



1.1 Beginning of the New Beginning

This is part 1 of **chapter 1**, named: **I and Myself**. Only later it will be clear what the pattern of the different chapter names will imply. To explain it right now would need too much explanation, so let your self be guided through the parts and the chapters, until we reach the point where this explanation has its rightful place.

My lived action research

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

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

I made a first attempt in May 2007. I tried to make sense of my notes and of the many experiences I had already had by then. I started an article entitled *A Story of Imagining the Future*, based on the draft chapter by

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Otto Scharmer *Twenty-Four Principles and Practices of Presencing for Leading Profound Change*, the final version of which would be published in his book *Theory U*¹. I never finished that article. The final sections were just signposts and the last notes never made it to the keyboard. I looked around, on the internet and everywhere, to see who out there was writing or experimenting with the next level of intersubjective space. Nowhere could I find anything describing the potential I had experienced. That was when it started to dawn on me: I had to write this book myself!

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

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



Some months later, in March 2009, I was involved in hosting a gathering called *Edge of Collective Sourcing*, in a remote and beautiful area in Greece. Preparing for the gathering, the hosting circle decided to create a document reflecting our current understanding of what *Collective Sourcing* was about (more on this later). This became an article of a few pages that I copy-pasted the day before the

gathering, to hand out to the participants. It marked another small step towards more writing. During the gathering, I was asked to return to this beautiful place later in the spring to take care of its animal residents - two dogs and a cat - while its human residents were travelling. This was tantamount to being offered two weeks of retreat time for free! I accepted with alacrity, recognising that it was finally time to start the 'real' writing. This

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was when I made the first outline of this book, starting from that short article.

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

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

- Being radical and consistent in translating the concepts of Oneness, the participative universe, the enfoldment of the implicit order into day-to-day reality.

- A community of people as a complex adaptive system, on the edge of chaos: what does that mean?

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

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

Integrating science, consciousness and sourcing

Words are sacred.
If you get the right ones
In the right order
You can nudge the world a little.
Adapted from Tom Stoppard – *The Real Thing: A Play*

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

I wrote: "This is not theoretical writing. I am used to writing 'from the inside', accessing my inner wisdom through writing, regarding important questions and issues. This means that my mind is not holding any ideas before the

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

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

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



During the cycle of gatherings in the container of Women Moving the Edge - which turned out to be a 5-year action research project - we experimented and learned a lot about dimensions of life which are either not much valued or simply not seen by mainstream Western society: the inner, the subtle and the collective. Our collective inquiry first required, then obliged us to articulate, to make distinctions, to describe - to find a language for the subtle differences between the different elements of the

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nebulous, intangible, inner and collective ways of knowing and sensing. It called on us to embody, integrate and seek the synergy of analysing, articulating and teaching with what came to us through inner knowing, subtle sensing and collective inquiry.

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

Blending Individual and collective knowing

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

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

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

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

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

The world is full of
magic things,
patiently waiting
for our sense to
grow sharper.

W.B.Yeats

Practice as embodied intention

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

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

This book brings to the practice its missing half: the framework, the overview, the step-by-step breakdown, the distinctions, the theory. Together, the practice and the theory form a whole, in which each can

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inform and enhance the other. Together, in synergy, they belong to the new paradigm that is unfolding and taking shape, each day a bit more, throughout the world.

This book charts the parts and the capacities, and describing the experiences that point to the formation of sentient collectives (circles, groups, networks, organizations). We have noticed that (any) action is far better informed when natural rhythm and right timing are attended to, allowing the collective, generative process to unfold. In these pages you will find practical advice that will make this collective practice more understandable and concrete, supporting its application — the practice itself — and pointing to what it makes possible in the world.

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

¹ Scharmer, O. Theory U. Leading from the Future as it Emerges. The Social Technology of Presencing. Society for Organizational Learning: Boston, MA. 2007