new horizons of meaning and possibility that can guide our actions and shape our understanding of the world. In fact, Scharmer said that "to create a future that is different from the past, we need to be able to tell a story that helps us move from one place to another. We need a narrative that inspires us, that gives us direction, and that brings us together in a shared journey of discovery and transformation" (2009, p. 172).

Finally, because Adaptive Humanism, quantum narratives, and Theory U share common themes related to adaptive capacity, change management, narrative, meaning making, and the spiritual and psychological aspects of human adaptation, Adaptive Humanism provides a framework for developing opportunities for integrating these concepts to support individuals and organizations in navigating change and uncertainty. In other words, Adaptive Humanism serves as a dynamic framework between limiting narratives, quantum narratives, and Theory U, providing a philosophical and practical framework that emphasizes adaptability, integration of multiple narratives, deep listening, and an ethical, human-centric approach to change and development.

Closing Reflections

The interaction of Adaptive Humanism, Theory U, and quantum narratives opens a vast field for academic exploration, presenting a complex interaction that demands thorough investigation. This exploration, integrating Theory U with quantum narrative principles, points towards a transformative path for collective development. While initial findings support this proposition, it calls for more rigorous research to confirm and practically apply this integration. Current efforts focus on developing methods to counter limiting narratives in individuals and organizations, encouraging the adoption of quantum narrative dynamics. However, this task extends beyond our current scope, leaving several critical questions open. These include the effectiveness of engaging individuals disconnected from their potential futures, strategies for national-level narrative change (Zunzunegui, 2023, in Mexico; and Liotti, 2023, in Argentina), and recognizing alternatives to dominant techno-deterministic narratives.

Further, the academic world must evaluate whether religious and scientific perspectives are constraining narratives that we need to transcend. Debates about moving beyond Modernity's narratives or even those of Western Civilization, and the emergence of unique digital narratives, remain underexplored. Addressing these issues requires more precise questioning and a commitment to Adaptive Humanism, which entails consciously shaping emerging futures into reality, aiming to co-create a quantum future free from the constraints of past narratives. Adaptive Humanism calls for a continuous, aware adaptation to an ever-changing future, while preserving a unified human identity, free from fragmentation or self-deception.

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Appendix

Interviews by Francisco Miraval

From June 24, 2019, to April 7, 2021, Francisco Miraval, serving as a consultant for Aurora Community Connection (ACC) in Aurora, Colorado, and under the supervision of Dr. Robin Waterman, conducted 85 interviews with a diverse group of ACC's program participants, parents, staff, board members, and community stakeholders. These interviews were aimed at fulfilling grant requirements and conducting community research on poverty and post-pandemic recovery. Utilizing the conversational interviewing technique developed by Dr. Waterman, based on Dr. Susan Silbey's anthropological methodologies at MIT, this approach allowed for indirect discussions on relevant topics, ensuring authenticity and adherence to principles of dialogical and dialectical exchanges. The interviews, conducted in-person and via Zoom due to the pandemic, prioritized privacy and were carried out in English or Spanish, depending on the interviewee's preference, with a clear explanation of the voluntary nature of participation and data privacy.

The demographic breakdown of the interviewees from the 80010 Zip Code of Aurora, Colorado, included 50 women, 11 men, and 24 teenagers, predominantly Hispanic/Latino (77 individuals), with smaller numbers of White (5) and African American (3) participants. The interviews varied in duration based on the demographic group and were conducted in languages preferred by the participants, mainly Spanish and bilingual (Spanish and English), with fewer English-only speakers. Detailed notes were taken during these interviews instead of recordings, and summaries were provided to Dr. Waterman for analysis. Francisco Miraval also performed pattern analysis on the aggregated data to identify instances of limiting narratives.

The 80010 Zip Code in Aurora, Colorado, home to approximately 45,000 residents, presents a unique demographic profile. The median age of 32 is younger than the Colorado average, with a higher percentage of male and single individuals. Hispanics constitute the largest racial/ethnic group, followed by Whites and African Americans. The area is characterized by lower median household income and higher poverty rates compared to Aurora and Colorado overall. Educational attainment is below state levels, with a significant portion of

the population having completed high school but a smaller percentage attending and completing college. Notably, this area is predominantly Spanish speaking, a unique characteristic among Colorado's large cities.

Herlinda Quintana

From September 2019 to August 2023, Herlinda Quintana, working as a consultant for AmeriCorps in Rifle, Colorado, conducted 60 interviews with Latina women involved in community programs. The initial goal was to understand the educational needs of Latinas in the Western Slope region, which, during the pandemic, shifted to focus on their health needs. These interviews, aimed at identifying and addressing limiting narratives, employed a semi-structured approach, starting with a form to gather personal information and needs assessment. The interviews, held at local non-profits, participants' homes, and via Zoom during the pandemic, lasted 30-60 minutes each, adapting to individual circumstances and needs. Participants were selected by AmeriCorps or partner non-profit staff, and the interviews were conducted in Spanish with a clear explanation of the voluntary nature of participation and data privacy.

The interviews, which were not recorded but detailed through extensive notes, delved into various topics including education, healthcare needs, barriers to resource access, and personal stories like childhood and immigration experiences. Herlinda Quintana provided summaries of each interview to a designated AmeriCorps representative, and the data was carefully validated by AmeriCorps staff. In the analysis, Quintana identified patterns of negative storytelling, termed as limiting narratives in this study, which were then re-examined for further insights.

The demographic profile of the interviewees in these sessions was consistent: all were Latina women, predominantly foreign-born, and Spanish-speaking. The 81650 ZIP code in Rifle, Colorado, where the interviews were conducted, has a median age of 32 and is characterized by economic challenges for the Hispanic community, including lower median household income and higher rates of housing instability compared to regional averages. The study's methodology ensured rigorous data protection, with physical notes securely stored and digital versions tightly controlled, to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the Latina community's educational and health needs while ensuring ethical research practices.

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Discussant Commentary

Transformative Practices from the Pluriverse

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Abstract

This Discussant Commentary seeks to delve into the fundamental principles underlying the study conducted by Miraval and Quintana (2023). Their article explores the concept of adaptive humanism as a means to transition from limiting to quantum narratives, recognizing the profound impact of these concepts on our perception of reality. As Latinos, we highly value research that empowers diverse voices, acknowledging the significance of individuals and groups embracing and expressing their unique narratives. This emphasis on understanding one's "modes of being in the world" deviates from the idea of a singular universal worldview, a perspective that Miraval and Quintana (2023) aptly characterize as endorsing "one-size-fits-all" approaches. It is crucial to underscore the necessity of comprehending the intricacies of the modern

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paradigm, challenging conventional notions of centrality to transcend singular perspectives that perpetuate the prevalence of limiting narratives. Furthermore, this paper places additional emphasis on the pivotal role of methodological approaches in empowering individuals to grasp the intricate processes of transformation within their spaces from a decolonial perspective. This involves fostering dynamics of co-creation and proactive participation within communities to create mechanisms for understanding alternative ways of being and relating to the world. Such an approach requires a direct understanding of narratives from their sources, facilitating the construction of individual, distinctive paths.

Keywords
decolonial, co-creation, knowledge production, transformational practices, participatory action research

Introduction

The aim of this commentary is to offer an alternative perspective on the research conducted by Miraval and Quintana (2023). The exploration delves into the process of adaptive humanism through the lenses of limiting and quantum narratives within a group of Latinos engaged in storytelling dynamics. Miraval and Quintana's (2023) research argues that societies have been bound by limiting narratives often rooted in tradition, dogma, and conventional wisdom. While these narratives provide a semblance of stability, they can also act as formidable constraints, restricting the scope of human potential and inhibiting progress (Boje, 2014).

To transcend these limiting narratives and embrace a fundamental shift in how we perceive ourselves, our societies, and the universe at large, the research urges us to question assumptions, challenge preconceived notions, and recognize the inherent interconnectedness of all aspects of existence. Grounded in Theory U (Scharmer, 2009), this transformative "jump" (Miraval and Quintana, 2023) is based on a mental state that requires focus and discipline to create a path of healthy body and mindsets capable of envisioning the desired future and the corresponding course of actions to achieve it.

Theory U can be recognized for its positive impact on mental and future-oriented aspects; however, there is a tendency to generalize experiences, sometimes overlooking cultural background. This perspective places a heavy individual responsibility often neglecting the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which these practices originated and may not account for the oppressive systems that have shaped individuals' experiences; emphasizing the importance of cultural respect, historical awareness and acknowledgment of diverse ways of knowing and healing (hooks, 2014; Mignolo, 2007; Smith, 1999; Escobar, 1995).

In this paper, we build on the ideas and effort invested by Miraval and Quintana (2023), while simultaneously juxtaposing their work with a decolonial

perspective focused on the articulation of a knowledge ecosystem. In this analysis, we aim to move beyond a mere appreciation of their contributions, delving into the integration of diverse forms of knowledge that reflect the richness of perspectives within this field of study.

Two Faces of Limiting Narratives "Keep Us Stuck"

Miraval and Quintana (2023) refer to limiting narratives as everyday dynamics that condition a restrictive future for underprivileged communities and individuals, preventing them from fully expressing themselves or achieving their goals. These narratives disproportionately affect people outside the central networks and institutions of knowledge. Miraval and Quintana elaborate on how an era defined by the values of modernity is confined to established rigid formulas that reject ambiguity and uncertainty. Consequently, communities or individuals developed in peripheral knowledge contexts, diverging from those seeking the replicability of central knowledge and generally valued by central spaces, are affected by these limiting narratives.

The authors delve into the possibility for communities or individuals to overcome the limiting narratives that disadvantage them through Adaptive Humanism—a process involving the transition from limiting to quantum narratives. This process relies on conscious (self-aware) and continuous adaptation to new situations that are more suitable for the current times and contemporary needs of societies. In order to achieve this shift in thought, Adaptive Humanism recognizes the necessity for principles and actions to be applied differently in various cultural, environmental, and technological contexts. This stands in contrast to *one-size-fits-all* approaches.

The authors of this Discussant Commentary acknowledge the importance of underserved communities finding a way to overcome situations that limit their possibilities for personal and collective advancement. This is crucial for them to fully engage in a globalized society, achieve better social positioning, and access comprehensive goods and services. Such aspirations are entirely legitimate within the socio-cultural and political-economic context in which we live.

Nevertheless, from a critical perspective, this stance appears to accord preferential treatment to the knowledge and ways of life inherent to central societies, potentially marginalizing the knowledge and livelihoods originating from peripheral societies. In our view, this position tends to overlook diverse and critical perspectives that challenge the development model advocated and propelled by the societies and governments of the Global North. The imposition of these models on societies in the Global South by their governments, in pursuit of modernity and development, often seeks approval from the North.

In the upcoming section, we will explore how an epistemological imposition has occurred in countries and societies of the Global South. This includes migrant communities originally from the Global South, who now find themselves

residing in and adapting to realities that are unfamiliar to them in countries of the Global North.

Limiting Narratives or Different Ways of Producing and Reproducing Knowledge

We argue that the uncritical pursuit of societies valuing the same knowledge, techniques, and ways of living can create a homogeneous society where differences and diversity may be viewed as a symbol of backwardness and consequently stigmatized as negative. In recent years, with the rise of conservative or far-right governments, we have witnessed the oppression of racialized minorities. An exception may be those individuals from minorities who choose to mimic the ways of the communities that oppress them. This homogenizing behavior has its origins after World War II when a series of policies were initiated by the Global North on the countries of the Global South to "develop" them (Escobar, 1995). It continues today through initiatives promoted by international institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank.

Aligned with the way capital and knowledge are produced and reproduced by central institutions, governments have relied on technocratic approaches throughout the 20th century to establish a very specific production and reproduction of knowledge and productive activities. This approach assumes that the only valid practices for accessing knowledge and growth are those conducted by experts formed and shaped by central institutions. This top-down access to knowledge and growth practices has been particularly harmful in contexts of underrepresented populations as these approaches have failed to capture and enhance underserved communities' agency, skills, and resources. These communities have developed important social abilities as they rely on community organization and deliberation to address threats and challenges (Staines-Díaz, 2022).

Additionally, it is crucial to acknowledge perspectives that recognize cultural, social, and economic underprivileged backgrounds, along with their capacity to overcome their limiting social structures independently. As elucidated by Miraval and Quintana (2023) through the concept of *limiting narratives*, Paulo Freire's (1968/2018) approach becomes particularly significant when engaging with a group of *campesinos* and *obreros* in rural Brazil. Initially perceiving themselves as inferior and ignorant, Freire responded by guiding a transformative educational process. This process involved using the local language, rather than an academic one, given its irrelevance to the local cultural context of the community. This pedagogy aimed to lead their liberation through participants' self-realization, not as an imposed idea from outside. Freire emphasized conscientization as the pivotal process for individuals to recognize and analyze the structures contributing to their oppression. By raising awareness, individuals can take transformative action. This is where praxis

comes into play, transforming theory into practical application, involving individuals with their realities as they take action to effect change. The concepts of conscientization and praxis are key to the emancipation of the oppressed, emphasizing that this liberation is a task that can only be undertaken by the oppressed themselves. In Freire's words, "The pedagogy of the oppressed . . . must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed . . . This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for liberation" (Freire, 1968/2018, p. 48).

Regarding the relationship between the desire for production driven by global inertia and its connection with local culture and modes of production, Borda (2001, p. 27) notes that capitalism and modernization possess the ability to dilute the cultural and biophysical aspects of diverse social structures. In response, he argues researchers need a radical critique and reorientation of social theory and practice. In contrast to the previously fixed conception of knowledge that prevailed in the social sciences, researchers must now appreciate science as a socially constructed process subject to interpretation, revision, and enrichment. Borda referred to this convergence between popular knowledge and academic science as Participatory Action Research.

The Decolonial Perspective of Quantum Realities: Praxis and De-Linking From the Matrix of Power

Miraval and Quintana (2023) assert that Adaptive Humanism provides a platform for delving into alternatives and possibilities, facilitating the transformation of these potentials into tangible actions and realities. Based on the realization of three pivotal elements intrinsic to quantum narratives: superposition, characterized by events existing in multiple states simultaneously; entanglement, signifying the interconnectedness akin the concept of oneness; and uncertainty, encapsulating the unpredictable nature inherent in quantum mechanics (Boje, 2014). The concepts of time and space have been explored through an appreciation of time as nonlinear, reflecting our actual experience where the past exists as memory, the future as a plan, and both unfolding within the immediacy of the present moment (Wilber, 1979).

This idea is grounded through the principles and methodology of Theory U (Scharmer, 2009), a meta-process designed to guide individuals to a transformative path, changing from the inner place where we operate, individually and collectively; this creates a shift from habitual patterns to a more open and intuitive mindset, that allows a connection to visualize the emerging future; co-creating a future that it is not determined by the past (Scharmer**,** 2009).

While Theory U is an extremely powerful and important methodological approach to help overcome the limiting narratives imposed by cultural and personal constraints aiming to fully engage in the professional and formative

spaces of central societies, we argue that it is equally important to understand how the past and our social contexts can contribute with significant guidance for the future from people's resources and within the context of communities own values. This section introduces a critical perspective on the access and validity of knowledge. In other words, we believe that the epistemology of the Global North is in contrast to that of communities from the Global South, creating an epistemic clash (Roy, 2006). Although this clash may not be fully overcome, there are possibilities for dialogue so that both epistemologies, that of the South and that of the North, can find fertile ground in contested spaces (Wallace & Staines-Diaz, 2022).

As presented in Quantum Narratives (Boje, 2014) and Theory U (Scharmer, 2009), this tendency leans towards a forward-looking perspective, emphasizing a deliberate distancing or endorsement of letting go of past experiences or limitations. This approach holds promise when the matrix of power, as articulated by Mignolo and Walsh (2019), operates in one's favor. However, challenges arise when confronted with the apparatus of coloniality, manifested through structural inequalities, historical injustices, ongoing power dynamics, and the complexities associated with intersectionality (Maldonado-Torres, 2017; hooks, 2014). In other words, quantum narratives could be employed as a tool to advance the vision and perspective of the powerful.

While we acknowledge the critical importance of "the present moment," true empowerment arises from a heightened awareness of praxis—the conscious integration of action and its consequential impact is where the quantum essence resides. Here is where an epistemic de-linking from coloniality (Mignolo, 2007) introduces a different perspective. It is not a call to forget the past, instead, it calls for a consciousness and intentional action in response to it, this is what gives power to those who attempt to change their narratives. Such epistemic de-linking creates a recognition and respect for the coexistence of various ontologies, epistemologies, and cultural expressions. This is recognized by Arturo Escobar (2018) with the Pluriverse idea, encouraging dialogue and mutual respect among different ways of interpreting and generating knowledge. This approach emphasizes inclusivity, recognizing that there are multiple valid ways of understanding and interacting with the world. Embracing the idea of a Pluriverse encourages a richer and more respectful engagement with the diversity of human experiences and perspectives, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious and equitable world.

The marginalization of specific communities has fostered an inherent resilience, firmly rooted in the cultivation of robust and distinctive communities that defy replication. Ginwright (2022) explores how community support, cultural identity, and transformative practices contribute to the ability to overcome challenges. He proposes the concept of radical healing emphasizing the importance of addressing the deep-rooted injustice in marginalized communities; supported by community-based strategies that empower local residents and organizations to create positive change and collaborative efforts that center the

voices and experiences of those directly affected. Transitioning from a problem-solving mindset to a future-oriented and re-imaginative approach marks a crucial shift in Ginwright's perspective on the subject.

Eduardo Gudynas (2011, p. 441), on the other hand, has been a prominent advocate for integrating a post-development perspective, *Buen Vivir* is a "way of being in the world" of the Andinos communities. An alternative to the development paradigm, that reflects a holistic approach to well-being that goes beyond an economic perspective, and emphasizes aspects like harmony with nature, comunal dynamics, and cultural identity. The alignment with *Buen Vivir* principles, supports the recognition of rights of nature, asserting that nature has intrinsic value beyond its utility for human needs and reproduction of capital.

There are transformative practices that can ignite change. For instance, Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer (2001, p. 238) describe the approach to building knowledge for transformational change as vital collaboration and joint knowledge-building. In this approach, competition must be replaced by cooperation. Building knowledge emphasizes fostering relationships and collaboration among diverse organizations, consultants, and researchers. This goes beyond leaving the past behind; instead, it involves drawing on the past critically to construct new possibilities.

Transformational practices focus on addressing society's structural problems by constructing images and visions of a preferred outcome and determining how to implement them. This theory transcends the usual boundaries of 'reasonableness,' rejecting the current way of doing things. It seeks discontinuity by changing concepts, structures, and ideas that result from continuity. Additionally, it considers a conception of 'futures' that goes beyond mere feasibility, emerging from judgments and choices primarily influenced by the ideas of *desirability*, *betterment*, and good social practices (Albrechts, et al., 2020). Transformational theory is connected to the idea of how knowledge should be considered in addressing social problems.

The idea of transformation based on reality is explored by Blanco (1994), who describes pragmatism as a strong voluntary element with an emphasis on action, and on the person's ability to bring out change. "For the pragmatists, freedom of the will is an unproblematic feature of our experience; hence, the world is plastic enough for the human purpose and action to have an effect" (Blanco, 1994, p. 62). Pragmatism is entangled from experience, as it is the source of knowledge; hence, epistemology takes as a starting point the subjective experience as the process of acquiring knowledge. "The concept of science is transformed by the pragmatist from the traditional concept of 'systematized knowledge' to a process of inquiry" (p. 63). This process is fallibilistic, as opposed to dogmatic. In other words, "it refers to an attitude of humility and openness toward beliefs stemming from the provisional, inexact, and error-prone nature of knowledge" (p. 57). This recognition of ignorance becomes a stimulus to learning from a particular subject, as every situation is new, unique, and special.

In the *Reflective Practitioner*, Donald Schön (1991) develops a model of professional practice that is influenced by pragmatism. The main difference between the rational and the pragmatic practitioner is best described by the influential and broadly cited work of Argyris and Schön (1997), who wrote the definitions of Model I and Model II, which are antagonists. The former model is characterized by control and evasion, in which the participants act defensively, discussions are private, attitudes and strategies used by participants are those of mystery and mastery, seeking to have control over the situation. Practitioners presume that they are dealing with win/lose situations, an unemotional stance as a condition of effectiveness, and testing assumptions openly, which are considered too risky (Fischler, 2012, p. 321; Blanco, 1994, p. 65; see also Wilson, 2019, p. 6). Whereas in Model II, the dialogue is primordial. To maximize validity, information should be transparent, including values, interests, and objectives. By doing so, the possibility of making good, free, and informed decisions are going to be maximized (Fischler, 2012, p. 321).

Ultimately, these transformative models aim to generate new knowledge while acknowledging diverse and even contested perspectives. It's not about forgetting the past but building upon it, recognizing the oppression generated by certain groups with the power to impose a common and overarching knowledge, labeled as scientific and technical. This knowledge is often distant from that originating in underrepresented communities and created from spheres less recognized by central spaces.

Discussion

Based on our experience working with vulnerable communities, we believe it is important for future research to explore the values and soft skills that already exist in underserved communities. While it is undoubtedly important for everyone to have access to the opportunities they desire, seeking to impose the same bodies of knowledge on everyone can lead to a homogenization of society that disregards non-traditional but legitimate and valuable knowledge. This is crucial because such knowledge represents a significant portion of the population, and non-traditional knowledge is at risk of being lost simply because it exists in spaces of difference (Lefebvre, 1974).

We argue that one way to ensure that no type of knowledge is given more value is to embrace differences and integrate them into the processes of knowledge production and reproduction. We propose that the bridge between knowledge generated by peripheral and central channels can be achieved through action research methodologies, given their transformational component. This reflection aims to explore creative paths to enhance the relationship between contrasting knowledge bearers, aiming to maximize well-being, understanding, and mutual collaboration beyond traditional vertical power dynamics.

A participatory action research process has the potential to foster and enable a new relationship to emerge between knowledge created in and by underserved

communities and the knowledge shaped by central institutions, thereby articulating diverse knowledge(s) in place. Action research is often utilized in community-based knowledge generation and change efforts. On the other hand, it is also employed as a tool for organizational change efforts within local government. However, there is less clarity on how to effectively bridge the two. Exploring these nuances would be valuable for future researchers.

Conclusion

We acknowledge and express our gratitude for the scholarly contributions made by Miraval and Quintana (2023) in their recent publication. Drawing upon our academic and personal experiences, we have encountered the formidable challenges associated with navigating contexts characterized by diversity. Particularly within Latino communities in the United States, the intricacies of assimilation manifest bidirectionally—emanating from employers towards migrant populations and reciprocally from migrant communities towards employers. These challenges often stem from language barriers or a lack of conventional academic training.

In recognizing the significance of Miraval and Quintana's (2023) work, we view their research as a pivotal bridge essential for the advancement of underserved communities within the socio-cultural and socio-economic-political landscape in which their investigation is situated. It is noteworthy to highlight the commendable nature of Miraval and Quintana's efforts, considering the arduous community work, largely undertaken through voluntary initiatives, aimed at serving their community. This endeavor represents a concerted effort to improve the material conditions of underserved communities.

On the other hand, our commentary aims to respond by challenging the necessity for underserved migrant communities to conform to narratives of power. While we acknowledge that our approach may not be immediately achievable or realistic within the context of Miraval and Quintana's (2023) current research, from a critical perspective, it is imperative to establish new ways of valuing divergent epistemological approaches in contexts of difference.

Building upon the substantial changes to foster harmonious coexistence on our planet, we emphasize the importance of minorities dedicating time and effort to gain a profound awareness of the systemic power structures that have historically constrained and continue to impact their lives. Only through this understanding can meaningful praxis emerge.

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Innovations in Praxis Article

The Extended Citizens' Assembly Model for Collaborative Governance:

Co-creating a Shared Vision from the Basque Gipuzkoa Province

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Abstract

Based on data from two Citizens' Assemblies and a year-long participatory action-research process, this article describes on-going attempts to shift the political culture towards collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa (Basque Country), Spain. Quantitative and qualitative evaluation data from a Citizens' Assembly in 2022 suggest that such representative-deliberative processes might be transformative under some circumstances, increasing action confidence, building capacity and co-creating a shared vision of the future. Could it be that the increase in confidence is a side-result of the co-creation of a shared vision? The growing literature on the impact of standard Citizens' Assembly models is used to explore and refine this hypothesis. Research has uncovered some barriers to such an impact, such as outcome-contingency and difficulties to scale because limited resources. To tackle those problems, and help institutionalize existing Citizens' Assemblies, a prototype for an Extended Citizens' Assembly is

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presented. This model contributes to collaborative governance by facilitating online-onsite deliberation in a frugal way and further extending those transformative and visionary capacities that Citizens' Assemblies and other experiments in democratic inquiry help to cultivate in cities and regions.

Keywords
citizens' assembly, capacity building, shared vision, frugal innovation, collaborative governance

Origins

I am writing from Arantzazu, a Franciscan sanctuary located in the highlands of the Basque region of Gipuzkoa, Spain. In the 1960s and 1970s Arantzazu was the center of a highly innovative period in Basque culture; at that time its Seminary was thought of as the "university of the poor" (Casado, 2023). Today, by the 500-plus-year-old basilica lies a new space for research, experimentation and socialization aimed at transformation. Founded in 2020, Arantzazulab is a laboratory of social innovation set in the mountains on top of the Deba valley, where the Mondragon co-operative movement—now the world's largest co-operative corporation—emerged in the 1950s (Romeo, 2022).

Being a second-generation immigrant in the Basque Country, I have always been attracted to higher education as a leverage point for community and personal development. My role in Arantzazulab has been to coordinate its collaborative research space with the University of the Basque Country, where I hold a senior research position in ethics and political philosophy. I see ethics as "deliberative wisdom" (Senghor & Racine, 2022), a structured process by which human values and meanings of life are understood and tackled. Deliberation is the capability to discuss openly and reflect on questions or problems, on the answers or solutions to these problems, and to explore proposals for meaningful resolution. This is done by a practical inquiry in which we rehearse actionable futures by making, as Dewey put it, "an experiment in finding out what the various lines of possible actions are really like" (1922, p. 190).

From 2012 to 2021 I served as mobility and outreach officer in the Gipuzkoa campus, and connecting the university with the outside world became my main line of work. As a researcher my focus has been on the narrative, technological and situated dimensions of collective deliberation, which has led me to study Ethics Committees, Citizen Assemblies, their associated digital platforms, and the pathways to make them more accessible and inclusive.

Perhaps because of my second-generation Basque identity, my passion is community integration and empowerment: to know and sustain what makes people connect and engage in collective action. In the face of present and future disruption, we need more resilient and inclusive communities, and I hope that universities will be a positive driving force in the transition of villages, towns, and cities into sustainability.

My aspiration for Gipuzkoa is a permanent, diverse, and dynamic deliberative space in which citizens, universities and other institutions get together to achieve the United Nations' Global Goals. I see my place in the "slow lane" (Haselmayer, 2023) of being, thinking, relating, collaborating and acting to drive change—that is, pursuing the Inner Development Goals.

Foundations

In my book *Casa de Cambios* [House of Change] (Casado, 2022), I provided an historical argument for what I call political transcendentalism, understood as a cultivation of capabilities to "transcend the persistent, cultural narrative of separation" between cities and nature, materiality and spirituality, personal change and social change—as Jayne Engle and her co-editors put it in *Sacred Civics* (2022, pp. 3–5).

In April 2023 I met in Arantzazulab with Jayne and twenty other "community connectors,"[1] who arrived from several places in Europe and Canada to shape a global network and design experiments to conduct in collaboration across regions. In this global gathering some participants became increasingly aware of our own role as designers, and the debates surrounding this role (Udoewa, 2022). "The activities and outcomes of designing", according to Carl DiSalvo (2022, p. 71), "help us collectively conceive and instantiate diverse civic imaginaries and practices," and to engage in "rehearsing futures." This image of "rehearsals" resonated with the whole group, and we began to imagine the gathering as a place to rehearse changes we want to see in the world and in ourselves. "Such rehearsals," DiSalvo argues, "are part and parcel of an experimental method of democratic inquiry, through which we participate in and contribute to the ongoing exploration and reinvention of democratic experiences and conditions" (2022, p. 71)[2]

Arantzazulab is set up as a non-profit, non-partisan foundation and it is supported by key agents in the Basque Country: public institutions from three levels of government (regional—Basque Government; provincial—Gipuzkoa provincial council; and local—Oñati town hall) as well as other key stakeholders from the private sector, such as Mondragon Corporation and Kutxa local bank foundation. This provides support and legitimacy to the lab, whose purpose is the development and promotion of collaborative governance and democracy innovation through reflection, research and experimentation on new models of relationship between public institutions and civil society. In short, to build a

[1] I owe the term to Michelle Baldwin, from Community Foundations of Canada, who also took part in the gathering.

[2] I thank Ione Ardaiz (Arantzazulab) and Stéphane Vincent (La 27e Région) for conversations about Udoewa's article, and Dewey's influence, respectively.

learning ecosystem and a community of innovative practices in collaborative governance.

But what is collaborative governance? There are many definitions. Arantzazulab is inspired and supported by the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* ("building up the future", in Basque) initiative, which has been developed by the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council since 2016 (Barandiaran, et al., 2023). In this framework, collaborative governance is seen as:

> … institutionalized cooperation between public institutions, social agents and citizens in order to empower and influence the ecosystem of public policies; this must be done by strengthening the social capital between institutions, social agents and citizens, by means of deliberation and shared action. (Arantzazulab, 2023, p. 9, translated from Basque)[3]

Here "social capital" means a network of relationships, but also the rich yet quickly declining tradition of communal practices in the Basque Country, and whose traces can be found in the co-operative movement and the *auzolan*—a Basque tradition of community work, still alive and with legal standing in some villages. According to some authors (Azparren, 2013), the *batzarra* (the assembly of people whose knowledge and experience illuminate and accompany a community) is the oldest trace of democratic organization in Europe.

However, Western democracies are in trouble, and the Basque Country is no exception. Numerous polls show that people are losing confidence in the system, as liberal democracies face two major, intertwined problems: the decline of their problem-solving capacities in an increasingly complex world, and the gap between political elites and the people. According to Taylor et al. (2020), we must rebuild democracy from the bottom up: "Only if we enhance and reinvigorate democracy at the base will the citizenry find clarity about what to ask for, or what future to envision for their community or region" (pp. 5–6). I am also concerned with the erosion of local communities. The acceleration of contemporary society, along with other forms of "absencing" (Scharmer, 2018), hardly leaves any time or space to build new connections, align the interests and goals of community members, and set free creative powers to solve complex problems and enable collective agency. For that purpose, Taylor et al. (2020) identify two kinds of action: (1) self-organization at the local level in order to find a consensus on the needs and goals of the community, and ways to bring these to

[3] "Lankidetzazko Gobernantza erakunde publiko, gizarte eragile eta herritarren artean instituzionalizatutako lankidetza da, herri politiken ekosistema ahaldundu eta eraginkortzeko; hau erakundeen, gizarte eragileen eta herritarren arteko gizarte kapitala sendotuz egin behar da, deliberazio eta ekintza partekatuaren bidez."

fruition; (2) modes of government-initiated consultation with ordinary citizens, again with the aim of defining common goals.[4]

Thanks to Arantzazulab, I was able to experience and study a successful experience of the second kind, which in turn inspired our Innovation in Praxis. I shortly describe it in the following sub-section.[5]

Learning from the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly

In collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and local agents engaged in deliberative practices, in 2022 Arantzazulab led two initiatives for community participation using what the OECD (2020) calls a *representative deliberative process*, more known as *Citizens' Assembly* (CA). The first initiative was implemented on a town scale (Tolosa), and it focused on the topic of health and emotional well-being; the second covered the whole of Gipuzkoa and focused on agricultural activity and the climate emergency.

In the Tolosa CA, 32 citizens participated in a 40-hour deliberation process to write recommendations in response to this question: "What can the Tolosa Town Council do through public-community collaboration to achieve a Tolosa that improves the health and emotional well-being of all?" The process was carried out over five weekends from October to December 2022, and in the last session the citizens presented a total of 14 recommendations to the political representatives. As of March 2023, 12 out of the 14 recommendations were agreed to implement, and a budget has been assigned to each (Tolosa Town Council, 2023).

Following standard practice in the organization of CAs, the 32 participants were randomly selected from a sample of around 200 citizens who applied to take part after another sample of 2,400 personalized letters of invitation was sent by the town Council. Both samples were done by means of software developed by the Sortition Foundation; they were randomly generated and then stratified by

[4] Taylor's strategy is consistent, I dare say, with the kind of Basque innovation that has been done traditionally in Arantzazu. One of its main proponents, the writer and Franciscan monk Bitoriano Gandiaga, wrote that such innovation is not an easy technological fix, but *awareness-based* and difficult: "Without awareness we are nothing. Leaves carried by the wind. But such awareness is bitter. It is painful and demanding." (Gandiaga, 1991, p. 203) Secondly, it is radically *bottom-up*. Gandiaga describes the innovative movement as that of the sap moving from "one thousand roots" (Casado, 2023, p. 17) up a vine's stem. Thirdly, it is *language-dependent*: Gandiaga's social poetry aims to bring people together by means of language and art. Fourthly, it is *regenerative and life-preserving* (1991, p. 198).

[5] Quantitative and qualitative data come from the evaluation report submitted to the commissioning entity (the Tolosa Town Council), which is available online (Casado, et al., 2023).

gender, age, neighborhood and education level, so that the final group was a representative cross-section of the Tolosa population.

In the "information kit" (Tolosa Town Council, 2022) provided to the 32 citizens, a U-shaped journey was proposed with five stops, corresponding to the five sessions of the CA. Session #1 was about framing the process, introducing the question, and providing some basic information by experts. Data was enriched in session #2, by hearing more expert testimonies about other experiences. In #3 information gave way to deliberation about specific proposals, after hearing the testimony of local agents from Tolosa. This deliberation phase continued in #4, in which recommendations began to be drafted. In session #5 the recommendations were finished and the results were presented to the Council representatives.[6]

Leading the evaluation team, I took part in several CA sessions and preparatory meetings, and right from the start I sensed a connection with Theory U practices. I asked Iciar Montejo, the person who was doing the graphic recording at the sessions, and indeed she was familiar with Otto Scharmer's and Kelvy Bird's work. This influence is visible in the images her facilitation company, Prometea, produced for the information kit. The booklet used for the devolution event included pictures and images from the framing session by Prometea. In one of them, the text inside the U reads in Basque "open mind / open heart / open will / presence and active listening" (Tolosa Town Council, 2023). [7]

The CA held in Tolosa in 2022 is arguably a significant milestone. It was the first representative deliberative process carried out in Gipuzkoa, and a fully bilingual one, since simultaneous translation was provided to all Spanish speakers (being the subaltern language, all Basque speakers could understand Spanish). It mobilized citizens, institutions and local agents who collaborated to make this CA a success, fulfilling all the formal criteria of the OECD for a representative deliberative process, with a considerable effort in terms of resources and personal dedication.

Our evaluation showed that the overall satisfaction with the deliberative process was very high among the participants, who reported that they valued meeting with diverse people and different realities, the quality of the facilitation, the help received, and the feeling that their contributions were valued within the

[6] All expert testimony, along with the minutes of every session, the final recommendations and the evaluation report, are available in the Tolosa Town Council website both in Spanish and Basque: https://partaidetza.tolosa.eus/es/detalle/-/visualizarProcesos/detail/viewResults/123

[7] Both images can be seen here: http://aktibait.eus/2023/04/28/tolosako-herritarren-batzarra-ebaluazioa-txostena/ (in Basque).

group. They also valued the information received and the acquisition of skills in relation to the topic addressed and to the public-community relationship.

From the analysis of the interviews, participants emphasized the importance of the fact that the group was diverse, which made it possible to connect with different people. This connection was generally experienced as positive and valuable: in their own words, "it is also very enriching because we got together people of different ages, different cultures, different thoughts" (Tolosa CA participant, 18 to 30 years old); "it has been valuable for me to see all the realities that there can be" (Tolosa CA participant, 31 to 40 years old).

The analysis of the interviews also highlighted the perception of the need to strengthen the link between citizens and public administration, stressing the importance of continuing to explore the pathways to collaborative governance, and perceiving the relationship as enriching for all parties: "This collaboration is really quite fruitful for everyone" (Tolosa CA participant, 51 to 60 years old).

When analyzing the changes experienced in the process, a high level of trust towards the CA was perceived during the process, which then increased to very high once the process was over. The level of trust expressed towards political representatives also increased. The importance of further deepening those channels for citizen participation was emphasized. This perception was also expressed by people in charge of the organization: "It has a value in bringing citizens closer to the institutions" (Tolosa CA organizer).

In general, the evaluation identified an increase in the participants' own capacities and argumentation skills, which they assessed following the process to be at a high level, and the feeling that they were up to the demands of the process, reporting that they enjoyed the experience. An increase in action learning and confidence around the topics covered was also identified. As one participant put it: "[now] I learn and can teach others. [I am] Taking what I have learned to others" (Tolosa CA participant, 51 to 60 years old).

While hearing those testimonies I could not stop thinking about the emerging field of research on "action confidence" (Pomeroy & Oliver, 2020). However, much still depends on the outcomes, on how the respective institutions will implement the recommendations. As a participant in the Tolosa CA reported, "I understand that citizens are expected to come here to give, but at the same time, then we will be able to demand" (Tolosa CA participant, over 61 years old). This is consistent with research suggesting that CAs have the potential of reconciling the politically disengaged, even though support for them is outcome-contingent, partly driven by citizens' expectations of a favorable result, not by a commitment to deliberative democracy per se (Pilet et al., 2023).

Now I sense a lot of interest and expectations about what happens *after the Assembly*, how to channel and institutionalize this kind of deliberative experience, so that it is not just a "participatory moment," but part of a wider, deeper process of political regeneration. Arantzazulab is studying how to embed these practices so that they become permanent, systemic and sustainable. CAs are a promising tool for collaborative governance, but also resource- and time-

intensive. They are expensive and complex to organize: in a small CA such as the Tolosa one, a support team of approximately a dozen people was deployed in every session to facilitate, evaluate, translate, scribe, communicate, and oversee the session.

What is the next level in citizen participation? There are several ways forward, and most involve some form of institutionalization of CAs.[8] In the following section I will describe an on-going process to co-create a shared vision of the emerging future within the Gipuzkoa region and how it might incorporate and extend some features of CAs. This "Innovation in Praxis" was inspired by existing literature, of course, but most crucially by two face-to-face experiences: (1) attending and evaluating the Tolosa CA, (2) the u-lab 2x project I had taken part in since 2019, which in its last iteration crystallized around the idea of "retreat" as a space to reclaim time for research and transformation.[9]

The Innovations

While our research team as evaluating the Tolosa CA, I had the feeling that the positive effects of the Tolosa CA (higher levels of confidence, both in the relationship with politicians and in the participants' perceived capacities) happened because *during the Assembly a shared vision was co-created by the participants, experts, and facilitators*.[10] For the CA to take place, politicians had to trust citizens, letting go, and *at the end of the Assembly the citizens mirrored back that trust to the politicians*, letting come the proposals embodying that very vision—in the Tolosa CA, all fourteen recommendations were approved by more than 80% of the participants. The co-creation of a safe deliberative space opened, as it were, an organ of perception for the CA to see itself and the emerging future (the vision) it wanted to create.

With slight variations in terminology, the literature about collaborative governance includes references to common goals and shared vision. As Ainhoa Arrona explains, the complexity of the territory and its problems makes it

[8] One of the most interesting ones to me is the proposal by Abels et al. (2022). This model for "European Citizens' Assemblies" requires 5 to 8 on-site and digital meetings, and a new CA announced and convened every year.

[9] In our last iteration (2022) the team was made up by Verena Hammes, Rita Aldabaldetreku, Orla Hasson and myself. I am grateful to all of them for their inspiration and commitment to the project. See https://www.u-school.org/offerings/ulab2x-2024 for an explanation of the u-lab 2x program.

[10] Aktiba Ikerketa Taldea (http://aktibait.eus) is an interdisciplinary research group focused on practices, learning and values, based in Donostia – San Sebastián.

necessary to base development in participation, and that in turn is a strong reason to seek the co-creation of "shared vision and trust relationships" and "strategies based on learning, negotiation and collaboration" (Arrona, 2018, p. 170).

Shared Vision as Common Caring For a Just Cause

The connection between organizational learning and shared vision was one of the key insights in Peter Senge's influential book, *The Fifth Discipline*. I think Senge made an important point when he emphasized the intrinsically relational nature of a shared vision and its connection to a common quest or "just cause" (Sinek, 2019):

> "A vision is truly shared when you and I have a similar picture and are committed to one another having it, not just to each of us, individually, having it. When people truly share a vision they are connected, bound together by a common aspiration. Personal visions derive their power from an individual's deep caring for the vision. Shared visions derive their power from a common caring. In fact, we have to come to believe that one of the reasons people seek to build shared visions is their desire to be connected in an important undertaking." (Senge, 1990, p. 191)

The quote by Senge is consistent with research on CAs, suggesting that the "important undertaking" connection has an impact on numerous factors, such as who decides to participate, the response rate, and the dropout rate. Removing the link to power makes participation less meaningful and makes it more likely that only those with a strong interest in the topic will choose to participate (OECD, 2020).

The Extended Lab as a Sensing Organ for the Whole

If connection and "common caring" are so important, how we can foster them *before* and *after* the actual CA taking place? To answer that question, at the University of the Basque Country we are currently experimenting with a prototype of an "extended lab" which moves beyond CAs in several ways. We call it "extended" because it uses digital technology to extend deliberation, both in space and time, so that the gap between decision making in complex systems and the lived experiences of people affected by those decisions might be somehow reduced. As Scharmer (2018, p. 102) explains, this requires new infrastructures that complement traditional forms of governance to catalyze collective action from a shared vision or "awareness of the whole".

The lab itself can be thought of as a sensing organ for a shared vision of the whole; this was suggested by the participant reported in the Tolosa CA evaluation interviews who stated, "it has been valuable for me *to see* [emphasis added] all the realities that there can be." As Scharmer (2009) recalls in *Theory U*:

> In his classes [Ed] Schein always emphasized that the most important principle of managing change is to 'always deal with reality'; that is, start by seeing what is actually going on. Our challenge is to find a way to cultivate and enhance the collective capacity of seeing." (p. 134–135)

Here "extended" means *extended perception* but also geographically *extended in space*, so that the lab reaches to a wider audience, and *extended in time*, too: both backward extended, so that the question and answers addressed by the lab are crowdsourced in a digital participation platform, and forward extended so that deliberative experiences on different topics can build on one another—all of them supported and hosted by the extended lab.

Open Infrastructures for Inquiry and Iteration

Another innovation lies in the way in which our extended lab goes beyond and complements standard CAs. For instance, the lab gives a lot of time and attention to how questions are formulated and chosen. In many CAs the question is a given, it is taken for granted. But much is at stake in the definition and framing of the question or problem that the mini-public is tasked to address. María José Sanz, the Director of the Basque Center for Climate Change, played a leading role in the first CA on Climate Change in Spain, which took place between 2021 and 2022. I asked her if there was something that she would like to change now in the CA design. "The question could be more or less concrete," she answered.

> But the important thing is that it can be repeated, that there are more assemblies and they democratize knowledge without undermining the capacities of the citizenry. The *Decidim* platform worked to create forums and the facilitation provided a safe space, but the best thing is that a high percentage of participants have become proactive in their own places as agents of change. (Personal communication, November 8, 2022)

Therefore, praxis showed us the power of iteration. Collaborative governance is above all a process, not a one-off event, and that is where the "new infrastructures" mentioned by Scharmer (2018, p. 102) need to be iterative and portable, so that they are able to scale in depth and across the territory. In the next section I will describe the Decidim platform we are using for that purpose.

The Implementation

Before starting this project, I knew what the literature on social innovation says: collaborative governance aims to bring together multiple stakeholders in common forums with public agencies to engage in consensus-oriented decision making (Ansell & Gash, 2007). But since we began "walking the talk" I have become convinced that collaborative governance needs to be enacted by democratic participation, not simply represented in a fixed model which then all

stakeholders are expected to comply with. I dare say that we need an "enactive turn" in governance theory and praxis (more about this in the last section). We should not waste too much time just defining collaborative governance and finding the right concept for it. The energy should be in *playing with it* and *being aware of it* as an ongoing, interactive "medium with which community members could potentially realize their own priorities and ways of living" (Mitchell, 2021).

Following Peter Senge's work, such a medium could be compared to that soil in which, emerging from the personal visions, the collective grows something that might be called a shared vision. As he wrote, "shared vision is a vision that many people are truly committed to, because it reflects their own personal vision" (Senge, 1990, p. 191).

For those priorities or personal visions to be reflected and shared up and across the territory, in our extended lab we gather them in a digital platform designed to empower citizen participation. Decidim, this digital platform, is the open software that has run, for instance, the University of Bordeaux participatory platform, the city of Barcelona municipal action plan, and the Conference on the Future of Europe deliberations (2020–2022). Created in 2016 for the Barcelona City Council, it is a free digital platform with strong democratic guarantees, and is now being used in cities, associations, and universities all over the world.

The enabling conditions to our implementation are two: (1) *mutual trust* between the university and citizens, on the one hand, and the university and the regional council, on the other; (2) *civic tech*, because to make deliberative mini-publics more visible we use the digital tools to share their visions across time and space, thus helping to catalyze collective action from those shared visions. The challenge is *to extend agency through technology without losing trust.*

We have experienced barriers, too. Not because of lack of resources—I think that the tools to bring collaborative governance to the next level are all in place. The pathway for institutionalization of an extended lab does not require expensive and time-consuming reforms of the existing institutional system, be it in terms of redistribution of authority, decision-making roles, or competences. The extended lab for collaborative governance might be just an "institutional add-on" (Abels et al. 2022) to the existing institutional architecture. The problem is that resources are nothing if the people are not able to mobilize them, and for that one needs not only a highly motivated team, but also a degree of autonomy from the demands that "business as usual" makes on university researchers, especially those in the early stages of their careers.

However, CAs are happening all over the world. By extending them we can make them more visible and easier to organize. A simple way to do it is to use a year-long cycle that can be replicated. Let's see how.

The Realizing

In Barcelona, Decidim was used to crowdsource its strategic plan, with a big budget. It received more than 10,000 citizen proposals, facilitating online and offline participation. It has also hosted CAs on Climate Change at the state (Spain) and city (Barcelona) scales. Our initative (https://gi2030.eus/) is more modest, since as of November 2023 we are only 11 months into the project, but it is up and running.

The first phase was to co-initiate the platform, which is promoted and funded by the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, but designed and run by the Gi2030-ZEHAR consortium together with citizens and social agents of the region. The consortium applied in 2022 to an open call at the University of the Basque Country, and the funding was used to set up the technological infrastructure and to hire three full-time researchers, which make up the core team along with two Principal Investigators. It is designed as a collaborative research initiative with an extended team of 25 academics from the humanities, health care, and social sciences.

Having set up the core and extended teams, we have also designed a 5-phase participatory process in a double-diamond[11] year cycle that can be replicated up to 2030 (and beyond). This process begins long before the planned co-initation in January, by "preparing the ground", applying for and receiving funding, hiring expert help, and learning from previous experiences. The team took Learning Journeys to places where forms of collaborative governance are emerging and spoke with their leaders (the Digital and Democratic Innovation Centre in Barcelona, Wikitoki in Bilbao, Etorkizuna Eraikiz, Hernani Burujabe and Debagoiena 2030 in Gipuzkoa). Then the process itself is structured in the following five phases:

1. Co-initiating (January)

In this phase, agreements are reached with local agents to contribute to the Gi2030 process, either as stakeholders or event hosts. Accordingly, the core team publishes a provisional calendar of activities and events. Prospective scenarios are commissioned for the workshops. We begin to use and test the platform as a hub, blog and container for the whole process.

[11] Our approach is adapted from a universally accepted design process, promoted by the UK Design Council from 2004 as the "Double Diamond" model: https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-resources/archive/articles/double-diamond-universally-accepted-depiction-design-process/.

2. Questioning (February-May)

Through several face-to-face workshops, questions and problems are explored for each of the five central themes of Gi2030 (people, economy, science and technology, climate change, well-being). The objective of these meetings is to explore, through the collective construction of questions, a shared vision between citizens and institutions, based on scenarios worked and presented by the research staff, activating the imagination about future collaborative governance scenarios.

3. Prioritizing (June-July)

This stage is the moment of truth at the bottom of the U: we start from the questions (100+) we have collected in the previous phase. The core team, with the help of the extended team, other experts, social agents and citizens, carries out a process of categorization, selection, refinement and prioritization of the questions collected in the previous phase, using an adaptation of the Delphi method. The bulk of questions goes through "the eye of the needle" to build up the most important or vital ones. Those questions (max. 10) will continue to be the guiding thread of the conversation about the Gipuzkoa we imagine in the year 2030.

4. Making proposals (September-November)

In this phase, new face-to-face workshops serve to transform the prioritized questions into proposals. On the other hand, the involvement of different agents is sought, so that from their situated knowledge, they can make new concrete proposals through the digital platform. In all cases, the proposals must be based on one of the questions prioritized in the previous phase. All proposals are published on the platform and a voting mechanism will allow participants to indicate which proposals they find most interesting.

5. Sharing and preparing the ground again (December)

In this final phase, which blends in with the "preparing the ground" stage for the next iteration, the collaborative drafting of the first Shared Vision document is completed. Everyone taking part in the process is invited to a face-to-face meeting so that we can celebrate together and share experiences from the year. In this event, some of the proposals that have been collected on the platform are also presented. The Shared Vision is published in the form of a script whose elements refer to the proposals made in the platform and ensure traceability with the questions formulated in the previous phases.

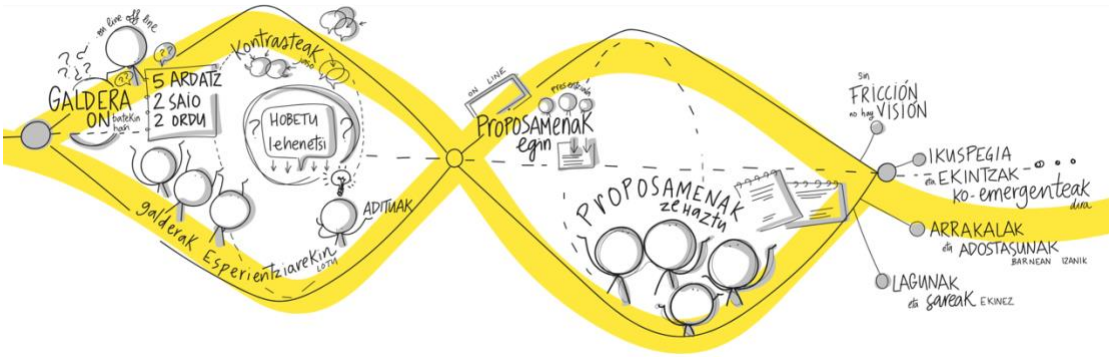

Figure 1. The Gi2030 double-diamond process in 5-phases over a year. Visual practice by Miryam Artola, @muxotepotolobat.

As of writing (November 2023) the first cycle is not yet over, but we have some provisional data. In the February-July period, Gi2030 has hosted thirteen 2-hour workshops (phase 2) and two 4-hour "summer festivals" in which the prioritization techniques (phase 3) took place along with cultural events such as poetry and dance improvisation, lectures, and music performances. 247 people took part in those synchronous, face-to-face events, while 185 people registered and took part in the digital platform.

Gi2030 has attracted some attention in local media and community engagement officers in five town governments are involved in this year's cycle: Errenteria (population: 39,000), Tolosa (19,800), Zumarraga (9,600), Zegama (1,500), and Itziar (800), and the plan is to continue with officers from additional town governments next year. All content is published in both Basque and Spanish, and participants are selected to promote diversity across age, gender, and cultures. Therefore, we might say that we are aiming at the edges of the system, bringing into the conversation participants that heretofore were not included in collaborative governance practices.

As Otto Scharmer writes, "real institutional impact usually requires an intentional and sustained intervention and does not result from merely sending individuals on a retreat" (2018, p. 78). Our praxis agrees with that, since from an initial idea of building the shared vision one retreat at a time, we are moving now into a "one meeting at a time" attitude, within a year cycle of learning and deliberation, facilitating a public conversation on questions and proposals that might catalyze institutional and collective answers.

In this journey our main achievements so far have been two:

1. The creation of the Gi2030 community, comprised by core and extended teams, participants in the online platform, the workshops and the weekly hub meetings.
2. The results of the first three phases of the process (the first diamond), which harvested more than 100 questions made in the workshops, and examined them until a final set of 10 questions was agreed upon. Those questions set the agenda for

the final two phases (the second diamond), and represent an on-going, provisional "overlapping consensus" (Rawls, 1993) between citizens and experts about the most pressing issues for Gipuzkoa in 2030.

The Learnings

In every action-research project there is an amount of learning-as-you-go. This is a work in progress and there is still much to learn. Part of our strategy is to share short and frequent recaps, so here are a few provisional lessons.

Dare to Move From 3.0 To 4.0 Governance

When we started, we thought that what we were being asked to do was "to make a strategic plan for Gipuzkoa" (Gi2030 stakeholder). Soon we realized that to do that we would have to facilitate a shift from, to put it in Scharmer's terms, 3.0 governance (coalitions between organized interest groups) to 4.0 governance (collective action from shared awareness). That is a huge transition, but we are determined to enact it with trust and confidence, acting as if we were already in that paradigm. Eventually it will come. Meanwhile, let's work one year at a time, within the wider horizon of this "decade of transformation," until 2030 and beyond.

Lead the Way by Synchronous Interaction

Contrary to our expectations, more people attended face-to-face meetings than registered in the platform. To discover why, the team interviewed a sample of workshop participants. Most of their answers were very positive, and found the workshops enriching and informative. Sharing the room with people who provided expert or experiential knowledge was appreciated, but also the dynamics of "listening and being listened to." The key role of facilitators to ensure inclusivity in participation was recognized, as well as the workshops being an intergenerational and intercultural safe space.

Try the "Enactive Turn"

Our emphasis on process over product is similar to that of enactivist cognitive science when it emphasizes interaction over representation.

Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1980) developed the idea that perception and action are co-emergent phenomena—perception develops as one moves, and one's movements are conditioned by perception. Following this idea, consciousness is seen as a process in which the knower is coupled with other knowers, affecting and being affected by systems that include the non-human environment. Enactive knowledge is thus more about systemic transformation than about processing data.

At Gi2030 we are inspired by scholars in the enactivist tradition, who have expanded Maturana and Varela's radical idea to understand cooperation. We feel that sometimes we do not even need *to know* that we are cooperating in order to be able to cooperate. This is important because it might explain emerging forms of cooperative governance and shared vision as a result of smoothing out friction by interaction.[12]

Be Frugal, but Get the Best Help You Can Find

Besides being extended in the sense that the process takes place over a year in several places, both online and onsite, ours is also a "frugal innovation" approach to collaborative governance, since it involves the development of low-cost tools and technologies that enable citizens to participate more effectively in the deliberative and decision-making process. This includes the use of the platform and other digital tools that make it easier for citizens to share their opinions, ideas and visions of the future.

This frugal quality is important in the Basque context for two reasons. First, because one of the lessons of the Etorkizuna Eraikiz initiative in Gipuzkoa is that "collaborative governance is costly" and therefore it cannot be sustained by just one agent: blended financing and private-common-public collaboration may foster joint ownership of the projects (Barandiaran et al., 2023, p. 101). Frugal innovation is about the "means and ends to do more with less for many or more people" (Bhatti et al., 2018, p. 181), but the point is not simply to do things cheaper, but to do it collectively. *Only frugal innovation democratizes governance.*

However, being frugal does not mean that we do not need external resources. We apply for funding, since we need it to keep the civic tech infrastructure in good shape, and use specialized facilitation and communication services when necessary. In my experience, it is crucial to have a highly motivated core team with at least one experienced social innovator.

[12] "Often, cooperation is presupposed as something we set out to do, so that actions are either clearly cooperative or not – a separate and identifiable type of action altogether. […] But taking this idea as the starting point for understanding cooperation presupposes that we already know what it is, and so we do not need to define the elements out of which it could arise. It precludes, for example, the possibility that cooperation arises without there being a predefined intention or motive to cooperate, while this may be key to understanding how people get to cooperate in the first place. Shared goals may emerge during the course of an interaction, and so participants can 'roll into' cooperation without having previous awareness of it. For instance, making space for someone who enters a crowded bus is achieved by the new and old passengers together, each adjusting movements and postures. Here, a common goal emerges out of the interaction and in the context of a small space to be shared as smoothly as possible." (Fantasia, et al., 2014, p. 3)

Turn Friction into Vision

Nothing can beat a good workshop. Perhaps we have been doing too many (13 workshops in five months is exhausting, and leaves less time to reflect and harvest learnings), but they make possible change by *hearing the unexpected*. Just one example: in one meeting in Itziar, a hamlet close to the town of Deba, one resident was angry with us because she associated the project with the Provincial Council, and she was concerned about the installation of windmills close to her home. Thanks to a "slow and care-full scholar" (Temper et al., 2019, pp. 10–11) her anger was transformed into an open dialogue, in which she mentioned her admiration for Schumacher's "small is beautiful" idea. Days later, we found that the Schumacher Institute had just released a toolkit that could be very useful for us (see below). Somehow the friction encountered in the meeting became not an obstacle in the way, but the way itself. And we will come back to Itziar and reconnect with its residents.

Cultivate a Practice Field (a Permanent Circle or Hub)

Workshops are important, but they take a considerable amount of time and resources from the team. In order to nourish ourselves, and to be open to stakeholders and interested people, we have seen the need to host a hub with regular meetings on campus. That is why every two weeks there is a day in which our lab is open for everyone: it is our practice field, where we host coaching circles and try new methods and techniques for our toolbox.

On September 8, 2023, we co-hosted a one-day summer school and, over lunch, the Provincial Deputy of Governance said something that I remember to this effect: *An elected politician's day-to-day business is hectic; there is very little time to acquire or reflect on new knowledge. That is why we appreciate so much this kind of collaboration with the university. You have something that we do not have, capabilities for noiseless reflection and research, and that gives us some security amidst all this uncertainty*. It made me think. Policymakers and pracademics need each other, but not because political decisions should be left to scientists (even action scientists) or think tanks. What policymakers need from researchers is that we do our own work: to go deep into generating new knowledge. For that we might have to create and protect safe and stable hubs within our own universities, because if campus life becomes hectic and noisy too, then we cannot deliver what they need from us, and collaboration will not take place. Policymakers need us to create times and spaces for "intentional stillness," avoiding hyperactivity and "mindless action" (Scharmer, 2018).

Put Together a Toolbox

When looking at the challenges ahead for Gipuzkoa, Naiara Goia, Managing Director of Arantzazulab, identified the need to "curate a tailored toolbox and develop capacities and skills in these methods that will contribute to the ambitions of collaborative governance" (in Barandiaran et al., 2023, p. 95).

We have created some tools like the workshops for harvesting and refining questions, or the adaptation of the Delphi method for hybrid environments, and we also use those developed by other agencies (such as the Megatrend Cards and the Futures Frequency workshops developed by Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund). But we also feel the need to adapt them. The Schumacher Institute (2023) has just released its community toolkit for climate action to help groups develop a collective sense of shared values and common purpose, which in turn helps projects to emerge. We aim to try, adapt and use many of those practices to put together our own toolbox.

Close the Feedback Loop Fast

This is an area where we still have a lot to learn. A good thing about hosting the workshops using the Decidim platform is that their results can be turned into open data and shared in the platform. If done properly, it could be of great interest to policy-makers.

One example in this direction is The Strategy Room developed by Nesta, the UK's innovation agency. It combines facilitated deliberation, interactive polling and collective intelligence to identify the best climate change policies in local areas. During the 90-minute experience, anonymized data about participants' preferred strategies are collected. It also captures how views shift during group discussions. The data is open and available for anyone to explore and for local councils to download and use for decision-making. According to Nesta, the data can also be interrogated to better understand the role of co-benefits, demographics and lifestyle factors in shaping people's preferences.

Turning the results into open data and visualizing it is technically possible with our Gi2030 platform. If we can do it in practice (still an unanswered question for us) it would be a massive breakthrough, and other members of the international Decidim community are working on it.

Be Open to Other Collaborative Governance Initiatives

At Gipuzkoa we have seen that CAs can build new bridges between the streets and the institutions to support short-term action based on long-term, awareness-based thinking. But in international CA networks sometimes more attention is given to questions of legitimacy (how to make the Assembly "look good" in terms of institutional, representative and deliberative standards) than to questions of capacity (how to create enough awareness and social momentum to put in place the Assembly's recommendations). By putting less weight on the representativeness standards, the extended lab model emphasizes capacity building, and highlights the need for a broader vibrant ecology of democratic practices, including activism, social movements, institutional and grassroot-led

innovation and experimentation, participatory economies and the revival of the commons.[13]

Last but not least, we have learnt that we are not alone in this. Small villages and organizations in Gipuzkoa have shown interest to use the platform, and we are considering alliances and joint projects with the Basque Centre for Climate Change and the itdUPM, an interdisciplinary centre of the Polytechnic University of Madrid.

In this journey over a year, the Gi2030 action research has been open to stakeholders and participants as a way to re-imagine the purpose of their system by creating a unifying, shared vision based on questions, answers and proposals. Our innovation is practical knowledge about how to make Gipuzkoa see itself in a systemic way. In a future line of work, we will begin to explore how we might shift existing systems towards the vision, and for that we will have to shift our focus, from a shared *vision* to several interconnected *missions*, and experiment with changing those systems in a safe, simulated environment, such a game.

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[13] I am grateful to Oliver Escobar for this last point, which he made in the summer course "Citizen´s Assemblies, a new wave of citizen´s engagement in Europe" (San Sebastian, May 19, 2023). I also thank Cristina Monge for an encouraging talk in that course.

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In Dialogue

Ecosystem Activation in Latin America: Embracing the Complex Edges of the System

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In March 2023, 160 leaders and change-makers from 14 countries[1] across Latin America participated in a four-day gathering held by the Presencing Institute[2] called the Ecosystem Leadership Program (ELP) in Latin America. The program is striking as an example of grassroots action taking place at scale. Participants

[1] The 14 countries represented were: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, México, Paraguay, Perú, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, Venezuela; the event also included contributions from individuals in five countries outside the region: Germany, Spain, Kenya, Netherlands, USA.

[2] The Presencing Institute is an action research institute, co-founded by Otto Scharmer and colleagues, that works globally to support systems transformation using Theory U (Scharmer, 2016), a framework and change process that locates itself at the intersection of action science, consciousness, and social and organizational change. See https://www.u-school.org/about-pi for more information.

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from multiple sectors, contexts, and corners of Latin America were selected from over 480 applicants through a careful curation process. A system of scholarships was created to ensure the event was inclusive and representative of the region's diversity. The program was supported by 20 partner organizations and was co-held, organized, and facilitated by a group of 28 individuals from across several countries.

Designed around three annual events, the program supports people in learning awareness-based systems change methods and tools, including ancestral and Indigenous knowledge, and connecting in a diverse, inclusive, participatory space that supports collaborative action. Multiple collaborations and prototypes have already resulted from the first gathering, including a participatory mapping exercise in a peripheral neighborhood of Recife, Brazil; an innovation lab at the Public University in Uruguay led by two participants who met on the Program which has yielded four tech prototypes so far; a joint intervention between Peru and Chile for cultural change in an engineering company; a Forum for bio-regional Landscape regeneration in the south of Chile, created and held by six Program participants, and a hub initiative started by Argentinian participants to face political disruption in their country.

In this dialogue, six members of the core holding team from four different countries take a moment of pause between the program's first iteration and the second to reflect on the experience and the conditions that enabled grassroots action at such a scale. They reflect on their intention to create an inclusive, multi-stakeholder, multisector, transversal enabling infrastructure for ecosystem activation in a regional context that is complex, polarized, inequitable, and, often, violent. Acutely aware of both the wounds that come from a history of colonization, genocide, and dictatorships, and the rich, wise, powerful, heartful, and vibrant nature of the continent, they consider what it means to offer a space of activation through healing and what it takes, on both an inner and outer level, to do so.

Participating in the Dialogue

All dialogue participants are members of the Latin American ELP core team.

Dayani Centeno-Torres
A communications consultant who applies Theory U tools to support community-centered and social justice projects. She is based in Puerto Rico.

Carolina Da Rosa
Project manager of the Latin American ELP. Based in Uruguay, her work supports projects related to personal and social development. She studied International Relations, is a Yoga teacher and currently studies ontological coaching.

Viviana Galdames
Faculty at the Presencing Institute and Associate at Creek.Presenciar, an

organization focused on enabling human spaces for Latin America. Her specialization is in learning design and the translation of theoretical and cognitive content into experiential learning processes. Viviana is based in Chile.

Laura Pastorini
Lead of Latin America Development & Learning at the Presencing Institute and advanced practitioner and international teacher in Social Presencing Theater (SPT)[3]. Her work supports the Spanish-speaking community of Theory U and SPT in Latin America and Spain. Laura is based in Uruguay.

Janine Saponara
Partner at Lead Sustentabilidade, an ESG Consultancy. In 2009, she led a project to translate the recently published Theory U into Portuguese. Since then, she has been a facilitator and researcher of the methodology for Portuguese speakers worldwide, including a multi-stakeholder initiative engaging politicians in the public sphere that formed the basis for her master's thesis.

Mariana Suniata-Miranda
Social Coordinator at Movi Institute, Counselor-Director of Diversity at SPORT Club Recife and Researcher at Sao Paulo University, Brazil. She is a nature-human rights builder, change-maker, and advanced practitioner in Social Presencing Theater.

Dialogue Facilitator

Eva Pomeroy
Research Lead and u-lab Faculty at the Presencing Institute and Affiliate Faculty of the Department of Applied Human Sciences, Concordia University, Montreal.

From Seeds to Scale

Eva: I'm coming into this conversation excited to have the time to dive deeper into what you've been doing, because I've read about it and it's just fantastic. I'm aware you're in between the first iteration and the second and it's exciting to capture the work and the initiative as it's actually happening.

You've mentioned that you're in different countries, speaking different languages and working across conflicts, so it's not as if this is a homogenous region. You're really working with what is, and that feels so timely.

[3] Social Presencing Theater (SPT) is an embodied social change methodology developed under the leadership of Arawana Hayashi (2021). For a detailed description, see https://www.u-school.org/spt

So can we start with the 'what': what was and is the ELP, what happened, who came, what was the intention?

> GAIA (Global Activation of Intention and Action) was a Presencing Institute program that arose in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a series of bi-monthly, open-access online sessions designed to support a global community to lean into the current moment by practicing global sense-making, help clarify individual and collective intention, and foster new action. The Theory U-based learning journey included guest speakers, moments of collective contemplation, dialogue, and social arts. Over 13,000 people registered for GAIA between March and June 2020 and seven language tracks formed both to make the program available in languages other than English and to curate the content and process for regional contexts. From the beginning of the initiative, a core team made up of the individuals in this dialogue and others formed to offer the GAIA journey in Spanish.

Vivi: I can share the first thing that came to me. I feel that in our Spanish GAIA track, we did a beautiful job of being together, sharing ourselves, taking more care between us, and making a special space for us to create or to be. I feel that we are trying to create this for Latin America: to have a big space where everybody can be seen and be receive. It's much more a 'mother's' way than a 'father's' way of holding this space.

Laura: Thank you, Vivi—I love this idea of mothering because I think what we did was create an enabling infrastructure for ecosystem activation. This program was inspired by an earlier experience we had with Otto (Scharmer) in Chile which was an activation with 100 leaders in 2022. These were 100 leaders who were very young leaders, activists, and grassroots leaders, and so the idea was, yes, we need to bring the Presencing Institute Programs to Latin America, but also, we want to inform our programs, our methodologies, our worldview with this local experience. We wanted to include local and regional knowledge, these other forms of wisdom from the Indigenous ancestors, but also from the different cultures that live together in Latin America.

It was creating this enabling infrastructure not only to learn concepts, methods, and tools, including Indigenous wisdom, but also to exchange and co-inspire with each other across different types of leadership, different sectors, and different levels of impact. It was also living the experience of going through ceremonies, being in nature, being all together. This earlier program had these different ingredients that made this proposal special and that we took advantage of when activating this regional ecosystem through the Ecosystem Leadership Program.

Mariana: I think the program is the regional expression of the global initiative of changing making after the pandemic [Spanish GAIA]. So now what we must do is we must act and innovate and put people together—multicultural, multi-

language. Even in the Spanish language people speak different Spanish and that's the whole blessing of Latin America. This sort of cycle of regeneration and innovation: being together and being able to see each other and see the other, being able to think differently, being able to relate and face the conflicts, and to stretch a little bit the collaboration.

But, at the end of the day, we must act. There are no more words for everything that we are experiencing all over Latin America. So that's about changing mentalities, changing behaviors. The program is reuniting leaders and change-makers from multiple sectors and multiple contexts to see each other and learn how we can improve our capacities, how we can improve our abilities, how we can relearn—learn again—how we must do things.

Dayani: I agree with everything that I have heard. I would add, looking at it months afterward, that amidst the crisis we are all in, and all that we have to do in our own countries, ELP was most significant because of the opportunity to be and work together. It grabs my attention that the possibility of being together is what holds the vision of a common future.

The objective was to bring people together to learn tools and practices for their own projects, and somehow explore the bigger ecosystem. But, in the process, I think that the most valuable thing that happened was being together after the pandemic. To actually sit down and have dinners together, listen to the music together, experiencing the ceremonies together. That level of connection will be key when we have to actually do difficult or profound work together. This is already beginning to happen. Participants are collaborating on ideas and projects. I think we were not as clear about that result when we were planning. It is a beautiful result that keeps on giving beyond the experience.

Mariana: I would like to echo Dayani's point about being together because we were also sharing traumas, collective traumas. We were also sharing wounds in a very sacred space, I might say, or in a very cared-for space. Leaders care about everything—problems and people—and the question is, who cares about them? Who cares about us? I think that's also a point here, how we can care for the leaders so they can also keep moving.

Inclusion: Opening to the Reality Around You

Caro: I was also thinking about the diversity and the inclusion. That was one of our goals too, to be able to learn from people that are in the margins of the system and bring them to the center. The wisdom of the original people was also a very important part of the program and we had the Abuelas (wise and respected female leaders of the original people). That's why scholarships and the support of organizations were key to bringing in people who otherwise would have never had the chance to come. That's a challenge for us and it's still one of our main goals: to try and bring in people who are doing an amazing job in their communities and perhaps never have had the chance to reach this kind of experience. They have so much richness to bring to the conversation. I also feel

this inclusion considering Latin America as a whole—including Brazil because we also notice that we have a separation that got very clear when we came together—even organizing this was a challenge because of language.

Eva: So, you are doing the thing that so many people are aspiring to do in terms of working across difference and working with difference. How do you manage to do this at the kind of scale you have, bringing in different cultures, as you spoke about, and respecting those and integrating them? I know this is one of the most diverse programs the Presencing Institute has ever held. So, just taking a step back, what's happening? What happened and what is it that you're doing that is making it possible to integrate so many cultures and languages and knowledge systems? How was it possible for this to come together?

Laura: One of the main intentions was to be really inclusive in terms of socioeconomic context. That's why we had a model of support from different partners and also a model of support where those who can pay to support those who cannot pay. We had a really high rate of scholarships: thirty-nine percent of participants received partial or full scholarships. So we could have people who couldn't even pay for their tickets to come, people who live in the middle of the Amazonia, in the mountains, or in very isolated communities. We were really trying to be inclusive in terms of accessibility to the program, and representative in terms of who was in the room. From 480 people who applied, we selected 160 participants who were the most representative possible in terms of sectors, in terms of gender, and in terms of countries. It was a very complex puzzle that we were doing moment by moment because the universe that you have, the total universe of participants, changes all the time.

So, I think that was a really good job that was done around this representative inclusion, but it wasn't only who was in the room but how they were in the room. For example, we have Indigenous people in the room, but what is the place that we give to the Indigenous knowledge or wisdom? Is it just to check that we have it in the program or do we really respect that knowledge enough? For example, the Abuelas[4] were the ones who did the first program design. The Abuelas, who were leading the ceremonies, did the design of the process. They said, "We have to organize the event design around these ceremonies."

They were the first ones involved and not the last ones. I think that made a big difference. Sometimes in Latin America, it's not so easy to integrate different sectors, different ethnicities, and different classes but we were strongly convinced that it was the right thing to do. We created the container, for both the

[4] Abuelas, literally translated as “grandmothers,” are female elders. In this dialogue, they are also referred to as Elders.

Elders to feel acknowledged and valued, and for the participants to respect the knowledge of the Elders as equals and feel respected in their own diversity and difference.

Being coherent with what we teach is also very important in terms of design. For example, with a fishbowl[5] we put in the center those who came from the most complex edges of the system. Those were the central voices. We worked on a 4D mapping exercise[6] with a very tough reality from the Colombian Pacific. It is a place that has a lot of violence, and poverty. It's been abandoned. They have very, very hard realities and their situation really touched everyone's heart. They were really an inspiration for us and putting their story in the center made people realize things they didn't know. We had people from Colombia saying, "I didn't know anything about this reality in my own country."

There is something about being open to the reality you have around you to be truly inclusive and coherent. What we did, for example, with a local activation in Uruguay was that we had deaf people in the room, we had people with different disabilities in the room, we had someone building the 3D mapping with their feet because they didn't have arms. We tried to bring all these organizations that work with disability, with ethnic and gender issues and make the space available for them. We measured the carbon print and compensated for it. We cared about what kind of materials were used in the room, also the food. We had this design and all this structure that was really inclusive but also the spirit of this inclusion was there.

Janine: I think I can bring some reflection on that because since we set up the call, I have been really thinking and preparing for this and what I went through, Eva, relating to my inner condition as a source for this movement is the 'let go.' The 'let go' for me is everything in this process, all the time breaking my paradigms and just listening, really listening and learning from the group as a core team here. Related to the inclusion of participants, I know that, in terms of Brazil, because of the scholarships we were able to have diversity. I know in all other countries this happened too, so I do believe that in our program we should pay attention to this transfer of money from class A to class B, C, et cetera, because we need to provide that. This, for me, must be a goal for us. How can we be inclusive? This is a question and a goal.

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[5] 'Fishbowl' is a facilitation technique that places a small group of participants in the center of a space to have a discussion and a larger group in a circle surrounding them to listen and bear witness to the inner circle members' experience.

[6] 4D Mapping is an embodied exercise from Social Presencing Theatre. In the structured process individuals are guided to embody key roles and form a dynamic embodied 'map' of the system, making visible its current reality and its emergent potential. See https://www.u-school.org/4d-mapping for a full description.

Eva: I actually have a question for all of you. I know that, in my context, you could come up with scholarships but still not necessarily access the folks that you really want to have present because you don't have the relationships and you don't have the pathways, but it sounds like you do. I was wondering if maybe you could say a little bit more about that.

Laura: Yes, I think the alliances were key for that because we contacted key organizations around Latin America that have contact with their own leaders. They know these leaders. For example, we offered these partners the possibility for different organizations to bring some of their own leaders—leaders that they work with, leaders that they have identified that are difficult to reach, that are working in different themes that we are interested in addressing. One organization in Chile got together about a hundred leaders and from those hundred leaders, they took 10 to send them to the program. There was this curator work and many of the organizations that were supporting our programs brought their own leaders or suggested some leaders that they knew. So that was also something that was really interesting. We also chose some of those leaders as what we called 'activators' in the program. So those voices were heard in some parts of the program or in some groups.

> Activators are special participants that bring an important voice that needs to be heard, most often from the margins of the system. We invite them to play a similar role to "guest speakers" but in a horizontal way, not as mere inputs but instead engaging in the process. They bring a different perspective on the ecosystem, as they perceive it from a place that is not central or hegemonic and, therefore, they are able to activate what some call "unlikely dialogues".
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> (Personal communication, Laura Pastorini, October 2023)

For example, we had eco-systemic groups to work on five different topics or areas of work: regeneration, social justice, inclusion, wellbeing, and new economies. We wanted to have some representation from new perspectives on those topics that we were addressing, so we brought "activators" with experiences or cases in each topic, to share their stories and co-inspire their peers.

Vivi: Another element that supported and created the proper social field of transformation was to hold classes and dialogue in the Spanish language, translating Theory U and Social Presencing Theater in Spanish gave us permission to access grassroots communities: the real problem owners that we want to work with, so Theory U was accessible only to an exclusive group as consultants. We tried to make Theory U accessible in our continent. We hosted special sessions answering questions and even helped out to fill out the applications, one by one. I think that we also open our hearts and our minds to

these groups of people. We have them much closer, their own reality became OUR own reality, I feel that when we make the U in Spanish.

Laura: We took care of them. When they arrived in the country where the program was, we took care of them from the moment they arrived in the plane to the moment they got back onto the plane. That makes it very easy for people who don't usually travel, for example. We also took care of making them feel included and safe, because for some people it's very usual to take a plane and travel, but some others never took a plane before.

Janine: Following this, I would like to share that in Brazil with the Brazilians, what Laura invited me to do was to really think about the presence of the whole country. I took all the five regions of Brazil, and then I searched; I profoundly researched what were and still are the sources of pain in these regions that we should address. As a continental country, we have a lot of issues but in different areas. In Amazonia, for example, I went to women, Indigenous people, and Black people living in the forest, fighting to have some source of economic activity.

And then, when we were activating regional—in this case, the North region/Amazonia state—and local community leaders, we shared with them this opportunity to participate and, at the same time, our need to attract young and regenerative emerging leaders. It was then I met Victoria—the only Brazilian appointed by the UN as a Regional Focal Point in Latin America and the Caribbean in the Constituent of Children and Youth in Sustainable Communities. She was one of the people that we decided should be an activator because what she represents: she's a Land Champion recognized by USAID[7], she's from a Black and Indigenous family, and she's recognized worldwide by the French and other countries' Embassies for her work.

This method of searching—through local community leaders—helped us arrive at the right people. For example, I found Carlos, an Indigenous man in Brazil, in Sao Paulo, who is linking Indigenous knowledge with universities like University of São Paulo (USP). Then, in the other four Brazilian regions, the same. So we developed a way of finding people—through alliances, through researchers, calling, searching over the internet and social media. Then, our scholarships and our participants came from this: in which region do we have which pain? This is what should be addressed by our program.

One last thing, the way of taking care of them: It was fundamental for inclusion because, as Laura said, some people are not used to taking planes internationally. There were some people calling me saying, "What about my plane? What about the transportation to the airport?" So, taking care, in some

[7] USAID is an acronym for the United States Agency for International Development. https://www.usaid.gov/

cases, meant sending money for them because we had the flight tickets, but they didn't have a way to get to the airport. And the language, of course, was crucial. As Vivi said, if it was not in Portuguese or translated to Portuguese it would be impossible to include anyone.

Eva: I'm curious, what is it about Latin America as a region that would make inclusion so central to what you're doing?

Dayani: Well, being excluded for 500 years. Exclusion, as a result of colonialism, is very present every day in our lives—be it because of language, ancestry, or race. It's interesting because, at moments, it's very present, but at some point, it's so common that it becomes unnoticeable, almost invisible. So it's imperative to always bring it to the front… Life, in Latin America, is about always bringing the need for inclusion to the front.

Vivi: I was thinking that even in Spanish Gaia as the first moment, we were really strong in saying, "Hey, we want to serve you in Spanish." Because here in Latin America when you speak English it is because you're really this little, little part of the whole society. Most of the time it is because you went to a good school, etc. so you are part of a small privileged part of society. We started holding the space with that consciousness and strength. We started with our own transformation, holding the space between us and meeting as a team, almost sacredly, once a week to talk about us and how we were leading our own pandemic issues, all this in our native language.

Dayani: That fabric that was woven from GAIA was integrated into ELP.

Vivi: This experience in Spanish GAIA helped us when Laura first had this idea of ELP. We could say: "Yes, let's do it" because we already had our way that allows us to put our inequality, which really hurts in our countries, to put it in front. We agreed: if we do it, we need to be inclusive.

Laura: There is something about legitimating being merged and melted all together, being in the same melting pot. We encouraged and created a safe space for this mix of not only sectors, areas, and levels of impact but also origins, socioeconomic contexts, and beliefs, something that in our region is not so common. People could let go of their identities, which is the key to true generative listening, attention, and action. There was something about this permission that was given to mix and merge and leave the habitual positions that people have.

If you put the marginalized voices in the center, then you give these voices another power. I think it creates a power balance, because a recognized voice of “power” (the well-known Presencing Institute, a Professor from the MIT Sloan School), invites the voices of the margins of the system to the center, which legitimates that movement.

Mariana: The social texture is based on the values of colonization, of being different, of being the one that comes from abroad, the one that comes from the land, the one that was mixed. So it's based on oppression and violence. Culturally

we are still promoting the things, the problems that we don't want to create. But we're still creating them together. So that's the point, how we create abilities, meta abilities, to observe what is happening, including ourselves.

Eva: I'm struck by two things. One, your acute awareness of power and power dynamics—speaking it and putting it forward. Then connected to that is that you live it each in your own domain and your own lives, the power and inclusion issues. So you speak from your own experience of being in a colonized context, and then you're simultaneously reaching out saying, "And from where we sit, there are those who are excluded, and we bring them in." This isn't even a question; it's just what's so striking right now, this acute awareness of power.

Archetypes of the Feminine

Eva: So maybe if there's a question related to this, it is around what you were talking about, Vivi, at the beginning when you were talking about the matriarchal, the feminine being present or being the way of holding the space. The ELP is very much a group of women coming together. So, is there anything there? I'd love to hear you all speak a little bit about that, the matriarchal and power and inclusion.

Laura: I would say that it was not planned, but it happened that we are a lot of women. I think there is something natural in the way that we relate to each other that has to do with trust, with enabling, something about mothering. Mothering brings the reminiscence of the uterus form, creating the container; it's more like container-building than something more directive. I think creating the container, this enabling, creative space, has to do very much with what we call mothering.

It's curious because it enabled a different perspective on gender issues, in a very patriarchal system that has a lot of gender violence, a lot of femicides everywhere, and a lot of gender abuse in Latin America. So, I think that it enabled a different space where we had, for example, what I call a 4.08 gender approach represented in one of the Colombian young leaders of the Pacific, a 23-year-old activist from the Colombian Pacific. He's a male and he was representing a female project, a so-called “seedbed” project of women from very critical and violent contexts. That was something very touching for me, these

[8] The concept of 4.0 is drawn from Otto Scharmer’s Matrix of Social Evolution (see Scharmer, 2016). Originally applied to economic models, the matrix outlines the shift in structures from centralized and top-down (1.0) to decentralized and competitive (2.0), to networked and stakeholder-focused (3.0) to generative and ecosystem aware (4.0). This model, and particularly 4.0, is then applied to a range of sector areas and refers to a mode of operating that is dialogic, decentralized, and operates from an awareness of the ecosystem around a particular issue or domain of work.

new masculinities. I think that happens when you open this kind of space with a different posture, not a patriarchal nor radical feminist posture but instead this more mothering posture or space-holding for whatever wants to happen. It enables a new form of being feminine and being masculine and all the possibilities in between.

Dayani: I'm just realizing something about the relevance of the feminine. It is true that mothering was really important with the Spanish GAIA track, because it was a moment of taking care, of bringing something new to life. But what sustained this experience for me as a team was sisterhood more than mothering. We are very strong women and we have very particular work styles, but no one questioned one another about what had to be done. If Mariana said, "Go there," I went there because we trusted each other in our shared intention for the ELP experience. I want to bring this up because in Latin America we tend to have this myth about the mother and the relevance of taking care of others. Mothering is beautiful, but I really think that what made our team work was sisterhood. I had difficult conversations with people. I know that other people had difficult conversations with each other, but when we had to be there at 7:00 AM and do whatever had to be done, we were committed, available, and totally open to do our part with our sisters.

I think we should highlight this to take it down a notch from the motherhood myth and uplift the solidarity of the sisterhood, which is very empowering. For me, thinking about what I felt in Uruguay and what I feel now, it is sisterhood.

Vivi: I love this idea that in our "in between" moment, between the first and second program, we are talking about moving from motherhood to sisterhood. I love it. In some conversations that we have been having here in Latin America, sometimes it's difficult for us as women to have a voice or to be in some spaces because it's just the way it's been. So, when Dayani says, "You have to be there," I will be there because I really trust in my sister and trust that we are "together on that."

In my personal experience, many times, men or the established power, when they tell me "Let´s go there" I go, because it is my nature. But when we get to where we are going, I find that the other person leaves me out, doesn't include me. I don't see it as something about a particular person's personality. Instead it´s like a phenomenon learned from school onwards. It is part of colonization too, a way we have been understanding power. Imagine what would happen if power served us to give visibility to what we do not see and include, instead of a power that's about 'winning.'

That's part of the colonization too. It's the same pattern in women and men.

Mariana: As an anthropologist, looking at the gender issue here that Laura brought—that new genders are coming, are emerging, I like this very much because there are many. We are different women with different styles. I would say that I am a woman, but I have a very strong masculine style and way of doing things, so I'm also working with it. The whole team of participants in the

ELP were 65% women and one trans woman. So this is also representative of who is down there on the grassroots doing the change. Who is there dealing with the social problems?

So that's very representative of the way of doing things in Latin America. The challenge here is how we can bring this all together and present it as the way it is. When we are dealing with what is coming from the field, and what is coming from the program, we can see that also that women are leading the initiatives. So that is also an expression of who we are representing, who are the people dealing with social problems. Nevertheless, we are still engaging both men and women because the point here is what Laura said: go beyond the gender issues. It's going beyond.

Sourcing Eco-System Action: Intention, Relationship, Purpose

Eva: This sparks another question. As we talk, the amount of work you have put into this becomes abundantly clear—and I'm probably only seeing a small part of that. When I think about the amount of work that you have put into this, one of the questions that surfaces for me is, what motivates you? What is it, on the most personal level that has brought you here that keeps you going? Your own motivation, your highest hope?

Dayani: What keeps me going, the thing that I love about the team is sisterhood. Why do I do this work? It's a sense that it is good, but it's also a sense of justice. I love that Viviana said, "this needs to be in Spanish and this needs to be in Portuguese and our people need this." I don't care what needs to be done for it to happen, our people need this experience.

Vivi: I can jump there because I remember one moment when we were in the ELP that I was really in my shadow just doing, doing, doing, doing without rest I was moving some chairs in a really crazy way. It was 6:00 in the morning. Suddenly, Flor (another holding team member) who's not here, but she's here, took my hands, looked at me and said, "Hey, what are you doing?" I said, "I'm moving the chairs because we need the chairs and all that." And she said, "Stop, I will do it. Go and rest a little bit." She showed me something I wasn't able to see.

I want that for people. I want people to feel that you've seen them, that you'll treat them with love. I feel that planning our second version of the program we are trying to build a structure that allows people to feel that and that they can be who they are.

Janine: The thing that I believe that unites us in this sisterhood as Dayani said is the same intention. I can feel that we have the same intention for the program, which is to build a container, to allow people to be together, to explore their sources, and then transform some system in their countries when they go back.

Mariana: I will jump in. I think it's Latin America Unite. It's always a very... It's important to look at the bridge that we're building. It's also about the building of this network that began a long time ago. And there are different pieces and elements and many stories that we can tell now.

Laura: I think that building on the community spirit. We walk in circle, we walk in community here. All our traditions, all our Indigenous traditions walk in community, horizontally. Connecting to our source and to that spirit, trusting that that's the spirit that can heal our wounds, bridge the differences and the polarization and all that violence. I think it's reconnecting that tapestry or that fabric, this trust in our inner wisdom and our "basic goodness." Arawana Hayashi[9] calls this *inherent capacity*, trusting that we have it and all we need is creating the conditions for it to appear, to come to the surface, to be alive.

One story that I remember strongly was the story of an Indigenous leader from Guatemala. He's a very important political leader in Guatemala. At the beginning of our event, we wanted to have all the voices of the different traditions that were in the room, the Indigenous traditions. He was a little bit reluctant and he said that he didn't want to connect spiritually with his tradition because he was now in a different spiritual tradition, and he was at the ELP only as a political leader. During the different ceremonies, he got more engaged in the traditional practices and one of the ceremony leaders was an Abuela from Guatemala, representing his tradition. At the end of the program, he said that he got connected with his animal of power in one of the ceremonies, who told him to go back to his roots. So he went back to Guatemala and reconnected with his indigenous spiritual tradition beyond the political, so with his spiritual roots, with the source. Then he wrote to me and said, "Thanks for making me believe again!".

This happened to many participants, I guess, that they could believe again, that they could trust, that they discovered something new. I think that's transformation, right? You need to transform yourself to transform the world. There is no chance of transforming anything if you don't really get transformed yourself. And I think this courageous skill of being able to transform yourself was what we cultivated in that space. Courage needs trust as a basis. That's my belief. So if you cultivate the soil of trust, then you can be courageous to change.

Caro: About your question about our motivation—my personal motivation. While I completely trust this group of women blindly, I also feel like my personal motivation is my daughter and children in general. We had a short conversation

[9] As described above, Arawana Hayashi is the founder of Social Presencing Theater and author of Social Presencing Theater: The Art of Making a True Move, 2021, PI Press.

with another team member, and she said that her teenage daughter had lost hope in humanity. I said, "We cannot allow this." And this is my motivation personally.

Eva: That's a beautiful final comment. Thank you.

Post-script

Laura: This interview touched us all deeply and, when it finished, we had a brief conversation and we agreed that what really moves us and holds us as a team, what ignites and tends the fire is: love. This is both universal love that sources compassion and inspires our work, and relational love or the love between us, that allows us to embrace our vulnerability, connect to our hearts, and hold each other as sisters.

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