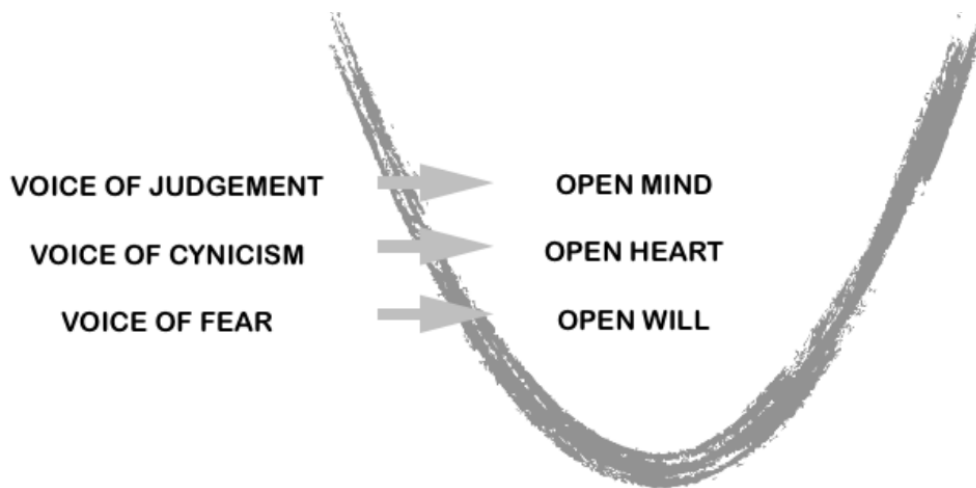


Befriending Polarization through Differentiation and Integration



In 1971 a destructive fire in a large, predominantly African-American school in Durham, NC, precipitated the issue of school integration and social justice. To defuse the tensions the mayor invited a facilitator expert in the Charrette approach to participatory decision-making. The first thing that the Charrette expert, Bill Riddick, did seems contrary to established common sense: he made sure to secure the participation of C. P. Ellis, local president of the K.K.K. Next he invited the African American civil rights activist Ann Atwater. They both ended up playing important roles in the lengthy process the whole city underwent.

Riddick is an African American with no possible sympathy for the K.K.K. So why did he invite its president? We could say the common sense perception that a lot of the white population unfortunately stood behind him. But this alone would have been a recipe for suicide. The reason Bill could pull it off was his trust in a process that allows us to suspend judgment and see the other person's humanity. This is the so-called "Charrette," a "collaborative process by which a group of designers draft a solution to a design problem, [that] in a broader sense can be applied to the development of public policy through dialogue between decision-makers and stakeholders." (from Wiki). And the process led to unexpected positive solutions for the city, and to the forging of the very unlikely and lasting friendship between C. P. Ellis and Ann Atwater. The fuller story has been told in the book *The Best of Enemies* and the movie of the same name.

In this article I intend to look not at what promotes polarization but at what allows us to overcome it or, better even, integrate it. In effect, pending major waves of cultural change, extreme polarization has to be accepted and transformed from within, as in the example above. This article will offer thoughts gleaned from life experience around the subject of conflict and polarization. I will refer to different aspects of them and point the reader to resources I have gathered over the years, such as effective change tools, inspirational stories, or imaginative material. Behind the examples and stories stand general principles/archetypes which we can internalize and render our own. I'll arrive at these through a gradual progression. In addition I list resources at the end of the article to deepen any given aspect presented here.

The Anti-Social Instincts of the Consciousness Soul

Polarization meets us first of all through conflict at the interpersonal level. If we acknowledge what Steiner has told us of the reality of the growth of anti-social instincts in our time we cannot take exception in the belief that anyone of us stands above the masses. We are and will keep being anti-social for quite some time into the future.¹ The consciousness soul reality of our time is in and of itself deeply divisive. Through the focus it places on the body and the physical it separates us, cuts us off, from the macrocosm and from other human beings. We know this is the premise for a conscious reconnection to the spirit done in freedom. Meanwhile we have to suffer the collateral effects, as it were. The individual himself is placed under great tension between matter and spirit. He is, we could say, polarized!

A conscious spiritual development, undertaken along the lines of spiritual science, will certainly allow us to stand differently in the presence of conflict, but will it allow to bring comfort and resolution? In the experience of this author, the meditative path is certainly helpful. The more individuals are earnest in this direction the more will our social milieux be uplifted. Yes, it's true, but the impact is slow and indirect. Thus we need something else at the group/collective level to impact social reality directly and as close as possible to the very moment. We need social awareness tools and these are specific for given domains. There is no silver bullet that works for all situations and all levels. This is the sobering news. On the plus side we can feel reassured that there are archetypes behind all of them which can help us to reform completely the way we relate to each other, work collectively and gain a fuller understanding of social dynamics of polarization and how to defuse them. In the following I will offer a completely individual example

¹ Rudolf Steiner, *The Challenge of the Times*, lecture of December 6, 1918.

of the progression into the matter. The tools that I have found and used could have been very different. In fact they may be different for any given person. The principles and archetypes behind these are what matters, not the individual forms they take in one biography or another.

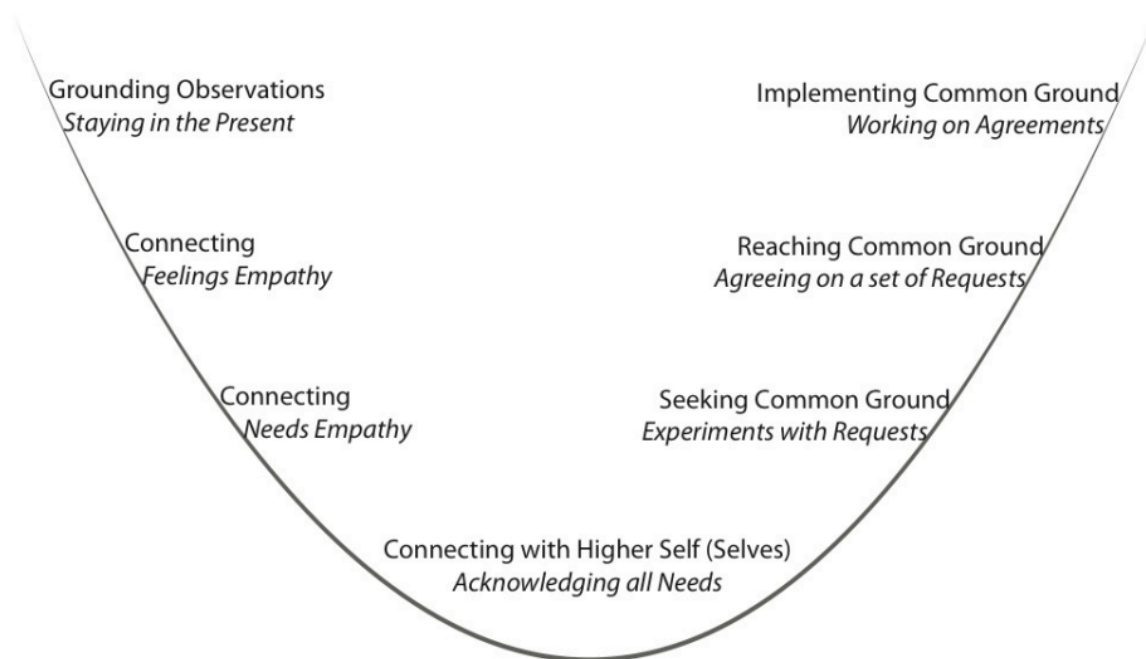
Listening to Connect Above Our Differences

The question of social strife hit me first with the experience that like-minded people, united or not by a common spiritual background, can both do great work for a target population, and still often render each other miserable in their social interactions at the personal level. This living question led me to Nonviolent Communication, just as it could have led me to other, similar tools.² I grew into the practice of Nonviolent Communication by teaching it and practicing it in a community of L'Arche that worked with people with special needs. It led to great transformations, I believe because we were all earnest, and because it was a small community. So what did I learn? I can capture it in a challenge that a simple statement threw at me: "Every judgment [of other individuals] is the tragic expression of an unmet need." This statement seemed excessive and I decided to challenge it, to disprove it. I found I could not.

With the growth of the living practice and practical understanding of Nonviolent Communication, the method became internalized into a consciousness. I saw all the more clearly, especially through the practice of mediation, that no matter how distant two people can be, if they are earnest in their desire to find a resolution, two hours of mediation are sufficient to persuade them that they share a common ground in the universality of feelings and needs/values; that once they understand their own and their adversary's stance, based on their mutual needs, the solution is very close at hand, a solution that is not a compromise. In the experience they will stop judging each other, they will have however brief a glimpse of the individuality facing them. When this experience grew it translated into a new presence in the world. The problems we have can be resolved if we step into a higher perspective. I don't need to solve problems, most often I cannot anyway. But I can invite people to embrace a new way to see conflict and how to tackle it, to lose fear about it. Conflict consists after all of polarities that need to be integrated in order to create a higher synthesis.

² Another approach I have turned to are what I have called Steiner's "karmic exercises." For an overview of these see *The Journey of Spirit Recollection: A Handbook for the Practice of Steiner's Karmic Exercises* at <https://www.millenniumculmination.net/spirit-recollection-journey.pdf>

Nature is, we could say, always in 'conflict' between innumerable sets of polarities that it integrates. It thrives in the integration of polarities.



Nonviolent Communication in Relation to the Seven Life Processes

So why does NVC, together with many other tools, work so effectively. This is because of an organic understanding of the human being. In the spoken language we face the obstacles of conveying accurate observations together with an expression of our feelings and needs. In the course of a conversation these lead to requests. How clearly we understand and express the single elements makes the whole difference. And we must not only express ourselves but also make the effort to understand how things stand for the other person. We can either rush the steps and miscommunicate in haste to find a solution, or take the time and gain a sense of connection with the other person, even with the "enemy," and let solutions emerge organically because we have honored each other and gained a sense of our humanity.

In the practice of Nonviolent Communication we progress through observations, feelings and needs to the moment of 'presencing' (witnessing the above objectively and detachedly) and then to resolution. We follow the seven life processes in an organic way through what Otto Scharmer has called the stages of the Open Mind (observations) Open Heart (feelings / heart level) and Open Will (needs/values). Elsewhere I have pointed out

that Scharmer's U corresponds to the seven life processes at work in the social process.³

The above could be slightly misleading if I didn't add something sobering. The ideas communicated above are seemingly very simple because they correspond to an organic/archetypal reality, but they are hard to put into practice for a couple of inter-related reasons. The first is the need to unlearn the way we have been socialized to tackle conflict and polarization. This unlearning can be irritatingly slow. The second one underlies the first one: we live in a time in which anti-social instincts predominate and we are human beings of our time.

Differentiating to Integrate

The second level beyond that of one on one or small group interaction leads me to the organizational/community level, for example in how we connect as a whole in our meetings and decision-making processes. I will refer to this whole field as that of participatory facilitation, of rendering possible seeing the same reality and acting on it together.

The first time I took on the role of facilitator I was part of a program called a "Mastery in Technology of Participation." In the simulated classroom situation the first time I heard the concern of an individual I naturally resorted to Nonviolent Communication by hearing what lived in the heart of the person and reflecting it back. The instructor looked at me perplexed "What are you doing." I said something like "she's troubled and I'm trying to understand why." "And are you going to do this for everybody?" she asked me amused. I saw that it would not be possible.

When we work with organizations, communities, groups of a certain dimension, we establish a body of practice through which we come to listen to and understand each other and take healthy decisions together, ... or not. We listen not to individuals but to stakeholders, groups of individuals who have certain more or less homogeneous sets of needs and values. This is what it means to differentiate in order to integrate: acknowledge our differences and standpoints very honestly and openly. Here again the principle of the seven life processes works to our benefit. In the course of the Mastery I learned to apply this at growing levels of complexity with high specificity; everything from an agenda item conversation to a strategic planning

³ See Karl Julius Schröer and Rudolf Steiner *Anthroposophy and the Teachings of Karma and Reincarnation*, Chapter 7: Exploration of the Impulse of Spirit Recollection, also available at https://www.millenniumculmination.net/Steiner_and_Schroer.pdf

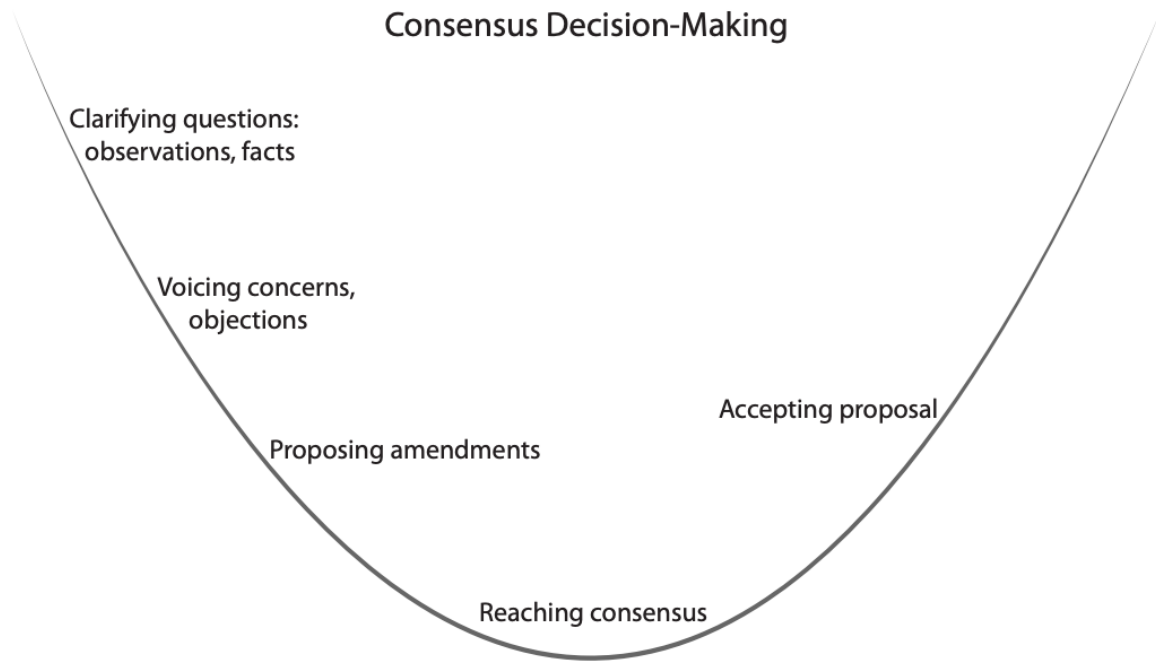
and all the in-between. Here I will give an example that I've practiced extensively in cohousing or small settings. I will use this as an example before once again returning to the general principles.

I met Consensus Decision Making at Occupy Wall Street, though in the city of Albany, NY. A couple of youngsters trained three or four of us. Trained is an overstatement, it was a crash course. But it covered the bases: the steps of the approach, the roles and tasks that the facilitation takes (facilitator, note-taker, stacker (stacking the interventions), vibes watcher, etc.), the hand gestures that the facilitators use and invite others to use, the strategies to defuse tension, etc. From this basic course I stepped into taking auxiliary roles of minute-taker to stacker to finally facilitating. On the heels of my more structured experience with Technology of Participation it was truly exhilarating to observe how a motley-crew of very diverse individuals in a fluid setting of comings and goings in the open air, can arrive at truly great decision-making. Over time I could observe how the initial squeaky wheels—so-called 'difficult individuals'—could internalize the process and become the allies of the facilitator.

So why does Consensus Decision Making and a great variety of similar processes work? Here once again is the archetype of the seven life processes at work but at a 'higher' level than NVC. Here we are listening not to the individual—as I did in the example above—but to the stakeholders. We exert empathy with the various interest groups. We come to understand that what we see as disruption, sources of delay and aggravation are actually important, even essential, contributions for better decisions.

Take the example of a proposal to be submitted to the Occupy Albany crowd. A group has crafted it and then presents it to the whole. At a first level the facilitator will only take 'clarifying questions.' Before starting to debate and argue it is important that we all sit (stand at Occupy) in front of the very same proposal. It is amazing that this is rarely the case in ordinary decision-making. We eliminate one possible source of conflict, by quieting the fears that emerge from misunderstandings.

At a second level we will then open the ground to concerns and objections, moving from the Open Mind of clarifying questions to the Open Heart. What is paramount at this stage is that the facilitator model true curiosity in relation to any objection he hears. Nay more; his role is to actively elicit all objections as paramount ingredients for an improvement of the proposal. Sheer tolerance becomes active curiosity and openness. The facilitator may in fact check a number of times that all concerns have been expressed.



Consensus Decision Making in Relation to the 7 Life Processes

To render the archetype understandable we will move to the simplest possible outcome, most often true for a proposal of low complexity and low controversial/emotional content. Once the originators of the proposal have heard the concerns the facilitator may bring them up one at a time and invite a negotiation of parties. To each concern they hear the originators may tweak and modify the proposal in order to integrate what they hear and then check if the concern has been addressed. When all concerns have been heard and addressed, we may stand in front of a significantly altered proposal and the facilitator will test for consensus. When the work has been done diligently the energy that supports the satisfaction of all needs is palpable, it's a something in the air that it is precious to experience. This is what Otto Scharmer has called "presencing." It is a palpable truly shared common experience that strengthens any group that will render it possible. If the proposal becomes complex and 'controversial' the process is still the same, only it takes on more iterations—back and forth especially in the last two steps—before arriving at the stage of presencing. Once more we can see that a process is efficient because it follows the dynamic of the seven life processes. In effect more could be said of what lies on the other side of reaching consensus, but this lies beyond the immediate scope at hand.

The example of consensus decision-making was chosen here because it is relatively simple. Other simple ones include Focused Conversation,

Conversation Cafés or Bohm Dialogue. But participatory change can be achieved at the organizational, community levels, even at the level of cities or vast networks. To this end larger processes have to be envisioned and carefully designed and planned. Among these we find on the simpler end, World Café, Appreciative Inquiry, Open Space, Dynamic Facilitation, Future Search, Theory U and many more to address growing complexity. These processes are specifically meant to be used for 'wicked problems.' They work through the encompassing of many polarities, like work in homogeneous stakeholder groups or cross-stakeholder groups, small groups or large groups. They integrate analytical and artistic/creative processes, day and night learning, review or preview, etc. But what is most important is that the planners go out of their way to invite an extreme diversity of constituencies: all racial/ethnic components, creeds/philosophies, sexual orientations, socio-economic demographics together with all the specific stakeholder groups relative to the issue at hand. For a seasoned facilitator, or expert in social processes, it goes without saying that a solution can only last if it truly integrates all possible polarities, if it welcomes polarization as it is present in society. Embrace great complexity at first then simplify through integration, and trust that polarization is the very stuff of progress, because it truly is so.

Social Forms that Integrate Polarities Effectively

The example of consensus decision-making has been chosen with an ulterior motif in mind. The author does no longer use consensus decision-making but consent decision-making, and the why of this will be explained shortly. In many small size initiatives consensus decision-making has become both a social process and, for lack of clarity, also the social form along which the whole community works.

I experienced in a large cohousing setting how consensus decision-making was both a social process and the de facto governance by default. All decisions were brought to the whole group and endlessly hashed out for an exercise of collective frustration ... and significant waste of time. In this instance polarization, that was not inborn, was actually created through an inadequate, deficient governance structure.

In this particular case the cohousing community had the courage to undertake a process of collective transformation, leading to the introduction of a more encompassing governance model. Here again, there is no lack of alternatives. I offer only one example, for the simple reason that it is the one I know inside out. It comes from the Netherlands and is called Sociocracy,

though in this land it is known as Dynamic Governance. In effect this second appellation speaks more to me about the nature of the practice.

The cohousing I'm referring to was born, as many examples in our time, from a rebellion against the top-down organizational model that most of us know and have suffered from, where the individual lacks a voice and is only a cog in a larger mechanism. In response to this we can do what many have tried in our time, the exact opposite: a completely equalitarian organization. This, once done, led to the misuse of consensus decision-making, meaning something it's not meant to be, a governance tool. What happened here? We have moved from one pole to its opposite, from top down to bottom up. Instead of integration we have created polarization. Two terms/polarities that are meant to be integrated are made to stand against each other.

I will offer here just a snapshot of an elegant approach to integrating all polarities. Dynamic Governance is meant to render possible for an organization to work with the degree of efficiency of a business and to satisfy the needs for which egalitarian structures are devised. In raising above the terms of the polarities, Dynamic Governance becomes an integration of the two poles and a great deal more.

Dynamic Governance rests on the principle of subsidiarity, or delegation of decision-making to the appropriate level. In other words a team, or so-called "circle," has a definite task and areas of competence and a great deal of autonomy of decision-making within the limits of its mandate. Within its modus operandi the team takes practical decisions more or less as it pleases. When it comes to setting policy it has effective decision making processes. One of these is consent decision-making. Following what was said above of the consensus decision-making process a group will take decisions. If consensus is not reached it will settle for consent, which means proceeding with a proposal and incorporating criteria and terms of review, according to the concerns raised. This way concerns expressed become standards upon which to improve the decisions that will be tested at clearly agreed terms of review.

The kernel of dynamic governance lies in what is called double-linking. Although a hierarchy of levels exists, outwardly resembling a top-down organization, the structure is bidirectional. On one hand, acknowledging competency and expertise, the technical decisions travel top down to ensure efficiency. But this is only half of the process. And this is the role of the representative of the circle or group. Another individual, the delegate, fulfills a completely different, but organically complementary role to the first.

His concerns will travel in the opposite direction. His task is to recognize how individuals in the lower rungs are affected by decisions taken at the higher levels. His will be the concern to harmonize efficiency and temper it with a view toward buy-in and satisfaction, a sense that everybody has a say in the conduct of business. The synthesis/integration consists then in valuing expertise and efficiency, while making room for participation that leads to true collective alignment with the goals of the organization.

We arrive here at another principle that I cannot present in any other form than a paradox. To counter difficult situations and difficult times, we need to embrace complexity in order to act with simplicity. High polarization can only be met with the integration of a high number of variables. The consciousness of the whole—the complexity—doesn't have to be carried by everybody, but by a sizeable amount of individuals nevertheless. The complex form allows us to act with specificity, subsidiarity and save time and emotions. It's a little like passing from a calculator and simple tools to a computer. The transition can take time and be painful but overtime the new becomes second nature and saves us time and trouble.

When all is said and done the only way to vouch for the success of a new form of governance is to take the pulse of the organization's vibrancy and liveliness at all points along the way. And one telling witness to the success of operations is discerning where innovation flows from. In a truly integrated organization innovation comes from all parts of the system, not just from management.

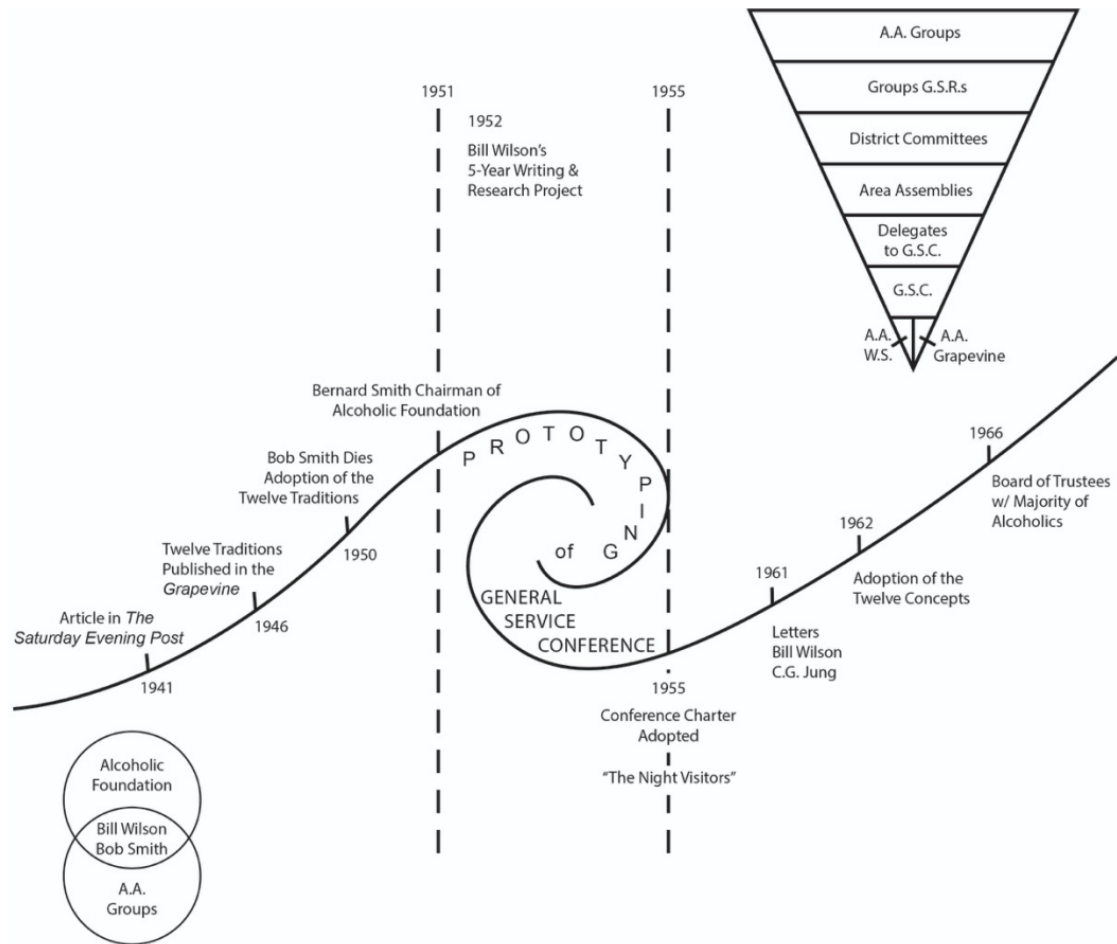
The archetype that I experienced comes from the transformation from the old model to the new model—from Consensus Decision-Making to Dynamic Governance. The process took two and a half years because it was important not to force the change but to educate all of us to a new way of operating. And that length of time was completely reasonable. Once again we have to overcome deeply engrained anti-social instincts. In modern parlance, that I resonate with, this process of change is called "emergence" and is compared to what happens in Nature in the evolution of complex forms of life from simple ones over millennia.

In anthroposophical terms emergence corresponds to a process of involution / pralaya / evolution, which can best be viewed as the sign of cancer: between the two diverging, spiraling arms there is the creative vacuum of pralaya. The involution consists in the deliberate letting go of an old form. The transition through the pralaya stage is only possible if seeds for the new form are sown at this stage. In our example this meant regular education through experimenting with little component parts of Dynamic

Governance, sharing of success stories, inviting leading authorities who had achieved the transformation, formation courses for a number of people, all of this leading to a collective workshop for the whole community. Involution is highly critical because the innovators who want to forge ahead with change learn to live with the traditionalists who cling to the past. They learn to take into account every and any objection and generate creative responses. This dialogue, and the time that it takes, is essential because both poles are transformed in the process and the eventual result that we seek is improved.

When the day came for the transition we had to go through a moment of great anticipation and uncertainty. One contrary vote would have been enough to derail the process under the practice of consensus. The change was accepted but, once we reached the other side, it was essential that a nucleus of people take advanced training and address creatively all critical steps of the transition: forming of the new structure and groups, training of people to the new roles, modeling of sociocratic processes within the circles, effective sharing of information and record-keeping, mid-term review of how the change was advancing, etc. This was the step of evolution.

Below is a diagram of the transformation of a well-known organization, the Fellowship of A.A., seen under the lens of involution/evolution. The highly complex form to the top right emerged from the very simple one shown bottom left. As a result A.A. was able to work anonymously, to avoid conflicts and schisms, and to operate in a remarkably resilient way. Through the very robust social form it was, and is, able to reach hundreds of thousands of individuals very efficiently with a very low professional overhead. Widespread participation goes hand in hand with great effectiveness in serving the mission of reaching any alcoholic individual in need. You'll find a detailed story about this transformation at <https://www.millenniumculmination.net/america-and-the-transformation-of-the-will.pdf> (pp. 5-27).



Stages of the A.A.'s Transformation Leading to the General Service Conference

Artistic Archetypes

To conclude I will add here are two imaginations/tales to help us alter our way of thinking about the role of the change agent and how to meet the cultural double that engenders polarization. They do not replace tools and practices for good processes and governance. They support the consciousness at the individual level. Here again the field is wide open and what I bring forth are but examples taken from personal experience. They could be multiplied ad nauseam.

Overtime certain stories and individual examples have acquired an archetypal, hardly exhaustible value for my role as a change agent in whatever setting I may be in. I offer here just two of them that can be explored elsewhere. To these I encourage you to add your own.

I don't know if Michael Ende saw in Momo an inspiring model for what it means to be a social agent, but it does so for me. The young girl stands

out as an unwitting social transformer because she has two key capacities for what it takes to be a social activist and change agent. She can listen deeply to the point of suffering with and share in the experience of the collective pain. She can so transform because she lets herself be transformed to the very bone. She can accept to bear the collective pain until a response emerges from within, and through it she is able to seize the moment of transformation. Truly a story for all ages.

Similar to Momo, and yet completely different from her, is the Haudenosaunee Hiawatha. In the legend of *The White Roots of Peace*, he is the willing collaborator of the exalted soul of the Peacemaker. Whereas Deganawidah is an initiate, and therefore hardly an easy example to emulate, Hiawatha is the willing collaborator, able to embrace the prophet's message of righteousness, health and law, so to speak, in his very bones. Once he has embraced the Peacemaker's message, he willingly faces the collective shadow of cannibalism, continuous warfare and grey magic under whose spell his people live. His being able to bear this burden without betraying the message of change is what makes him an example of effective social transformation. His message is as timely in this continent as it was five hundred years ago.

The strengths I perceive in these two stories, and many others, lies in key imaginations that we can live with in order to pierce through to new understanding. Some images may readily open up to our understanding/interpretation, others may take years, but thus become worthy questions to live and move forward with in our own journey of transformation.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Social Processes and Social Forms to Address Polarization

[Café Conversation on the Movies *The Best of Enemies* and *Accidental Courtesy* exploring the race question; the Civil Rights movement and MLK: the Quaker John Woolman](#) (video) (Passcode: 69N^N+%B)

[Focused Conversation, Nonviolent Communication, The Art of Living](#) (video) (Passcode: *N0Ef2@F)

[Leadership, facilitation, ICA and Technology of Particiaption](#) (video) (Passcode: bN+y&IN7)

[Appreciative Inquiry, Future Search, Theory U](#) (video) (Passcode: *0dBymG.)

[Franklin, A. A. Fellowship, the rebirth of Freemasonry, selfgovernance](#) (video) (Passcode: 3#%*iiR9)

The following [Front Range Café presentation](#) (video) elaborates on the universality of the U (the 7 life processes in social life) as an archetype present from work done at the individual level to the interpersonal and group/organizational levels.

[Threefolding Social Order Zoom conference with Seth Jordan and Gopi Krishna Vijaia](#) (video): 45':50" to 1 hr:09':20" (social processes and social forms to sustain social threefolding: personal experience of the paradigms).

A practical example of integration of the Paradigms: [an interview with Greg Georgaklis of Farmers to You](#) (distributing organic and BD foods) (video)

[The Birth of an American Spiritual Fellowship](#) (chapter of a book) The Story of the A.A. Fellowship (pp. 5-27)

[Visions for a Compassionate America](#) (book)

Chapter 3: The Evolving Horizon of Equality: looks at Nonviolent Communication, Technology of Participation and the whole of Social Technology.

[Accelerating Social Change: Impacting Our World While Transforming Ourselves](#) (book)

Chapter 3 (Social Processes)" covering Consensus Decision Making, World Café, Future Search.

Chapter 4 (Social Forms): covering from simple forms of emergence/self-organizing (Buurtzorg in the Netherlands) to more complex ones: Holacracy and Socially Generative Networks.

Tales and Examples to Inspire the Change Agent

Stories can inspire us to better envision effective social change. Here are two stories with two articles about them:

- Momo by Michael Ende
- [Cultural Activism: What Can We Learn from Momo?](#)
- [The White Roots of Peace](#) (Paul Wallace version)
- [The Iroquois League: Deganawidah and Hiawatha](#)

To conclude here are modern stories of social change from a cultural, rather than political, perspective, or from the angle of associative economics: <https://luigimorelli.wordpress.com>