



0.0 Introduction

- To write authentically about any territory, such as 'art', one has to go there - to take a dive into that gap, plunging toward the territory as deep and as far as one can let oneself go. To extend the metaphor, we have to dive for as long we can hold our breath - which is the suspension of making convenient interpretations for as long as it takes to touch bedrock. And then – and only then – are we qualified to report back. What was it like? How deep did you go? What did you discover? Did you touch the face of the Muse?
- – Bonnitta Roy, *The Gap, the Map and the Territory*, 2006

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

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

The book started out as an article supplementing 'Theory U', as developed by Otto Scharmer¹, because, inspiring as I found his framework, it didn't seem able to accommodate what we had been living in our many women's gatherings. The practice that we came to call Collective Presencing seems to tell us something about evolution itself, about a new human capacity beginning to emerge, and about the new paradigm that

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we see and feel unfolding through us. The framework I found that best fit our experiences was Jean Gebser's² description of the mutation of consciousness, written half way through the previous century. The book in your hands seeks to articulate how we can live in the new Epoch that is dawning during our days.



What our collective experience adds to conventional understanding and knowledge chiefly

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

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

You don't need to know anything about Theory U or Gebser's framework to understand what is written here and to be able to apply it. More crucial is the practice of Circle work³, in all its depth and humility.

A New Human Capacity

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

Bonnitta Roy emphasizes the difference between development and evolution. She states (online, within the Magellan courses): "... machines can develop well beyond our capacities, because they can run an unlimited number of operations in unlimited time... but they cannot and will never be able to evolve. To evolve, someone will have to pull the plug, and install a new operating system, according to a new paradigm." She goes on to ask: "Do we live as if the whole purpose of evolution is to get up to human? Or: Do we live as if human is one of the stages in a greater cosmic story? What we really believe out of these scenarios makes a big difference!"

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

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

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

David Whyte describes courage as "the ability to cultivate a relationship with the unknown; to create a form of friendship with what lies around the corner over the horizon—with those things that have not yet fully come into being."

How you can read this book

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

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

2 Gebser, Jean; The Ever-present Origin. Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio.

³ <http://callingthecircle.org/>