

ADVANCES IN PRESENCING

Volume 2

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First Edition

CHAPTER 2

Gestures of the Mind as an Invisible Force for Social Change: A Phenomenological Exploration of what it is to Listen

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“Every object well contemplated creates an organ of perception in us” (Zajonc, 2009, p.182 f).

Connecting Inner Transformation to Social Innovation

We face an unprecedented challenge requiring social innovation of unknown complexity and authenticity. Disconnected from the lived experience of citizens, democracies in the US, Europe, and elsewhere fail to provide solutions on a governmental level. Institutions, such as hospitals or schools, face demands that cannot be satisfied with the approaches of the past centuries. Earth’s web of life is the fundamental foundation of our societies. Extreme weather events and changing regional climates, along with mass extinction of species, profoundly destabi-

lizes this foundation, desperately testing our capacities for peace, justice and cooperation.

To act differently than we have done before, we must think differently. We must be different. In 2007, after ten years of research and practice in the field of social change, Otto Scharmer (2007) published *Theory U*, “The Social Technology of Presencing”, suggesting that in order to cope with systemic challenges, we needed to “learn from the future as it emerges” (2009, p.7). To propose “the future” as a new “source of learning” turned out to be the tip of an iceberg. The more we explore it, the more the future is revealed as a place of possibility and a place of engagement. *Theory U* is an expedition into the inner worlds of our social existence.

At its core, *Theory U* offers a new paradigm of how we relate to ourselves and the world and, consequently, opens a new perspective and set of skills to support this new way of being, thinking, and acting in the world. “Presencing blends the words ‘presence’ and ‘sensing.’ It means to sense, tune in, and act from one’s highest future potential – the future that depends on us to bring it into being” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 8). Note that the person in the first half of the sentence, the one who is sensing and tuning in, is not the same as in the second part of the sentence, the one who is addressed by the potentiality that needs to come into being. What is action in Scharmer’s *Theory U* and who is acting? If the experience of the past is not the only source for learning, what are we accessing when learning from the future? How is the nature of what we might learn from the future different from what we have been learning from the past? How can we access a knowing that we are not aware of?

For decades, management theories of change have tended to focus on the outer side of change, creating change through restructuring, re-engineering, or exchanging people. In 1990, Peter Senge (1990) started to turn the perspective from a third-person perspective inwards, logging into our own experience. Doing so, he started to bring the power of the invisible levels of intervention for change to consciousness, including systems thinking, mental models, team learning, dialogue, and personal mastery.

Echoing this development, another silent revolution in re-

search started to arise, which aimed to support the exploration of inner worlds. Consciousness, the biology of cognition, and neurophenomenology (Depraz 2003; Petitmengin, 2009; Varela, 2000), as well as microphenomenology (Petitmengin-Peugeot, 1999; Petitmengin, 2006; Petitmengin, Van Beek, Bitbol, & Nissou, 2017), contemplative learning (Gunnlaugson, Sarath, Scott & Bai, 2014), such as meditation and compassion, and their impact on body, mind, and brain (Goleman & Davidson, 2017; Klimecki, Leiberg, Lamm, & Singer, 2012) increasingly became of interest.

With Theory U, a new line of theories of change has been entering the field of management and leadership theory, linking inner practice to social innovation. Based on Lewin's *Field Theory* (1997), Theory U seeks to unite action and awareness. However, it sometimes remains unclear how action and awareness fuel each other and create dynamics for change. For all Theory U's unique focus on the journey through the U, it sometimes feels that the radical importance of the sequential steps of inner experiences (suspending, seeing, redirecting, sensing, letting go, presencing, letting come, crystallizing, prototyping, embodying) may get muffled as we are planning to help realign a system. In working within the world of broad systems change, we can sometimes stay at the top of the U, even while moving through it. Without knowing more about how action and awareness work together, we may be missing opportunities for greater collective learning and organizational impact.

Ten years later, many of the core concepts and tools of Theory U have been broadly spread and used by thousands of practitioners in many different contexts, organizations, countries, and cultures. To our knowledge, little research has been done to understand the inner side – the lived experience – of the process of creating change from the perspective of U-practitioners. What seems to be true for contemplative practice in general, “what it is like to meditate – from moment to moment, at different stages of a practice – has barely been addressed in contemporary contemplative science” (Petitmengin, et al., 2017), seems to be the same for the practice of awareness-based social technologies. Nevertheless, we cannot make fruitful a source of knowledge that we are

not aware of, let alone compare notes on how awareness-based social technologies do or do not help create innovation and change. For knowledge to become actionable, it has to be grounded in the awareness of the people who are creating changes. We need to develop a kind of vision that relates the invisible dynamic of our own inner experience as change makers to the visible effects evolving in the current moment of the social process we are just about to create. What skill is needed so that we can we catch up with ourselves real time? The cultivation of the seed of awareness and related changes in the quality of thinking in the person-in-change herself, it seems, is the fertile ground and point of departure for interesting and instructive phenomena to unfold themselves.

To take responsibility for the outcomes of their work, U-practitioners (and any person involved in social innovation) need to become more aware of the inner dimensions of their work. Bringing awareness to the activity of experiencing the human journey as such, rather than just addressing the content of that experience, is a crucial precursor to bringing awareness to the sources that give rise to the activity of experience. The practice of cultivating these forms of awareness within oneself must intentionally guide the course of any intervention. Theory U hypothesizes that changing levels of self-other-awareness based on functioning with an open mind, open heart, and open will, results in shifting relationships in the social field. In short, a social field shifts based on a change in consciousness of those who constitute the field (Scharmer, 2018). The capacity of a social field to co-enact a new social reality co-emerges with the capacity of its players to become aware of their own way of being in it.

It seems to us that the journey of becoming aware of deeper levels of knowing follows three co-evolving streams: First, accessing and reflecting one's own lived experience as a U-practitioner concerning a specific tool or practice in certain case contexts. Second, continuously deepening contemplative practice to increase capacity for awareness, loving-kindness, and compassion to bring to work. Third, researching experience, forming terms, and conceptualizing frames to capture and make accessible the most invisible yet active and effective drivers of our existence. Scharm-

er's *Matrix of Social Evolution: Embodying an Evolving Consciousness* (2017, 2018) is a first sketch trying to surface, bring together, name and trace the visible results of action with the yet-invisible impulses of inner activity. In this article, our focus of exploration will be the lived experience of listening residing at the cross-section of awareness and action.

Specifically, from an impact perspective, listening is a core practice underlying Theory U. As Scharmer (2018) pointed to: "Listening is probably the most underrated leadership skill" (p.25). Listening and speaking may not be everything. However, without the capacity to shift the quality of listening and speaking, Theory U can do nothing.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the workings of Theory U through the lens of listening and its impact on social field transformation from our perspective as practitioners. How is listening effectively creating change? We will focus on listening because of three reasons. First, it is a practice for which we have personal case examples. Second, we have used listening as a contemplative practice over time, and third, with the four types of listening and the four social fields provided by Scharmer (2009; 2018), we have some initial grammar and a framework to work with. We thus ask how listening functions as a discriminative and productive inner activity that, if consciously experienced and mastered, can be effective to link the invisible world of thought with the visible world of behaviors, thus making social innovation possible. Put differently, what is the inner experiential process of becoming aware of one's listening as an invisible and mostly unconscious intermediary activity that either connects or disconnects us to ourselves, to each other and the whole?

The chapter is organized into two parts. The first part reconstructs the broader social context from which the "need" for Theory U as a new theory of change has evolved from a phenomenological point of view. The framework of the four types of listening is reviewed. The second part will explore the experience of listening from a phenomenological point of view. Through case stories, we will examine how Theory U serves as a phenomenological approach that cues awareness of the lived experience of people and makes space for change-makers to immerse them-

selves into the reality of their interiors, thereby observing the workings of co-creation from within. We will put the cases in the context of Scharmer's framework of social system change (2018).

Part I: Theory U as Phenomenological Approach

The Crack: Unexpected Awareness (1st Person Perspective as a Theory U Practitioner– 1).

My, Ursula's, personal starting point into the riddle of listening and the nature of the challenges of our time was as a Ph.D. student in Psychology and early on in my professional career in the health policy department of a global health company. I was confronted with some incidents that made me recognize a stunning gap between the intentions that institutions held about what they were supposedly doing and my own experience about what I felt was happening.

For instance, I learned that meetings as a collaborative infrastructure were supposedly bringing people together to collaborate and tap into collective intelligence. My experience of them, however, was that in most meetings, a couple of people spoke forever, usually elderly, white, male leaders. The majority of people did not speak at all or very little. Nonetheless, when the rare moments happened that one of them would speak up, it sometimes felt like an opening into a new world. However, what was that opening and what made it different? At one point, we were organizing a big cultural transformation program, involving tens of thousands of people to create a more participatory employee-driven and entrepreneurial culture. However, our employee survey turned out to be an all multiple-choice survey with predetermined categories of what the consultant experts wanted to know, except for one open, so-called "qualitative" question. Here, employees could share their experience of the day-to-day lived reality of the company.

After we had analyzed the data, we ended up having one company, but two worlds. On the one hand, we had the quantitative data depicting an organization with infrastructures and pro-

cesses that employees rated as more or less satisfactory. On the other hand, qualitative data sometimes revealed heartbreaking stories about how it felt to work for the company. Both sets of data were talking about the same company, with the same people as the “database.” However, it seemed that the quantitative part of the survey had tapped into a completely different reality and knowledge base than the “qualitative” part.

My studies in psychology had been similarly ambivalent. I had hoped to understand more of what it meant to be human. I was interested to learn how it was possible that despite the many good intentions of human beings, we were still faced with a deeply complex and challenging world. Instead, I ended up learning a lot of analytical concepts about being human. It felt as if we had been studying aliens from another planet. I was told that what I experienced as highly relevant inside of myself could not be talked about in the “real” world of academia and later, corporate life. It was considered non-representative and subjective and thus in a way, irrelevant and non-existing. How could something I saw from within be so real and tangible and yet simultaneously be so irrelevant at the same time? Expressing subjective experience became the fast track to losing credibility at that time, so I shut up. The piles of so-called representative data became weighty testimonials of another world impossible to grapple with and from which I grew disconnected. As nobody else questioned the significance of that data, I quietly resigned myself from it. I grieved about the everyday world becoming a boring, if not harmful realm, as this deeper inner divide created a profound loss of something deep inside that I did not have words for. At some point, the pain numbed and I soldiered on.

Reconnecting Inner And Outer World (1st Person Perspective as a Theory U Practitioner– 2)

After three years into my career, in the early ‘90s, something equally surprising, but in a reverse sense, happened. I had been trying to meet Peter Senge, head of the Organizational Learning Center at MIT. He turned out not to be in. Instead, I was told to

wait to meet the new teaching assistant in the department. I decided to stay. Surprised by myself, I wondered why I would be waiting for someone I did not know, for an unknown amount of time not knowing whether he would even want to talk to me? Where did that come from? At the same time, there was some faint sense of calling I realized inside of myself that I could not ignore either. Despite all the uncertainty on the who, when, if, and why level, on another level, there was something more real and promising in the unexpected turn of the situation. Some part of me knew I had to wait for however long it would take. I was not waiting for someone. I was holding onto to a possibility that needed to land.

Once the unknown teaching assistant arrived, he readily agreed to go for a cup of coffee. He then explained to me why he had come to the US. He wanted to bring a new dimension to the theory of organizational leadership and learning that he felt was lacking. The way he spoke touched me profoundly, and something inside of me cracked open. MIT, as today, was one of the most prestigious, highly respected, frontline, and academic places in the world of whole systems change, leadership, and organizational learning. He and I, sitting there, greenhorns who just finished their PhDs, thinking about the missing piece in the change approaches of some of the world's most famous experts in the field. It felt disturbing and inspiring at once.

The teaching assistant outlined three threads of reasoning for me. As he spoke, my world spun. I did not understand a word of the content of what he was saying, but I was confident of his meaning. How could I possibly know without understanding? Watching myself, I realized I was not even looking at him. My gaze was hanging somewhere between his hands and his coffee. The whole set appeared to be the backdrop of something else happening. Nothing was in focus. The entire scene seemed to be dimmed down weirdly despite the bright morning sun pooling around the Au Bon Pain in Harvard Square. Although he was sitting right next to me, his voice seemed distant. Technically, I heard the words, but I realized I was listening to something else. I was listening to the pauses during the search, the activity behind the words, the trying to push them out. At some point, my

listening had taken the guy out of the picture. It was not about him. It was about a larger story that had taken a ride through him. I had a profound experience of a synchronicity. There seemed to be a space of resonance emerging above and beyond me that I was soaked into, connecting to a deep sense of longing, of being human, and of uncompromising certainty. I could feel being opened, turned, and connected to a larger stream. A reality that I seemingly knew, that I vaguely recognized but was not keenly aware of, began to stir. Here was proof confirming some deep layer of my experience and I was taking it all in. I had met Otto Scharmer.

A Recurring Crisis: The Mismatch Between Collective Awareness and Systems Reality

Years later, I came to understand that one of the observations Otto Scharmer had tried to share with me that morning at Harvard Square was that the reality of our systems, be it education, health care, business, or government, often do not match the experience of learners, patients, customers, employees, and citizens. In the Global Health Company, both groups saw different parts of a reality that they could not recognize as one. From one perspective, the leaders viewed the company from the perspective of their intentions and ideas. From the other, employees experienced it from the perspective of suffering the behavioral consequences from an institutional body that they felt was long outdated. From the mindset of their leaders, they had to be mobilized to engage. From their own experience, the institutional body kept them from realizing their aspiration. In their minds, they were effective *despite* and not *because* of the existing institutional body. They were self-organized along real needs growing vital connections and relationships into a social body of their own that felt young and alive.

The difference between third and first-person data mirrored the gap of awareness between thinking and acting in the collective social body. The leaders were aware of their intentions but not of the impact of their actions. The employees suffered from

the impact of the consequences but were not aware of the intentions that had caused them. The organization was meant to move as a whole, but the limbs seemed to take a different course than the head. Together they created something nobody wanted.

Twenty years later, these patterns of social bodies and their outdated institutional forms, leading increasingly separate lives in a somewhat uncomfortable marriage, have sped up, deepened, and widened. Not only within organizations, but also across systems, societies, continents, and planet spheres, pain and suffering seem to have increased in all living beings, be them humans, animals, plants, or soil. We seem deeply estranged from our institutional creations that have become sclerotic reminders of past mental models. We are stuck in the dead bodies of our institutions, unable to see ourselves in light of the future forces that would lever us ahead. Scharmer and Kaeufer (2013) have summarized the outcomes of our limited capacity to synchronize awareness and action within ourselves, amongst each other, and on a broader, societal and planetary scale as the “three divides” (pp. 37-39), with this expressing the outer symptoms of profound inner disconnects:

“Today, in most social systems, we collectively produce results that no one wants. These results show up in the form of environmental, social, and cultural destruction. The ecological divide (which disconnects self from nature), the social divide (which disconnects self from other), and the spiritual divide (which disconnects self from self) shape the larger context in every large system change today.” (Scharmer, 2017)

Scharmer (2017) describes the structural challenge we face as a society as the “double split of the social field” (p.10), the combined effect of disconnect from each other and between collective awareness and action, both of which we are not (yet) present enough to experience them as they drive our behaviors: “Case in point: climate change. We collectively produce results that no one wants: severe climate destabilization. That is the body-mind split. Why, then, don’t we wake up? Because at this point the second

split kicks in: I am so remote from the people who are beginning to feel the worst impact of climate destabilization that in spite of their suffering, nothing motivates me to move from beginning awareness to action.” (Scharmer 2016, p. 12).

Reconnecting Action to Awareness and Them To Us: An Evolutionary Grammar for the Social Field

From a phenomenological point of view, the challenge of Theory U practitioners is to design social processes that are effective with regards to “learn[ing] to understand what we see” (Zajonc, 2009, p.150), but taking into account at the same time “what we know is a reflection of who we are... who we are also determines how we act and the ethics we embody. In this way, being, knowing, and acting are invariably interconnected.” (Zajonc, 2009, p.188). To close the three divides, we have to understand what we see, but our seeing itself is a reflection of our understanding who we are. Scharmer’s *Matrix of Social Evolution* (2017, 2018), depicted in Table 1, shows the resulting interdependencies of “being, knowing, and acting” and how their specific configurations give birth to evolving consciousness.

Table 1 shows four different stages of attention (first column on the left) translating into four types of listening, speaking, organizing, and coordinating. Scharmer (2017) comments that “consciousness is the independent variable that can facilitate a change in the degree of separation between body and mind (or action and awareness). The development of social fields is the embodiment of a human consciousness that is evolving from ego to eco.” Henceforth, we use the notion of the *social field* as the phenomenological version of social systems, meaning that social fields are social systems seen from within (Scharmer, 2017).

Each social field evolves through the contingencies among the triad of being, knowing, and action. Zajonc’s (2009) careful and extensive research points exactly to what we are dealing with. If we want to upgrade our capacities as human beings to the level of successfully dealing with the complexity of our time, the transformational approach chosen needs to match the funda-

mental nature of the challenge. Being, knowing, and acting are inseparable.

| Ecological Divide: Self ≠ Nature | | Social Divide: Self ≠ Other | Spiritual Divide: Self ≠ Self | |
|--|------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Attention | Micro: Listening | Meso: Conversing | Macro: Orga- nizing | Mundo: Coordinating |
| 1.0 Habitual | Downloading Habitual | Downloading Polite Phrases | Centralized Hierarchy | Centralized Commanding |
| 2.0 Ego-System | Factual Open-Minded | Debate “I am my point of view” Speaking my view | Decentralized Divisions | Free Market Competing |
| 3.0 Stakeholder | Empathic Open-Hearted | Dialogue “I have a point of view” Speaking from the whole inquiry | Networked Stakeholder Groups | Social Market Negotiating |
| 4.0 Eco-System | Generative Open-Presence | Collective Creativity Presencing, flow speaking from what is moving through | Eco-System Co-Creating | Co-Creative Eco-System Awareness based collective action |

Table 1. Being, knowing, and acting social evolution. Adapted with permission from Scharmer (2017 b, p.5)

However, what does it take for a transformation in consciousness to happen in a way that we can transform what we see and who we are as a seer simultaneously? *Mirroring* is one of the 19

points Scharmer (2017a) names as a condition for a social field to be able to metamorphose:

“To change the operating levels of a social field, people need a mechanism that helps them *bend the beam of observation back onto the observing self*. When this happens for the individual (micro), we call it mindfulness. Mindfulness is the capacity to pay attention to your attention. When this happens in a group, we call it dialogue. Dialogue is not people talking to each other. Dialogue is the capacity of a system to see itself. What’s missing in today’s capitalism is a set of enabling or mirroring infrastructures that would help our systems to sense and see themselves and thereby remove the barriers preventing the next round of profound institutional innovation and systems change. “ (Scharmer 2017).

Zajonc (2009), reflecting on what is needed to create new thinking, notes:

- “new experience must be joined with new thinking if new knowledge is to result.
- New insight requires new concepts as well as new percepts. We require a way of
- bringing experience and reason together, a way of perceiving meaning in the
- given, even when the given arises through deep meditation.” (p.179)

Zajonc (2009) and Varela (2000) have pointed to new organs of perception tending to build as a consequence of their functional use, not as their prerequisite. Being exposed to new experiences stimulates the use of otherwise dormant capacities. The formation of new organs of perception will, in turn, improve the capacity to explore the experience entirely. As Varela (2000, as cited in Scharmer, 2009) has shown in his famous experiment with cats, cats learn seeing by being nudged into it. Born blind, the capacity to use their eyes will arise pending on the experience

of hurting themselves on an unseen object. Cats that are carried around do not hit any walls and do not learn to see. Extending these dynamics to human development, this implies that we may be holding the potential of new organs of perception that we are unaware of. This potential will remain dormant as long as we are not exposed to the experience relevant to their awakening. Applying the dynamics to the future of human development, Zajonc (2009) suggests that we may have to develop seeing beyond the sensual world: “We need more than material mastery of the outer world; we require an inner knowledge and spiritual mastery as well” (p.155). If we stay blind for the inner knowing, we may hit the invisible walls within ourselves, between us, and between us and the planet.. Zajonc (2009) notes that “the organs we need for insight are fashioned by attention and immersion in the object of contemplation. With every repetition, the cycle of attention and formation is at work fashioning the organs required for contemplative knowing.” (p. 183).

Relating this to the Matrix of Social Evolution (Table 1), this implies that transforming our capacity to listen from downloading to factual, empathic, and generative will create new circuits of functionalities forming new organs of perception that embody a higher quality of consciousness through an open mind, open heart, and open will.

Throughout the chapter, we will refer to the four types of listening, L1-4, as outlined in the ‘micro’ scale of Table 1. Each mode of listening is an activity associated with a social field structure of attention (1-4), as outlined in the first column of the same table. These structures of attention relate to the development of the three organs of perception, which are open mind (suspending judgment and observing), open heart (connecting through feelings), and open will (letting go and connecting to what is at the edge of becoming). The open mind helps to move from habitual (L1) to factual listening (L2). The open heart facilitates moving from listening to the other (L2) as an object to tuning into the subjective experience finding “Thou” (L3; Buber, 1997). Lastly, the open will allows to let go of ego and connect to what wants to come into being.

In conclusion, experiential awareness of each of these fields is

essential if we are to mindfully maneuver among them while navigating towards knowledge and change creation. Listening is an activity that defines the absence-presence, self-other, and inner-outer divides and is therefore ideal for exploring the relationship between consciousness, the social field, and its results. If the central challenge to making the presencing level of the social field visible and tangible is the degree of its interiority, then the scientific study of one's own experience is well worth recruiting. In the next section, we will present phenomenology as a method of inquiry into an experience and present phenomenological studies in an attempt to add language to the grammar of the social field.

Part II: Tuning in: Making the Invisible Process of Social Reality Formation Visible, Speakable, and Tangible

To become knowledgeable about who we are, we need to become researchers in the science of studying our own experience. Knowledge, in this context, is “knowledge (...) constituted from two sides: in the act of cognition, each percept from the sense world is united to a concept of our minds” (Zajonc, 2009, p.147). Theory U practitioners seek to design social processes for multiple stakeholders to make new experiences to be joined with new thinking, aiming to create actionable insights and innovation. Zajonc (2009) describes the difficulty of this task, stating that once we turn from the study of outer to inner phenomena and begin developing the organs of perception described before (open mind, open heart, open will), new things begin to happen:

“Its character becomes richer, our dreams change, and life itself seems to gain other dimensions. In order to discover authentic meaning in these experiences of inner life, our thinking must become free and mobile in ways that are quite unfamiliar to us. For this reason, it is extremely difficult to capture in thought and give expression in words to that which is within” (Zajonc, 2009, p.151).

Zajonc (2009) further argues that turning the within outward “requires the joining of intelligence to impression, and concept to percept” (p.151). For this reason, we view Scharmer’s (2009) four types of listening as an excellent tool and prototype of giving *outwardness* (Zajonc, 2009) to impressions of the inward listening experience. Each percept from experience in the sense world is associated with a concept of mind. In other words, following the four types of listening, I can either listen to myself as the center of my world (Level 1), listen to discern my world vs. their world (2), listen from the within world of the other (3), or listen from the collectively-arising potentiality (4). These four types of listening are reflected in four different mindsets, namely, a “download-ing” awareness (habit-driven; 1), a “factual”, open mind awareness (ego-driven; 2), an “empathetic” stakeholder awareness (open heart-driven), or, finally, a “generative” open-presence awareness (eco-system-driven; 4). The social technologies of Theory U give language to a world of knowledge that we all share but are often not aware of. The “known” thus carries a potential for meaning once we become aware of it.

Becoming Aware of Awareness

What makes it so difficult to access deeper levels of human experience? Petitmengin and colleagues (2017) argue:

“a large part of our experience remains unnoticed or ‘pre-reflective’ in the language of phenomenology. This is because our attention is almost completely absorbed in the content, the ‘what’ of our activity, largely or entirely excluding the activity itself, the ‘how’”.

Aiming “to help subjects redirect their attention from the content of the experience towards the mode and dynamics of appearance of this content and to describe it precisely,” (Petitmengin et al., 2017, p. 3), they have developed so-called “micro-phenomenological interviews.”

At a deep level it seems, we are faced with both the remark-

able capacity and the challenge to unconsciously imprint ourselves into sensual life in a way that makes us believe that the resulting affect is coming from the outside. We become victims of our inattentiveness. To track our own minds' activity, we have to learn to bracket or withhold the content level we take for a given: "I withhold my assent to the ontological status of the perceived: I 'bracket' its facticity." (Husserl, 1982). We suspend the assumption that what we see is there for real.

"This redirection is like the gesture of phenomenological reduction as described by Edmund Husserl: withdrawing from our exclusive focusing on objects and broadening our attentional gaze (Bitbol, 2014) so as to reveal and describe the underlying 'intentional life' of consciousness (Husserl, 2002), and, even deeper, the pre-intentional layer of the "self-affection" of life" (Henry, 2000)" (as cited in Petitmengin et al., 2017, p. 3)

Petitmengin and colleagues' (2017) micro-phenomenological work dramatically enhances the granularity of the picture of how we are co-creators of the reality we live in, helping us discern imagination from perception, ego from eco. What is it like, in concrete terms, to be listening generatively, to be presencing?

Observing Becoming Aware of Awareness in the Social Field (1st Person Perspective as a Theory U Practitioner– 3)

Otto Scharmer and I, Ursula, had been working with a group of physicians in central Germany (cf. Kaeufer, Scharmer, & Versteegen, 2003; Scharmer, 2009; Scharmer 2018) who wanted to set up a seamless 24/7 emergency call system for a rural area. Together, they had co-created a health care system that did not provide a single emergency call number that was always working for the whole population. Instead, various parallel infrastructures operated as independent emergency systems with different emergency numbers, call centers, staff, and emergency helpers

independent from each other. All of them were stretched thin in capacity, eventually ending up with situations that were both confusing and possibly dangerous.

A meeting was organized by the doctors who had initiated the change project. They had invited most of the stakeholders who needed each other to change the regional emergency system. 15-20 people were sitting in the room, including leaders from local insurance companies, physician associations, emergency call centers of various organizations, local politicians, and us, the action researchers and process consultants. Patients and citizens – the lived experience of the system from within - were missing. During the initial check-in round, each person spoke from the perspective and the organization they were representing. Everyone went on explaining their good intentions as they were trying to do the best for the patient as they saw it, but for reasons beyond their scope, their intentions were stymied by the system's workings. As they went on and on for about an hour, making their statements and putting forth their claims about their expectations for everyone else, I sensed that with each of them speaking, the mood got increasingly heavy, and we were drifting apart. The way we spoke out of our own perspective regenerated all the systemic fault lines we were talking about. The climate in the room dropped. We were pulled into different directions by a mysterious invisible force. The walls that separated us were almost palpable. We were stuck.

There was dead silence. Some of us were wondering how we would ever be able to raise ourselves out of our chairs again, let alone elevate the health care system to its next level. As the heaviness sank in, Otto Scharmer started talking. He talked into that dead space of isolated units of what supposedly was a health care system. He started describing what he saw in a very calm and slow way. He spoke about how everyone had been trying so hard to do the right thing and the frustration that despite all the hard work the outcome was not satisfying. However, it was not so much *what* he said, but *how* he spoke. It was like soothing a baby. He progressed through what he felt to be the predominant experience in the room. Although he did not move, it was more like a movement pervaded the room than words. First, there was a soft

breeze, a gentle stirring of the space between all of us, and as his stirring went around and touched deeper layers in each of us, the various fragmented health care islands one after the other started bursting like little soap bubbles and became part of a more substantial soup.

The longer he spoke, the more time slowed down, from time to time small nods and sighs started coming up, accompanied by a softening of body language. As everyone was letting go, that what had been sealing individual knowing peeled itself off like a decal, revealing the mess from a safe distance with a rising awareness and disbelief: Wow, this is *us* creating that mess?

While all of this was happening between all of us in the room, connections amongst us started to root and move into the foreground. The single institutional units started to pull away into the background like heavy furniture being pushed aside. The relational space became palpable, revealing a soft, warm, and wobbly substance extending itself and including everyone to become part of the new skin of the emerging collective social body that all of our senses started to attend to. Color and mood in the room had shifted. The whole scene felt like we had been actors going through a collective dream state of a yet emerging play that we were co-producing without being aware of it, with Otto Scharmer being the scene shifter. He was clearing out the stage setting of act one: “Experts doing Health Care Systems Change” to act two: “Human-beings-in-development caring about those in need of emergency help.” It became evident that a real shift in health care might not be done by reassembling existing expert pieces. The shift needed to be a relational and intentional revolution about how to cooperate and to co-create towards an activation of the life forces of a caring love-impulse bringing forth the system, instead of changing the institutional surface of an already dead body.

Where is the entry point into a world of thought that matches our experience of ourselves and the world as one whole, breathing organism? If we are estranged from our own experience, we may neither know ourselves nor the other. In my unexpected awareness of something compelling me to wait at MIT, I had an embodied experience of understanding. I was aware of disso-

nance between my intellectual understanding of the moment, my behavior, and a felt understanding. From a second-person perspective, I could see in this meeting how Otto Scharmer was able to access, name, and reframe the experience we were having. He was stitch-by-stitch interweaving the precepts with the language and concepts that helped us to understand what was going on. I intuitively realized that there was a level of knowing in the room that I had not been aware of but that his speaking had revealed. He had listened to the painful experiences of human beings in the room who had tried to do something amazing for their fellow-humans, while I had been listening to arrogant experts and their little ego-silos trying to maximize their power on behalf of everyone else. Through Otto Scharmer's intervention, we all could start attending to the highest future potential that tried to come into being, but needed the force of love to come through.

Theory U is designed to develop a shared sense of the existence of this experiential dimension of "I-in-Now", which Scharmer describes in *The Blind Spot: Uncovering the Grammar of the Social Field* (2017) and what we refer to as "L4", generative listening, or "listening from the source." Drawing from the work of Petitmengin and colleagues (2017), whose research invites us to "reflect (...) on the basis of experience and on the basis of the experience of its description", this portion delves into the micro-phenomenological research on listening, confirming and enriching Scharmer's (2017) grammar of first-person experience of the social field.

Phenomena of Listening and Dimensions of Experience: Activating Organs of Perception Along the Double Split of the Social Field

What is listening? Do we listen with our ears? As must be taught to children – and relearned by most of us adults – we listen with our whole bodies. We are listening with our hands and feet by keeping them still, listening with our mouths by being silent, and listening with our brains by paying attention to the speaker (Truesdale, 1990). When listening to another, we do not just lis-

ten to the meaning of words, signed or spoken, but we also listen for meaning by observing a whole array of non-verbal signs (Burgoon, 2016), and by reading cultural contexts and group dynamics (Schein, 1993). We listen for the whole meaning, conveyed within and among all the parts (Bortoft, 2007, p.8).

Hearing offers an immense world of experiences from which to explore what it is like to listen. An example below, Petitmengin and Bitbol's (2009) micro-phenomenological study of listening to a sound, provides the kind of 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) that reveals rich layers of sensing, cognition, and consciousness. We can listen with our ears, but this is only one of many starting points.

To hear with our ears, sound waves manifest themselves through our vibrating eardrum, ossicles, and cochlea, and transform to electricity at our nerves. The electrical brain transforms vibration into information through a "flexible and adaptable processing system" (Imhof, 1985). As brain imaging has shown and as many in the deaf community validate, one can listen visually (Vox, 2017) and tactilely (Shibata, 2001), as much as aurally. Indeed, "hearing is basically a specialized form of touch," says deaf percussionist Evelyn Glennie, who hears with her feet (Kassabian, 2013, p. xv). In this way, listening is a networked sense of touch. As Scharmer (2009) alludes to in the *Grammar of the Social Field* and as we saw in the palpable atmosphere in the example above, listening's haptic sensibility is one of the clearest wavelengths for attuning attention and social field.

Dimensions of Experience: Self-Other

Who are we as listeners? I listen, unaware, through my first-person perspective on the world. I listen to others from within this perspective, a second person listening out to another. I may use my senses of curiosity, empathy, and imagination, activating the open mind and open heart organs to come close to a first-person perspective of another. Using these senses and organs, I begin walking in their shoes, seeing what they see, feeling what they may feel. Through dialogue, through exchanging sub-

tleties of intersubjective experiences, we confirm one another (Brown & Keller, 1979, p. 304, as cited in Floyd, 1984). I may listen, that is, apply a sense of curiosity, concern, or anxiety (Nancy, 2007, p. 5) from a third-person position, trying to understand the whole from outside the whole. I listen, aware that I am listening, to myself, watching what I think, sense, or feel.

“To be listening is thus to enter into tension and to be on the lookout for a relation to self: not...a relationship to ‘me’...or to the ‘self’ of the other, ... but to the relationship in self,...as it forms a ‘self’...Consequently, listening is passing over to the register of presence to self, it being understood that the ‘self’ is precisely nothing substantial...but precisely the resonance of a return” (Nancy, 2007, p. 12).

In this way, the self is a reverberation. The self is knotted, enmeshed, and becoming-with (Haraway, 2008). “Listening in its entangled form is dialogical listening which stretches a radical openness towards interconnections and ‘listening with’” (Heddon, 2017). A self who listens *with* (rather than listens *to*; L3+4 rather than L1+2) is the place from which we may leverage collective understanding and mobilize ourselves into meaningful, concerted action.

In Petitmengin and colleagues’ (2009) phenomenological study of listening to a sound, they uncovered a generic structure relating one’s attentional disposition to the experience of self-other. For example, when listening to a sound with the intention of discerning its source, there was a clear distinction between self and other, namely the self in the role of the listener, the other, the sound, and the imagined source of the sound. Listeners reached out from their ears, across space, to the source of the sound. However, when listeners shifted their attention to the characteristics of the sound – its pitch, timbre, and volume – there was a parallel shift in the relationship experienced between self and other. At this moment, space became denser, physical boundaries opened, and sound mixed with visual, tactile, and other kinaesthetic sensations. When listeners then focused attention on the

felt experience of sound, this shift was even more dramatic. In order to bring attention to felt sound – which can be described as the resonance of sound within themselves – listeners activated their entire bodies and prepared a ‘receptive’ inner stance. What they felt brought about the synchronization between interior and exterior space: “as though [the sound] got hold of me somewhere inside myself and forced me to follow, led me to follow...” (Petitmengin et al., 2017, p. 273).

Beyond synchronization, listeners experienced a complete shift in identity, ego to eco, with subject and object rendered meaningless: “The sound, it abolishes the limit between me and the outside...there is no more skin, or a skin which is much more permeable” (Petitmengin et al., 2017, p. 273). Another quote supports this impression: “There are [...] moments when truly I am no longer there...There is a coalescence at a given moment between what I am and the music” (p. 273). A nimble, relational, pluralistic self is demonstrated through these shifts in attention. By deploying a self who can experience the dissolution of the subject vs. object split, a hidden organ of perception is activated, allowing conscious access inside of the blind spot.

Emerging Common Gestures.

We can observe similar gestures in Petitmengin’s study of the intuitive experience (Petitmengin-Peugeot 1999). Participants in the study examined an array of reflective and pre-reflective procedures for accessing intuition. In the example given at the beginning of this chapter, when deciding to stay to meet the unknown teaching assistant, intuitive certainty came as a surprise. The mode of its delivery was barely conscious, and my conscious response was to stay put and wonder why. Petitmengin-Peugeot’s (1999) project was to come up with a model “of the structure of intuitive experience, which is made up of a succession of very precise interior gestures” (p. 60). This model contained four major gestures, which were “letting go”, “connection”, “listening” for signs of a coming intuition (what we would call generative listening, where attention is simultaneously “panoramic” and

“discriminating”), and the arrival of “the intuition” itself, in three phases (p. 60).

Additionally, eight other gestures were, although not brought to conscious awareness in all participants, common enough to suggest a more nuanced generic structure of the experience and, therefore, may be fruitful clues to follow for fleshing out the grammar of the social field. These other gestures were “maintaining”, “anchoring”, “disconnecting”, “getting out of the intuitive state and back to usual functioning”, “protection”, “distinguishing intuition from projection”, “interpretation” of the intuition, and “translating the intuition into a communicable form, such as words, drawings, or scientific hypothesis” (p.60).

We highlight the volume and particularity of gestures involved in one type of experience. Petitmengin-Peugeot (1999) notes that these were the gestures that came via the explication interview through layers of consciousness into a reflective awareness allowing a clear, verbal description. There may be others that stayed within pre-reflective experience; there may be gestures that are particular to both the intuitive experience and a particular context involving the individual, environment, or intuition.

Each gesture can be broken down into common “experiential variables” and “descriptive traits” (p.60), some of which chime in with Scharmer’s “seven dimensions of first-person experience of social fields” (2017) and 19 quality “points” of the social field (2017). The seven dimensions of first-person experience are akin to variables within “interiority”, one of the points along the journey through the social field. These variables show quality changes as a person experiences moving from one social field to another. For example, what it is like to experience moving from “downloading” to listening with empathy. We present some of these terms below as sketch of associations (See Table 2). The loose and overlapping relationships point to both broader and more granular categories, and perhaps to other organizing frameworks entirely.

| Petitmengin (1999, p.60) | Scharmer (2017) |
|---|--|
| “experimental variables” and “descriptive traits” | “Seven dimensions of first person experience” and “points” of the social field |
| Sensorial modalities | Materiality |
| Attentional modes, internal and external | Interiority |
| Mental activities | Field structures of attention, thinking |
| Non-voluntary gestures | Co-creativity |
| Perception of body and space | Time, space, boundaries, materiality, non-locality |
| Processes of connection | Source, self, other |
| Internal state | Wholeness |

Table 2. Comparison of key terms used in Petitmengin (1999) and Scharmer (2017)

If we compare the two studies of Petitmengin (Petitmengin, 2009, p.277; Petitmengin-Peugeot, 1999) with Scharmer’s (2017) first-person descriptions of experiencing a generative social field, balanced with the personal case above, we could come up with a rough approximation that we are talking about common aspects of basic human capacities and, for lack of better words, spiritual functioning in the material world. Time slows. Space widens, it expands from a point-source trajectory to distributed presence where attention is non-directional, unfocused, and receptive. The experience of otherness slides into an experience of connection and wholeness. The experience of self is de-centered, featuring a “panoramic awareness” (Scharmer, 2017), which both creates a sense of “unified self” and a “synchronization” with others (Petitmengin, 2009 p. 70). The materiality of the field is perceptible. It is “warming,” “thickening” (Scharmer, 2017), densifying, becoming a beam of light, or like a fabric (Petitmengin, 2009;

Petitmengin-Peugeot, 1999). Scharmer's (2017) "source" dimension of collective awareness, seeing from "the surrounding sphere," may be akin to Petitmengin-Peugeot's (1999) description of the experience of being "completely mobilized" (p. 71). Scharmer (2017) describes the "thinking" dimension in terms of "emerging possibilities" "at the source of the social field," Petitmengin-Peugeot (1999) categorizes listening experience as moving from mapping cause-effect, to qualities and resonance, which are tracked through increasingly transmodal sensations. She documents a "feeling of coherence" (p. 70) within the experience of accessing intuition.

Theory U plots the journey to presencing and the experiential tools of Listening 1-4 along the gestures of epochè- suspension, redirection, letting go. Research of first-person experience of listening activity supports this alignment. Along this journey, evidence of a distributed self emerges: a self that is rooted in the individual and directly in touch with the collective. A self that resembles a vessel whose definition shifts but is always spacious within. We cannot think of ourselves as only single, prepackaged entities whose wills either stimulate or respond. We are also demonstrably anchored in interbeingness and we, *ourselves*, emerge and evolve in concert with ever-changing social-ecological contexts (Scharmer, 2000; Zahavi, 2005). To be ourselves, we become with others (Haraway, 2008). Our own listening lets us experience this.

Two Sides Linking Awareness and Action: Observing and Doing.

As Zajonc (2009) states, "What we know is a reflection of who we are." (p. 188), we can comprehend Listening 1-4 as activities imprinted on the process of becoming aware of awareness. Listening changes our sense of the self and the world. We may direct our attention to L1, 2, 3, and 4, but the process of listening, *doing* the listening is what changes our perceptive lens. By listening through each level, we develop a capacity to perceive the otherwise imperceptible.

At pre-reflective levels, we may know that these fields exist, but only through effective listening, we can directly observe those fields and the transformation of their realities. To quote Zajonc (2009), “the organs we need for insight are fashioned by attention and immersion in the object of contemplation. With every repetition, the cycle of attention and formation is at work fashioning the organs required for contemplative knowing.” (p. 183). Thus, awareness of and experiencing the different listening modes reveals an abundance of ways to engage with an abundance of being. Generative listening is the organ we use to perceive the energetic affluence of life. Listening allows us the conscious experience of exchanging breath with this life. It is this kind of heightened vitality that John Dewey posits as essential to growth and learning (Dewey, 2005):

“Instead of signifying being shut up within one’s own private feelings and sensations, [an aesthetic experience] signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events” (p.18).

“Active and alert commerce with the world” echoes the way writer Nan Shepherd (as cited in Macfarlane, 2012), referring to her experience of herself, all the parts, and the whole of the “living mountain” of the Cairngorm as a “traffic of love”, with traffic implying exchange and mutuality rather than congestion or blockage (Macfarlane, 2012, p. 193). The personal relationship between attention, generative listening, and the self is clear. However, what does listening do “out there”? If listening is simultaneously perception and action, which, like touch, orients and settles us into a position in the world, what is the outer result? What impression does our touch leave on others? Perhaps as traffic smooths pathways, commerce softens cash, mycorrhizae make and holds space, generative listening is a movement that massages the soils, a passage that ripples the waters, a holding that warms the whole.

Doing generative listening may be a “homeopathic medicine” (McKanan, 2019) for the social system. Once done, the experi-

ence of generative listening is a map of an otherwise invisible territory, the social field. Awareness of the experience is guiding knowledge for entering into the field and way-making-with the other inhabitants of this place. Our work as researchers and practitioners of an “applied metaphysics” is to ride the phenomenological lemniscate of experience and observation of experience: centered in source, going out deeply, attentively into direct experience, connecting with self and other; swooping back through center, bringing attention to the way inner and outer was experienced, increasing the granularity of our picture of the social field and the way our consciousness brings us agency within it.

Observing the self, “the I,” we see that as an individual attunes their attention and awareness to the “frequency” of vibration, intuition, or presencing, we are no longer observing a strictly first-person perspective, but something more akin to an expanded first-person perspective, or perhaps an embodied third-person perspective, which is a transcendental subjective perspective, saying something like: “I see the whole from the outside, but I have not removed my thinking-acting self from the whole.” Becoming aware of this perspective is one thing, reliably entering into it is another. Do we possess agency over our “distributed selves” (Debarba et al., 2017) in the collective simply by inhabiting this self? Is there another layer of awareness to become conscious of? How does an individual “generative self” produce a “generative outcome” as laid out in the grammar of the social field (Scharmer, 2015)?

Examining our lived experience is an intermediary to linking thinking and action. If we can describe the inner gestures of activating the organs of perception – open mind, open heart, open will – through listening, if we can share the description of what it is like to make these gestures and experience these organ functions, we can raise the question of what the next gestures are. This may be either at the microscale or at the larger scales we discuss below, which allow us to coordinate our functioning as organs of a larger social body.

Observing Listening as an Activity in the Social Field

As we have seen, listening is an expression of the degree to which we can master our attention. It is an internal activity that allows us to transcend the boundary of our “I (Ego)-organization.” In that sense, it is important to note, that listening is not just a means to observe what is going on in the outside world, but also has an immediate presence in the sensual outside world. That is, our counterparts can sense whether or not and how we are listening. This immediate presence through non-physical action, such as listening, will change the experience of what one can say and hence, the experience of social reality.

I, Ursula, once had a pre-program interview with a top leader from a global consumer goods company. The phone conversation was meant to help him reflect his leadership to prepare for the program. However, he was so busy that we had to postpone the call twice. Once we spoke, he was still under so much pressure that he poured out like a waterfall all the reasons why he did not have time to talk at all. I did not get to ask a single of my pre-prepared questions for 45 minutes, the time the conversation was initially meant to take in total.

I sat there, overwhelmed by the massive volume of content that felt raining down onto me, under pressure myself not being able to achieve what I was meant to do, torn between either hanging up or yelling at him to stop. The second I noticed my own downloading and realized that what I had been hearing all along but did not listen to, was the suffering and pain of an overwhelmed human being, the exact moment my heart opened and connected to the place from where he was speaking, precisely in that very instance, he stopped. He dropped the sentence.

There was absolute silence. I was stunned. Then it was as if he turned around 180 degrees and for the first time addressed me as a real person: “Are you still listening?” I had a sensation of immediate tangible physical presence, though we were still 1000 miles apart. Boundaries ceased to be. Time stood still. I responded: “I only started now.” I could almost hear an in-between space open that we both started tuning. That space was empty and beautiful. Each of us seemed to be putting words into it like into

a shared bowl.

We spoke for a long time. This was one of the most formative experiences of listening presence in my career. This other layer of the reality of something waiting to be seen by us seems always to be there. The future is present. What makes it a future is that it takes time to let go of our mental distractions and open our will to step into it. Once we do, the world spins around.

The following points to some evidence we have found over and over with regards to the workings of the networked self, in this case in dyads of people practicing listening 1-4. My colleagues Beth Jandernoa and Glennifer Jillespie have developed a small exercise called “paired listening.” After having been introduced to some small listening practices and the four types of listening, participants are invited to experiment with the “unwanted side effects of non-listening.” In pairs, sitting opposite to each other, they move through three rounds of listening, with only the listener getting instructions about how to listen. It can be a handful or a ballroom full of pairs, but each pair always has its own dyadic space and is part of a larger social field at the same time. The speaker is asked to share an activity or story that she loves. The speakers do not know what the listeners are instructed to do. Depending on the instruction (i.e., whether the instruction is “open mind, open heart, open will”, a subset of those, or, to the contrary, “closed mind, heart, will”), two fundamentally different types of social fields will arise. With the instruction of “open mind” and “open heart”, the listeners generate a social field of compassion that makes the whole room buzz like a beehive. Why is this the case if the speakers do not know what the listeners have been instructed to do? The intended level of quality of listening remains invisible to them. They speak their minds into unknown territory. When debriefing the “open mind, open heart, open will” set of instructions, we have heard speakers repeatedly report patterns of experience such as that they had said more than they initially intended to. They surprised themselves and started discovering dimensions of the experience they have not been aware of. They got to say things they did not know that they knew. It helped them to reconnect to the deeper layers of themselves. They loved the listeners for their listening. The listeners

noted that the growing enthusiasm of the speakers touched them and helped them to open their hearts even more. The more the invisible dance between listeners and speakers kept unfolding, the deeper became the wish of the listeners for the speakers to be happy. On the opposite end, when the listeners were instructed to close their organs of perception – mind, heart and will – and to listen “full of judgement” and “as if they did not genuinely believe what the speaker said”, the collective buzz died down. Speakers report that after a moment of disbelief and confusion, they start turning inwards, checking whether there is something wrong about them. They try harder, starting to entertain the listeners, hoping to re-connect to them and on the way begin to lose themselves. After a few moments, the motivation of the speakers dies down, not much is coming to their minds any more.

The “paired listening” practice does not take more than 6-8 minutes. It teaches everyone in the room the difference between a social field of presencing and one of absencing. In a nutshell, the practice brings together cause and effect in time and space of an invisible, inner activity, with the visible results of social reality creation as the co-enacted drama put on stage. Everyone knows this from daily life but most often, most take it for granted. The realization that it is not a natural law unfolding but *us* who unwittingly create the double split of the social matrix is stunning. Here, we can see the phenomenon unfold in slow motion in front of our eyes. By closing down one’s organs of perception, we cause the other to experience relational disconnect. By the other trying to re-connect to me being in offline mode, she or he disconnects from herself. Ideas that seemed to be flying in from nowhere, seizing the speakers to speak more and the listeners to listen even better, cease. That is the disconnect from the social field, a dying down of human relation and creativity. In order to deal with the confusion of their speaking partners, the listeners have to disconnect too. They turn inwards as well, shutting further down their sensing. The traffic of the buzz subsides. I am no longer part of the other’s experience and she is no longer part of mine. We both go offline from the generative source that was fueling us, returning into the isolation of our physical bodies. The room is getting cold.

By contrast, the upwards movement with mind, heart, and will wide open, started a dissemination process causing something to travel within the dyads and across the room as a whole. A kind of social soil builds, nurturing and inspiring speakers and listeners, transcending the ego-boundaries of their speaking and listening, giving room to the non-physical presence of a larger sense of resonance. All this is the social field, the container, and the holding space of the collective activity of compassion. Our counterparts sense our listening. They tune in with their whole bodies into the opening of mind, heart and will, co-creating an inter-relational space and collectively shifting the forces of the social field. Further research is needed to understand how collective dialogic encounter shifts the forces of the social field towards either experiencing it as a body of generative resonance and creativity (presencing) or the opposite (absencing).

The experimental practice above consciously induced micro-changes in the quality of listening. Bringing together the experience of self, other and whole within the boundaries of time and space the practice suggest a threefold experience of Self. First, one experiences in real time the effectiveness of listening as an activity modulated by three different inner micro-gestures of the mind. For instance, noticing confusion and enthusiasm triggered in the speaker as a direct consequence of either closing down or opening one's mind. Second, as the feedback loop between listening action and impact awareness is instantly closed, listeners often experience both types of results as if it was happening to themselves and not to a separate person. Third, from a peripheral perspective participants get a sense of temperature shifts in the surrounding larger holding body, either cooling down or warming up, as the space reflects back their listening beyond the dyads. By being able to experience the relatedness of causes and conditions of the incident, a new sense of self turns into a longing to help the speaker to feel well again.

Listening is an activity to cultivate a field, including one's own inwardly. Luckily, as the paired listening practice is a constructed space of seeing oneself through collapsing time and space, people have a chance to immediately apologize, laugh, hug, and heal right away. The container makes it possible for them to become

aware of the consequences of their own behavior, hurting themselves as much as the other. Conducting this exercise in such a controlled setting thus allows direct experience of how quality of listening, as well as its consequences, can be guided by intention, without exposing our participants to a non-cushioned shock outside that echo chamber.

What this exercise tells us about the thinking-acting circuit in the evolution of the social system is that we are overdue to take the next evolutionary step, which is to put the development of compassion into focus. The enormous formative forces of our challenges are pushing hard for new types of social coordination mechanisms. Yet, the development of the “inner light,” that cultivation of empathy and compassion produce to meet the outer light, seems to have a hard time keeping up. Though mindfulness is in everyone’s mouth, mindfulness without compassion seems to leave the world cold.

As the “paired listening” exercise shows, it does not take more than a tiny shift in our inner field to change the world. The freedom for intentional action lies within. With our lack of intention, we create random social fields of disconnect that turn back to us with the bold package of intended consequences. Whereas non-intentionality creates disconnect, absence and isolation, intentionality gives form- scaffolding to possibilities. The quality of listening as a gesture of awareness can create social asphalt or a healthy soil for humanity.

Conclusion

One core aspect of listening is to be simultaneously perceiving and creating. It is a breathing process between deepening one’s vertical connection of accessing deeper levels of experience and cognition, and at the same time, it means to expand and reach out beyond oneself into some sense of self. A key question in the work of transforming social fields from Ego-awareness-based systems to Eco-awareness-based systems is how local, personal states of quality attendance exactly give rise to the global, systemic properties of a social field. One movement that we have explored

so far is to turn away from habitual thinking about content into one's own experience, and another one is to turning into experiencing together. How do we get there? What does the experience of the fourth level of cognition or being look like on the level of the collective? Is there something like a "collective contemplative knowing" (Gunnlaugson et al., 2014)? Answering these questions could be a fruitful field of research.

In this article, we have applied a phenomenological approach to get a better understanding of what transformation as an intuiting agent in the collective may be.

Concluding on a higher level, recall that the paired listening exercises have shown that listening can have a global effect on all people in a given environment. Thus, a promising question for future research asks how we can activate our own and others' listening in a way that contributes to the greater good of society. An implication related to this idea is that we can only transform as a whole but not as separated or fragmented pieces. As long as we cannot see ourselves as part of the problem, we cannot be part of the solution.

The moment the entire system sees itself, it shifts as inner light meets outer light and creates insight. As long as the experience is individualized in isolated bubbles, we cannot become relevant. Like each note in a piece of a composition cannot create and change anything by itself, it is only on the level of patterns of relationships that the voids become places for human beings to step in and intuit the new relationships. These relationships can and should reorganize over time, but let our transformations be agencies of love.

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