

Editorial

Editorial Journal of Awareness- Based Systems Change:

From Duality to Complementarity

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The act of writing an Editorial calls us not only to showcase the published collection of articles, placing them into a wider frame to orient readers, but also to step back and reflect on the time in-between issues. As a biannual journal the timespan of half a year flies by in an instant. Much like a newborn, the time from birthing the journal (Koenig et al. 2021) to raising it into its current “toddlerhood” has at times passed by more quickly than one would want. These inflection points, however, give us reason to pause and bring our attention to the current moment and our intention within it.

More than twenty years ago, Morin & Kern (1999) framed the emerging condition of our planet and time as one of polycrisis. Looking back just half a year one can hardly comprehend the accelerating pace of the “complex intersolidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrollable processes, and the general crisis of the planet” (p. 74) that they described. Against the backdrop of the ongoing Covid-Pandemic, the swelling Ukraine-Russia conflict has escalated to a full-fledged war, not only setting in motion new streams of forced migration in Europe but also affecting the global fuel and energy market, currency devaluations, economic inflation and global food supply chains, especially in relation to some of the already most vulnerable parts of the world

(Lang & McKee, 2022). In addition, the journalistic coverage of the war, at least in the global North and West, itself reveals the shadow consciousness of these regions—attentional racism—as conflict-born suffering in regions such as Eritrea, Afghanistan, Yemen and others slip away from the newsfeeds.

The complexity and multi-dimensionality of our existence is at odds with the way the human mind has been taught and learned to behave. Our minds tend to search for easy answers, including blaming others—particularly those in authority. Yet the polycrisis, as Swilling (2013) puts it, defies “reduction to a single cause” (p. 93). The problem is not easily located “out there”, it is nested and interwoven in the entire fabric and make-up of our global institutions and the socio-economic, ecological and cultural frameworks, structures and mind-sets in which they are embedded (Swilling, 2013). And it is we who embody and enact these frameworks, structures and mind-sets.

Two decades ago, in a UNESCO publication on the future of education, Edgar Morin stated that, “The difficulty of knowing our world is aggravated by our mode of thought” (Morin, 2001, p. 52). In order to comprehend the globality of this critical planetary era that we are in, he continued “we must hereafter conceive the unbearable complexity of the world” (p. 52), which demands that we:

...simultaneously consider the unity and diversity, the complementarities and antagonisms of the planetary process ...
Our planet requires polycentric thought that can aim at a universalism that is not abstract but conscious of the unity/diversity of the human condition; a polycentric thought nourished by the cultures of the world. (Morin, 2001, p. 52)

What can a single journal still in its infancy, and the emergent field of Awareness-Based Systems Change which it aims to serve, contribute to this daunting task? We believe our role is to partake in and co-shape the r-(e)volution of science and research, supporting the move from differentiation to integration, from binary to plurality, from dualism to complementarity.

To have adequate knowledge of the world in all its complexity is not just a matter of survival, as Lorraine Code (2020) puts it, but also one of obligation. What philosophers have framed as the act of “knowing well” can also be framed as a moral exigence to expand our knowledge base and integrate what formerly has been subject to epistemic oppression or exclusion (Dotson, 2014).

In so doing, one embodies a position of “epistemic responsibility” (Code, 2020) in the ethical process of trying to understand how humans attempt to know, understand and act in their worlds embracing their full diversity. This form of ecological thinking “can generate more responsible knowings than the reductivism of the positivist post-Enlightenment legacy allows ...and... can spark a revolution comparable to Kant’s Copernican revolution” (Code, 2005, 87). We believe the field of Awareness-Based Systems Change, and the journal in particular, are well suited to foreground and undertake such an endeavor, as the collection of papers in this, our third issue, will demonstrate.

As an inter- and transdisciplinary field, we take an integrative and pluralistic methodological and theoretical approach at the cultural cusps of: theory and practice, research and action, inner and outer, personal and systemic. As such, our task is inherently hybrid in nature (Bhabha, 1994). The work is to intentionally engage in processes of disassembling and reassembling the structural and cultural foundations and symbolic conditions of which we are a part. We undertake this work with the intention to create new, less restricting and more enabling narratives which can generate action confidence (Scharmer & Pomeroy, 2020; Pomeroy & Oliver, 2021) that leads to palpable systemic change. Doing so demands we create (third) spaces that simultaneously are nourished by and benefit from difference and which produce a multiplicity of meanings. To that point, Bhabha (1993) writes:

It is precisely in that ambivalent use of ‘*different*’- to be different from those that are different makes you the same – that the Unconscious speaks of the form of the otherness, the tethered shadow of deferral and displacement. It is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness (p. 117).

This is the theoretical and methodological space we aim to inhabit and evolve.

Contributions to This Issue

We see Awareness-Based Systems Change as an invitation, aptly framed by Tony Hodgson in the *In Dialogue* piece of this issue, as giving ourselves permission to simultaneously hold and live in a multiplicity of ways of knowing (drawn from the *Three Horizons framework*, Sharpe, 2013). The articles in this issue, individually and taken together as a collection, reflect this expanded epistemological stance.

The original and peer-reviewed publications of this issue provide deep dives into specific perspectives. As a group, they can be seen as an array or a journey intersecting and oscillating back and forth between the first-, second- and third-person perspectives (a) knower/s can inhabit in their search for meaning, all of which serve, and are needed to advance, the field of awareness-based systems change.

Taking as her starting point the self-reflexive and introspective first-person perspective afforded by autoethnography *Erin Alexiuk* explores the potential contributions of this method to systems analysis. Alexiuk interweaves Sauna-Stories as narrative layers to explore her family’s history as Finnish immigrants to northern Ontario, Canada. In doing so, she surfaces nuanced understandings of highly complex social and cultural processes, in particular the intergenerational and translocational processes of identity formation and its connection to land. This piece also draws connections and carves out opportunities for introspective work to advance systems change research, not

least of all by capturing and making visible the messy complexity of lived experience.

Moving from and being moved by her own first-person perspective of the effects embodied practices have had on her sense of feeling connected, *Daniela Lehner* invites the reader on a theoretical journey into relational terrain: the intersubjective dimension of the second-person perspective. Taking as her context the highly pertinent field of peace education she delineates the place and contribution of body and heart intelligence(s) to shift dualistic and binary modes of being and knowing towards relationality and interconnectedness. She argues that only by overcoming the various forms of separation that promote violent structures, and realizing the connective nature of all beings, can we start to embrace and learn what she frames as *imperfect* peace.

With her second article in the *Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change* *Melanie Goodchild*, continues to tell the/her story (Dibaajimowin) of the evolution of relational systems thinking as an Indigenous standpoint theory in its own right, which is presented in at least three ways. As a spatial nexus, relational systems thinking is a cultural and dynamic interface that enables emergence in the third and sacred space between differentiated but equal ways of knowing. As a standpoint, relational systems thinking helps systems change practitioners and scholars transcend binary and hierarchical thinking in order to embrace a complexity mindset, informed by Indigenous wisdom traditions. As an experience, relational systems thinking is an invitation into relational knowing through engagement with the net of relational stories and lessons representing the author's own lived experience of embarking on a journey of coming to know as she researches at the interface of knowledge systems.

The journey through perspectives is completed by *Sandra Waddock, Steve Waddell, Peter H. Jones and Ian Kendrick*. These authors take a third-person perspective that allows them to discern an integrative system of systems which they call Transformation (T-) systems. The T-system is both a heuristic frame and a practical organizing process to help socio-ecological systems flourish. T-systems are understood to be the totality of initiatives, people and organizations who are collectively seeking to transform a particular issue, in a given context. Drawing on the *Seafood 2030* initiative as an illustrative example, they describe passages of connection, coherence and amplification as discrete stages in T-systems evolution, involving processes to develop self-awareness and overcome disconnectedness in order to support greater systemic and transformative impact.

The articles featured in our innovation formats, *Commentary from the Field*, *In the Making* and *Discussant to In the Making*, and *In Dialogue* all illustrate and reflect upon the lived experience of moving away from dualistic approaches to knowledge creation to instead bring different knowledge systems into conversation with one another, i.e. shifting from duality to complementary. In the *Commentary*, Editorial Board member, *Shobi Lawalata*, writing from the context of Indonesia's considerable linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity,

provides an inspirational illustration of what polycentric, non-reductivist thinking looks like in practice. It is perhaps not by coincidence that “United in Diversity” is the organization that provides the context for this article. The organization’s work to support leadership capacity-building with Indigenous and grassroots community leaders in service of equitable and sustainable nature stewardship is underpinned by a collective intention to build infrastructures for complementarity. She points to the need to first recognize the existence of rigor in knowledge systems that have been subsumed by dominant colonial knowledge so that the two may be brought into dialogue to meet current challenges.

This issue’s *In the Making* continues the theme of holding plurality and illustrates the potential for emergent creativity that lives within it. *Renata Sbardelini, Daniele Almeida and Liliane Moreira Ramos*, share their action research initiative, the MAPA Social Innovation Lab, in which they engaged leaders from diverse sectors and positionalities to rethink a social model anchored in feminine-masculine duality in their home county, Brazil. Guided through a Theory U (Scharmer, 2016) based process, participants deepened the initial inquiry question, connecting them with the power relations related to gender, race, social class, economic class, and humankind’s relationship with nature. Through powerful, granular examples drawn from the five-day lab, the authors illuminate key moments of consciousness shift around the plurality of gender experience and the conditions that allowed this plurality to surface and co-shape new and multiple gender narratives. In doing so, they simultaneously illustrate the inextricable connection between personal and systemic.

As *Discussant to In the Making*, *José Romero Keith* picks up on this thread, identifying gender inequity as a “showcase” of the systemic workings of exclusion that makes visible the dynamics of systemic exclusion more broadly. Romero frames the MAPA Social Innovation Lab as a meeting of Paulo Freire’s (2018) emancipatory pedagogy and Theory U as a framework for awareness-based systems change. He points to the complementary of the two, as learning processes that share an ultimate goal for the generation of collective consciousness for social transformation.

The *In Dialogue* piece in this issue, brings together *Oliver Koenig, Megan Senegue, Bill Sharpe, Zahra Ash-Harper, Stefan Bergheim, Anthony Hodgson, and Asiya Odugleh-Kolev* to explore the links between Presencing and Three Horizons in the context of creating inclusive, just and equitable futures. The conversants explore what it means to avoid totalizing structures (however well intended), as we work with a plurality of perspectives in the kind of reflexive futuring processes that are contained in both the Three Horizons and in Presencing. This exploration around the nature and quality of structure required for authentic presence and for the emergence of collective insight from a plurality of perspectives, drew the conversants to the nature of structuring that love brings. *Ilija Delio* (2013), a scholar at Georgetown University who is bringing new insight into the work of Jesuit paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, talks about love as the animating force in the universe. She talks about the

‘unbearable wholeness of being’, which resonates with the earlier reference to Morin speaking about the ‘unbearable complexity of the world’.

The question of how to structure for love, while not always explicitly stated as such, can be seen as an undercurrent for several of the articles, and it connects through the theme of holding plurality of experience and perspective. More than a sentimental notion, love has been taken up by important critical thinkers of our time. For Adorno (2005) “love is the power to see similarity in the dissimilar” (p. 191). Bhaskar (2012) contends that love is “the principle of union behind all unions without which nothing could cohere” (p. 189) and that it is “the cohesive force in the universe, which makes it whole, and in your ground state that makes you coherent, strong, autonomous and whole” (p. 192, all of the above quoted in Hartwig, 2015, p. 207).

We began this piece with a consideration of the complex polycrisis of our current moment. Surely existence—and ideally flourishing—in this context demands of us action drawn from a plurality of perspectives, voices and epistemologies. Perhaps the role of love in structuring for plurality is to provide the motivation to stay with that which is different, complex and unfamiliar long enough to create the new narratives we, as individuals and societies, need. This is the role of what Bill Sharpe in the *In Dialogue* piece refers to as ‘existential convening’, which enables a deep mutuality of presence, where people are able to be fully themselves while being fully part of the flow of the whole.

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