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Presencing with Soul:

Transpersonal Perspectives on Awareness-Based Social Change Practice

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Abstract

In the spring of 2020, I joined the GAIA initiative, an "impromptu global infrastructure for sense-making, for leaning into our current moment of disruption and letting this moment move us toward civilizational renewal" (Presencing Institute, 2020). Facilitated by the Presencing Institute, GAIA intended to galvanise global intention and action, by initiating a collective presencing process that aimed to shift participants from ego-system to eco-system awareness. Some 10,000 people joined a series of online sessions with the help of video conferencing technology, jointly engaging in mindfulness and contemplative practices, reflective and expressive writing, Social Presencing Theater, and visual art practice. The journey was informed by Theory U (Scharmer, 2018), an awareness-based social change methodology consisting of

the seven stages of presencing, which invite the suspension of habitual perception, thought, and action to foster deeper levels of awareness and knowing. The term presencing combines *sensing* (feeling into possibilities) and *presence* (being in the present moment). The aim of Theory U is to enable practitioners to come into conscious relationship with the "deeper *source* level" (Scharmer & Käufer, 2013, p. 18) from which they act, helping them to notice the invisible roots of dysfunctional social patterns and systems, to acknowledge and relinquish them, and to co-create new pathways and structures that may aid profound societal transformation.

In this paper, I relate to Theory U through the lenses of transpersonal psychology and consciousness studies to illuminate the deeper dynamics at work. Doing so, I address such questions as: What happens in consciousness when we practice presencing, working in person or online? What might it mean to 'connect to the source level'? What may be cornerstones of safe and effective practice? And how can presencing practitioners cultivate their capacities to facilitate this work?

In the first part of the paper, I map the seven stages of Theory U onto three core streams of consciousness that inform the human experience, reflecting on the features and qualities of each stream, and considering what psychosomatic dynamics may be at play as we enact the trajectory of the U. In depicting the three streams of consciousness, I highlight some of the challenges presencing presents, suggesting that it is, in essence, a depth-psychological and spiritual approach. In the second part of the paper, I explore the practical and ethical implications of presencing, considering what capacities and attitudes may need to be nurtured in practitioners to support skillful facilitation and enactment of the U process. I also consider what frameworks could be deployed to facilitate safe and effective practice.

Presencing and Streams of Consciousness

In psychology, a range of models have been put forward which embrace the idea that there are several concurrent streams of consciousness. The first can be described as a stream serving the emergence of the personal *self* (Assagioli, 1993) or *ego* (Jung, 1995), generating the I-narrative (Lancaster, 2004) or *primary process* (Mindell, 2002). It gives rise to our ordinary sense of self marked by feelings of a continuous, independent, and unique identity. On a collective level, this stream of consciousness constellates our *consensus reality* (Mindell, 2016), the familiar world we inhabit and share with other people day-to-day.

The second stream of consciousness, or *secondary process* (Mindell, 2002), serves the unfolding of another, deeper *intentionality* (Lancaster, 2004). The depictions transpersonal psychologists have provided of this second stream are complex, yet all move beyond the sphere of the individual in some way and towards the collective—the *archetypal* (Jung, 1995), the *universal* (Grof, 1993), and the *interconnected* (Wright, 1998). Many feature the notion of a *higher self*

(Assagioli, 1993; Washburn, 1995), *transpersonal self* (Rowan, 1993), or *soul* (Wilber, 2000). This transpersonal self is embedded in the world at large, relating individual experience to a deeper, beyond-human reality. We might comprehend the first and second level of consciousness by evoking the metaphor of trees: Rising seemingly independent above the ground, they are enlivened by a profoundly interconnected network of roots below the ground which links them seamlessly into the larger web of life.

Some scholars further distinguish the first and second stream of consciousness from a third, described by Mindell (2016) as the level of *sentient essence*, and inhabited by the *cosmic self* (Heron, 1988) or (Wilber, 2000). This stream or level of consciousness is described as non-local and non-dual (Mindell, 2016). Spiritual traditions relate that at this level the dichotomies that shape our normal experience have been transcended, and there is but a profound sense of oneness with all that is. This level, although more ineffable than effable, is explored in transpersonal psychology with reference to schools of non-dual mysticism (e.g. Wilber, 2000) and quantum theory (e.g. Mindell, 2004).

The second and third streams of consciousness are mostly imperceptible to the ordinary self and yet transpersonal theories suggest that these streams exert perpetual influence on us - just as trees are shaped by the places in which they grow, influenced by the quality of soil, water, air, and the presence of other life in its myriad forms. The invitation of transpersonal and integral psychologies and their body of practices is to come into relationship with these deeper, unconscious, collective, and more-than-human streams of consciousness, to awaken to them and to integrate them—so that we may become more fully rounded human beings who are more intentionally and co-creatively embedded in the larger web of life. In the following, I consider how practices of the Presencing Institute might relate to these streams of consciousness, illuminating what psychodynamic processes might be at play at each level. I believe that such mapping is not only of theoretical value, but that it has implications for the evolution of practice frameworks and practitioner training - areas on which I will elaborate in the second part of the paper.

Letting Go: Attenuating the First Stream

Presencing involves the enactment of the *U process* (Scharmer, 2018) which entails seven steps or stages designed to enable us to shift from ordinary cognition to a deeper level of awareness. The process begins with a shift from habitual action and thought, *downloading* (1), to *seeing* (2) which invites direct observation of our experience. *Sensing* (3) follows, redirecting attention from the observed to the observer. *Presencing* (4) arises as we enter stillness and silence in the observation of direct experience, giving us the opportunity to "let go of the old" (Scharmer, 2018, p. 24). The principles informing these steps have become refined through Scharmer's discussions with the cognitive scientist Francisco Varela, among others, who was immersed in the study of phenomenology, psychological introspection, and contemplative practice. Along similar lines, I can

relate these initial stages of the U process to the classic discussion of deautomatization in meditative and mystical practices (Deikman, 1966). Drawing on the work of Hartmann (1958), Gill and Brenman (1959), and Rapaport and Gill (1959), Deikman elaborates that in ordinary life we depend much on the automatization of perception, thought, and behaviour. According to Hartman (1958):

> In well-established achievements they [motor apparatuses] function automatically: the Integration of the somatic systems involved in the action is automatized, and so is the integration of the individual mental acts involved in it. With increasing exercise of the action its intermediate steps disappear from consciousness… not only motor behavior but perception and thinking, too, show automatization. (as cited in Deikman, 1966, p. 329)

Deikman suggests that mystical practices that involve contemplation and renunciation enable a reversal of this automatization, "by *reinvesting actions and percepts with attention*" (Deikman, 1966, p. 329). Deautomatization thus refers to a loosening of the psychological patterns that progressively organise and restrict our thinking, perception, and behaviour. According to Deikman (1966), deautomatization can be achieved through contemplation because contemplation invites nonanalytic apprehension: "…discursive thought is banished and the attempt is made to empty the mind of everything except the percept of the object in question" (p. 327). Along similar lines, renunciation involves "freeing oneself from distractions that interfere with the perception of higher realms or more beautiful aspects of existence" (p. 327). Crucially, Deikman asserts, mystical traditions insist that renunciation of worldly attachments and desires must be complete before divine wisdom is revealed.

Reflecting on the cognitive processes at work in spiritual and mystical practices, Lancaster (2004) proposes that they entail "a shift in the focus of attention away from the 'I'-narrative stream and towards that of the deep memory process" (p. 246), reorienting the leading edge of ego consciousness towards increased awareness of what is ordinarily preconscious. In the I-narrative, meaning is focused and singular—a cloud in the sky is just a cloud—whereas in the deep memory process meaning is fluid, ambiguous, dynamic: the cloud is at once a bird and a dragon and yet it is also neither bird nor dragon as it continuously shifts in form.

Lancaster asserts that there are two routes through which the shift from ego to deep memory process can be achieved. One entails attenuation of the emphasis on 'I'—in theology this is referred to as the apophatic path, the path of renunciation, often emphasised in Buddhist traditions. Citing Varela, Scharmer (2018) speaks of it as "*suspension, re-direction and letting go*" (p. 22). According to Lancaster (2004), the other path involves augmenting awareness with associative practice, enabling a conscious dreaming, a reverie, a play with meaning. This is the kataphatic path or way of affirmation. It is emphasised in Jewish language mysticism, for example, where creative play with words comes

to the fore: Here words are deconstructed to their elemental letters, revealing multiple layers of meaning, so that "the 'knots' binding the soul would be loosened" (Lancaster, 2004, p. 242), and the mystic would achieve union with the Active Intellect, the intermediary between the divine and human spheres. Reflecting on such practices from a cognitive perspective, Lancaster (2004) suggests that in human perception, stimulus processing involves a preconscious, associative stage, in which multi-sensorial memory is activated in relation to sense data, before the multiplicity of meaning is narrowed and tagged to the I-narrative. In language mysticism then, the use of kataphatic practices, stimulating imagination and inviting reverie, enables the adept to become aware of this preconscious dynamic and intentionally engage with it.

In presencing practice, which integrates mindfulness, creative arts, and embodied knowing, I see the interplay of the apophatic and kataphatic paths, engaging both attenuation of habitual processes and creative association, with the aim to enable a more expansive state of awareness, in which the practitioner is poised to access the deeper streams of consciousness.

Letting Come: Stepping into the Second Stream

As we enter *presencing* (4), Scharmer (2018) suggests that we cross a threshold, transitioning from 'letting go' to 'letting come'. The crossing of the threshold requires us to suspend our voices of judgement, cynicism, and fear—opening mind, heart, and will. Scharmer (2018) asserts that here we "connect to the surrounding sphere of future potential. The boundary between observer and observed collapses into a space for the future to emerge" (p. 24). Whilst this may sound like a non-dual state such as might be achieved by sustained meditation practice, I wonder whether what might be happening in most presencing processes is that the tight grasp of the ordinary 'I' is loosened and so preconscious materials begin to rise into awareness, as described above. And thus in the step that follows, *crystallizing* (5), these emergent materials begin to guide the way, "As we *let come* and crystallize vision and intention" (p. 24). Scharmer himself notes that in crystallizing "the relationship between the observer and the observed starts to invert" (p. 24)—which is not suggestive of a state of non-dual realisation. What exactly Scharmer's term "observer" means in these depictions of the process is not clear. To me, it seems that the observer (or the process of observing) remains unaffected by the practice. Instead, the shift which presencing practitioners experience may have to do with where observation is focused. I propose that the power reversal which Scharmer describes occurs between the ordinary self, or ego, and the contents of the second stream of consciousness, which according to depth-psychological theory have a life and will of their own. As we let these contents exert their will, observation becomes focused on and serves the unfolding of their intentionality.

Jung used the term *active imagination* to depict the process of engagement with the second stream, and he regarded it as the most important auxiliary which could facilitate dialogue between unconscious and conscious domains of

the psyche and thus lead to a more harmonious and balanced personality. Crucially, unlike Freud who regarded the unconscious as "limited to contents rejected and repressed from consciousness" (Miller, 2004, p. 2), Jung believed the unconscious to be a generative and purposeful guide, "a mysterious landscape of autonomous, teleological intelligence that compensates for, supplements, even opposes [ego] consciousness" (Miller, 2004, p. 2). According to Jung, active imagination unfolds in two stages, the depictions of which seem to resonate with the presencing process. Describing the first stage, "Jung speaks of the need for systematic exercises to eliminate critical attention and produce a vacuum in consciousness" (Chodorow, 1997, p. 10). We have explored this step in the sections above, highlighting the need for "suspension of our rational, critical faculties" (Chodorow, 1997, p. 10), enabling nonanalytic apprehension. Jung also likens this step to the Taoist idea of *wu wei*: "The art of letting things happen, action through non-action, letting go of oneself (…) became for me the key that opens the door to the way. We must be able to let things happen in the psyche" (Jung, 1929, CW 13, para 20).

As the door is opened, the second stage of active imagination begins and the contents of the second stream lead the way, prompting their expression in imagery, movement, sound, or word. The Jungian analyst Arnold Mindell (2002) elaborates on this spontaneous engagement as a *process-oriented meditation*, which he suggests unfolds across the spectrum of sensory and extrasensory channels that are available to humans—from proprioception or bodily feeling, to the visual or to the auditory channel, to movement or kinesthesis, to the relational channel, and to the world channel which signals through synchronicities: meaningful coincidences which appear to relate to our inner experience but have no apparent causal connection. Crucially, Mindell (2002) asserts that we must learn to follow the message arising from the second stream as it switches channels, presenting itself as a dream, a sound, an image, a bodily sensation, or perhaps a synchronicity. He suggests that whilst all the channels are operative all the time, we only occupy some of them consciously. Others transmit signals that do not reach our awareness, as we have learned to ignore and block those channels. As a result, we have blind spots and perceive the deeper stream only partially, even when we make a conscious effort to pay attention. To come into fuller relationship, we must thus learn to be flexible process meditators, cultivating reception through all the channels available to us, by engaging in a range of meditative, contemplative, and creative techniques which expand our ability to notice and express our moment-to-moment experience.

Engagement with what emerges from the second stream of consciousness may not be a comfortable process, as what surfaces is complementary to the perspectives and beliefs held by the ego. It presents a counter-position, a balancing opposite, which can feel truly 'other'. Active imagination invites us to grant this other authority and voice, ultimately to integrate self and other and transcend their opposition through the birthing of a third perspective, a new way of life. Entering a fully-embodied engagement, compelling us to move, enact,

sketch, sculpt, and write, we become expressive artists, making visible the other—and we gradually come into relationship with the larger reality of which we are a/part. According to Jung (1995), our life-long task is to reunite the ego with its superordinate subject, the higher Self, which represents the totality of the psyche and its collective, archetypal ground.

Jung (1995) was keen to distinguish active imagination from fantasy, which he regarded as superficial and escapist. He asserted that fantasy is a conscious invention, serving the ego and complying with conscious expectations. Similarly, Raff (2000) asserts that fantasy never transcends the ego and can lead to ego inflation, illusion, and stagnation:

> …confusing fantasy with imagination, and confounding active imagination with ego manipulation is damaging and at times dangerous. An inability to differentiate fantasy from active imagination precludes a real relationship with the self, and perpetuates the ego's illusions that it alone is of value. (p. 48)

Jung (1995) noted that the process of active imagination, too, is not without its risks, for it may lead to the spontaneous eruption of unconscious contents into the conscious mind, leading to temporary overwhelm. In the light of this, what are the implications for presencing practice? As facilitators and researchers, how can we develop the right capacities to engage safely and effectively with the second stream? And how can we know whether or not we are tapping the second stream of consciousness at all, and not merely indulging in ego-affirming fantasies? I shall address the former questions later on. As to the latter, one indicator of tapping the second stream is *surprise*. The messages that arise from the second stream can feel truly unfamiliar, as they complement our conscious perspective. They may feel like a revelation. Another indicator may be a change in our language, expressing a shift in the locus of our agency: As the 'other' informs our actions, the ego experiences a surrender to this other will, and 'I' no longer drives the action: 'I' lets happen.

Universal Will: Enacting the Third Stream

Active imagination does not end with rational awareness. For the new level of being to endure it must be applied and integrated into daily life. It must be embodied. There is an ethical confrontation (von Franz, 1980), a demand for the new way to be lived and enacted. Along similar lines, Scharmer (2018) proposes that the final stages of the U process require us to explore the future by doing—*prototyping* (6)—and to evolve our practices and infrastructures from the context of the larger eco-system—*performing* (7). Yet these final steps of the U process do not simply seem to imply integration and application of the messages arising from the second stream. Relating his ideas to the teachings of Chinese Zen master Huai-Chin Nan, Scharmer (2018) asserts that "Enacting happens from 'being in dialogue with the universe'" (p. 25) and through "connecting to source" (p. 23)—which, according to Master Nan (in Scharmer & Käufer, 2013), is God,

the Tao from which all originates. Scharmer and Käufer (2013) seem to imply that the U process enables access to what I have called the third stream of consciousness above. In the transpersonal field, writings concerning this third stream are largely informed by Indigenous and esoteric traditions. When Scharmer writes of dialoguing with the universe, is he encouraging us to embrace an esoteric path? If so, what would be the implications of that, for practice and for research? I would like to call on Scharmer to address these questions. Can and should presencing be an active spiritual discipline? My own answer to that would be a resounding yes! To me, vertical literacy - as advocated by Scharmer (e.g. 2020) - implies spiritual literacy. Moreover, I believe in integrative development: The engagement of the second and third streams of consciousness should go hand in hand, on individual and collective levels, so as to enable us to become more integrated and balanced, and thus more capable of enacting the wisdom and intelligence of the Transcendent, whatever you may conceive this to be: Universal intelligence, God, the Tao, Brahman. Below, I begin to unpack what it means to embrace the consequences and responsibilities that this metaphysical position bestows upon us as we endeavour to create, enact, and research spiritually informed social change methodologies.

Questions of ontology and metaphysics continue to rouse disagreement between those working in the discipline of transpersonal psychology. When we evoke notions of a universal intelligence, are we entering the territory of religion and theology? Can and should we adopt and enact transpersonal perspectives without invoking notions of the Transcendent? Some transpersonal psychologists have chosen to adopt an agnostic position (Friedman, 2002; Daniels, 2005). Daniels (2005) asserts, "This does not mean, of course, that we must necessarily deny the reality of the Transcendent, but only that, as transpersonal psychologists, we are limited to exploring the ways in which the Transcendent is experienced phenomenally…" (p. 230). Others have argued that such bracketing is not possible nor desirable (Lancaster, 2002, 2004). As Lancaster (2002) elucidates, many of the practices and traditions which transpersonal psychology explores embrace metaphysics of transcendence, from which they cannot be divorced without being distorted or devalued. A defining feature of the transpersonal "is the assertion that there is a value in transformative experience involving transcendence […] the vertical axis is involved; contact with the Transcendent is instrumental in effecting meaningful transformation" (p. 5). Citing Ferrer (2000), Lancaster (2002) elaborates that there are dangers in an endeavour which focuses solely on the phenomenological examination of experiences of transcendence and transformation. In step with Ferrer (2000), Lancaster (2002) suggests that the *emphasis on experience* may invite

> …*spiritual narcissism* (which includes ego-inflation, self-absorption, and spiritual materialism); *integrative arrestment* (meaning that natural processes through which spiritual realisations are integrated into everyday life are arrested); reductionism of the spiritual into individual inner experience which is at odds with the testimony of the traditions themselves;

and (emphasising the separation of the 'objects' of experience from the 'subject' having the experience). (p. 9)

I share Lancaster's and Ferrer's concerns. At present, our scientific endeavour is marred by an overbearing materialist paradigm which has either denied the existence of so-called 'anomalous' phenomena or sought to grasp them through reductive, materialist frameworks—with little success. If we embrace the idea that a transcendent dimension infuses our very existence, bracketing such a wellspring from our research may be like trying to make sense of a living body by examining a corpse. As we engage in and evolve presencing and other awareness-based social change methodologies, the challenge lies before us to explicate and operationalise our ideas as best as we can, and to relate them to other maps, integrating and evolving our common knowledge base, whilst honouring the Mystery at the heart of our participatory co-creation—lest we cut ourselves off from the Transcendent Source. To me, awareness-based social change methodologies need to be active spiritual disciplines, serving as vehicles for deeper transformation, and as we engage with these methodologies as such, discernment must not be left behind. We must explicate the implications for theory-building and research. Some, like Anderson and Braud (2011), have already begun this work, evolving research frameworks and methods which integrate skills and practices from our spiritual and wisdom traditions, thus enabling researchers to access and integrate expanded ways of knowing, to enhance research projects in all their facets. These skills and practices include working with intention and attention (developing our witnessing capacities, quieting and slowing); reducing distraction and noise and enabling fuller appreciation of subtle information; and fostering direct, participatory knowing (engaging intuition, empathy, and compassion). These skills also include cultivating nuanced sensory appreciation and imagination through play and creative arts, shifting us "beyond the usual egoic modes of functioning" (Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 164). The application and integration of these skills has implications for every aspect of a research project—from the ways in which we formulate our research questions, to sampling and data collection, to analysis and the presentation of findings. In the fields of transpersonal and integral psychology, research methods have evolved that specifically cultivate and draw on these skills, such as Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson, 2004) and Organic Inquiry (Clements, 2004).

The ideas and practices outlined by Anderson and Braud (2011) certainly resonate with and complement Theory U and its associated body of arts-based practices. I believe it would be highly fruitful to draw from transpersonal methods, to expand and advance awareness-based social change research. As an applied theatre artist with years of experience in expressive movement, dance, and voice work, I am acutely aware of the potency of creative and embodied methods in revealing and transmuting personal and transpersonal dynamics; and I believe that practices that utilise active imagination and illuminate collective patterns are key to unlocking societal transformation.

So, when we practice presencing, what might it mean to be "in dialogue with the universe" (Scharmer, 2018, p. 25)? Let me give one tentative answer here, by drawing from writers exploring the converging fields of quantum physics, spirituality, and psychology.

Advocating for science as a spiritual practice, Barušs (2007) draws on quantum mechanics to speculate what may be happening when our observations collapse probabilities into singular physical events. It has been widely suggested that consciousness—the act of observation by a conscious agent—may be responsible for the collapse of probabilities into actuality. Barušs (2007), however, argues that "we do not go about our lives deliberately intending particular events to occur" (p. 42), therefore it appears that there may be "hidden variables" that act as "*volitional directives* emerging from a transcendent aspect of reality that determine the actual manifestation of matter upon observation" (p. 42). Barušs' argument is predicated on the idea that there is a domain of reality that transcends our ordinary world but has causal effects on it. Crucially, Barušs asserts that it is a level which we cannot access with our senses. In contrast to Barušs, psychologists Amy and Arnold Mindell (Mindell, 2016) assert that this level <u>can</u> be experienced as

> …subtle tendencies that occur before they can be verbalized, such as a slight tendency to move before actually moving, vague intuitions, and very subtle feelings. These pre-signals or sentient experiences […] are like seeds from which more overt signals and experiences arise. As these sentient experiences emerge, they begin to break up into parts and polarities, expressing themselves in more stable form and through the various sensory-grounded channels. ("Quantum physics and pre-signals" section, para. 3 & 4)

Mindell (2016) describes this level of experience as the *sentient essence* level, relating it to Indigenous and spiritual wisdom traditions which depict unitive and/or nondual states of consciousness. One aspect of sentient essence, Arnold and Amy Mindell suggest, is the *silent force* (Mindell, 2004) or *intentional field* (Mindell, 2016). Amy Mindell (2016) likens the intentional field to a magnetic field, invisible and immeasurable, yet guiding us throughout our lives. When first developing the idea of the intentional field, Arnold Mindell (2004) related it to Sheldrake's (1981) concept of *morphogenetic fields* in biology and Bohm's & Hiley's (1993) description of the *pilot wave* in quantum physics. In their explorations of quantum theory, Bohm & Hiley (1993) had invested the wave function of the electron with a guiding intelligence, which they suggested informed the electron on its path like radar guiding a ship through the sea. Building on these ideas, Mindell (2004) proposed that

> …with expanded awareness, we can become aware, at every moment of the day, that while we inhabit physical bodies, at the same time, there is a kind of intentional field, a buzz around us, that gently moves us in subtle ways but which we usually marginalize. […] To the everyday mind that is very much out of

touch with quantum wave experiences or the force of silence, this energy appears awesome. […] After we have 'shifted our assemblage point' from the everyday world to the hyperspace of tendencies, the division between the pilot wave and ourselves diminishes until there is no sense of division. In that moment, you don't *do* something; rather you experience it as *getting done*. (pp. 76-77)

Again, we note in the last sentence the shift in agency. Yet here there is no 'other' whose expression we serve. Rather, we are deeply aligned with the intentional field. Studying the qualities of the silent force, Arnold Mindell immersed himself in Aboriginal wisdom and practices, discovering "what the Aborigines have always known: that each feeling we have is intimately connected with directions on the earth" (Mindell, 2016, "Earth and Universe" section, para 2). Mindell now postulates that we are each guided by specific earth-bound directions which act upon our lives like vectors, guiding us to walk particular paths. Mindell calls the sum of all vectors uniquely acting upon each individual the central guiding pattern or Big U—a term which, at face value, feels uncannily resonant with Scharmer's (2018) Theory U. Reading Mindell (2002, 2004, 2007), I perceive the *Big U* as modulating the directional/intentional expression of the individual psyche—and this modulation is perceptible as the psyche is deeply embodied and spatially expressive. As therapists working in somatic and embodied creative disciplines are aware, our feelings and thoughts are displayed through spatial and directional tendencies which are visible in bodily expression and in our language. Therapist and educator Paul Newham (1999) puts it thus: "…the concept of Self remains verbally inarticulate without recourse to spatial metaphor" (p. 31). Crucially, those spatial metaphors are not mere abstract concepts, but embodied and informed by deeper archetypal forces animating our being and sense of self. We are quite literally, through our flesh and bones and blood, directed by the forces of earth and cosmos which inform our sense of self and shape our individual and collective narratives.

In closing this section of the paper, I want to emphasise the overarching earth-bound direction we have taken here, binding ideas of transcendence and immanence in a ouroboros of self-inquiry. Drawing on the alchemical opus, already C.G. Jung wrote of a psychoid reality at the deepest layers of the unconscious, the *unus mundus* where "psyche and nature are not two but one" (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 38). The psychoid archetype is the *anima mundi*, the soul of the world, which acts as bridge between spirit and matter. Fundamentally then, our work in active imagination and in awareness-based social change is not simply a personal journey we each must take, but a collective and cosmic quest, awakening us to the deeper unfolding of the world and her ecosystems within which we are embedded. A commitment to inner work is also a relational commitment, honouring the participatory nature of our being and compelling us to be of service in the world. And conversely, as we work to be of service in the world, we are called to attend to our inner condition, to become more conscious of

our co-creative powers and potential. As I see it, the challenge that lies before us today is to converge the paths of activism and awakening, to embrace them equally, so that we may come to realise our greater wholeness.

At the heart of the U process, Scharmer (2018) depicts experiencing the crossing of a threshold. There, a subtle shift takes place which Scharmer asserts no one has articulated better than Martin Buber.

> He must sacrifice his puny, unfree will, that is controlled by things and instincts, to his grand will, which quits defined for destined being. Then, he intervenes no more, but at the same time he does not let things merely happen. *He listens to what is emerging from himself, to the course of being in the world; not in order to be supported by it, but in order to bring it to reality as it desires.*
> (Buber, 1923, in Scharmer, 2018, p. 64, Scharmer's italics)

This surely sounds like an expression of Universal Will - in service of the Transcendent, the third stream of consciousness - whatever you may want to call it! Yet if we aim to engage in such a way, drawing on the deeper streams of consciousness in service of social change, what are the practical and ethical implications? How will we know what stream of consciousness we are tapping and should be tapping to serve a particular context? How may we develop the right capacities and attitudes in practitioners to engage with these deeper streams? And how can we develop our vehicles of practice to catalyse the deepest potential of our work? Whilst practitioners and researchers will likely discuss these questions for years to come, I want to make some initial suggestions below.

Cultivating Presencing Practice

My own work with the deeper streams of consciousness has evolved from my engagement with various forms of Buddhist meditation and Japanese martial arts, as well as theatre, movement, and song work, serving as vehicles for transformation (Bockler, 2011). Traversing the borderlands between the martial arts, performing arts, esoteric arts, and applied social arts, I have learned much about the need to adapt, frame, and scaffold 'sourcing' practice that lends voice to the deeper streams of consciousness, to ensure that it is both safe and evocative. It is my belief that the second and third stream of consciousness serve the unfolding of distinct potentials, and that presencing practice needs to tap the streams in context-specific ways to serve the needs of individuals and groups. In my opinion, the healing of conflict, psychological wounding, and collective trauma is best served through attending to the second stream where otherness constellates and calls for re-integration. The unfolding of universal intelligence and cosmic potential, on the other hand, may be nurtured through contemplative engagement, opening to the third stream. Crucially, as I have indicated above, I believe that the evolution of human consciousness necessitates attending to both streams, to enable us to heal distortions, transcend fragmentation, and fully awaken to and partake in the cosmic whole. Building on the above, I feel that the

following considerations may be beneficial to support the framing and evolution of the U process and other awareness-based social change methodologies.

Receptivity, Deautomatisation and Imaginal Play

The depth of our engagement is predicated on the receptivity the practitioner can muster. Receptivity—the ability to tune into and perceive the stream of information available to us through our sensory and extra-sensory channels—can be enhanced through psychophysical warm-up, balancing silence and stillness with play, bringing greater fluidity to body and mind. Such warm-up is not a mechanical process, but engages the imagination, inviting a curious and embodied attitude. Working on my own, I approach practice playfully and with full attention: Suspending posture or gesture in stillness, then letting a part of the body lead me in movement, then attuning to sound or visual cues or other sensory information, noticing and amplifying that… allowing myself to relax the habitual modes of perception and sense-making. When leading groups off- or online, I invite them to play, letting the body and imagination lead the way—tossing, rolling, and bouncing an imaginary ball, for example, or inviting them to traverse different landscapes or embody weather patterns or material textures, sensing into and enacting each. Such work can help to increase the inner commitment to the presencing process, by raising our psychophysical energy and expanding awareness whilst deautomatising perception and action. Our ability to entrain with what is arising in our experience, and to amplify that, aids the expression of the deeper streams and their intentionality. Such entrainment and amplification do not imply that we are forcing the process—instead, as I have elaborated elsewhere, we are "listening inwardly, patiently, increasing presence, awareness and receptivity, and letting go of the desire to control the outcome" (Bockler, 2011, p. 231). At the same time, we are not losing ourselves in this playful engagement. Process-oriented therapist Arlene Audergon likens the practice to snorkelling:

> It's not like being self-conscious … you're in it and you're conscious at the same time. […] …it's a bit of a shamanic thing, to dive in … but it's not the same as just diving in and then drowning! You dive in and you are aware, you're conscious inside of it. In process work we used to say it's like having a snorkel. (Audergon, in Bockler, 2011, p. 233)

Psychophysical engagement feels particularly important when we work online. Sitting in front of our computers, we can easily lose touch with the embodied nature of our being and become drawn into the virtual reality tunnel, tuning out the vital information that is calling to us through our many sensory channels. We can stiffen up, lose flexibility, and become passive consumers, merely 'downloading' information, as Scharmer (2018) would put it, and 'absencing' from our deeper experience, becoming stuck in mindless enactment of habitual patterns. In my online sourcing work with groups I often encourage people to stand in front of their computers, to step into an exploration (physically

stepping forward) and to move, inviting the kinaesthetic channel to the fore of their experience, thereby anchoring the sourcing process in the body. The visual and auditory information I provide through the computer act as scaffolding for their own process-meditation which takes the lead. Engaging in such ways—inviting expressive movement alongside stillness and silence, and weaving in spontaneous writing and drawing to enhance expression—I have found that online work can become remarkably potent.

Containment, Presence, and Compassion

With any evocative inner practice, psychological safety is an important concern. Any psychodynamic work requires conducive structure and presence, in order to support the participants who become more open and vulnerable in non-ordinary states of consciousness. It is also vital to contain the energies that rise from the deeper streams, which can at times be fragile and at other times powerful. Whilst the U process is not an initiatory ritual or therapeutic practice, it would be naïve to assume that its trajectory is not evocative—and indeed, we would want it to be! So, how can we take care of participants as they traverse trans-rational streams of consciousness? It seems vital to me that we endeavour to create safe and conducive spaces for the work. Psychological safety is predicated on a sense of confidentiality as well as a sense of feeling seen and acknowledged. Individuals and groups need to feel they are held in secure and compassionate ways, so that they can freely express themselves without feeling judged or exposed. If we take presencing online and dive to greater depths, it feels important to acknowledge the limits of the containers we can provide: Online we are not in control of the physical spaces people find themselves in. We may want to give guidance, suggesting, for example, that participants join online sessions from private spaces, so that practice and reflections are not observed by by-standers in cafés and offices. In smaller groups, working agreements could be made to enhance a group's integrity and commitment. The strength of the psycho-physical container informs the potency of the practice, so these are not trivial points.

Initiatory Structures and Guidance

In Indigenous and esoteric settings, initiatory structures are established to support the transition of participants from an ordinary to a liminal (threshold) state (Turner, 1982), hold them in this liminal state, and then aid their safe return. In transpersonal psychotherapeutic practice which incorporates work with altered states of consciousness, the potency of liminality is also well-recognised, and therapists, like ritual elders, strive to provide adequate containment, enabling immersion as well as subsequent dis-identification from the deeper streams as participants return to ordinary reality (Moore, 2001). For each sourcing practice that I guide in off- and online groups I apply the following structural framework:

- Preparatory guidance (seeding the theme of a session, outlining preparatory work and required props, and advising on group etiquette and privacy)

- Arrival (welcome, recalling session theme, structure, and aims)

- Check-in (meditative or contemplative practice, followed by free drawing or writing, expressing the energetic qualities of the moment, sharing the essence of what has emerged either verbally or via instant messaging)

- Setting intention (bringing the theme or question into focus through a short presentation)

- Psycho-physical warm-up (engaging the whole person as depicted above)

- Establishing the liminal work space through physical actions (e.g. encouraging individuals to create their ritual space by demarcating its boundaries)

- Liminal exploration (flowing through a combination of visualisation, expressive movement and vocal exercises, as well as free writing and sketching, sequenced to serve a particular aim)

- Dis-identifying from and releasing the exploration (stepping out of the liminal space, taking physical actions to dis-identify—for example, by placing emphasis on release through exhalation, brushing off the body with our hands, and using hands and imagination to give the physical space an imaginal clean, and bringing sensory awareness back to the physical space in which we find ourselves)

- Sharing and reflections (an opportunity to share moments of practice—for example through body sculptures or gestures, verbal sharing, or by writing in instant messaging—and ask questions or signal for further support as needed)

Structural requirements and the need for guidance will vary from context to context. Presently, my primary field of practice is transformative learning in higher education. Many of the sessions I facilitate focus on deep immersion in groups of ten to thirty students, supporting their learning journey through embodied, imaginal engagement. Whatever the context, as we employ contemplative, embodied, and creative methods in our work, we need to consider the potency of our practice, and equip ourselves to hold groups effectively and safely. If awareness-based social change methodologies are to grow in their transformative impact, there is no doubt in my mind that facilitators of such work need to evolve conducive practice frameworks, as well as commit to working on themselves, so they grow in their capacity to hold the space for deeper

sourcing processes. To me, this means being present with our own growth process and growing edges in an integrative way, attending to all our human dimensions and their developmental needs, and committing to a way of life that honours our deeper nature and interconnectedness.

Enacting and Living Wholeness

Intellectually, many of us already appreciate the interdependence of all things and all beings on earth and in the cosmos. Yet we need to practice living and enacting our unity and interconnectedness, or else we run the risk of succumbing further to fragmentation, myopia, and tribalism, thereby fuelling social, cultural, and spiritual divides. As integral philosopher and activist Terry Patten (2018) puts it,

> The practice of wholeness is thus ongoing, and pervades every sphere of our lives. It means to enact the health and wholeness of the body, mind, emotions, relations, culture, society, and the entire natural world. It is also about participating consciously and constructively in every dimension of the larger whole. (p. 141)

Together with colleagues from the field of integral psychology, Patten has created a blueprint of integral practice, aiming to meet the needs of our time. *Integral life practice* (Wilber, Patten, Leonard & Morelli, 2008) takes a modular approach, suggesting that we need to commit to tangible practices across at least four core domains of our being—body, mind, spirit, and shadow (the latter encompasses emotional, depth-psychological, somatic, and ecopsychological work)—to remember, experience and enact our fundamental wholeness. Furthermore, in his most recent writings Patten (2018) has brought previously less emphasised relational practices to the fore, balancing the emphasis of inner transformation with the deep engagement in spheres of social praxis. Patten acknowledges that in our time the relational practices—addressing our relationships, work, and civic engagement—are not only equally important, but "even more ultimately consequential" (p. 159) as they will help us transform our systems, policies and institutions.

If we embrace integral life practice as a vehicle for nurturing our presence, integration, and growth, Ferrer (2017) warns us not to be too *cognicentric* in our approach, thereby subordinating intuitive and embodied intelligences to the rational. Ferrer (2017) asserts that we need to allow all our dimensions to mature autonomously, according to their own developmental principles and dynamics. This, in turn, requires each of us to become researchers of our lived experience, attending to our multi-faceted nature with all our senses, deeply listening to the needs and impulses of each facet, and embracing practices that truly respond to those needs. For awareness-based social change facilitators, first-person research thus becomes a life practice, focused on investigating the dynamics of social change by making a daily commitment to attend to the living dynamics within. As Scharmer (2018) likes to emphasise, it all begins with

bending the beam of observation and attending to our interior condition—which reflects and affects the wellbeing and integrity of the larger whole.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have mapped three streams of consciousness onto the seven stages of the U process. Drawing on transpersonal psychology, I have endeavoured to illuminate the psychological dynamics at play, relating presencing to active imagination and process-oriented meditation. I have proposed that, like these transpersonal practices, presencing aims to facilitate the expression and enactment of insights emerging from the trans-egoic streams of consciousness, serving the unfolding of a more holistic intentionality that moves us beyond the narrow viewpoints of the ordinary self. I have also explored the metaphysical ramifications of presencing as channelling of Universal Will, ultimately endeavouring to manifest actions arising from the Transcendent Source. I have acknowledged the challenges for research and theory-building in this area, whilst asserting the vitality of such a quest, affirming presencing as an active spiritual discipline. The implication of such a position is that the inner work of integration and awakening and the outer work of activism must go hand in hand. I have made suggestions as to how we may achieve this and how we may frame such work effectively and safely; and I have considered how practitioners may cultivate the right capacities so that they can be competent facilitators of such work.

This time is calling for us to align collectively with the *anima mundi*, the world soul. At the start of 2020, one of the smallest of organisms on earth, a virus, made visible our deep social, ecological, and spiritual disconnects. Now, we must open up to the wider streams of consciousness and let the wisdom of universal intelligence inform our path, or else we remain stuck in rational enlightenment—knowing of our deeper interconnectedness but not honouring and enacting it—to the detriment of all.

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