

GEORGE PÓR

## FROM RIGHT MINDFULNESS TO COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE TO COLLECTIVE SENTIENCE: SIGNPOSTS TO THE LATER STAGES OF OUR EVOLUTIONARY JOURNEY



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**T**HIS ESSAY IS A WIDE-RANGING EXPLORATION INTO THE conditions for realizing the next-level potential of human and social evolution. A starting point for looking at “evolution” is the unending journey resulting from the “dynamic interplay of the passive and the creative polarizations of the Absolute that unfolds itself into the energetic process of differentiation bringing forth the whole of creation<sup>1</sup>.” The evolutionary process actually continues through cycles of differentiation, then integration, at a higher level.

We are on the threshold of a new cycle of the spiral, the spiral of consciousness. The previous cycles, archaic, magic, mythic, modern and post-modern consciousness served us well by leading us so far. However, becoming stuck with them is becoming stuck with an existential threat of intertwining global crises that cannot be solved at the currently dominant modern and post-modern levels. The next cycle is the one of an integral, holistic consciousness that enables the integration of the inner and outer technologies and sciences, deep intuition and systems thinking, spirituality and precision of inquiry.

In this essay I explore some of themes that are core to our move into the next cycle, such as, collective intelligence, collective sentience, evolutionary guidance systems, integral and shared mindfulness.

### CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

The first sciences arising with agriculture started distinguishing themselves from intuition, imagination,

and other inner ways of knowing, during the dawn of human civilization. In the ensuing millennia, the separation and differentiation both between and within scientific and spiritual practices (reflecting the division of labour in the material domain) contributed to the spontaneous evolution of consciousness and culture.

“We are the product of the process of evolution, and [...] we have become the process itself, through the emergence and evolution of our consciousness, our awareness, our capacity to imagine and anticipate the future, and to choose from among alternatives<sup>2</sup>.”

Spontaneous, unguided social evolution develops powerful forces of science and technology, but not a just social system, where all can benefit from their fruits. The development of those forces, in the conditions of private expropriations of the fruits of humankind’s general intellect, is raising the risk of systems-wide cataclysms due to the galloping complexity of our intertwining, global messes. That’s the moment in human history, when the useful life-cycle of blind, unguided evolution ends in a global problematic, unmanageable at the level of social organization and consciousness that created it.

“To date, evolution on Earth has moved along its trajectory of its own accord. But it will not progress beyond this point unless it is driven forward intentionally. Evolution will continue to advance on this planet only if certain conditions are met: humanity will need to awaken to the fact that we are living in the midst of a meaningful and directional evolutionary process, realize that the continued success of the process depends on us, and commit to intentionally moving the process forward<sup>3</sup>.”

At this juncture, blind evolution must yield to conscious, intentional evolution if we are to pass the chasm from humanity’s prehistory, where we could live with the false sense of separate self, to its real history that starts when (out of a sense of recognized prior unity) we reinvent our ways to organize toward maximizing the well-being of the Whole and all of its parts.

This essay is intended to make a modest contribution to some of the signposts of that reinvention, and to spark a collaborative, action inquiry into it.

INTEGRAL AND  
SHARED MINDFULNESS

INTEGRAL MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness, especially shared mindfulness, is an essential doorway to the collective intelligence and action required to re-orient where we want to go as a society. “Mindfulness” here refers not to its popular, “stress-reduction” meaning, but to a discipline of training our attention and intention to foster wise action grounded in compassion with self and others.

“Mindfulness is not merely a compartmentalized tool for enhancing attention but is informed and influenced by many other factors – our view of reality; the nature of our thoughts, speech, and actions; our way of making a living; and our effort in avoiding unwholesome and unskilful states while developing those that are skilful and conducive to health and harmony<sup>4</sup>.”

Without an ethical foundation grounded in the common good and an integral, evolutionary worldview, the currently trending mindfulness practices and trainings risk reducing a radical, ancient wisdom tradition of self-knowledge and self-transformation to a self-help technique or psychological state readily co-optable by the defenders of the institutional status quo.

To distinguish mindfulness engaged with the ethical challenges of our times from the escapist, “McMindfulness” version, I call the first “integral mindfulness”. Integral mindfulness is taking mindfulness off the meditation cushion and infusing all dimensions of our life with it; not only the life of you and me, but also of collective entities, such as organizations, networks, cities or nations. Your being mindful *integrally* may contribute also to the mindful development of the cultures and structures you’re in.

Showing up mindfully in a group may have “contagious” impact. This story illustrates it. Sometime in the 80s, I was sitting in a leadership team meeting convened by my client, a VP in a major Silicon Valley company. That was before Google introduced the idea of relaxed, cool workplaces; all businesses in the high-tech industry were pressure cookers: high speed, fast talk, never enough time for a heartfelt, deeply meaningful conversation about questions that mattered to the members. My client’s company was not an exception. Yet, in that meeting, there was an atmosphere of ancient mystery school; silence frequently following statements to give enough time to absorb their implications, people not cutting into each other’s words, and genuine curiosity for each other’s concerns and contributions. Later I learned that the VP was an advanced Buddhist meditator, but he never mentioned that in his team. People just picked up the vibes and enjoyed it.

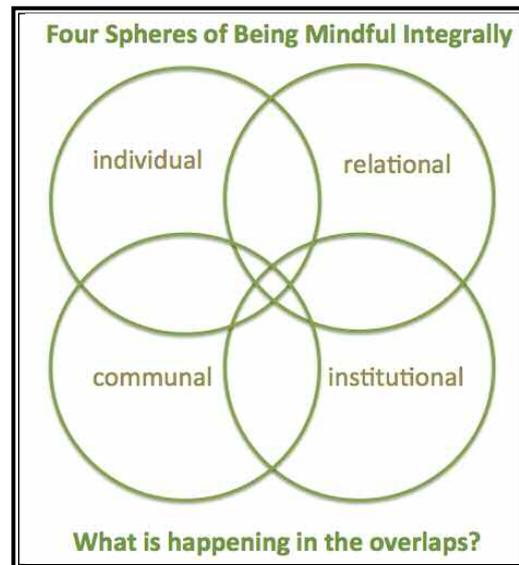


FIGURE 1 - A map for inquiring into the overlaps.

What is novel about “Integral Mindfulness” is the shift of focus from the snapshot-like, static quadrants of the regular integral matrix to the dynamic interactions in the overlaps of the four spheres. For example, let’s see what is happening in the overlap and transitions between the individual and communal spheres.

Both collective intelligence and “shared mindfulness” start within (following the pattern of the We-space that starts with We-in-the-I<sup>5</sup>.) I am already participating in shared mindfulness, when I preparing to enter that shared space (physical or virtual) of heightened, collective awareness. It’s a moment of solo practice of cantering and welcoming what will come, shared by many of the other members of the community. Some participants in our Mindful Together community described their experience as follows:

“For me stepping into this virtual intimate collective space is new muscle – its like swimming in the sea, which I love but there’s always a little resistance on first feel of the cold water but once I’m in – I’m loving it again but that is now an established practice. What I am observing is this habit of being used to being in our own separate bubble – the comfort of the sofa that we know and getting out of it always calls for a little push against the reflexive resistance to a minor change in habit. Coming together like this in a deeper shared collective space is a new muscle that needs exercising to work well and being mindful of our lack of fitness/resistance is a start. However once you are in and like the ocean, you feel carried or elevated by field between us<sup>6</sup>.”

If all start paying attention to their inner experience already in the preparation for entering the circle,

that attitude will be conducive to the emergence of a potent inter-subjective field of “shared mindfulness” allowing us to sense what is happening more accurately, think more clearly, act more coherently, and achieve greater collective results.

MINDFULNESS WHEN SHARED  
EXPANDS FREEDOM, JOY,  
AND CONSCIOUSNESS

WHY ELSE WOULD WE WANT TO EXPERIENCE  
SHARED MINDFULNESS, IF NOT FOR THAT  
EXPANSION?

Instead of talking *about*, can we talk *from* and to mindfulness? From mine to yours, from yours to mine? Separated by time and space, but connected by a shared curiosity, we can choose to bring our attention to what is happening in this inter-subjective exchange between us right here on this page.

Don't think that your part is merely passive here. I exist because of you, in the sense that my thoughts are coming from the felt sense of our communication because I know that you're there and curious. Thanks to the gifts of modern communication technologies, you can also add your voice and describe your end of the experience. So, how is it when you read an essay with your body, allowing half of your attention to rest on the pattern of your breathing, while absorbing the words reaching you? (That's how I'm writing to prevent these heady subjects from coming only from my head.)

When two or more people are gifting their conversation and their inter-personal relationship with an intentional, choiceful attention, the space created between them becomes a space of shared mindfulness, regardless whether it is mediated by a physical or virtual space. Such a practice fosters a deeper sense of connection and adds more presence and significance to the experience of each participant.

Communities of mindfulness practice engaged in shared inquiry and joint discovery have been favoured places of accelerated personal and spiritual development throughout the centuries. Enhanced with today's communications technologies, they can make the shared experience and insights just one click away from their members, as shown by the practice of many online communities of inner development.

Inter-subjective or shared mindfulness is one of the inter-disciplinary fields where outer and inner sciences started meeting. There's a growing number of first-person descriptions not only of various meditative states and the practices to reach them, but also of

different paths to inter-subjective mindfulness, labelled for instance, “Insight Dialogue,” “Transparent Communications,” “Magic in the Middle,” “Evolutionary Dialogue,” “Chaordic Chat,” “Collective Presencing,” “We-space” approaches, etc. Let's take a closer look at some of these practices.

CHAORDIC CHAT

“This practice starts by breaking the habit of giving and receiving immediate response in real-time conversations, texting, on skype or on the phone. It gives access to a fuller intelligence of the parties in communication. When we take any insight, a striking inspiration, or a special resonance between possibilities, into the focus of our non-judgmental observing and contemplating them, then we can access a deeper intuition. Giving room to such contemplation, before moving to expression, is a gift to the conversation's highest potential<sup>7</sup>.”

When groups of people are engaged in this practice something remarkable happens. As Viktor L Frank stated: “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” When all participants in a multiparty exchange listen and respond from that spaciousness, the resulting shared freedom opens the doors to breakthrough possibilities in whatever domain of collective action.

MAGIC IN THE MIDDLE

“The magic in the middle begins with a shift in awareness, from parts to relations between parts. Imagine a circle of people in conversation. When we are interested in understanding the processes that take place in the conversation, we can pay attention to the individual in the circle, to the circle as a whole (group or team), or to the relations between the participants. All three realities coexist at once, but we can choose to let one of them come in the foreground.

“To pay attention to the field of relations is not the same as paying attention to the whole. The parts are still important. The whole is still important. But we are particularly interested in what goes on in the interaction between the parts, and let that reality come in the foreground<sup>8</sup>.” This approach has nine distinct practices outlined in more depth in the article referenced.

TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

Transparent Communication resonates with the some of the practices of the Magic in the Middle or

Collective Presencing but takes them to a new dimension. It allows us to tune in with the inner experience of each other, simultaneously being present to our own reality, the reality of the other and the inter-personal field of energy and meaning.

These are some of the injunctions that make this form of shared mindfulness possible:

- Speak always from the Now;
- Continuously widen your perception of subtle energies;
- Keep the space of relationship always open, i.e in any context, independently of the contents of the conversation, don't contract but stay consciously connected even through feelings of unease or pain;
- Respect the different inner experiences of others even if you may not personally share them.

Transparent Communication is a competence people can cultivate and become better at. That is happening in TC practice groups around the world<sup>9</sup>.

There are also a growing number of “*outer science*” approaches to shared mindfulness, scientifically studying it as a measurable object, without necessarily taking into account the scientist’s direct experience of it.

#### INTERSUBJECTIVITY

“Intersubjectivity is a term used in philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology to conceptualize the psychological relation between people, who construct meaning in their interactions with each other and used as an everyday resource to interpret the meaning of elements of social and cultural life [...] Intersubjectivity emphasizes that shared cognition and consensus is essential in shaping our ideas and relations. Language, quintessentially, is viewed as communal rather than private [...].

“The cultural value of *respeto* may also contribute to Intersubjectivity in some communities; unlike the English definition of ‘respect,’ *respeto* refers loosely to a mutual consideration for others’ activities, needs, wants, etc. Similar to ‘putting yourself in one’s shoes’ the prevalence of *respeto* in certain Indigenous American communities in Mexico and South America may promote Intersubjectivity as persons act in accordance with one another within consideration for the community or the individual’s current needs or state of mind.” (Wikipedia).

#### INTERPERSONAL NEUROBIOLOGY

Dr. Dan Siegel, psychiatrist and author of several books on *interpersonal neurobiology*, emphasizes

that the mind is a relational, “self-organizational emergent process that is arising as energy and information flows not just in the body, certainly not just in the skull, throughout the body, but also as it’s shared between people and among people and even with the planet. This sharing we call relational, this embodied relational process is self-organizing<sup>10</sup>.”

As we understand mind and language, they are relational, inter-subjective processes that in their everyday use, are not recognized as such. Understanding each other’s meaning-making tools and frameworks, inner and outer scientists working together can make a greater difference for the sake of the common good than each can alone. Dan Siegel’s insight points in that direction: “I think there’s a moment in cultural evolution where people, on a grassroots level, can be empowered to learn how to focus their minds in a way that strengthens how the mind works, integrates the brain, and creates kinder relationships, both with other people and also with themselves<sup>11</sup>.”

Can that moment in cultural evolution be *now*? When an interpersonal neurobiologist calls for massive empowerment by focusing our minds in a way that creates kinder relationships, it’s also an invitation to practitioners of other disciplines to bring the gifts of their own arts to the same. It challenges us to complement our in-the-moment practices of shared mindfulness with the practices of sustainable, mindful relationships.

#### COLLECTIVE BIOFEEDBACK

If mindfulness refers to keeping one’s consciousness alive to the present reality, and biofeedback is a process of gaining greater awareness of various physiological functions, including one’s brainwaves, then their marriage was made in heaven, using instruments that feed back real-time information to the user. “The presentation of this information – often in conjunction with changes in thinking, emotions, and behaviour – supports desired physiological changes. Over time, these changes can endure without continued use of an instrument<sup>12</sup>.”

Promoters of biofeedback-enhanced mindfulness practices and games claim that you can’t improve what you can’t measure. The seed of truth in that exaggerated statement is that real-time feedback assessing one’s depth of meditative state can contribute to its further deepening.

The potential of group biofeedback for shared mindfulness didn’t get lost on biofeedback scientists studying Heart Rate Variability (also known as Heart Rate Coherence). Users of certain biofeedback equipment can obtain real-time feedback about their “synchrony,

the time lag between the peak of the breath and the peak of the heart wave, around the end of the inhalation. The more closely the breath and heart wave are 'in sync', the lower the synchrony<sup>13</sup>."

The following work-in-progress project run by a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, sketches out a path to individual synchrony states getting connected and scaling up in larger groups.

"Pulse is a distributed collective biofeedback system that aims to synchronize the heartbeats of its participants [...] The pulse rate is continuously collected from people, who choose to participate using a wearable device (optimally a ubiquitous device such as an iPod or cell phone). The pulse rate is transmitted via a wireless network to a computer. The computer calculates the average pulse rate and transmits it to the participants as a single beat sound played in the same device that recorded and transmitted the heartbeat [...] Pulse aims to create a tangible experience of the relationship between individual entities and the networks they form and act within<sup>14</sup>."

Biofeedback is still rarely used in collective settings for examining and creating connections between participants. Synchronized heartbeats may induce a subjective experience of increased connection. Relational closeness doesn't automatically lead to shared integral mindfulness that also has an ethical component.

Enabling technologies are getting more and more sophisticated and commonly available. The state of consciousness necessary for human groups to make the best use of them is lagging way behind. When completed, the Pulse would let participants become aware of their shared heartbeat. However, unless their culture has shared purpose and values and an attitude of striving for competence in some inner technologies, then it is unlikely that the outer technology of biofeedback can deliver on its potential for fostering shared, integral mindfulness.

That brings us back to the role of the teachers and practitioners of inner sciences, and also brings us forward to examine collective intelligence and sentience.

## COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

### WHAT IS COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE?

Becoming mindful of how our moment-to-moment experience is shaped by the social relations in which we participate is not enough. The challenge and opportunity of socially engaged meditators is to not only experience our social world mindfully, but help it evolve beyond the limitations imposed on it by outdated socio-economic system. None of us can do it alone; for that, we need to mobilize and augment our *collective* intelligence.

Collective intelligence is an emergent capacity of social groups (of any size), which enables them to evolve towards higher-order harmony and complexity, through such innovation mechanisms as differentiation and integration.

Of course, that is only one of the many definitions of CI. That one is seen through the "evolutionary" lens and differs from the "wisdom of crowd"-type CI and, possibly, from some other definitions used in this issue of the journal. The emphasis on emergent quality distinguishes it from "additive CI" that merely states, "two minds are better than one."

That evolutionary lens is complementary to a cognitive lens through which CI can be seen as follows: "Intelligence refers to the main cognitive powers: perception, action planning and coordination, memory, imagination and hypothesis generation, inquisitiveness and learning abilities. The expression 'collective intelligence' designates the cognitive powers of a group<sup>15</sup>."

I introduced what CI might look like through important lenses of political economy and information technology here<sup>16</sup>, which I don't elaborate on in this essay due to space limitations.

What we perceive as practical applications and implications of CI differ also according to whether we look from an intra-personal, inter-personal, or transpersonal perspective. Let's explore CI in those three dimensions.

## CI STARTS WITHIN – THE INFRA-PERSONAL DIMENSION: HOW COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE MANIFESTS IN MYSELF

We are part of a vast web of collective intelligence and it is part of each of us because we are products of the evolving intelligence of life itself. Not to mention our ancestors in the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms, we are products of many millennia of social evolution. We couldn't have language, tools, not even our most intimate thoughts and feelings, without the long journey of CI in humankind's history.

Given that, we might do well to ask ourselves: How does CI manifest in *myself*? What is *my* collective IQ (C-IQ) and how could I boost it?

I first asked those questions in a presentation I gave at the University of Ottawa in 2004, using a 6-pole model of CI developed by Pierre Lévy for discerning and assessing the main CI resources an individual or a collective has.

Lévy's 6-pole Model of the Main Resources of Collective Intelligence

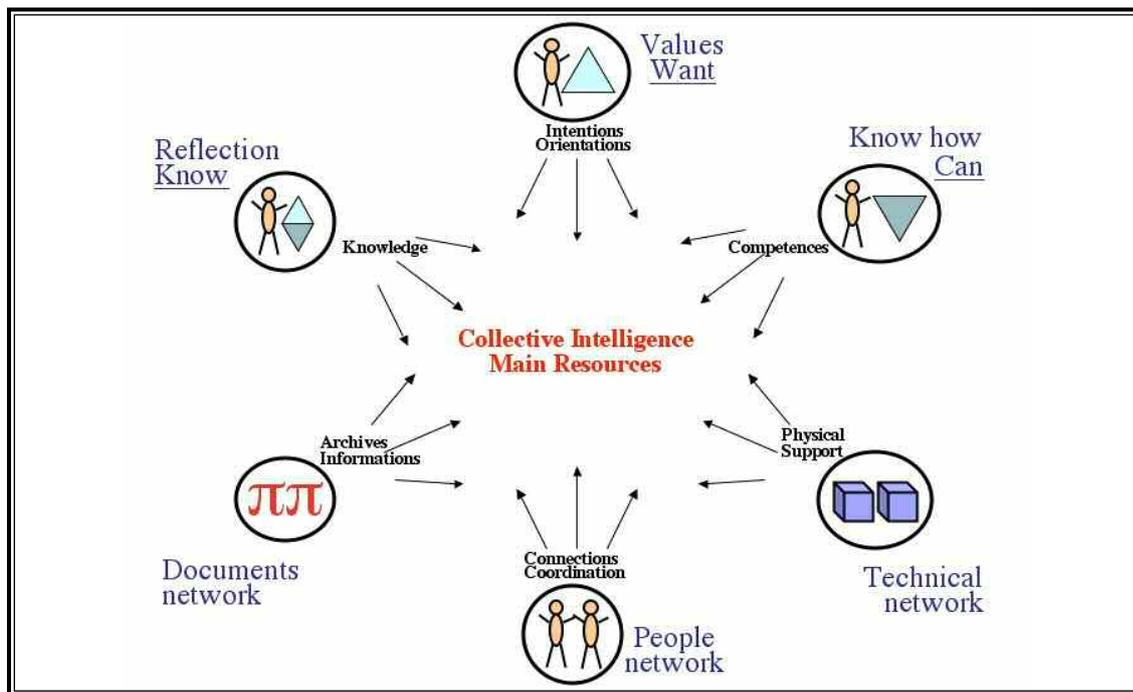


FIGURE 2 - Pierre Lévy's diagram quoted in Social Software and CI?<sup>17</sup>.

The top half of the diagram represents the three virtual resources of CI and the bottom half its three physical resources. Extrapolating that the intelligence potential of a biological organism increases with the number of connections among the cells in their nervous system, I suggest that the C-IQ of a social being (individual or collective) is proportionate with the level of connectivity within and across of the 6 CI pictured above. Below are 6 examples of what the increased connectivity within the 6-pole resources of CI may mean.

1 - The permanent inner chatter of the mind, with its frequent jumps to unrelated thoughts, creates a disjoint series of only loosely-connected *reflections*. We can grow higher coherence in that chatter by practicing contemplation, meditation, and visualization of our mental models. Growing competence in any of those arts will boost our C-IQ. The practical value of the capacity to maintain a more coherent inner discourse cannot be overstated.

2 - If my *intentions* are driven by a rowdy bunch of competing desires and ambitions, then my C-IQ, the capacity to co-evolve with others towards higher harmony and complexity, will be compromised. Correspondingly, if my intentions are aligned and oriented by the evolutionary value of continually upgrading my consciousness, compassion, and capacity to absorb more complexity, then chances are, my C-IQ will be even higher.

3 - Humans may not swim as swiftly as dolphins or run as fast as gazelles but we have a repertory of competences far richer than other species. Our intellectual *competences*, such as memory, sensing, discerning, intuiting, etc. are all related with each other. Exploring the nature of their complex interdependences, one can find the sweet-spot of interdependence among all those capabilities. Most likely, it will be the one with the biggest influence on coherence within the ecosystem of those capabilities.

4 - Our document networks and personal knowledge ecosystems provide us with the many gifts of *recorded memory*, including the opportunity to examine and increase the coherence of our mental models. How well our personal knowledge gardens are tended has a huge impact on everyone's C-IQ.

5 - The wider and more diverse is my *people network* of trusted relationships, the more connected I am with a larger variety of life experiences and perspectives on reality. A web of mutually supportive relationships is also a booster of my C-IQ.

6 - Finally, the *technical network* supports all the 5 other poles of CI -in-me, by putting at the disposal of each of us a wide array of *enabling technologies*, e.g.: massive and miniaturized memory storage, two-way and communal high-speed connection with the Web, and much more. All of that can be connected in configurations optimized for supporting and augmenting CI -in-me.

Now, let's envision widening the scope of our exploration of how to increase the connection not only *within*, but also *across* the 6 poles. For example, what if we could turbo-charge the creative potential of value flowing from our *reflections* to our *enabling technologies* and vice versa? Imagine, what could it enable and make possible?

The circular flow of *information* and energy between our *intentions*, *recorded memories*, and *trusted relationships* is another key factor of C-IQ. The vitality of that inner flow decides the breadth and speed of access to the collective mind, which comes in handy when we need to mobilize that access for meeting the key challenge or opportunity at (our individual or collective) hand. The elegant beauty of the 6-pole model of CI is its scalability from individuals to small and large groups.

CI OF THE RELATIONAL FIELD  
– THE INTER-PERSONAL DIMENSION:  
COLLECTIVE SELF-REFLEXIVITY

When each of us observes patterns of interest in what we pay attention to, in a communal or organizational setting, and share them with other members, we sow the seeds for collective self-reflexivity to sprout. It is a capacity of human groups to reflect upon the content of their collective sensing and meaning-making.

For a collective entity to become a fully co-intelligent living organism, it needs to gain competence in the arts of collective self-reflection (CS-R), including proficiency in building and using collective sensing organs. The latter can include collaborative blogs, wikis, and sensing and meaning-making practices in face-to-face and online group events.

Well-tended collective self-reflexivity can lead to a more fine-tuned sensing of reality, more attuned and agile collaborative meaning-making processes, thus, higher C-IQ and wiser action.

“Within 10 to 20 years, the human family will have in place the communications infrastructure that could support a quantum increase in the collective intelligence – and the collective consciousness – of the species<sup>18</sup>.” If Duane Elgin's epiphany is to come true, epochal shifts will happen in the next year. In fact, we are already in the midst of some of them; we just don't know their likely outcomes. To enable the best outcome of those shifts, organizations, groups, and other collective entities need to build capacity for cultivating their collective self-reflexivity.

In conversations on the “How” of CS-R, a frequently recurring question is: “But will it scale?” Here are two other questions that may be more practical: What is needed for enabling CS-R in groups of increasing scale? How to optimize the

initial conditions of its collective DNA for continually updating itself?

Some insight about those questions can be gleaned from the three principles of the Master Code of the Human Hive<sup>19</sup>. Those principles are; Take Care of Yourself, Take Care of Each Other, Take Care of This Place”. (It's remarkable those principles and the associated practices were pioneered by high school students in Canada.)

Taking care of each other and this place/organisation/planet wouldn't be possible without becoming ever better at practicing collective self-reflexivity.

I also keep hearing the question: when to exercise CS-R? Any moment when a community is facing critical challenges or opportunities is a good moment for exercising its “collective self-reflexivity” muscles. How well-performing those muscles will be at those hot moments depends on how well-trained they are.

CI OF NOOSPHERE  
– THE TRANSPERSONAL DIMENSION:  
LETTING COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE  
USE US FOR ORGANIZING ITSELF

I frequently email a tweet I stumble upon in my tweet stream to friends, family, colleagues, and clients, if I know that it reflects one of their interests, or I tag them in a thread on Facebook, letting the system alert them to it.

That's because nobody can spend all the time in the stream, yet staying current with what is unfolding in cyberspace around issues of priority interest is a need of more and more people. Subscription services may help a little but we risk creating the notorious “filter bubble,” filtering out everything we didn't know how to ask for.

The good news is that the larger the circle of friends who care for us, the better the chances that we can stay informed of not just 0.5% but maybe 1% of what we need to know to stay current. No keyword-based filtering system comes close in effectiveness to a network of humans in mutually supportive relationships, where they act as “organic” sensors for each other.

Relying on an intuited map of resonances, which shows the intersections and adjacent areas between my own topics of interest and those of my friends, I send the gems I pick up on my surfpeth. What makes me an “organic” sensor is that unlike most algorithm-based filters, I read their feedback so the excitement that my pointer has (or hasn't) generated, informs and motivates me to refine my catch-and-forward strategy.

In my post on the Blog of Collective Intelligence<sup>20</sup>, where I wrote about this, Heinz Robert responded

by saying: “I am always grateful for hints and links of friends who think that can be useful for my work and/or development. That’s what friends are for.”

Pamela McLean wrote there: “We can do our own practical learning-by-doing, and reflection and then connect in conversations, on topics of overlapping interest, which are enriched by our different perspectives. We can share information, exchange questions, gain insights and possibly create new knowledge together. Thanks to the Internet we can do all that without needing to travel to international conferences or being part of formal professional bodies. We are gradually discovering how we can be part of a world-wide shared-learning-and thinking community.”

Comments from them and others who joined our conversation across space and time, made clearer for me that while “friends are doing what they are for,” something else is also happening, unbeknownst to them.

Patterns of connections are getting generated in the global brain, and maybe even the trust and intelligence flowing through them can reach wider and deeper.

The most influential nodes in that brain are not individual humans, but the various kinds of glocal-scale<sup>21</sup> learning and thinking communities, particularly, communities of practice and epistemic communities<sup>1</sup> organized around various domains of knowledge.

“Neurons that fire together, wire together” seems to be true not only for our brain’s neural processes, but also for the global brain. If so, we can be sensors not only for each other, but for collective intelligence itself, letting it use us for organizing itself, by increasing the neural connections inside and among our communities. We let it use us, when with some new, valuable information at hand, we’re wondering, who else can benefit from this info?

Helen Titchen Beeth, another commenter of this blogpost further refined the “organic sensor” position, writing about “practicing what you plead for here: that collective curation and skilful sifting for potent nuggets of meaning that can bond with other nuggets to create novel compounds and – who knows – even new life-forms! A small inner voice said ‘you could do that for this conversation’ – and then a deeper knowing said ‘no, this one is not for you... or not yet/now’. Which adds another coloured thread to our weave: There’s more to this than just relationships between nodes. It is as if we are each rooted in our unique place in the Kosmos and can learn to hear feedback directly from ‘the source’ about what is uniquely ours to do<sup>22</sup>.”

Titchen Beeth’s point about orienting her choices by a sense of what is uniquely hers to do rhymes

with my own sense of how the selection of topics we attend to is the precise place where our own life journey and the journey of our self-organizing social mind meet. If I gain some clarity about the particular question to which my particular life/journey is the answer, it will inform the kind of memes/topics to which I attend.

Many other interesting things are also happening at the same time, in that very same act of letting certain issues attract us to curate them (for self and others). For example:

- ~ Trails of hyperlinks between groups, issues, memes, are being built and travelled, giving rise to new perspectives that emerge from the pathways connecting them.
- ~ Some emergent areas of our distributed mind are gaining more attention.
- ~ Some practices and principles of participatory epistemology<sup>23</sup> and liberating epistemology<sup>24</sup> start appearing.

I think what makes all those synchronously occurring trends possible is that “content curation is the natural evolution of our globally networked consciousness.” The author then says: “This sounds like a bunch of hippie drivel, but we really are creating a global brain, of sorts, by encoding human knowledge and tracking human activity. Using the human nodes of this network to strengthen some of these connections while weakening others (by choosing either to pass along i.e., ‘curate’ information or not to pass it along) helps this global brain function better as a system, which in turn increases its power whenever any of us need to tap into it<sup>25</sup>.”

I couldn’t have said it any better. Of course, it’s not only the global brain functions better thanks to our active and conscious participation; our individual brain does too. It’s very plausible that the global brain is increasing its power whenever any of us engages with it. But an even bigger game-changer on humanity’s evolutionary journey is: A fully functional global brain, with all its advanced affordances, will enable us to bring its resources to bear on meeting individual and collective needs of the multitudes, only the few. That will open the possibility for humankind to awaken to its collective sentience.

## COLLECTIVE SENTIENCE

### WHAT IS SENTIENCE AND COLLECTIVE SENTIENCE?

Are you sentient? You wouldn’t doubt that. How about an animal, a bacteria, or a plant? Sentience is not a binary concept. An entity is not either sentient or not. The meaning of the “sentience” distinction ranges from the entity being capable of perceiving

and feeling, to being sensitive and responsive to the vital needs of its parts and its whole. For current purpose, I use the latter meaning.

Another description of sentience comes from the Buddhist tradition. “Sentience seems to be characterized by awareness and care. This is sentience as understood by Buddhists and others who talk about sentient beings. Such sentient awareness is basically openness, space, within which things discriminate themselves. And that openness is characterized by compassion [...] we feel a kinship with sentient beings [...]”<sup>26</sup>.

Collective sentience is not exclusive to humans; we find it in a school of fish that can turn on dime, or a troop of baboons protecting collectively their babies in face of external aggression, or the forager bees following the pattern of the swarm’s waggle dance to find key resources.

The development of language and increasingly complex communication tools in human groups and society gave rise to a new dimension of collective sentience: the capacity to care for the well-being and evolution of the species itself, as well as its habitat, its larger encompassing whole. We see an early, limited manifestation of that capacity, when the human family gathers bringing aid to disaster victims.

Higher levels of collective sentience may be characterized by:

- the human species bringing to bear the fruits of our collective intelligence on urgent challenges;
- the eradication of war and other forms of man-made suffering;
- and ultimately, the development of an evolutionary guidance system<sup>27</sup> for spaceship Earth.

Given that evolution is an open and emergent process, Banathy’s concept of “evolutionary guidance system,” and the “intentional evolution” that I wrote about in the context-setting session of this article, do not imply some sort of social engineering. In both cases, we are talking about *self*-guided evolution, in which collective entities, including the human society as a whole, cease seeing themselves as only objects to/through which evolution just happens, and start recognizing that they have choices about its unfolding.

Evolution’s arrow points to higher complexity and harmony, but the process doesn’t advance in a straight line; it can move through detours and even fall back to previous stages, at tremendous human cost. Hence the importance of reaching higher levels of our collective sentience. The aspiration for that is an integral part of an evolutionary ethos of moving towards higher-order harmony. Given the dominance of today’s

individualist culture, its realization is only one of the possible futures.

#### THE GLOBAL BRAIN NEEDS TO BE JOINED BY THE GLOBAL HEART

Thinking about sentient humanity, the slowly emerging planetary meta-being, I wrote last year: “for it to be viable, its collective mind needs to be joined by a collective heart, consciousness plus compassion. That will start a new leg of the human family’s learning journey: the era of the species-being’s collective sentience<sup>28</sup>.”

Quora is one of the engines of our global-scale collective intelligence, or to put it in more specific terms, “Quora is a question-and-answer website where questions are created, answered, edited and organized by its community of users. Quora aggregates questions and answers to topics. Users can collaborate by editing questions and suggesting edits to other users’ answers.” (Wikipedia)

I decided to run a small experiment for using a tool of collective intelligence to explore an aspect of collective sentience. I asked this question on Quora: “The metabeing cannot come alive before having a global brain AND heart. What will do the same for the new civilization what the heart does for the body?” The question received a number of thoughtful responses, from which I quote one:

“This question is best answered by analogies about function, not anatomy. The heart is a metaphor for functions of the entire organism that go far beyond the physical heart’s mechanical interpretation as a pumping device. Brain and heart are physical structures that symbolize two different but not really separate, styles of intelligence conventionally called ‘thinking’ and ‘feeling’. The brain is considered the seat of thinking, and the heart is considered the seat of feeling and emotion [...] What function(s) do heart and emotion serve in individual humans, and what might accomplish analogous functions in the collective meta-being? The ‘heart’ has at least the following functions (the many meanings of which are suggested by common idioms using “heart”). These are ‘design affordances’ for the ‘global heart’:

- Distribution of energy and nutrients;
- Rhythm, pacing, and coherence;
- Sense of central unity, for self and towards others;
- Relationality and social attunement;
- Excitement and motivation, vitality;
- Hope, courage, and intention;
- Assessment of what is worth doing”<sup>29</sup>.

I took that long quote because I like both the depth of that reply to my question and the playful spirit suggesting that the list of functions are ‘design

affordances' for the 'global heart'. It's fascinating just to think about how the global heart would be "designed" if it were optimized for those affordances.

Who are the designers and is there an identifiable design process? Clearly, anything as complex as the "global heart," which seems more of a process than a "thing", cannot be designed; it can only emerge from favourable conditions.

Nevertheless, those conditions can be and are being promoted by trailblazing "We-space communities"<sup>30</sup>, Circles of Presence<sup>31</sup>, and other groups where members hold and support each other in their highest potential. The injunctions and practices used in those groups, worth replicating, deserve a well-resourced collaborative learning expedition to the tip of the evolutionary wave.

Collective sentience at increasing scale will emerge when communities and organizations start learning to sense, think, and act from the biggest "We" that they can put their arms around.

CONCLUDING NOTE ABOUT THE  
SHARED MINDFULNESS,  
COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE,  
AND COLLECTIVE SENTIENCE  
OF YOU AND ME

The first outline of this essay was much more expansive than I ended up writing. It had a number of sections that didn't make it into what you've just read, including important topics, like collective consciousness, we-space, collective wisdom, and various approaches for augmenting them. The plan felt like the pilot for a book I always wanted to write.

Around the turn of the year, I went on a two-week writing retreat on a mountain in the middle of an awe-inspiring national park of Catalonia. I was looking forward to it for months but when the time came, I had a nasty and persistent cold. Nursing myself back to health took most of my first week, leaving very little energy for writing.

When I was down to my last five days of the retreat, I noticed how much I grew attached to the original plans for the article, which by now, given the shortness of time left, became impossible to pursue. That noticing rang a mindfulness bell inside my head, which shifted my relationship to the process of pulling the pieces of this essay together. It shifted the restricting feeling of performing to a scope anticipated months ago into the joy of writing from the living centres of what is true and most alive for me now, and trusting that their inner coherence would somehow manifest in the outer coherence of what was produced in those five days.

It was like some kind of mental congestion got removed by changing the direction of the writing process from outside-in to inside-out. I am grateful to all readers for that shift because it was our shared mindfulness, collective intelligence, and collective sentience that made it possible. Let me explain.

Writing is communing, a passage of the chasm from me to we. You've been present with me in creating this essay, in all the choices I made about it, including the shift in my attitude about the writing process I mentioned above. Your voice inside me made it clear that what's important is not how complete the story is, but how authentically it is poured forth from my passion, because only then can it connect with yours.

The presence of collective intelligence of the Spanda ecosystem also helped me letting go of the anxiousness about the imperfections and blemishes due to the shrinking time left to complete the article. When the writing is alive and generative, the writer creates only the first draft; the readers produce the next. Given the affordances of the digital media, we might just make this a reality.

Finally, a word about our collective sentience, our caring for a possible better world, which connects us. As you were reading certain passages, your caring has probably evoked both some resonances in your heart and new questions in your mind. Our collective sentience can be summed up in the question: What are we willing to do for each other and the field that holds us? Will you share with the other readers and me your questions, concerns, appreciations, whatever can take this inquiry forward?



<sup>1</sup> Spanda Foundation 2005, *A Concise Introduction*.

<sup>2</sup> Salk 1985, *Man Evolving*.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart 2009, *Evolution*.

<sup>4</sup> Purser & Milillo 2014, *Mindfulness Revisited*.

<sup>5</sup> Pór 2014, *Connecting the We-in-the-I*.

<sup>6</sup> Fleming 2014, in *Mindful Together*.

<sup>7</sup> Pór 2009, *Chaordic Chat Practice*.

<sup>8</sup> Voldtofte 2005, *Introduction to Magic in The Middle*.

<sup>9</sup> See <<http://bit.ly/1tXWeK2>>

<sup>10</sup> Siegel 2012, *Teaching What We Need To Learn*.

<sup>11</sup> Siegel 2011, Fifth Anniversary Commemorative Edition of the GAINS Quarterly.

<sup>12</sup> AAPB 2008, *What is biofeedback?*

<sup>13</sup> Blackett 2012, *Does HRV Biofeedback Help Mindfulness Meditation?*

<sup>14</sup> Jevbratt 2009, *The Pulse*.

- <sup>15</sup> Lévy 2003, *Frequently Asked Questions about Collective Intelligence*.
- <sup>16</sup> Pór 2008, *Collective Intelligence and Collective Leadership*.
- <sup>17</sup> Henshall 2003, *Social Software and CI?*
- <sup>18</sup> Elgin 1997, *Collective Consciousness and Cultural Healing*.
- <sup>19</sup> Pór 2012, *Living into the Master Code of the Human Hive*.
- <sup>20</sup> Pór 2014, *Letting collective intelligence use us for organizing itself*.
- <sup>21</sup> See <<http://bit.ly/1yVtL8F>>.
- <sup>22</sup> See <<http://bit.ly/1y3bd6A>>.
- <sup>23</sup> See <<http://bit.ly/1DyAJSV>>.
- <sup>24</sup> See <<http://bit.ly/1tXWusp>>.
- <sup>25</sup> Van Buskirk 2012, *Curation: How the Global Brain Evolves*.
- <sup>26</sup> Szpakowski 2014, *What is sentience*.
- <sup>27</sup> Banathy 2000, *Guided Evolution in Society*.
- <sup>28</sup> Pór 2014, *Op. Cit.*
- <sup>29</sup> Wylder 2014, Reply on Quora.
- <sup>30</sup> Pór 2014, *The Emergence of Higher We-Spaces*.
- <sup>31</sup> Scharmer 2006, *Theory U*.



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