

Peer Review Article

# Advancing the Field of Presencing:

## Five Principles to Inform the Development of Emerging Presencing Approaches

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Olen Gunnlaugson  
*Université Laval*  
[olen.gunnlaugson@fsa.ulaval.ca](mailto:olen.gunnlaugson@fsa.ulaval.ca)

### 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

## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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

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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: Darso (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.

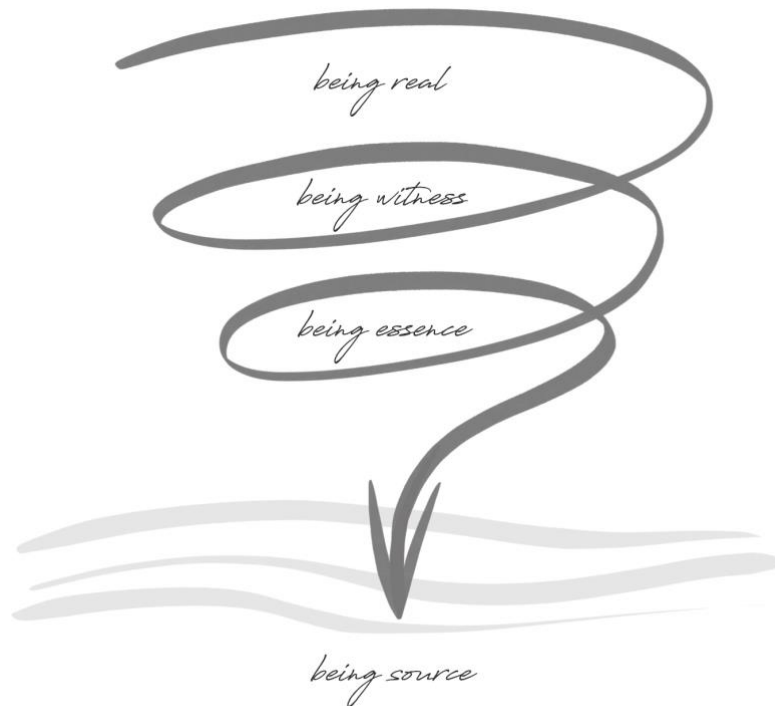


Figure 1. The Dynamic Presencing method of primary presence (Gunnlaugson, 2020a).  
Image by Reilly Dow.

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.

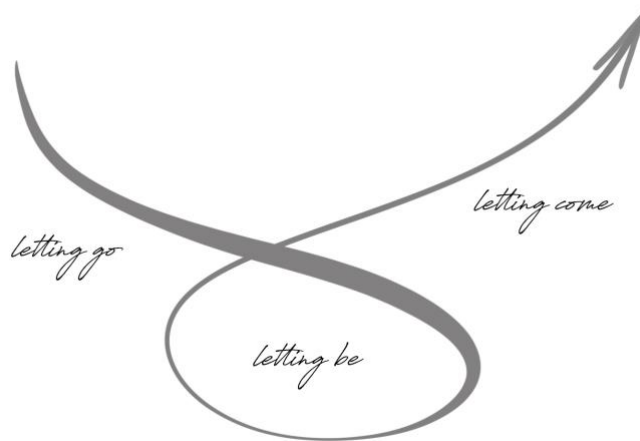


Figure 2. The Dynamic Presencing method of primary knowing (Gunnlaugson, 2020a).  
Image by Reilly Dow.

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).

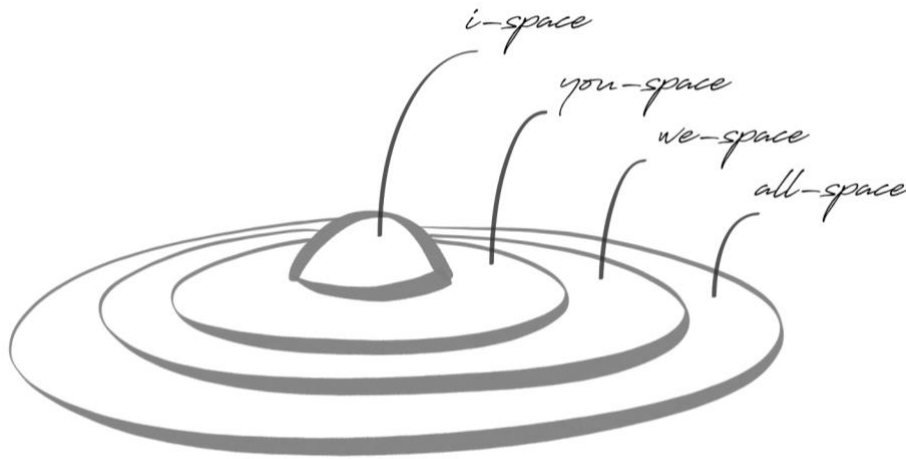


Figure 3. The Dynamic Presencing method of primary communicating (Gunnlaugson, 2020a).  
Image by Reilly Dow.

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-sense-making 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.

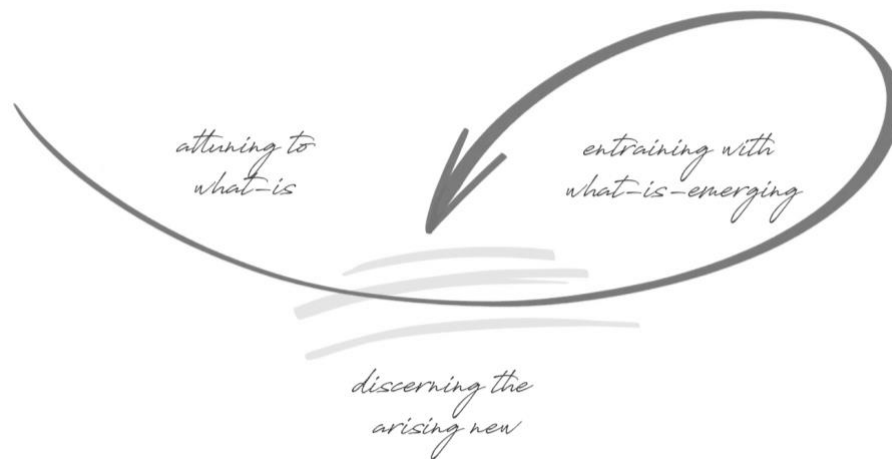


Figure 4. The Dynamic Presencing method of primary perceiving Gunnlaugson (2020a).  
Image by Reilly Dow.

*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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