WHEN BEAUTY LEADS
THE AESTHETIC OF UNCERTAINTY IN COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP

by

LAURA BLAKEMAN

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

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IN

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Loose and strict, chaos and order, knowledge lies in the paradox of these polarities, and the paradox should not be solved. The knowing is only possible in the aesthetic of uncertainty which will inform not just our findings, but the process of our searching. No cut pieces, no quick solutions—complexity demands a more engaged inquiry to explore the patterns that connect.

~ Nora Bateson, *Small Arcs of Larger Circles*

ABSTRACT

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The contemporary leadership landscape is beset by pervasive, exponential, and perpetual change. In such conditions, leadership interventions yield acausal, nonlinear, and unpredictable outcomes, rendering certainty evasive and improbable. This study's Research Problem inquired: In what ways might beauty serve as a catalyst in promoting a leader's relationship with deep intuition as an enabling condition for creative action amidst uncertainty? It was hypothesized that the catalytic nature of beauty seeds creative action by increasing a leader's connection to their deep intuition when certainty is unavailable.

The literature review indicated that continuous learning is critical in complex environments, requiring leaders to depart from their zone of familiarity. Because uncertainty is ubiquitous, aesthetic sensibilities outside of the purview of customary logic are examined. The literature revealed a lack of research about leaders' experience of beauty in uncertainty.

The research methodology, Imaginal Inquiry, was intended to evoke participants' experience of beauty in uncertainty through image, poetry, and reflective dialogue. Leadership action taken from the participants' experience of beauty was also examined.

The Cumulative Learning, *Ensouling Leadership*, suggests that experiences of beauty hold the potential to inspire *ecstasis*, moving a person outside the confines of the familiar self where more intuitive information (more feeling, more creativity, more perspective) becomes available. The first learning states that beauty has the potential to animate a pre-discursive knowing, experienced as a disruptive form of inner guidance. The second learning states that following beauty's guidance can precipitate an experience of *liminal disequilibrium*. The third learning suggests that creative action that flows from beauty has the potential to stimulate an experience of deep connection. And the fourth learning proposes that creative action taken from beauty may require a willingness to experience difficulty.

Reflections garnered from this study include the idea that resolving uncertainty would seem to be a primary goal of virtually every leadership strategy. Yet, in complex contexts, such efforts are often ineffective or counterproductive. Working with beauty can help individuals develop greater uncertainty tolerance and increased aesthetic receptivity to subtle streams of information. Moving from beauty can inspire creative action and deepen connectivity in complex environments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to many who have helped to bring these pages alive. It feels appropriate to begin under my feet. As I write, I am watching the Winter Solstice sun rise into the pocket between the red rock canyon and Sleeping Ute Mountain. If there is anything worth saying in this work, it belongs as much to the ones here—the blooming cactus, the water-marked sandstone, and the tawny mountain lion—as it does to me. I want to acknowledge the Indigenous communities—the Weeminuche Ute, Diné, and Ancestral Puebloan people—who have been shaped by this stunning landscape far longer than my ancestors. May the beauty they steward be reciprocated many times over.

I would like to thank my colleagues, co-conspirators, and fellow dangerous dreamers at the Wolf Willow Institute who believed this project to be a worthy endeavor. Particular gratitude to them for allowing me to hold my mornings sacrosanct. To my family who has always encouraged coloring outside the lines, and to Dr. Bill Plotkin of the Animas Valley Institute for his fierce, loving, and unwavering commitment to soul. A special thank you to Dr. Julian Norris, whose friendship, thought partnership, and camaraderie has grown with each passing year, and who is always able to see the beautiful even when I cannot.

Finally, I am grateful for having found a graduate school whose founders are courageous enough to address the lacuna of the soul in the halls of the academy and audacious enough to have a go at filling it. It was not always smooth, or pretty, but I do believe it was beautiful.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> The bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert even tho' it is vast and empty and untouchable—and knows no kindness with all its beauty.

~ Georgia O'Keeffe[1]

This study explores an emerging edge in contemporary leadership theory and practice. The edge is defined not by one domain of study, but through the integration of seemingly disparate enclaves straddling the arts and the sciences to get closer to a more holistic and complex leadership praxis. The Research Problem explores how beauty might serve as a catalyst in promoting a leader's relationship with deep intuition as an enabling condition for creative action while experiencing uncertainty. The ubiquity of the words *beauty* and *intuition* in common parlance leads to multiple meanings, requiring the following preliminary exploration.[2]

Beauty, in this study, is held as a feeling state that arises in and through relationship with another.[3] It is transitory, highly affective, and fundamentally experiential. Beauty is transitory because it arises in the presence of something or someone—an act of generosity, a magnificent mountain vista, a terrible wildfire, or a piece of art, for a few examples.[4] It is affective because beauty can arouse strong emotions, feelings, or attitudes.[5] And it is experiential because it is perceived by the

senses, touching the body, the heart, and the mind at once.[6] Contrary to more common conceptions of beauty as an aesthetic judgment, it is explored here as a particular kind of catalytic inner experience.[7]

The meaning of *intuition* is equally opaque, arising from multiple and sometimes contradictory uses of the term. A brief, interdisciplinary review of the literature reveals that intuition is located along an epistemological continuum ranging from entirely untrustworthy to essential for complex cognition.[8] Drawing from contemporary theorists across the fields of psychology, leadership, the arts, and neuroscience where appropriate, intuition could be understood as a way of knowing which connects disparate elements of information. This can enable one to arrive at a deeper understanding than could be accessed with logic alone.[9] This conceptualization is congruent with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *receptive mode of consciousness*, which utilizes the sensory and perceptual categories of thought, and is nonverbal, nonlinear, and holistic.[10] Stephen Buhner contends that this way of perceiving evokes a "complex grouping or gestalt of responses," altogether physiological, emotional, spiritual, and psychological.[11] Intuition becomes worthy of greater consideration at a global moment pushed to the point of breaking by pervasive, perpetual, and exponential change where customary logic falls short.[12]

This study's core experience focused on a leader's capacity for *creative action* amidst uncertainty. Aftab Omer et al. define creative action, as practiced within Imaginal Transformation Praxis, as a pragmatically transgressive act that holds the potential to transform culture.[13] Omer et al. contend that such actions enable experiences for both individuals and collectives that "shape the next cycle of learning" and contribute to the

emergence of collective wisdom.[14] Omer et al. suggest that *creative transgressions* are acts that move against or fracture what they call the *cultural trance*, or dominant mindsets and behaviors that "deny difference" through the suppression or trivialization of marginalized experience.[15] In this way, the research question explores if a leader's experience of beauty might instigate a generative *counter-action*—one that draws from a comprehensive ecosystem of information—both logical and analogical, to inspire fresh learning.[16]

Finally, a few words on research. Though it would not be uncommon to understand research as an act of discovery that yields new facts through the collection and analysis of information, a deeper excursion into the etymology of the word reveals that *re-search* is best engaged as a practice of careful looking—a seeking again, a peering backward, or searching closely.[17] Its motivations begin with the realization that looking deeper is an imperative reorientation toward the unknown that begins and ends with respectful curiosity. On such a quest, there is no promise of a neat conclusion without coming out changed at some elemental level. There is no guarantee of certainty, let alone conclusive fact (at least in qualitative research). Its gift lives in its insistent complexity. Like beauty, the impact that may live on from this study will likely be of a feeling kind, inviting more questions than answers.

Research Topic

What changes the world is not power, but beauty.

~ Michael Jones[18]

Today's leadership is shaped by the demands of increasing global volatility and exponential rates of change.[19] At the time of this research, the world had found itself over two years into a pandemic that by then had cost millions of lives, wreaked havoc on financial, health, and education systems, increased rates of depression, malnutrition, isolation, homicide, and suicide, and further exposed the fault lines of widespread inequity.[20] The UN Sustainable Development Goals Report claimed that decades of progress toward a more equitable and just future had been halted or reversed in one single year.[21] As is too often the case, the COVID-19 pandemic, like most systems-wide disruptions, disproportionately impacted marginalized peoples, with the heaviest burden falling on women and children. This was not a singular challenge. The report also revealed that biodiversity was declining as greenhouse gases continued to rise; extreme weather events threatened coastal communities, farmlands, and water systems; and drought and wildfire increased in severity and frequency. Authoritarian regimes around the world were gaining traction, threatening once-stable democracies, and innovative technology infrastructure was leading to unprecedented ethical dilemmas.[22] Collective well-being was at best arguably fragile and remained disproportionately accessed.[23]

Amidst such overwhelm, it had become widely known that hierarchical, control-based change efforts not only fail but fail spectacularly in complex environments.[24] To understand why it becomes important to distinguish between simple, complicated, and complex contexts. *Simple contexts* are characterized by their easily discernable and self-evident cause-and-effect relationships. These largely stable environments call for straightforward assessment and categorization of the facts.[25] *Complicated contexts* require seasoned expertise and high levels of technical training to see the relationship

between cause and effect.[26] *Complex contexts*, in contrast, are what David Snowden and Mary Boone refer to as *domains of emergence*, "beset by constant flux." [27] Leadership interventions in such contexts can cascade into acausal, nonlinear, and unpredictable outcomes, yielding insight and right action only in retrospect. In such domains, certainty is not only evasive, it is improbable.[28]

Aneel Chima and Ronald Gutman claim that the conditions for accelerating change, and therefore for increasing complexity, have been building for years.[29] Advancements in information technology, automation, human interconnectivity, and artificial intelligence have launched the world into a new normal. "Effective leadership," they write, "will be defined by its ability to navigate this new reality." [30] Yet most management literature and leadership training focus on simple and complicated challenges.[31] Change is needed. We can no longer live with the consequences of our compounding global crises than we can expect to meet such crises using conventional strategies. In the face of such immensity, the very word *leader*, asserts Nora Bateson, has become "cringe-worthy," reeking of colonialism and lopsided, weighted toward the individual.[32]

Many agree that a new form of leadership is needed, one forged in the shaping power of complexity and able to draw on the largely unseen connections between parts. Such leaders are grounded in the skills of collaboration, improvisation, and adaptive innovation and are oriented to possibility rather than predictability.[33] Jean Houston refers to such leaders as *social artists* who can enhance and draw forth human capacity in complex contexts by bringing "new ways of thinking, being, and doing to social

challenges." [34] The perils we face will not be solved with more information. Transformation of both self and system is required.[35]

At such a critical juncture in the human story, it could arguably be considered ignorant to dedicate such focused time to leading from beauty. Why beauty? At face value it appears inconsequential, lurking, as it does, at the edges of dominant culture. At best, Frederick Turner asserts, beauty is considered a "leisure activity, a decorative hobby, a status symbol, a narcotic form of entertainment," and at worst, "a consolation prize for those whom the educational system has failed to teach serious knowledge and skills." [36] This level of cultural disdain is striking. But beauty, so long relegated to the arts, may have much to offer change agents seeking to make an impact at scale. Good leadership, like art, begins with the imagination—with a vision for what could be. When enacted with influence, it takes people and societies to places they have never been before.[37] What might leadership look and feel like when it aspires to beauty? What of the previously unseen or unfelt would be rendered visible through an artistic perspective?

Nancy Adler links leadership to artistry, describing three attributes shared by both. Leaders and artists, she claims, "have the courage to see reality as it is; recognizing both its beauty and its ugliness." [38] This capacity to be with truth, soberly, and without embellishment, would arguably disrupt the pervasive indifference that appears to blanket many leadership acts. The ability to see and sit with what is good and beautiful may also allow a leader to see what solutions already exist within the system they are attempting to influence.[39]

Adler further contends that leaders and artists hold the courage to see possibility and to move toward it with beauty at heart. In describing a leader's new work, Michael Jones writes that times of uncertainty require attending to the "spaces between" where there is "order and coherence," a practice of sensing into what he calls the "commons of the imagination." [40] Here, a leader's role may be less about providing answers than listening for what might be missing and asking the right questions.[41]

Finally, through their influence, both leaders and artists inspire others to see possibility, trading up the status quo for something never seen before on a collective scale. Though the centering of the human imagination can be messy and nonlinear, Jones contends that it may equally enable more skillful navigation through the mire of complexity. He writes, "…as a home for the senses, [the imagination] expands our attention so that we may more fully comprehend the full complexity of unfolding events." [42] After all, a leader cannot take action on something they cannot first see or imagine.

These parallels are gaining some traction in unlikely spaces. At the time of writing, contemporary leadership education reveals promising advancements in an aesthetic direction. An increasing number of executive education programs, MBA programs, and organizational initiatives prioritize artistic, transformative, and collaborative methodologies.[43] Adler identifies multiple trends that support this perspective: corporate recruitment strategies that draw from art and design schools, the incorporation of the arts and poetry into the Academy of Management, and the myriad of leading business schools that are adding requisite arts-based courses to their MBA

degree tracks.[44] Artistic perception is no longer a luxury. In the context of rising complexity, some believe it to be a necessity.

This research is situated in context, emerging out of an ongoing, interdisciplinary conversation at a perilous global moment. While most of the existing literature at the time of this writing explores the theoretical and metaphorical connections that can be made between the arts and leadership, this study sought to turn toward the direct experience of complexity leaders who encounter beauty while mired in uncertainty. Further, the research was partly directed toward the question of whether beauty might catalyze creative action in such conditions. If so, what might such actions look like, and what might be their impact? To close on a more poetic note, this work, like Georgia O'Keeffe's desert bones, sought first to "cut sharply" toward the center of something alive in a time arguably marked more by ugliness than beauty.

Relationship to the Topic

> There's a thread you follow. It goes among
> things that change. But it doesn't change.
> People wonder about what you are pursuing.
> You have to explain about the thread.

~ William Stafford[45]

I have long felt there to be a sharpness—an austerity of expression in poetry that gets at something far closer to truth than the road to reason ever could. The long path of graduate research demands endurance, but it is only one winding way to walk. My true practice here is poetry. I am after the thread.

The thread that has informed this research sings of beauty to me. Where the invisible becomes visible in all its messy glory is the closest I feel to beauty. Metaphorically speaking, I go for the *bones*—the underlying structures, motivations, beliefs, feelings, visions, and possibilities that move the soul and give rise to action. When I am at my best, I help others to do the same. My endgame is not just individual, organizational, or societal thriving—though those outcomes are significant. It is rather to contribute in some small but precise way to the dream of regenerative culture in a time of peril. This kind of transgressive, subterranean work requires the *double vision* of the pragmatic poet.

My early years were shaped by the rough and tumble of the performing arts, working as a dancer and educator of various movement disciplines. It was a scrappy existence, full of irregularity and the entrepreneurial *bootstrapping* required to make ends meet. It was also wildly free. San Francisco was still a place where maverick artists gathered in warehouses, design studios, and collectives to create together between gigs. Experience was our currency.

I apprenticed to the upwelling, preverbal wisdom of my body. I learned how to listen to the voice of longing that speaks the language of aesthetics and to make the conversation visible through artistic expression. I learned that such a vulnerable act, when rooted in something good and true, holds significant, influential power. These times are marked in my memory by countless women who would show up new to dance, at first withdrawn, lacking in confidence, and uncoordinated. Invariably, years later, I would run into those same women in another workshop or event, this time appearing completely changed—dripping with confidence, and at home in both their bodies and

their lives. I began to wonder about the link between the inward turn to the soul that good art inspires, and the exterior, visible behaviors that appear to be impacted. I began to look to the bones.

Thus began a lifelong leadership inquiry. Coaching and mentoring young women in leadership was a natural next step as the glitzy world of the performing arts lost its glamour. Beauty was sinking deeper for me, inviting a different kind of aesthetic play. I completed numerous coaching programs designed to help guide individuals in and through transformative shifts. Many of these programs blended executive coaching techniques with methodologies designed to support adult development.[46] These approaches have trained me to work closely with individuals at their most vulnerable; tracking, and then integrating the qualities, skills, and perspectives that scaffold behavior.

Over the years, I attracted a coaching clientele of women in their mid-life who had become highly successful in demanding leadership roles, often at the expense of their fullest humanity. I watched these women struggle in the tension of their longing to be fully themselves in leadership environments that demand their partiality. The influential power of a deeper, whole beauty was often the sacrificial offering made on the path to career success. This trade-off carried significant consequences for them, and I believed, for the world. I began to understand, as Margaret Wheatley eloquently noted, that "partiality is at the root of our lack of visionary leadership." [47]

Perhaps most influential has been the decade I spent with the Animas Valley Institute. Crafted over 40 years by founder Bill Plotkin, honed in a learning community of guides, and ripened in relationship with wild landscapes, Animas' specific approach

to transformative learning has deep aesthetic underpinnings. Animas holds the premise that contemporary institutions and the dominant, anthropocentric ideologies that shape them arrest human development, colonize the imagination, and trivialize the missives of the soul.[48] Informed by nature-based models of human development, and enacted outdoors on the land, Animas' work explicitly seeks to "support each participant to access and embody the world-changing and vital creativity at their core." [49] Its methodology is comprised of a multi-modal set of depth and eco-centric practices, guiding techniques, and ritual forms designed to enable leaders to consciously discover, and then commit to their particular way of being alive.[50] This intent does not end with individual well-being, but with acts of accountability and responsibility that might contribute to collective thriving.

Beauty was ubiquitous in these wild learning spaces. It showed up, without prejudice, in unlikely moments of intense grief, challenge, pain, and difficulty, as it did in moments of liberated creativity, meaningful commitment, encounters with the other-than-human world, and acts of generosity. Though not perfect, and not for everyone, the work unfolding at the Animas Valley Institute felt like a critical cultural experiment in a moment punctuated by madness—it has been a thread worth following. Yet, at the time of this writing, few formal inquiries had been made into the leadership capabilities developed, and the kind or quality of contributions participants might make to society on the heels of such a transformative ordeal. What can we make of beauty's impact?

I and my colleagues founded the Wolf Willow Institute, an educational institution and social enterprise that emerged from the Social Innovation Generation, a collaboration that sought to transform critical social and ecological challenges using a

complexity lens.[51] Endowed with a multi-million-dollar grant, we had been piloting two primary programming streams— both of which were designed to link transformative learning with systems impact at scale. In partnership with Syrus Marcus Ware of Black Lives Matter Canada, Indigenous systems scholar Melanie Goodchild, Vanessa Reid of the Living Wholeness Institute, and Aneel Chima of the Stanford Flourishing Project, our pedagogical approach to leadership development was cross-cultural, transdisciplinary, and sought to attend to the whole person.[52]

At the time of this research, the Institute saw itself as part educational initiative, part mystery school, and part leadership training, unambiguously committed to the transformation of unsustainable systems that result in patterns of harm, injustice, and suffering. We had been startled by the affective response our work evokes across multiple domains. As if enchanted by beauty-made-visible, many reached out simply to share how moved they were by the language we used, the look and feel of the website, and the methodology we espoused. Alongside the promise of its programmatic offerings, I presume what Wolf Willow presented was a vision of possible participatory leadership grounded in and informed by an ensouled universe. If that is not something we could all call beautiful, I am not sure what is.

This research was inspired by what felt to be an exciting moment. It appeared there was a readiness in unlikely places for a different kind of learning journey—one that connects the vulnerable aesthetics of inner work to outer impact. My colleagues and I held the hope that the ripples the Institute made would be a worthy contribution to the ongoing exploration of new leadership—a leadership grounded in our fullest humanity on behalf of the systems we long to shape.

Theory-In-Practice

The overarching theory that is put into practice in this dissertation is Aftab Omer's overall body of work, *Imaginal Transformation Praxis* (ITP). ITP consists of three primary components: Imaginal Process, Imaginal Inquiry, and the theory and practice of Cultural Leadership. The first component of ITP, Imaginal Process, is what has become Meridian University's specific approach to transformative learning.

The term *transformative learning*, first coined by Jack Mezirow, describes a pedagogical methodology that seeks the reconstitution of one's perceptual lenses, mindsets, and systems of meaning-making.[53] Such learning enables individuals and collectives to more skillfully navigate in complex contexts.[54]

Omer returns the *soul* to its origins in Greek antiquity as the primary concern of psychology. Soul, Omer claims, "refers to the mysterious aliveness at the center of being." [55] It is the soul's passionate nature that renders it capable of metabolizing and integrating the full range of life experiences.

A basic tenet of Imaginal Transformation Praxis is that learning is an important way life increases in complexity. *Authentic learning,* or learning that results in sustained future action*,* entails experiencing. "Hence," writes Omer, "whatever promotes experiencing, promotes learning. Conversely, whatever diminishes experiencing will hinder learning." [56] Evoking experience must consider the interior and exterior, as well as the individual and collective domains to attend to the whole person. It is through engaging with experience as it arises, in its fullness, that the soul can flourish.

In the research methodology of Imaginal Inquiry, another component of ITP, Omer takes the central organizing principle of *experience* and has developed four distinct categories for the design of data collection and analysis: *Diversifying*, *Deepening Embodying*, and *Personalizing Experience*. Diversifying involves engaging the multiple nature of the self. Deepening includes practices that connect to the mythic and symbolic aspects of experience. Embodying is the work of reconnecting the somatic, affective, and cognitive dimensions of experience, and personalizing refers to the claiming of experience by the individual.[57] Imaginal Inquiry is organized into four distinct research phases—evoking, expressing, interpreting, and integrating.

Resistance to new experiences is not uncommon. Omer terms such resistance *gatekeeping*, which he describes as "the individual and collective dynamics that resist and restrict experience." [58] Startling and confusing encounters with anything or anyone that falls outside of the learner's zone of familiarity can be described as an encounter with *otherness*. Omer et al. define otherness as "difference experienced problematically." [59] Experiences of *other* can challenge the "core beliefs, deep assumptions, mindsets, and specific perspectives that constitute identity," and are often perceived as a threat.[60]

Imaginal Process, Meridian's specific approach to transformative learning, seeks to support learners to transmute the affects that invariably arise with new experience, into capacities. *Capacity*, Omer clarifies, refers to "a distinct dimension of human development and human evolution that delineates a specific potential for responding to a domain of life experience." [61] When practitioners transmute how they are personally affected by an experience, *creative action* becomes possible. Such acts are influential.

Omer explains, "Creative action, when it is pragmatically transgressive, transforms culture, enabling new experience that shapes the next cycle of learning." [62]

Research Problem and Hypothesis

This study explored leaders' experience of beauty in the context of uncertainty. It posed the research question: "In what ways might beauty serve as a catalyst in promoting a leader's relationship with deep intuition as an enabling condition for creative action amidst uncertainty?" The research hypothesis speculated that the catalytic nature of beauty seeds creative action by increasing a leader's connection to their deep intuition when certainty is not available.[63]

Methodology and Research Design

This research applied *Imaginal Inquiry*, a research methodology developed by Aftab Omer and situated within the participatory paradigm.[64]

The core experience the research design intended to evoke was the participants' experience of beauty amidst uncertainty. This experience was evoked in three primary ways. First, through images that closely resonated with individual experiences of uncertainty and beauty. Second, through the use of poetry at the beginning of each meeting and at other strategic intervals. And lastly, through a guided imagery experience that invited participants to be with their experience of uncertainty and beauty as it arose in their imagination.

The Expressing sequence closely followed and included any moment in the research where participants were invited to respond or share based on how they were evoked. Participants were given multiple options for expression including verbal or written sharing, nonverbal movement, silence, or sound, and drawing or dialoguing with their images and artwork.

As the research question in this study inquired not only about the complexity of a leader's experience of beauty but beauty's ability to catalyze creative action amidst uncertainty, it was central to the research design to move reflection into leadership action. Meeting Two included an Evoking-Expressing sequence that invited participants to lead the group to and from beauty for three minutes.

The Interpreting phase allowed the participants to reflect on their experience, identifying impactful moments for themselves or the group, and then to either journal or verbally share them. Participants were given short journaling prompts between meetings that intended to both keep them close to the study's inquiry, and to provide opportunities for greater sense-making (see Appendix 12 for the full list of journaling questions).

Lastly, the Integrating phase invited the participants to assimilate and digest their experiences as a whole, offering final reflections and articulating any lingering questions. During this phase, both the participants and this researcher shared our initial learnings from the research study which allowed for very open discussion. This phase was additionally supported by small opening and closing rituals that gave structure and a sense of containment to each meeting and to the study overall.

Learnings

This study yielded four primary learnings. The Cumulative Learning, *Ensouling Leadership*, suggests that experiences of beauty hold the potential to inspire what Cliff Engle Wirt terms *ecstasis*: a state that liberates a person from the constraints of identity where more information (more feeling, more creativity, more perspective) becomes available.[65] The soul's nature to be wildly affected by beauty—to be moved, touched, and stirred as appears to have been the case in this research— lends credence to the idea that a leader's engagement with beauty invites something new. Such movement appeared to initiate greater feeling and deeper reflection, catalyzing creative action from a place of vulnerability, connectivity, and fresh possibility. Each of the subsequent learnings supports this core proposition.

First, beauty, when evoked in a field of uncertainty, has the potential to animate a pre-discursive knowing, experienced as a disruptive form of inner guidance. Participants were more able to access novel insights, sensations, and emotions that fell outside of their familiar experience.

Secondly, it appeared that beauty's guidance, if followed, can precipitate an experience of *liminal disequilibrium*, a term that I use to describe the apparent dissonance and permeability of identity that participants appeared to exhibit. In such a state, participants were more able to access a multiplicity of perspectives both startling and comforting to them. New uncertainties, and at times painful insights, appeared to be more accessible.

Third, creative action that flows from beauty has the potential to stimulate an experience of deep connection. During the leadership enactments, participants found themselves moved by the individual expression of others in a way that engendered a sense of collectivity and belonging. Leadership acts that flowed from this sense of connection held transformative potential.

Finally, it appeared that creative action taken from beauty may demand *conscious sacrifice*, which Omer suggests includes a willingness to experience difficulty, disturbing emotions, and vulnerability.[66] Participants reflected that such actions may be synonymous with a deeper, invisible coherence that some participants characterized as authenticity. Participants expressed that such actions, while potentially impactful, can conflict with larger, dominant narratives, thus requiring personal sacrifice and an ability to sit in the tension between reality and possibility.

Significance and Implications of the Study

Resolving uncertainty remains the primary goal of virtually every leadership strategy, yet in complex contexts such efforts are not only ineffective, but arguably unethical.[67] Generative leadership involves a range of behaviors, processes, and strategies that are intended to unearth, disrupt, or otherwise transform the invisible web of relationships, mindsets, and routines that keep generating such challenges. Skillful complexity leaders, therefore, attempt to create the learning conditions required to generate transformative outcomes.[68]

Experiences of beauty in this study appeared to serve the creation of a generative learning space. If nothing else, beauty appeared to initiate new learning in a deeply personal yet collectively inspiring manner. Its power had something of *ecstasis* in it—an ability to move a person outside of the confines of the familiar self into a place where more information (more feeling, more creativity, more perspective) becomes available.[69] It lets something new in—something alive and of the soul—to initiate a process of deeper reflection, empathy, and connection where important learning can begin. The accompanying distress may not be antithetical to creative leadership action, but a prerequisite for envisioning how or when to act in the first place. Working with beauty may help individuals develop greater uncertainty tolerance and increased aesthetic receptivity to subtle streams of information.

While the participants' experience of beauty did indeed appear to be personally catalytic, these learnings call for sober reflection on beauty's connection to goodness (ethics) and truth. The field of personal development is rife with theories and practices that, despite one's best intentions, amplify narcissistic, individualistic, and self-referential behaviors.[70] In fact, as Ken Wilber has argued, pursuing the transformative impact of beauty on its own, without equally attending to goodness and truth, may further exacerbate modernity's pattern of fragmentation, enabling leaders to perpetuate or cope inside systems of injustice.[71] Yet, recent explorations between beauty and moral development offer encouragement.

Moral development, which enables a leader to gain insight into conceptions of justice, is initiated in part by the need to take in diverse points of view.[72] Research by Adam Cohen et al. suggests that experiences of beauty can increase "other-focus," and

result in greater empathy for both self and other.[73] Similarly, Rhett Diessner et al. conclude that beauty can stimulate a sense of "unity-in-diversity," which may act as a developmental steppingstone.[74]

In this light, beauty may offer educators, lab practitioners, and coaches a fresh pedagogical approach to leadership development, an approach that could require a delicate revision of many of the helping professions. Given the high levels of anxiety that volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous contexts engender, most leaders— indeed, most people—are so resistant to fresh experience that without the right mix of support and challenge, such learning may never take place.[75] What's more, beauty's proximity to both goodness and truth, may inspire and inform contemporary conceptions of new leadership. Perhaps, such proximity may enable complexity leaders to serve a wider constituency on behalf of mutual thriving. Further exploration of the link between beauty's potential impact, moral development, and the skillful, transformative facilitation it may require would prove beneficial.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explores how leaders' experience of beauty might catalyze creative action amidst uncertainty. To contextualize this inquiry and justify the research question, this chapter explores relevant supporting literature. It weaves together seemingly disparate fields of study to provide a comprehensive review of helpful concepts and principles and identify gaps where more research is needed. To assist the reader in assimilating extensive and, at times, complex material, this chapter is organized into four primary sections: Imaginal Psychology and Imaginal Transformation Praxis, Leading in Complexity, Tacit Knowledge and Intuition, and Artful Leadership.

The first section, *Imaginal Psychology and Imaginal Transformation Praxis*, begins with an exploration of Imaginal Psychology that positions this research inside a tradition that re-centers ways of being, doing, and knowing that are largely marginalized in contemporary psycho-educational approaches. It explores the idea that the imagination is the core mediator of the human experience, bridging its interior and exterior dimensions, and able to lead a practitioner to more complex developmental thresholds. Central to Imaginal Psychology is Omer's understanding that *soul* refers to the "mysterious stillness, aliveness, and otherness at the core of being." [1] Omer's central point, that the soul is passionate and affected by and through experience, opens the door to a brief inquiry into transformative learning. *Imaginal Process* is a specific approach to transformative learning, developed by Omer and in use at Meridian University. This

dissertation, including the study's research methodology, draws heavily from Omer's overall body of research and practice, that of Imaginal Transformation Praxis. The first section of this literature review explores those concepts and principles most directly related to the core themes of this dissertation.

The second section, *Leading in Complexity*, examines the pervasive, perpetual, and exponential change that characterizes complex leadership contexts. It begins with an exploration of complex adaptive systems and the shift required from a mechanistic worldview to an organismic worldview that gives rise to systems thinking. This section integrates prominent Indigenous voices who argue that most Western approaches to complexity science and systems thinking leave out the fullness of the human experience and exacerbate anthropocentrism, thus requiring further cross-cultural dialogue.

An investigation of the differences between simple, complicated, and complex contexts follows. Because the leaders in this study are also complex living systems, this section explores the dynamic pattern of systems transformation, which correlates with the natural order of birth, growth, maturation, death, and renewal. Transformative learning is explored in this section through a complexity lens.

The second section also presents some of the implications for leadership that arise out of complexity. A brief overview of the growing number of voices arguing for a new kind of leader who challenges traditional notions of leadership serves to situate this dissertation in a modern context. Because working in complex contexts requires an integral approach to leadership development, this second section also explores complexity capabilities as discussed in Imaginal Transformation Praxis. This section

ends with an investigation into the nature of uncertainty as it relates to leadership efficacy and development.

The third section, *Tacit Knowledge and Intuition*, explores how uncertain and complex contexts require ways of thinking and knowing that lie beyond customary logic. It begins with an examination of relevant differences between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge and investigates the primary sources of tacit knowledge that support knowledge acquisition and exchange. This sets up an extensive exploration of the concept and role of intuition in decision-making, revealing the need for greater shared understanding. To get closer to this study's landscape of inquiry, section three closes with a glance at parallel ideas such as differences between analytical reasoning and receptive reasoning, Goethe's scientific method, and Buhner's praxis of non-physical touching.

Finally, the last section, *Artful Leadership*, turns to the purview of the artist, drawing from theorists who argue for a more holistic and aesthetic approach to leadership development and practice. It explores a current trend in leadership education that seeks to integrate artistic praxis and subtle forms of intelligence to more adequately and efficaciously thrive in a complex world. It then explores the contested and at times oblique concept of beauty, beginning with a general overview and focusing on the literature that explores beauty as a transformative catalyst. This section also briefly explores beauty's proximity to both goodness and truth.

Taken together, these five sections seek to support this study's focus on beauty, uncertainty, and complexity leadership.

Imaginal Psychology and Imaginal Transformation Praxis

Imaginal Transformation Praxis offers a useful doorway into this study's landscape of inquiry. Imaginal Transformation Praxis (ITP) is made up of three components, described by Omer as:

- *Imaginal Process*: an approach to transformative learning understood as the emergence and cultivation of capacities by individuals, collectives, and societies.
- *Imaginal Inquiry*: a methodology for participatory research that weaves together both inquiry and transformation.
- *Cultural Leadership Praxis*: a creative approach to fostering cultural transformation within organizations, communities, and societies." [2]

Imaginal Transformation Praxis serves as the theory-in-practice for this dissertation.

Imaginal Psychology

Imaginal Psychology is an orientation to psychology that emerged from several historical streams, most notably the work of Henri Corbin, Carl Jung, James Hillman, and Thomas Moore.[3] Encompassing many concepts housed in the cognitive-behavioral, humanistic, transpersonal, and depth psychologies, Imaginal Psychology, as further developed at Meridian, draws from a wide array of knowledge domains. These include spiritual traditions, creative arts, mythology, somatic practices, literary and poetic imagination, mystical philosophy, Indigenous wisdom, deep ecology, and social critique.[4] Its central premise, as iterated at Meridian, is that Imaginal Psychology "seeks to reclaim the soul as Psychology's primary concern." [5] *Imagination* is the core of human experience, bridging both the interior and exterior, and able to lead a practitioner

to more complex developmental thresholds.[6] In Imaginal Psychology, the word *imaginal* centers the role of the imagination in interpreting and integrating experience.[7]

Originally named by Corbin who suggested that the *imaginal* exists in the intersubjective space between empirical and abstract intellectual modes of thought. Drawing from esoteric Islam, the *mundus imaginalis*, or the imaginal world, is for Corbin "as ontologically real as that of the sense and that of the intellect." [8] In Corbin's words:

> This world requires its own faculty of perception, namely, imaginative power, a faculty with a cognitive function, a *noetic* value which is as real as that of sense perception or intellectual intuition. We must be careful not to confuse it with the imagination identified by so-called modern man with 'fantasy', and which, according to him, is nothing but an outpour of 'imaginings'. [9]

While the focus in humanistic psychology is on the essential unity and actualization of the self, a depth and soul-oriented perspective looks to the multiplicity; the disintegrative aspects of the soul, and the world encountered primarily through images.[10] Jung, along with Hillman later, was dedicated to the power of the visionary imagination. Jung's maxim, "image is psyche," is rooted in the belief that the contents of the *unconscious*, or the deeper fluctuations of the psyche, become known to the conscious mind through *archetypal images*. Such images were thought to signify universal themes, patterns, and mythic motifs that when engaged could lead a practitioner into greater psychological wholeness.[11]

Hillman, one of Jung's most influential successors, diverged from the main thrust of Jung's work. Like Corbin, Hillman viewed the imagination as not only a useful guide in personal therapeutic practice but as an all-encompassing, objective experience.[12]

Unlike Jung, who explored archetypal images through waking life associations, Hillman believed them to arise as emissaries of the soul, alive and imbued with vitality.[13] Douglas Thomas speaks to the earlier point made by Jung, Corbin, and Hillman, that the core invitation imaginal work offers is to enter into a relationship with such images, and by functioning independently from their meaning one may attach to them and allow them to speak in their way rather than engaging in analysis.[14] In describing a dreamwork methodology influenced by Hillman, Thomas suggests that one must "replace the causal person-centered questions, 'Why did I dream that?' and 'What does it mean?' with the phenomenological questions, 'Who's visiting now?' and 'What's happening here?'" [15] As Hillman notes, "Images claim reality [with] authority, objectivity, and certainty." [16]

Imaginal Psychology draws, in part, from Hillman's theory and practice. Notably, Hillman's concern with the depth and centrality of the human soul as the primary subject of psychology is equally centered in Imaginal Psychology.[17] Because the soul speaks in images, Imaginal Psychology seeks to temper contemporary psychology's emphasis on behavior and cognition by placing greater attention on the images that mediate experience, and the transformative practices that predate modernity.[18]

Although some humanistic psychologists have applauded Jung and Hillman for re-centering the soul and the imagination in psychology, others argue that a psychology based on the imagination risks relativism, denies truth, and evades important, logical applicability.[19] Wolfgang Giegerich, for example, argues that such psychologies have the potential to succumb to nostalgia and lean overmuch into the metaphysical.[20] Differentiating from Jung's interest in the metaphysical, Giegerich equated the nature of

soul with one's active, meaning-making capacity as grounded in both an individual's subjectivity and in culture. For Giegerich, Daniel Anderson writes, "soul is meaning, plain and simple: nothing metaphysical." [21] The expressions of the soul are therefore contained and should not be assumed to be influenced by some outside force. Giegerich cautions that such perspectives delegitimize the discipline, and therefore have no place in a modern psychology.[22] Robert Sardello similarly cautioned that Jung's psychology "…turns away from the world to the realm of archetypes or archetypal imagination," leading the field of psychotherapy to similarly turn away from the world.[23]

To that end, Omer argues that the word "imaginal" does not speak to a rarified place outside oneself (like Corbin claims) but to the stirrings of the soul that accompany all experience. He asserts, "the ability to follow where imagination leads in the service of the greater good is of profound significance to both our individual and collective development." [24]

Indigenous Wisdom and Imaginal Psychology

Practitioners and scholars of Imaginal Psychology claim its epistemological roots draw from Indigenous wisdom traditions that predate modernity.[25] While it could be argued that the transformative ordeal is indeed an ancient, archetypal pattern found everywhere in stories and myths, the blanket use of the word *Indigenous* presupposes commonality among "native" peoples.[26] While there are indeed some similarities across Indigenous traditions, Melanie Goodchild highlights that it is important to recognize that wisdom traditions arising out of different Indigenous cultures are distinct and embedded in land and language.[27] Francesca Merlan also argues that the "internationalization of the

Indigenous category" arose out of liberal, democratic political cultures, such as those found in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.[28] Therefore, argues Goodchild, Indigenous and non-Indigenous cross-cultural dialogues are required to further decolonize dominant epistemologies and habits of mind.[29]

For example, while Omer sees the imagination as a mediator of experience that can unify cognition, affect, and sensations, Dan Longboat diverges by describing the imagination through the Haudenosaunee/Mohawk worldview. The imagination is not a quality of mind but "animal and spiritual helpers manifesting their presence" in a person's life. The authority that the images are endowed with comes not from an abstract principle or the individual psyche or soul, but from the land itself. Longboat states that any understanding that does not source the imagination in its ecological origin, "extends anthropocentrism," and, "violates the unity, interrelation, and reciprocity between language and psychology, landscape, and mind." [30] Notably, Longboat states that "like everything Haudenosaunee, imagination has a place because *imagination is a place*, and because everything is connected to everything else, the encounter with imagination is a living communication within a sentient landscape." [31]

Although the scope of this work did not easily allow for the nuanced exploration that a cross-cultural study truly demands, this study has attempted to remain sensitive to this limitation, weaving in other Indigenous voices when possible. Such limitations are sadly common in many qualitative psychology studies, yet perspectives held by distinct Indigenous worldviews offer some powerful critiques and may highlight common blind spots in Western psychological praxis.

An Ensouled Universe

Central to an imaginal approach is the reclamation of the human *soul* as a guiding intelligence potentiated by and through images.[32] Though widely used, the word soul seems to mean different things in different schools of thought. Often it eludes definition entirely or is intentionally left open to interpretation. Hillman, for example, famously resisted a clear articulation of soul, deferring instead to what he saw as the soul's deliberate ambiguity that eludes "all definition in the same manner as do all ultimate symbols that provide the root metaphors for the systems of human thought." [33] Even still, soul assumes a steady yet undefinable presence throughout the vast canon of his work, ephemerally associated with psyche, image, the *anima mundi* or soul of the earth, the Muse, the *anima* or female principle, or a thing's ultimate place.[34] Importantly for this study, Hillman, while avoiding concrete definition, speaks most clearly of the expressions of the soul, which happen through the instrument of the deep imagination; the soul is fundamentally aesthetic by nature.[35]

Hillman was an influential teacher and mentor of Moore. As such, Moore also speaks of the soul as less a thing than a "quality or dimension of experiencing life." [36] It is in the practice of engaging soul, or *caring for the soul*, that one comes into their full aliveness. He writes:

> The act of entering into the mysteries of the soul, without sentimentality or pessimism, encourages life to blossom forth according to its own designs and with its own unpredictable beauty. Care of the soul is not solving the puzzle of life [but] an appreciation of the paradoxical mysteries that blend light and darkness into the grandeur of what human life and culture can be. [37]

In comparison, Bill Plotkin feels it critical that soul is defined clearly without ambiguity. Plotkin claims soul is a person or a thing's unique purpose or identity. Soul is not to be confused with one's personality or social-vocational role but rather something much deeper—a *mythopoetic identity* revealed and expressed through symbol and metaphor, image and dream, archetype and myth.[38] He claims that "soul is the particular ecological niche, or place, a person was born to occupy but may or may not ever discover or consciously embody." [39] By *place* Plotkin does not mean a geographical location but rather "the role, function, station, or status a thing has in relation to other things. A thing's place", he continues, "tells you how it fits in the world." [40] He argues that it becomes important to have a word that speaks to this place because discovering that is something people naturally long for, believing it to be an essential milestone of the journey to true adulthood.[41]

Imaginal Psychology holds the concept of soul more loosely. Omer defines it as "the mysterious stillness, aliveness, and otherness at the center of being." [42] Sardello, whose work has also influenced Imaginal Psychology, believes that a central part of being human is one's inherent capacity to enter a relationship with something larger than the self. Sardello points out that the soul's largesse must also be experienced as more significant than "any familial, collective, religious, political, or social organization that claims to provide meaning." [43] Coming to know the soul within and without requires self-love and "the dedicated work of being present to our depths." [44] The practice of Imaginal Psychology is, in part, refining this loving attentiveness to the ever-presence of soul in oneself and in the world. For Sardello, entering this primary relationship is a way

to enter the world more fully and to participate in the creative act of building a generative future for all.[45]

Many believe soul, and by extension, the *feminine* is chronically and historically marginalized, particularly from Euro-centric discourse. Anne Baring's work, for example, which is studied within Imaginal Psychology, links the plight of the feminine with the plight of the soul in Western consciousness. The many injustices of modernity, she believes, are a logical result of what happens when the soul is excluded from the human experience.[46] For Baring, the feminine has little to do with an individual's gender identity or even the particular workings of one's physiology but rather gestures toward the archetypal or universal pattern in all life that she describes as an "immense matrix or web of relationships through which spirit and nature, the invisible and the visible dimensions of the life of the Cosmos, [are] connected with each other." [47]

Holding this perspective, soul cannot be easily defined through a positivistic lens or relegated to religious experience. The use of the word soul, and the locus of experience it gestures to, opens the door to the sacred dimension of human learning.[48] This sacred dimension of the soul, particularly the soul's capacity to be affected and to thrive by and through direct experience, is central to Imaginal Transformation Praxis, blurring the boundaries between religious experience, psychology, and education.[49]

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning, first defined by Jack Mezirow, describes a pedagogical method that seeks the reconstitution of one's perceptual lenses, mindsets, beliefs, and systems of meaning-making.[50] In transformative learning theory, Mezirow illustrates

that learning is understood as both the intentional and incidental processes of examining

and then transforming one's "frame of reference." [51] Influenced by the work of Thomas

Kuhn, Jurgen Habermas, and Paolo Freire, transformative learning theory asserts that

growth happens through the engagement of a disorienting event.[52] Mezirow concludes

that such events present new information that is seemingly at odds with the learner's

current frames of reference. Self-examination and the examination of larger cultural or

traditional values, beliefs, or habits may ensue, thus stretching the learner to see beyond

previously held assumptions to achieve a more comprehensive perspective.[53]

Imaginal Process, the distinct approach to *transformative learning* developed and

in use at Meridian University, Omer writes, enables both individuals and collectives to

"inhabit new, more complex, and emergent landscapes." [54] In fact, most adult educators

believe that capability can be increased through practices of transformative learning.[55]

Omer et al. describe transformative learning as learning that "engenders the emergence

of distinct human capabilities in a unique and connected way," thus shifting the way the

learner perceives, functions, and engages the world.[56] Similarly, O'Sullivan likens the

kind of learning that occurs as a "deep, structural" shift of consciousness that

"irreversibly alters our way of being in the world." He writes:

> Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our
> relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of
> relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body
> awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of
> possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. [57]

Transformative learning theory owes its widespread success to Mezirow's ability

to present useful concepts in accessible language.[58] Now ubiquitous in the fields of

education and adult development, its central tenets are easily distorted. Many theorists

and practitioners assert that the word *transformation* has been used to refer to any kind

of change process whatsoever.[59]

Meridian's learning praxis differentiates two kinds of learning, *informational*

learning and *transformative learning*, and seeks to integrate both. Informational learning

is that which increases the knowledge, skills, and established cognitive structures within

an existing frame of reference. Jean Piaget used the parallel term *assimilative processes*

to refer to the ways new information is often shaped to conform to existing knowledge

structures.[60] Transformative learning, in contrast, not only changes what is known but

how a learner knows it. It puts the frame of reference, or the underlying form of mind, at

risk of change. Omer and Schwartz argue that the primary form or structure that is

pressed to change in transformative learning is a learner's identity.[61] Such learning

enables individuals and collectives to first engage and then transform complex

challenges.[62]

Research and practice of transformative learning have grown exponentially over

the last 15 years alongside robust debate and burgeoning critique. Some scholars argue

that much of the research on transformative learning has been redundant, deterministic,

and shallow.[63] Others reasonably question whether the concept of transformative

learning, as distinct from learning more generally, is useful at all.[64] Edward Taylor and

Patricia Cranton purport that little attention paid to critiques of the theory, a failure to

reference and review primary sources, and methodological concerns are just a few

explanations for stagnation in the field.[65] Because much of the research on

transformative learning has occurred in North America, some critiques argue that the

emphasis of the theory weighs heavily toward individual transformation without appropriate social (positional and multi-cultural) considerations.[66]

Imaginal Transformation Praxis

Imaginal Transformation Praxis (ITP) approaches transformative learning as an essential aspect of human maturation and evolution that becomes even more necessary as informational complexity accelerates.[67] It seeks to challenge individualistic, dominator models of Western education by focusing on building the capacities necessary for collaborativity and cultural sensitivity. Omer and Schwartz claim a learner's movement from dependence to independence and to interdependence, marks psychological maturity and a successful transformative learning journey.[68]

ITP has been informed by the understanding that learning is the way life increases in complexity. *Authentic learning,* or learning that results in sustained future action,* entails experiencing. "Hence," writes Omer, "whatever promotes experiencing, promotes learning. Conversely, whatever diminishes experiencing will hinder learning." [69] In addition, experience requires an integral framework that bridges interior and exterior, individual and collective domains; a framework that attends to the whole person: soul, self, and system.[70] Omer asserts that it is through engaging with the fullness of experience as it arises that the soul can flourish.[71]

Omer and Schwartz believe that transformative learning can be thought to entail a practice of approaching and then crossing thresholds of uncertainty, failure, and complexity, requiring the unlearning of fixed frames of reference in order to grow.[72]

This kind of learning invariably presents a sizable risk to a person's default ways of being, thinking, and doing. New experience, Omer et al. explain, is perilous:

> The inherent *peril* associated with experience is implied in the root stem of the word, *per,* which is the Old French word for lead and pass over, and which subsequently enlarged into *peril*, meaning danger or risk. There is no significant human learning, which does not in one way or another, diversify, deepen, embody and personalize experience and in so doing, perilously disrupt the routines of familiar identity. [73]

Because transformative learning, by definition, catalyzes periods of disorientation and uncertainty, the concept of *liminality* is useful here. Originally coined by Arnold Van Gennep to describe the ambiguous threshold phase between significant life stages, the liminal is a time constituted by de-integration and the loosening or reversal of familiar customs, norms, and narratives.[74] Victor Turner likens liminality to a process of becoming, drawing on the analogy of a pupa changing from grub to moth. This *betwixt and between* time is marked by ambiguity, where the subject in transition resembles or maintains "few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state." [75] They are, instead, dwelling in what Turner calls an *interstructural state*, ripe with paradox and fraught by a pervasive "confusion of all the customary categories." [76]

While such transitions are commonplace enough in the natural unfolding of a human life, Omer et al. claim that transformative learning, because it requires the failure of one's belief systems, mental maps, and identity, delivers one into a liminal state necessitating a disciplined approach to the experience of failure.[77] "Such discipline," claims Omer, "demands the acknowledgment that transformation is predicated on failure." [78] ITP, therefore, presses a learner to dwell in the liminal which can range from being uncomfortable to being grossly challenging, *generatively*. Julian Norris defines

generativity by saying it is through generative processes that individuals, groups, and human systems actualize latent potential, resulting in a metamorphosis from "one order of being to a higher order of being." [79]

Resistance to Experience

Moments of liminality act as points of departure from previous ways of thinking, doing, and being. Disorientation is common, making resistance to liminal experience equally ubiquitous. Omer et al. propose that personal, social, and cultural dynamics restrict experience and stall the process of maturation on the way to interdependence.[80] They claim that this "homeostatic imperative," also called *gatekeeping*, operates at both an individual and systemic level. It can be further understood as an adaptive, protective dynamic that enables an individual to thrive under threatening circumstances. Such measures invariably become maladaptive over time as circumstances change.[81]

Cultural gatekeepers are adaptive dynamics that occur at a larger scale, forged out of collective belief systems, norms, rules, and historical patterns that can become internalized to ensure conformity.[82] Omer et al. write that the restrictive "rules, norms, values, and taboos" held by collectives at any scale resist cultural transformation by reaffirming the dominant *cultural trance*.[83] Omer characterizes cultural trance as a "collective state of complacent passivity and loss of individuality." [84] These internalized dynamics, he claims, act as barriers to experience through habituated protective strategies that restrict the flow of the imagination.[85]

Until such barriers are recognized and engaged, Omer explains, it can be difficult for learners to take the necessary risks that come with new experience. One of the most

challenging barriers is personal and collective *identity*. Identity, writes Omer, could be understood as the "core beliefs, deep assumptions, mindsets, and specific perspectives" that act as filters of perception.[86] Although both individual and collective identity can support and stabilize experience, it can also act as a wall, deflecting anything that is perceived as outside of what Omer et al. refer to as a learner's "zone of familiarity." [87] Omer defines adaptive identity as a constellation of self-images "associated with adaptive patterns of reactivity." [88] These self-images are also called *imaginal structures*. "Imaginal structures," writes Omer, "are assemblies of sensory, affective, and cognitive aspects of experience constellated into images; they both mediate and constitute experience. The specifics of an imaginal structure are determined by an interaction of personal, cultural, and archetypal influences." [89]

Differences perceived as other are often deflected rather than engaged. *Otherness* refers to "difference experienced problematically," such as a threatening thought or challenging insight, an unfamiliar interior voice, or an unsettling affect.[90] Omer et al. claim, that when engaged with awareness, new information liberated by and through experience can permeate the learner's wall of identity.[91] Building a relationship with otherness is, therefore, part of rich, unencumbered experience.[92] They go on to say that when liberation from identity occurs, a learner may experience an *ecstatic state*. ITP argues that the soul has an *ecstatic imperative*, or a need to express its "passionate and plural nature, despite the constrictions of personal identity and the requirements of conventional culture." [93]

Capacity Development

For this kind of learning, Omer suggests that it is necessary to identify, express, and integrate emotion.[94] Omer claims that it is through *affect* that initially one is moved, linking emotion with movement and movement with action.[95] Silvan Tompkins defines affect as the "biological portion of emotion" that is hardwired into one's physiology.[96] *Emotion,* conversely, refers to the overlay of biographical narratives that have been formed through life experiences and allow a learner to interpret and make meaning out of the affect. Affect, therefore, is precognitive and preverbal, while emotions are filtered through one's personal history, socialization, trauma, and environmental influences.[97]

Over time, Omer posits that emotion can be transmuted into *capacities*, empowering the learner to become a more effective leader in their respective spheres of influence. Omer defines capacity as:

> A distinct dimension of human development and human evolution that delineates a specific potential for responding to a domain of life experience (e.g., Compassion responds to Suffering; Courage responds to Danger; Destinicity responds to the Future; Dignity responds to Failure; Fierceness responds to Injustice; Faith responds to Uncertainty; Reflexivity responds to Personal Identity). [98]

Transmuting the soul's vulnerabilities over a longer period of time can endow a person with *Authentic Power*. Authentic Power, which Omer also refers to as Soul Power, or the Power of Being, can be understood as the constellation of capacities and qualities that allow one to respond to experience in ways that generate truth, beauty, and justice.[99] Such powers, though rare, are becoming more critical in contexts beset by exponential, pervasive, and perpetual change.[100] Aneel Chima and Ronald Gutman, for

example, claim that trust and psychological safety empower individuals and teams to continuously learn and enable more effective participation in complex contexts. Such a perspective centers humility, vulnerability, and ongoing learning.[101]

ITP outlines four dynamisms of experience that can support the learner to lean into the perilous promise of transformative learning. *Diversifying experience* includes practices that encourage a learner to shift both states and structures of consciousness, as well as those that make possible an encounter with multiple nodes of identity. *Deepening experience* invites a learner to work with story and myth to engage the archetypal and symbolic depths of experience. *Embodying experience* seeks to connect the somatic or physical dimension with the cognitive and emotional dimensions of experience. Finally, *personalizing experience* refers to practices that encourage the learner to have a fresh experience of their personal identity unencumbered by dissociative adaptations to stress or trauma.[102] The success of ITP, and transformative learning more generally, relies on the skillful crafting of experience that supports the emergence of these dynamics. In doing so, the learner and their lives, perspectives, worldviews, and capacities to respond to life's complexities transform.[103]

Cultural Leadership

This dissertation focuses on the efficacy and impact of complexity leaders. It is important to note that such leaders attempt to address systems-wide dynamics at scale. While they work on the downstream visible actions, behaviors, and outcomes of a given system, they are primarily focused on the upstream mindsets, beliefs, and habits that give rise to such actions.[104] ITP's third component, Cultural Leadership Praxis, offers a

useful lens for how such upstream habits might be made vulnerable to change through leadership.

Like complexity leaders, Omer's concept of the *cultural leader* is one who attempts to influence the invisible web of habits, or *culture,* that constellates into collective behavior. Culture is constituted by the norms and perspectives that undergird familial, organizational, and social systems.[105] During moments of stability, Omer claims, the center of culture remains difficult to influence. In such a stable state, Omer describes the center as "dense with rules, norms, taboos, and consensual notions of 'truth'— while the periphery is marginalized and remains disenfranchised, disempowered, and often scapegoated." [106]

Omer suggests that during moments of transition, conflict, or change, the center of culture becomes more porous and therefore vulnerable to influences at the edge. It becomes more able to recognize and engage what had previously been denied or suppressed. In such moments "…a culture's web of habits transforms as it responds to the perspectives and practices at the periphery." [107]

Omer proposes that cultural leaders hold this dynamic exchange in view, attempting to amplify opportunities for cross-pollination. Like Gandhi or Martin Luther King, such leaders *transgress* the rules that constrict sovereignty and cultural creativity. Omer defines *creative transgressions* by the presence of three features: they are a) principled; b) imaginative; and c) require *conscious sacrifice. Principled actions*, he claims, are effective because they are aligned with a deeper truth, requiring the cultural leader to have a passionate connection with truth. *Imaginative actions* are those that invite in the unexpected, requiring others to reorient and reach for new meanings. To

make an impact in this way, a cultural leader must be willing, Omer writes, "to experience difficulty, failure, and loss of privilege." [108] Conscious sacrifices allow one to take actions that counter a culture's dominant ideology and weather the forces of cultural gatekeepers who seek to restrict change. Cultural leaders, therefore, learn how to surrender to the challenges and opportunities of the present moment, and can transmute or channel the way they are affected by the oppressive habits of culture into *creative action*.[109] Omer et al. write, "creative action, when it is pragmatically transgressive, transforms culture, enabling new experience that shapes the next cycle of learning." [110] Such actions contribute to the emergence of collective wisdom.[111]

Collective moments of dynamic flux can be tumultuous and uncertain as connections break down and new possibilities emerge. Omer claims that cultural leaders can contain and invite others to surrender to new insight through *creative ritual*. Omer posits, "creative ritual is imagination in action, allowing us to tap into our Indigenous knowing, therefore releasing the transformative potentials of our collective life." [112] *Ritual trust* emerges, which Omer argues, "engenders a temporary suspending of fear, suspicion, indifference, conflict, and even hatred." [113] Cultural leadership enables collectives to learn together, grow together, and listen in for the future that may want to emerge rife with imaginative potential. This is also the heart of complexity leadership, the essence of which is to facilitate adaptive learning.[114]

Leading in Complexity

A leader's capacity to take creative action becomes increasingly vital as contexts become more complex. Terry Patten describes this moment as being one of crisis and fragmentation where the unraveling of entrenched patterns and institutions is leading to growing confusion and incoherence across all domains. In such a climate, he suggests, the capacity of change makers to not only see but relate to and act from a deeper underlying wholeness and connectivity becomes "a truly subversive and revolutionary act." [115] This section investigates the nature of complexity, differentiating between simple, complicated, and complex contexts. Throughout, the literature demonstrates how complex contexts, characterized by uncertainty, ambiguity, and emergence, impress new challenges on conventional notions of leadership and require the development or refinement of complexity capabilities.

Complex Systems: From Machine to Organism

> A deep understanding of context, the ability to embrace complexity and paradox, and a willingness to flexibly change leadership style will be required for leaders who want to make things happen in a time of increasing uncertainty.

~ David Snowden and Mary Boone[116]

Complexity is a way to describe the nature of reality. Fraught with uncertainty, colored by emergence, and tempered by ambiguity, complexity is baked into life itself. Originating from the Latin root *plexus*, meaning to be braided or entwined, complexity describes the connectivity of elements within their environment.[117] Paradoxically, such ways of seeing have not been common over the last century of modern thought. The

industrial revolution, which colored ways of thinking, doing, and being, was predicated by the mechanistic, linear, and causal schema of classical science. The ensuing entrenchment of a perspective that tended toward the analysis of parts made it difficult to see interrelationships and even more difficult to understand emergent and nonlinear behavior.[118] The pressures of increasing technological growth, global connection, and new scientific advances forced what Ludwig Von Bertalanffy called a "re-orientation of science" that responded to the insufficiency of a mechanistic approach.[119] Formed over time through transdisciplinary insight from physics, biology, psychology, and the social sciences, *systems theory* began to challenge the prevalent mechanistic view with an *organismic* view—one of interrelated wholes.[120] Now a robust theoretical field, systems theory is the interdisciplinary study of *systems*, which Donella Meadows and Diana Wright define as a "set of things—people, cells, molecules [that are] interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time." [121] Joanna Macy reminds her readers that a system is less a thing with finite boundaries than a pattern.[122] Systems theory maintains broad concepts and principles that apply across domains of knowledge.[123]

Engaging complexity requires *systems thinking*, which can be understood as a way of approaching problems that asks how the various elements or players in a system interact and influence one another over time.[124] Kambiz Maani and Robert Cavana claim that this way of engaging systems-level challenges requires one to look and think holistically, honor dynamic change as a constant, understand how relationships affect each other, and presume that cause and effect are not linear.[125] Kathia Laszlo claims that the systems view "provides us with a rigorous way of looking at reality from a different

perspective, an expanded viewpoint that enables us to see how nothing exists in isolation." [126] Rather than reacting to individual issues as if they are isolated events, a systems thinker will turn to the relationships in the system, look for broader patterns, and seek out root causes.

Systems Thinking vs. Systems Being

A growing number of voices have pointed out that systems thinking largely remains focused on scientific and mathematical processes that are heavy in theory but tend to leave out the depth and breadth of the human experience; that is, the *inner* and *invisible* variables that meet the *outer* and *objective* contexts that demand skillful engagement. Laszlo describes this gap as a need for leaders to link cognition and emotion, the head with the heart.[127] She cautions that though systems thinking is often taught in formal academic contexts "…the connection between systems thinking and systems feeling happens through life experiences and reflection." [128] Invariably, writes Meadows, "modern systems theory, bound up with computers and equations, hides the fact that it traffics in truths known at some level by everyone. It is often possible, therefore, to make a direct translation from systems jargon to traditional wisdom." [129]

Melanie Goodchild stresses the need to incorporate multiple wisdom traditions at "the nexus of Indigenous place-based wisdom and Western science." [130] The Indigenous worldview has embodied the practices and principles of systems *being* long before Western science put words to theory. Goodchild helps provide a contrast between traditions that further illuminates this point. She explains, "Western scholarship, for the most part, offers us preconceived theoretical perspectives representing a Western

understanding of how the world works." [131] A journey to the nexus of Indigenous wisdom and Western thought begins with the important realization that both are equal but differentiated.[132]

Goodchild elucidates that the contemporary canon on systems praxis reflects its epistemological roots in the Western scientific method—a worldview that privileges analysis, false dichotomy, and fragmentation.[133] Joanna Macy and Molly Brown offer perspective, writing, "the mechanistic view of reality separated substance from process, self from other, mind from matter. In the systems perspective, these dichotomies no longer hold." [134] In contrast, Indigenous ways of "coming to know, as practiced by Elders," writes Goodchild, "is the pursuit of wisdom-in-action." [135] This fundamental difference is relationally and experientially embedded in an Indigenous context and worldview. Tyson Yunkaporta explains:

> Preindustrial cultures have worked within self-organizing systems for thousands of years to predict weather patterns, seasonal activity, and the dynamics of social groups, then manage responses to these complexities in nonintrusive ways that maintain systemic balance. While interventions are possible from within these dynamic systems, they cannot be controlled from the outside. [136]

The shortcomings of Western science and research reached their limit in early findings of quantum physics.[137] Yunkaporta argues, "no matter how hard you may try to separate yourself from reality, there are always observer effects as the reality shifts in relation to your viewpoint." [138] In the Aboriginal cosmological view, this limit is dissolved in the understanding that each individual actor is an interconnected part of the system, able to accept their subjectivity.[139] Margaret Wheatley agrees and claims that fundamentally "systems influence individuals, and individuals call forth systems. It is

the relationship that evokes the present reality. Which potential becomes real depends on the people, the events, and the moment." [140]

Perhaps an Indigenous systems view that is rooted in place and relationship is best conveyed through differences in language. In *Anishinaabemowin* or Ojibwe, the word *system* is a verb, "dynamic and imbued with spirit," writes Goodchild, whereas in English *system* is a noun, static and external to the observer.[141] Robert Yazzie, in describing Navajo philosophy, shows that this central, dynamic aliveness is in the "lived practices of cultural forms that embody…their connectivity in the worlds of spirits of nature, humans, animals, plants, minerals, and other natural phenomena." This philosophy emerges out of relationships with all parts of the living world, which, for Yazzie, are to be understood not as separate agents but as relations.[142] Tying an Indigenous worldview and scientific approach to systems directly, Gregory Cajete writes, "native science embodies the natural system characteristics of diversity, optimization, cooperation, self-regulation, change, creativity, connectedness, and niche." Cajete also highlights that knowledge gained is done so through the "interaction of body, mind, soul, and spirit with all aspects of nature." [143]

Perhaps, as Goodchild, Yunkaporta, Yazzie, and Cajete demonstrate, the centering of the Indigenous worldview and a unified attempt to *decolonize* and *indigenize* Western perspectives through cross-cultural dialogues will bring soul to systems work.[144] Decolonization, conclude Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, is a social and political process that "brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life." [145] The particular knowledge that Indigenous cultures embody can help ground Western theories in how cross-scale change can happen within an embodied, collective practice rooted in

place. Across cultures and contexts, Laszlo agrees that it will be "those individuals able to make the emotional connection between an expanded and more comprehensive understanding of interconnectedness," that will be, "more able to translate systems ideas into actions." [146]

Making such integral and holistic emotional connections requires a dialogic in-between space that celebrates diversity, is respectful, recognizes spirit, and, as Goodchild explains, "enables a mindset of *connection* rather than *separation*." [147] Willie Ermine refers to such spaces as *ethical space*, which he defines as a "theoretical space between cultures and worldviews" that are constituted by diversity, highlight uniqueness born from distinct histories and realities, and welcome the "unstated, unseen level of thought and feeling" while simultaneously attempting to balance intersecting moral considerations.[148]

A growing number of theorists, practitioners, Indigenous elders, biologists, and cultural philosophers have argued this shift toward deep relationships; the subjective invisibles that underlie what can be seen and measured, can both inspire change and will require nothing short of a complete shift of the dominant paradigm.[149] Wheatley soberly reminds those leading in complexity that "we will never cope with this new world using our old maps. It is our fundamental way of interpreting the world—our worldview—that must change." [150]

The key lesson from these theorists is that systems thinking on its own is not going to result in social, ecological, or individual thriving. Such transformations require relational and developmental learning.

Simple, Complicated, Complex

Though all complex challenges require a systemic approach, it is worth noting that not all systems are complex systems.[151] David Snowden and Mary Boone characterize *simple contexts* by their easily discernable and self-evident cause-and-effect relationships. These largely stable environments call for straightforward assessment and categorization of the facts. When met with skill, they elicit a process-oriented response that is based on established practice.[152] Simple problems, claim Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Patton, are analogous to baking a cake. Following a recipe allows the baker to achieve consistent results each time. A good recipe, they write, "notes the quantity and nature of the "parts" needed and specifies the order in which to combine them, but there is some room for experimentation." [153] Simple contexts require one to pay attention and follow known procedures without requiring extensive expertise.

Complicated contexts, in contrast, write Snowden and Boone, "may contain multiple right answers, and though there is a clear relationship between cause and effect, not everyone can see it." [154] These moments demand strategic analysis and seasoned expertise, such as tending to a mechanical repair, building a rocket, or the analysis required to safely drill for oil.[155] Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton remind their readers that complicated problems require rigid protocol predicated on "high levels of expertise and training in a variety of fields." [156] By following protocol, one can have a high degree of confidence that the same result will be produced each time. Therefore, navigating complicated contexts requires a good degree of informational learning and practice over a longer period.

Snowden and Boone refer to *complex contexts* as domains of emergence beset by constant change.[157] A classic example, suggest Westley, Zimerman, and Patton, is raising a child. No matter how rigid one's parenting protocol, nor how experienced the parent, the outcome remains uncertain. Each child is impressionable and sensitive to their environmental surround, but they are also, at their core, a mystery—to be approached as a unique individual. Each parenting intervention opens into the possibility of an acausal, unpredictable response, yielding insight only in retrospect. Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton write the "essence [of raising a child] exists in the relationship between different people, different experiences, [and] different moments in time." [158] Snowden and Boone call this increasingly ubiquitous and relational space the "realm of the unknowns." They claim that this is the domain to which much of contemporary leadership has shifted.[159]

A key variable that distinguishes simple, complicated, and complex contexts is the degree of certainty present within each.[160] Simple contexts, suggests Ralph Douglas Stacey, are those where issues and the corresponding decisions a leader may need to make are near certainty; and agreement among all involved is correlative.

Complicated contexts are characterized by either high levels of agreement and low levels of certainty, or the opposite, low levels of certainty and high levels of agreement. Both require an increased degree of trust and an iterative response. Where agreement is low, but certainty high, Stacey recommends coalition building between relevant stakeholders to close the agreement gap. Where agreement is high, but certainty low "a strong sense of shared mission or vision may substitute for a plan." [161] Most

management literature and leadership training seek to address simple and complicated challenges.[162]

At the other extreme, contexts with both low levels of agreement and certainty are characterized by anarchy and breakdown. *The edge of chaos* or the *zone of complexity* is the large area that exists between anarchy and the simple and complicated regions of traditional leadership practice. This is a zone that engenders high levels of creativity, innovation, and deviance from the known to create new ways of operating.[163] Richard Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja give this space its contours. They write:

> The edge of chaos is a condition, not a location. It is a permeable, intermediate state through which order and disorder flow, not a finite line of demarcation. That's why the edge of chaos creates upheaval, but not dissolution. That's why the *edge* of chaos is so important. The edge is not the abyss. It's the sweet spot for productive change. [164]

In reflection of the last century of scientific advancement, Warren Weaver similarly grouped scientific inquiry into three broad categories: problems of simplicity (simple systems), problems of disorganized complexity (complicated systems), and problems of organized complexity (complex adaptive systems).[165] Notably, Warren begins his exploration into contemporary complexity science with a series of proactive and poetic questions:

> What makes an evening primrose open when it does? Why does salt water fail to satisfy thirst?... Why is one chemical substance a poison when another, whose molecules have just the same atoms but assembled into a mirror-Image pattern, is completely harmless? [166]

These, and other aesthetic questions arise from complex problems; categorically distinct from those that can be engaged in simple and complicated systems. The complexity of a self-organizing system writes Steven Johnson, "lives up one level."[167] Far from sensory overload, organized complexity, he argues, has "a coherent personality, a personality that self organizes out of millions of individual decisions, a global order built out of local interactions."[168]

Complex contexts present adaptive challenges where certainty, agreement, and variables shift, ebb, and flow. These contexts are endemic to the human experience, and yet, claims Ronald Heifetz, the fundamental challenge with leadership at this moment is that many are treating adaptive challenges as if they are technical challenges.[169] A leader's lackluster response to complex contexts comes not from a lack of passion or goodwill, but from the unconscious mislabeling of complex challenges as simple or complicated. Context matters, yet the ability to see things as complex requires the language and lens of complexity.

Complexity: A Leadership Language

Complex adaptive systems (CAS) are systems connected to their wider environment that can adapt and evolve within a landscape beset by constant change.[170] Resulting from an inquiry into the common properties of all living things, complex adaptive systems, writes Pascale and Millemann, involve "independent agents that can act in parallel, develop 'models' as to how things work in their environment, and, most importantly refine those models through learning and adaptation." [171] Melanie Mitchell writes that a complex adaptive system is one in which "…large networks of components

with no central control and simple rules of operation give rise to complex collective behavior, sophisticated information processing, and adaptation via learning or evolution." [172]

Much of the current understanding of such systems comes from close observation of natural processes interacting at varying scales. For example, Simon Levin suggests that the observation of microscopic processes in evolutionary biology gives rise to the macroscopic patterns that shape systems at scale.[173] Although the study of complexity science is in its infancy, the literature on complex adaptive systems is vast.[174] It is useful to extrapolate three common characteristics that differentiate complex adaptive systems from other complex systems. First, a CAS is constituted by a diversity of elements. Second, interdependencies between those elements result in nonlinear and emergent behavior. And third, a CAS has a cumulative capacity for adaptation based on feedback from the wider environment.[175]

A CAS is comprised of a diversity of individual agents or elements that form relationships. Brenda Zimmerman, Curt Lindberg, and Paul Plsek explain that diversity is a necessary element for the sustainability of a CAS. Both a source of information and the engine of novelty, diversity is what creates the potential for innovation and resilience, and opens the door to future adaptations.[176]

Second, with a myriad of agents in play, outcomes in a CAS emerge from interdependencies, shifting the locus of control from the individual element to the relationships between them. Because each part cannot be reduced or removed from its relationship to the whole, one can never fully see a CAS without looking to relationships. For example, Westley et al. caution that the prevalent use of the machine

metaphor invariably entrenches a pervasive ignorance of the "living aspects of our world." They write, "you can point at things, but you can't point at relationships. They are literally hard to see." [177]

Accordingly, outcomes do not and cannot be planned by individual actors, nor by acting upon the system from outside, but rather *emerge* as a result of interrelationship, often resulting in nonlinear and acausal behavior.[178] The nature of distributed control in a CAS, writes Zimmerman, Lindberg, and Plsek, means that outcomes "emerge from a process of self-organization rather than being designed and controlled externally or by a centralized body." [179] Emergence, they claim, suggests unpredictability, where minor shifts can produce seemingly disproportionate consequences. As such, argue Snowden and Boone, solutions to complex challenges cannot be imposed from the outside, but rather arise because of shifting circumstances. In a CAS, there is no way to solidly predict how the system will act.[180]

Finally, complex adaptive systems shift and change based on feedback from the wider environment. *Feedback loops* can be thought of as connected, sensory inputs and outputs. The system's output (behavior, energy, impact) simultaneously becomes an input for future behavior as those impacts are digested through feedback loops which trigger corrective actions that seek to stabilize or shift a system accordingly. There are two types of feedback loops that either dampen or amplify particular system properties. *Negative feedback loops* are what Meadows and Wright call "equilibrating or goal-seeking structures" that create stability and maintain resistance to change.[181] In contrast, *positive feedback loops* reinforce behavior that has been successful in the past. This kind of input can engender either a "vicious or virtuous circle," that Meadows claims, "can

cause healthy growth or runaway destruction."[182] Through feedback loops, a CAS can adapt and shift subsequent behavior. This central competency for *adaptive learning* is a core feature and characteristic that implies the "capacity to alter or change—the ability to learn from experience."[183] Such systems are *self-organizing* and can change themselves by creating whole new structures and behaviors.[184]

This exploration of the three primary characteristics of complex adaptive systems has implications for effective complexity leadership. A CAS' ability to transform over time through adaptive learning centers learning as the core focus of impactful leadership. It could be said that a complexity leader enables a system to learn, adapt, and transform.[185] Strong leadership in complex contexts attempts to create the learning conditions required to meet adaptive challenges, where the changes sought require people to not only employ their skills and life experience but potentially alter their mindset, behavior, or perspective.[186]

It is worth drawing a connection here to the central tenets of transformative learning theory, and to ITP specifically. Omer writes:

> Any organization—in order to engage and transform complex challenges—must learn. Organizational transformation is itself inherently a complex challenge. And it is often when organizations act to engage the complex challenges they are confronted by that they can transform to the next stage. When this engenders the experience for organizational members that the organization itself is the complexity challenge, the stage is set for transformation.[187]

Omer suggests that complexity leaders are practitioners who facilitate transformative learning for others while engaging in transformative learning themselves.[188] Such learning, argue Omer and Schwartz, "prepares the ground for growing partnership capabilities from the intimate to the global," essential for

flourishing collectives.[189] It is learning that enables societies to navigate exponential change, systems collapse, and accelerating complexity.[190] Without learning, there can be no change, adaptation, or evolution.

Patterns of Learning, Adaptation, and Transformation

The preceding characteristics of complex adaptive systems emphasize that unpredictable change is a considerable companion for all systems actors. Yet, in identifying the deep structure of systems dynamics at scale, Lance Gunderson and Crawford Holling found that even complex adaptive systems operate by nature's rules.[191] Unpredictability, they emphasize, is not always equivalent to chaos and anarchy. The adaptive cycle is "a conceptual model that describes the ways in which complex systems of people and nature are dynamically organized and structured across scales of space and time." [192] With it, Gunderson and Holling demonstrate the general, dynamic patterns inherent in complex systems and the way they adapt.[193]

Having gained much traction since its publication in 2002, the adaptive cycle offers a way to understand a system's behavior that is aesthetic, intuitive, and applicable at multiple scales. It underscores the fractal nature of systems suggesting that what is true at an ecosystem level also tends to be true at an individual level, and bridges concepts from the hard and natural sciences with those of the social sciences. The leadership interventions that are required at different phases of change, argues Jacobs, are correlative with the underlying promise and process of transformative learning.[194] Although such interdisciplinary comparisons are rare, bringing a complexity framework to parallel concepts in transformative learning can, alleges Jacobs, build greater

developmental capacity.[195] The adaptive cycle offers a useful heuristic for leaders navigating complex social-ecological systems.[196]

Taking inspiration from the study of old pine forests, Holling determined that systems transform, and indeed thrive, by submitting themselves to the shifting rhythm of four distinct and connected phases: growth, conservation, release, and reorganization.[197] These natural rhythms or phases of a changing system offer a window into a deeper or underlying coherence in complexity.

The initial *growth phase* (*r*) is constituted by the rapid exploitation and sequestering of resources in a short time span. Westley et al., correlate this phase to putting a proposal for a project into action—moving from the idea to making the idea a reality.[198] A leader's energy, time and attention, and other adjacent resources are naturally channeled into an acute focus at this stage, and the path forward unfolds ahead with reasonable clarity. Here, a primary leadership task involves seeking out growth opportunities, offering support, and mobilizing resources for visionary action.[199]

Transformative learning also requires appropriate encouragement and support. In ITP, creating opportunities for diverse experience, and then supporting the learner to deepen, embody, and personalize the content of their experience can be thought of as a form of complexity leadership.[200] Such transformative learning moments can lead individuals and collectives to greater capacity over time.[201]

In the second phase, the system stabilizes over a longer duration through the accumulation and conservation of energy or capital. In this *conservation phase* (*k*) the system becomes more rigid, and therefore more fragile through a loss of *resilience*.[202] Drawing from economic theory, resilience is often understood to be synonymous with

steady-state equilibrium. Conversely, in the biological sciences and by extension the social systems sciences, the concept of resilience lives far from equilibrium, working *with* instead of *against* instabilities.[203] Meadows and Wright define resilience as "a measure of a system's ability to survive and persist within a variable environment," and, "the ability to bounce or spring back into shape, position, etc., after being pressed or stretched." [204] Resilience "is about how massive change and stability paradoxically work together," write Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton.[205] In the conservation phase, as in old-growth forests, the system stabilizes and concentrates, thus locking up the system's resources (like water, soil, and sunlight) for the existing life forms, which increases equilibrium but diminishes resilience. This freezing of resources, though important, over time eliminates a system's elasticity and innovative potential. If the system's resources are not released and the overall structure allowed to transform, it runs the risk of falling into what Holling called the *rigidity trap*. The rigidity trap is the anathema to healthy change. Akin to stagnant water or old forests heavy with underbrush, a diversity of life cannot thrive. Accordingly, warn Westley et al., the rigidity trap is waiting for anyone who can "only see one way to do things," or with groups who are hanging on to best practices even when they are no longer working.[206]

When a system is guided to release trapped resources, or innovate on habituated ways of operating, the potential for disruption and creative innovation increases. Economist Joseph Schumpeter called this idea *creative destruction*.[207] Creative destruction releases stored creativity and trapped resources.[208] A parallel concept in transformative learning is Mezirow's disorienting dilemma, where a practitioner's fixed frames of reference are challenged through the liberation of experience.[209] Creative

destruction is not only a property of large social, ecological, or organizational systems but a healthy property of all living systems at any scale. The turbulence that the conservation phase requires for systemic well-being is equally required at the level of the individual. "In the transformative learning process," Jacobs writes, "one must deconstruct an existing worldview to make way for a new one, and this self-organization results in the emergence of a newly forming perspective." [210]

The conservation stage precipitates the anticipated phase of *release* (Ω) where the energy gained and held static during the conservation period is freed through systems collapse. The totalizing power of an overdue forest fire is a useful analogy. While the fire burns existing trees to ash and leaves destruction and loss of life in its wake, it also, paradoxically, serves an important creative and life-giving function in the forest ecosystem. Indeed, it is known that many species of trees and plants require fire to regenerate and compete successfully. Equally known is that the disruption of such fires through human intervention has resulted in increasingly severe wildfires and insect epidemics that place whole systems, and the human cities that border them, at extreme risk.[211]

Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton caution that this kind of change is difficult. In concrete terms, it can look like the failure of a project, the loss of a career, or the abandonment of safety and familiarity.[212] It is no surprise that this phase in the adaptive cycle marks what Holling identified as the lesser known *backloop* of the cycle that lacks the same mechanistic detail and data as the exploitation and conservation phases. Instead, Holling suggests this period of creative destruction and the subsequent phase of

reorganization require a more qualitative understanding, and an emphasis on crisis and collapse largely absent in traditional models.[213]

On an individual level, the release phase finds resonance with transformative learning moments that require an individual to experience the failure of their mental models and habituated ways of being, doing, and knowing. Like whole systems leadership, the kind of learning required for skillful complexity leadership involves engaging experiences of failure with discipline.[214] Helping to make meaning at the edge of chaos is a form of skillful leadership. Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey suggest that meaning-making creates reality, touching the cognitive, affective, and relational dimensions of experience at once.[215] When new meaning is made of a difficult experience, it guides future action. In these moments, Jacobs suggests, meaning becomes learning.[216]

Finally, the release triggers a period of reorganization (*x*) which Allen et al. write is "a relatively rapid period of assembly of system components, and is an opportunity for novel recombination." [217] It is during the reorganization period that a system may adapt to assume a novel structure constituted by new relationships, processes, and behaviors.[218] Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton describe this phase:

> New life quickly grows. Where seeds from birch, maple, and aspen trees have landed, you might see a dozen new plants crop up an inch or so apart. Overnight, seedlings cover the ground with a blanket of new life. In organizations or social groups, this reorganization phase can be a heady time of exploration; anything seems possible and the mood is optimistic. [219]

Such an abundance of resources and space engender intense competition; a crowding of ideas and rich potentialities all vying for a foothold. As such, yet another trap can inhibit

the natural progression of change in a system at any scale. The *poverty trap*, Holling

clarifies, can occur when no new idea or species can gain enough resources to take root

and grow. It becomes important to remember, write Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton

that "some death is required at this stage too." [220] Culling back allows for some ideas to

gain traction by capitalizing on available resources.[221]

Taken together, it becomes clear that the phases outlined in the adaptive cycle

correlate with the natural order of birth, growth and maturation, death and renewal,

allowing for a more relatable and personal grounding in the nature of change. It

emphasizes that adaptive learning at any scale requires very different leadership

interventions. At times, the task may be to support, and at other times to disturb or

challenge. The adaptive cycle demonstrates that living systems undergo processes of

concurrent creativity and conservation, initiation, and destruction. Perhaps most

importantly for this dissertation, Holling points out that the lesson of the adaptive cycle

"ties learning to continuity." [222]

Impactful complexity leaders hold the perspective that change and learning are

necessary for novelty to enter the scene.[223] While significant research has focused on

complex dynamics at varying levels of scale in social, economic, and ecological

systems, there has been less exploration of systems dynamics at the level of the

individual and collective interior.[224]

Leaders as Agents of Learning

> This is a strange world, and it promises to get stranger… we must live with the
> strange and the bizarre, even as we climb stairs that we want to bring us to a
> clearer vantage point. Every step requires that we stay comfortable with

> uncertainty, and confident of confusion's role. After all is said and done, we will have to muddle our way through… For these stairs we climb only take us deeper and deeper into a universe of inherent order.

~ Margaret Wheatley[225]

Throughout the leadership literature, there is a growing consensus around the need for a new kind of leader—one who can meet the growing complexity and rapid changes of our time.[226] According to many, we are on the precipice of a new epoch, one whose increased demand calls for the acceleration of human evolution.[227] Economic collapse, environmental degradation, digitalization, and widening gaps of power are just a few examples of the complex conditions that are known to place increasing constraints on traditional constructs of leadership.[228] Whereas much leadership training has focused in the past on equipping leaders to face simple and complicated challenges, Snowden and Boone remind us that most leaders fall back on their habitual capabilities in contexts of adaptive complexity—in part because tools and techniques for navigating today's world are lacking.[229] This section explores both the theory and practice of complexity leadership. It begins with a broad look at how the leadership literature is changing to accommodate emergent understandings on what leadership is and should be. It explores the literature on complexity leadership and systems leadership, both of which see leadership as a relational and interactive dynamic that requires different capabilities. Such complexity capabilities are explored through the lens of ITP. Finally, because complex contexts evoke uncertainty, a brief dive into the literature on leading in uncertainty is warranted.

Complexity Leadership

The need to address the socio-ecological challenges facing the global population
is acute. Emerging leadership literature, such as the work of Richard Osborn, James
Hunt, and Lawrence Jauch, argues that to meet that need the field of leadership requires
a "radical change in perspective" that eschews the narrow vision of leadership as
hierarchical and individualistic.[230] Mary Uhl-Bien, Russ Marion, and Bill McKelvey
attempt to address this challenge by drawing from complexity science to define
leadership differently. They write, "the vast majority of leadership research has studied
leadership in formal, most often managerial roles and has not adequately addressed
leadership that occurs throughout the organization." [231] Their core proposition is that
leadership is not the work of heroic individuals but rather contextually embedded in
relationships. To further distinguish a shift in perspective, they use the term
a*dministrative leadership* to refer to the formal, bureaucratic acts of leadership and
adaptive leadership to refer to leadership that occurs in "emergent, informal, adaptive
dynamics throughout the organization." [232] Benyamin Lichtenstein et al. support this
perspective by saying that leadership is not a skill that resides "in" or is "done by" a
leader but rather "emerges through dynamic interactions." [233] Reframing leadership as a
function of interaction allows for a shift away from traditional, heroic ideals and into a
field of complexity.[234] It also serves to include both formal and informal leaders as
capable of leadership as the context demands.

Complexity leadership, first defined by Wheatley, is a union of two distinct
disciplines—systems thinking, in which complexity science is one aspect, and leadership
theory.[235] Whereas much of the literature fails to take into account that leadership

efficacy and enactment is largely informed by context and relationship, complexity

leadership focuses on what Nicholas Clarke defines as a "much broader set of leadership

processes associated with managing dynamic systems and the interconnectivity within

networks." [236] Uhl-Bien et al. propose that:

> …leadership should be seen not only as position and authority but also as an *emergent, interactive dynamic*—a complex interplay from which a collective impetus for action and change emerges when heterogeneous agents interact in networks in ways that produce new patterns of behavior or new modes of operating. [237]

This focus on relationship, process, and context provides an integrative framework for

other leadership theories that seek to explain interactive dynamics in relationships, such

as *shared leadership*, *collective leadership*, *distributed leadership*, and *adaptive*

leadership.[238]

Rather than focusing on the leader as the standard unit of analysis, in complexity

leadership theory it is the CAS. Naturally arising in social systems, Lichtenstein et al.

describe complex adaptive systems as made up of individuals and groups whose history

and worldview engender resonance in common interest, knowledge, and/or goals.[239]

Within the social system, leadership occurs in a naturally distributed way as a response

to environmental/situational stimulus that is felt as tension. They write:

> Agents respond to both external pressures (from environment or from other CAS agents, e.g., leaders) and internal pressures that are generated as the agents struggle with interdependency and resulting conflicting constraints (e.g., when the needs of one agent conflict with those of another). These tensions, when spread across a network of interactive and interdependent agents, generate system-wide emergent learnings, capabilities, innovations, and adaptability. Importantly, such elaborations are products of interactions among agents, rather than being 'caused' by specific acts of individuals described as leaders. [240]

This perspective demonstrates that leadership actions, whether they occur through formal or informal leaders, could be viewed as "field-level effects" that catalyze innovation or change of some kind.

Complexity leadership theory remains in its infancy and critics claim the complex nature of field-level leadership makes for challenging research. Very little has been done to substantively support the principles espoused by its proponents.[241] Dennis Tourish also argues that despite its focus on relationship, complexity leadership theory continues to scaffold "heroic images of leader agency" by assuming leaders in complex environments can exert rational and purposeful influence on others to an extent that is unrealistic given their context.[242] Moreover, the theory does not offer a clear pathway that a leader may take to cultivate the capacities necessary to thrive in such complex adaptive social systems.

Inner and Outer Dimensions of Complexity Leadership

A growing number of people are moving to adopt a holistic approach to leadership development.[243] Peter Senge, Hal Hamilton, and John Kania echo complexity leadership theory when they define a system leader as "someone able to bring forth collective leadership," but diverge when they stress the requisite need for a system leader to commit to their learning and development.[244] They claim that three core capabilities are required to foster collective leadership: the ability to see the larger system; the capacity to foster reflection and stir generative conversation; and an ability to shift the collective focus "from reactive problem solving to co-creating the future." [245]

To cultivate these capabilities, a leader must pass through three primary *gateways* which serve as initiatory commitments to growth. They write, "those unwilling to pass through them may say all the right things about system leadership, but they are unlikely to make much progress in embodying their aspirations." [246] The first gate they call *re-directing attention.* It involves reorienting oneself to see that problems are both exterior and interior. They write, "the fear and distrust we seek to remedy also exist within us—as do the anger, sorrow, doubt, and frustration." [247] The second gate they call the *re-orienting strategy*, where the emphasis is on making space for collective intelligence and practice wisdom to emerge. Like complexity leadership, this skill involves a fundamental shift from the individual act of trying to "make change happen," to creating generative conditions in which change can occur collectively. The third gate involves re-orienting toward a life of practice. They write, "all learning is doing, but the doing needed is inherently developmental." [248] A systems leader never stops practicing, learning, and growing in relationships.

Senge, Hamilton, and Kania's work echo those who explicitly connect a leader's inner capacity to their efficacy in influencing change. These systems-oriented leadership theories are located at the intersection of systems thinking, transformative learning, and emerging leadership theory.[249]

Many systems-oriented theorists espouse the understanding that leaders need to develop various *soft skills*, such as emotional intelligence (EQ), social intelligence (SQ), and systems intelligence (SysQ) to work generatively in complex environments.[250] *Emotional intelligence* can be defined as the capacity to identify and work with emotions to enhance thought, make meaning, and take subsequent action.[251] *Social intelligence*

refers to one's capacity to act wisely and with adequate sensitivity in social environments.[252] *Systems intelligence* incorporates the first two and adds concurrent awareness of the larger system. Jennifer Campbell describes it as "the understanding of yourself and others through your experience of the system in which you are a part." [253]

Such soft skills are contextually embedded, arising from, and responding to present conditions. In reflecting on what they see as the rapid acceleration of change spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, advancements in technology, automation, Artificial Intelligence, and human interconnectivity, Chima and Gutman describe three dimensions of the "new normal" all leaders must navigate. They view change as *perpetual*—always occurring and never-ending, *pervasive*—ubiquitous and endemic to all life domains, and *exponential*—accelerating at an alarming and rapidly increasing rate.[254] In such conditions a new order of leadership is required that diverges strongly from what they call the historic leader-as-hero model. "Projecting the past onto the present," they assert, "exposes a fundamental error: linear thinking can never adapt to the perpetual, pervasive, and exponential change occurring around us—it's simply too fast and too complex." [255] Instead, what is needed is an *anti-heroic leader*—one who has developed fundamental, interior qualities such as authenticity, humility, and vulnerability, who can inspire trust, evoke psychological safety, drive shared learning, and draw out a sense of shared purpose. Such *sapient leaders* are "characterized by being wise, sagacious, and discerning in navigating change while also being humane in the face of change that can feel alien." [256]

Notably, the qualities listed gesture toward a new approach to leadership – one that is not only focused on the acquisition of new tactics and domain-specific tools, but

on a leader's interior *development*. The process of development is one in which a person moves through distinct psycho-spiritual growth stages—a journey Robert Kegan calls, "a succession of qualitative differentiations of the self from the world," that result in increased capability and a wider spectrum of perspectives.[257]

The key lever in development, alleges Jennifer Garvey Berger, is *transformative reflection* that leads to new action. In such reflection, writes Garvey Berger, one not only notices what arises internally, but actively unpacks the entrenched assumptions, lenses, and perspectives that are noticed.[258] This kind of learning happens "on the edge of knowing." [259] For Garvey Berger, this is a precarious, important, and liminal space characterized by constant movement and a lack of understanding.[260] Jennifer Garvey Berger and Keith Johnson believe that such developmental spaces can increase leadership complexity fitness and be accessed in part through adopting three core *habits of mind*. Resonant with Senge, Hamilton, and Kania, these include asking different questions, taking multiple perspectives, and seeing invisible systems dynamics.[261]

Complexity Capabilities and ITP

Many leaders oversimplify complex problems because they are unable to see them as complex.[262] Like Garvey Berger and Johnson, Omer asserts that leadership able to assist in organization and systems-level transformation is resourced by a constellation of soft skills that he calls *complexity capabilities*.[263] These capabilities arise through the transformation of inner practices that are embodied, engaged, and interpersonal.[264] As such, working with complexity challenges becomes fundamentally an aesthetic process, which draws from and is situated within the domain of sensory affect or feeling.[265]

Therefore, such capabilities, he writes, "are attuned to the dangers and opportunities of edges and thresholds." [266] Resourcing from complexity capabilities can enable a leader to cut through complexity to touch its *deeper coherence*—the patterns and principles that matter in a system.[267] Omer outlines five primary complexity capabilities: negative capability, imaginal capability, perspectival capability, autopoietic capability, and collaborative capability.

Omer asserts that *negative capability* is primary, which he defines as the "ability to surrender creatively and engage the unknown and the unknowable in ways that support creative emergence." [268] Drawing from John Keats, negative capability can be understood as a state of presence that allows a leader to perceive with greater sensitivity and sustained reflection.[269] Keats felt this capability to be central to the creative work of the poet who is "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason." [270] The result of doing so is more space for emergent possibility, an affordance for connection, and a more holistic understanding.[271] Peter Simpson, Robert French, and Charles Harvey claim that negative capability is an essential, yet difficult state of mind in a culture dominated by control and the burden of performance.[272] They differentiate *positive capability* from negative capability, "Where positive capability supports 'decisive action', negative capability supports 'reflective inaction', that is, the ability to resist dispersing into defensive routines when leading at the limits of one's knowledge, resources, and trust." [273]

Challenge aside, contemporary leadership is not constituted solely by decisive actions and influence, but rather punctuated by periods of deep uncertainty and a lack of

clear direction. These times call for a different capability, which Simpson, French, and Harvey write "manifests in behaviors such as waiting, observing, and listening." [274]

   Imaginal capability is a leader's ability to creatively engage with the personal dimensions of complexity. As the world becomes more complex, one response, claims Omer, is to retreat into false simplicity inside oneself, becoming increasingly unaware of one's nuanced interior experience. The other is to lean into the developmental opportunities that complexity requires, thus responding to external complexity with increasing internal complexity.[275] This is a fundamentally developmental process, in which the *imagination* plays a part. The imagination, illuminates Omer, functions as a bridge between the exterior and interior dimensions of a leader's experience, as well as the collective levels of reality. Working with the imaginal dimension enables one to hold a multiplicity of perspectives at once, both distinct (and sometimes conflicting) interior aspects of the self, and exterior differences.[276] He, therefore, defines imaginal capability as the capacity to "aesthetically engage the essential heterogeneity of Being in its ever-present wholeness and purposiveness." [277]

   More commonly identified as a critical soft skill for complexity leadership, *perspectival capability*, suggests Omer, refers to one's ability to seek out and hold a multiplicity of perspectives.[278] Contexts of complexity are complex, in part, because they involve multiple stakeholders, both human and other-than-human, each of which have different and sometimes competing interests, perspectives, needs, and goals. Adam Kahane cautions that such challenges of social complexity "cannot be successfully addressed by experts or authorities, but only by the engagement of the actors themselves." [279] Perspectival capability enables a leader to build shared understanding,

look for patterns, and gain insight through multiple viewpoints not otherwise native to their singular perspective.[280]

Omer's *autopoietic capability* refers to the capacity of the individual to recognize themselves as a dynamic, ever-changing part of the whole.[281] Through the study of the circular organization of the nervous system, Humberto Maturana discovered that all living systems organize themselves through a circular network of processes in which every process contributes and informs all others.[282] Maturana and Francisco Varela named this process *autopoiesis* from the Greek word meaning, "self-making." [283] The reference to *self* in autopoiesis expands beyond the boundaries of the individual actor to recognize that each is entangled in a vast network and never acts in isolation. Fritjof Capra further defines autopoiesis as "a network of production processes, in which the function of each component is to participate in the production or transformation of other components in the network. In this way, the entire network continually makes itself." [284]

Autopoiesis has strong implications for working in systems and suggests that the way leaders participate matters.[285] The problem is not only "out there" but also exists, by nature of one's entangled place, within the system.[286] As Westley, Zimerman, and Patton point out, the central paradox is that shifting a system in any way requires a shift in the self—a fundamentally different meeting point between the self and the system. They write, "in connecting to the world in even the smallest ways, we engage its complexity and we begin to shift the pattern around us as we ourselves begin to shift." [287] For Omer, *autopoietic capability* can therefore be understood as a leader's ability to "self-organize in ways that presence the whole in the part." [288] It is the capability to recreate oneself, to recognize one's embeddedness in the very challenge they seek to shift—to transform

self and system while maintaining an essential continuity.[289] Like the adaptive cycle, autopoiesis gestures to the ever-present rhythms of birth, death, and renewal.

Finally, Omer's *collaborative capability* can be understood as a leader's ability to act creatively with others. This ability allows one to build a shared sense of understanding and vision that unifies distinct perspectives and distinct worlds. Implicit in collaborative capability is accountability. Omer writes, "deep collaboration requires deep accountability for one's impact on others, regardless of one's intentions."[290]

Like others in this section, Omer's complexity capabilities underscore that complexity itself cannot be engaged with more information but requires holistic development and a capacity to be with uncertainty.[291] Yet, in reflecting on the academic literature on systems leadership, Laszlo identifies that the importance of a leader's state—the inner dimension that exudes through their *being*—is often left out.[292] Otto Scharmer, Betty Sue Flowers, Peter Senge, and Jacob Jaworski agree that the deeper dimensions of change are largely unexplored, a blind spot that they argue, "concerns not the what and how—not what leaders do and how they do it—but the who: who we are and the inner place or source from which we operate, both individually and collectively." [293] Placing emphasis on ongoing learning and development, deepening integration of perspective, and embodied relationship helps to animate and bring to life these system's approaches in a critical way. They help to elucidate the complexity of the human being and gesture toward the ongoing learning journey that helps build capacity. Laszlo writes:

> The expression of systems beings and systems living is an integration of our full human capacities, the expression of an evolving humanity. It involves rationality with reverence to the mystery of life, listening beyond words, sensing with our

whole being, and expressing our authentic self in every moment of our life. The journey from systems thinking, to systems being is a transformative learning process of expansion of consciousness—from awareness to embodiment. [294]

Leading in Uncertainty

Good questions do not have answers at all, let alone right or wrong ones.

~ Nora Bateson[295]

The nature of complexity and the adaptive processes that engender evolutionary change at any scale, be it personal change or whole systems change, presses a leader against the limits of knowledge to face the ubiquitous presence of *uncertainty*.[296] Uncertainty refers to a state of *unknown unknowns*; a genuine inability for an organism to ascertain where, when, how, or why an event has occurred or will occur in the future.[297] As described by David Smith and David Washburn, one's experience of uncertainty has both an *informational component* as in a lack or deficit of knowledge, and a *subjective component* that can be described as a feeling of not knowing.[298] Such subjectivity in the face of messy unknowns, write Smith and Washburn, demonstrates that the state of uncertainty is both a characteristic of complex contexts, and a deeply personal experience—one knows when they do not know.[299] An irreducible fact of reality, uncertainty arises when simplifications and assumptions of prediction cannot be made because the underlying structure or behaviors are in flux.[300] Because organisms learn and adapt to their environment through the accumulation of information, uncertainty presents a considerable adaptive challenge. Yoav Bar-Anan, Timothy Wilson, and Daniel Gilbert claim that this kind of challenge can result in the perception

of uncertainty as an aversive state, leading organisms and leaders alike, to reduce, avoid,

or otherwise cope with pervasive uncertainty in ways that are both adaptive and

maladaptive.[301]

Recent studies that demonstrate the impacts of uncertainty on physicians' well-

being, for example, show that prolonged ambiguity can lead to increased frustration and

anxiety, a sense of powerlessness, and loss of control.[302] More generally, the uncertainty

rendered by the current COVID-19 pandemic has been shown to significantly increase

anxiety and depression in the general population. Jo Daniels and Hannah Rettie

identified that common adaptive coping strategies included acceptance and taking

actions to improve the situation like seeking out support, while maladaptive strategies

showed tendencies toward self-distraction, denial, behavioral disengagement, and (least

common) retreating into religion, thus making it clear that not all people handle

uncertainty with the same degree of tolerance.[303]

Notably, a study by Bar-Anan, Wilson, and Gilbert refutes the premise that

uncertainty is always a state that people seek to reduce or avoid.[304] Their findings

present a more nuanced view, claiming that uncertainty should be considered an

emotional amplifier. Its presence, they state, "makes unpleasant events more unpleasant,

and pleasant events more pleasant." [305] Subjected to the same information in the form of

five-minute video clips, participants in their study repeated orienting phrases to

themselves as they watched. One group repeated a certainty phrase, "I see what's

happening." The other group held a question, "I'm not sure what's happening." In both

the negative and the positive clips, those that held uncertainty phrases exhibited more

extreme emotional reactions. The authors posit that uncertainty may increase affective

response because its presence can heighten attention, increase curiosity (which in turn increases emotional engagement), and may keep an event accessible long after it ends.[306] Bar-Anon et al. evocatively suggest that "…the psychological effects of uncertainty may have less to do with what people do not know than with what people feel." [307] This study offers a distinct possibility that the way uncertainty is engaged, and the positive or negative narratives that arise in relation to any event, *matter*.

Yet it remains critical to note that coping with complexity and ambiguity does not occur context-free or only at the level of the individual, but rather is largely shaped through cultural and societal perspectives—norms, customs, conventions, rules, and patterns—that result in a collective worldview and a habitual response to not knowing. Such conditions, write Willem Salet, Luca Bertolini, and Mendel Giezen, "empower and enable certain ways of dealing with complexity and uncertainty while blocking others."[308] Uncertainty, write Peter Allen and Jean Boulton has not had a place in the current dominant perspective that is underpinned by the "mechanistic idea that the world is objective, measurable, predictable, and controllable…despite almost overwhelming evidence to the contrary." [309] What has been assumed is that things can be understood by examining their "static endpoint" rather than, for example, investigating the nature of change.[310]

Heisenberg's *uncertainty principle* is a helpful example. Where classical science presupposes that all things can eventually be known, Heisenberg stated that quantum mechanics, in contrast, violates this fundamental premise demonstrating instead the inherent, fluctuating nature of change that limits predictability.[311] As the tenets of quantum science increasingly challenge classical approaches to decision-making,

uncertainty nevertheless continues to be tempered, ignored, or denied, wrapped in thin simplifications and common assumptions.[312]

A renewed focus on uncertainty has stimulated further conversation on how to adequately prepare leaders to thrive in complex conditions. The healthcare literature, for example, is rife with studies that demonstrate the negative impact of ambiguity on physicians, yet most goes little further than to acknowledge that the culture of uncertainty intolerance in medical school, and later, in mentor relationships, must change. "I don't know," writes Ronald Doman, "should be a cornerstone of faculty development programs in all institutions." [313] To do so well, the culture of denial, and "society's quest for perfection" needs be replaced with an "acknowledgment of imperfection and limitation" to normalize experiences of uncertainty.[314] Similar pushes to reconceptualize a learner's relationship to uncertainty in what Mordechai Gordon colorfully describes as "the age of certitude," have been espoused in the fields of leadership, science, and education respectively.[315] Gordon writes, "creating a space for perplexity and uncertainty in our classrooms is crucial for the goal of fostering citizens who are critical and independent thinkers." [316] Such a culture shift would be served by asking open-ended questions, acknowledging and speaking to complexity, probing certainty, and inviting multiple perspectives.[317]

A significantly smaller number of voices suggest the development of *corrective virtues* such as humility, courage, diligence, and curiosity that enable a leader to move with uncertainty rather than against it.[318] Samuel Reis-Dennis, Martha Gerrity, and Gail Geller argue that such virtues would serve, for example, physicians at both extremes of uncertainty tolerance, high and low, who encounter pitfalls in practice.[319] High-tolerance

physicians may become unmotivated to engage in medical scholarship, less interested in seeking assistance, and more likely to "lapse into contented stagnation that results in poor practice." [320] Low uncertainty tolerance, in contrast, may result in a predisposition to simplify data to avoid discomfort (distorted perception), a hesitancy to act, less of an inclination to be forthcoming with patients, and an aversion to new challenges.[321] *Courage*, they explain, guards against the low-tolerance tendency to flee from threats, cultivating instead the inner capacity to lean in and look deeper. *Diligence* presses against the high-tolerance tendency toward complacency, inspiring leaders to remain learners. And an ethos of *curiosity* tempers and engages both high and low uncertainty tolerance individuals, inspiring deep engagement, exploration, and advancement in times of not knowing.[322]

These suggestions align with those espoused in much of the leadership literature where it is common to find lists of capabilities or virtues that would allow for greater efficacy in the face of uncertainty. Few, however, offer any substantive discussion on how such virtues are developed.[323] The few notable exceptions exhibit a bricolage of interdisciplinary approaches and differing worldviews that are braided into their pedagogy—many of which would otherwise be relegated to their respective domains of practice.[324] A handful of examples include arts-based approaches, practice wisdom from the depth, humanistic, and transpersonal psychologies, transformative learning theory, adult development, contemplative and spiritual technologies, and Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being. Together, such a bricolage may more adequately serve contextually-informed, whole-person learning.

Tacit Knowledge and Intuition

It cannot be overstated that many contemporary challenges are characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). In such circumstances, assert Allen and Boulton:

"We can never sit back and say 'that's it, I know how the system works'…This implies that we are destined and indeed evolved to live always with uncertainty. Certainty only arises for closed systems and correspondingly closed minds. …Our game is to try to counter it with actions and innovations that actually, whether we mean to or not, create new uncertainties as we go. This is a never-ending (we hope), multi-level game of creation and response that is far more appealing and interesting than the closed, controlled and predictable world that we have believed was where science had led us. [325]

As contemporary leaders square up to a shifting complexity landscape, it is also becoming known that ideas, strategies, and decisions cannot be produced, nor can they succeed through rational strategies alone.[326] This section holistically explores knowledge acquisition and application, looking to the literature that explores the tacit, intuitive, or lesser-known and trusted forms of knowledge.

Tacit Knowledge: How Do We Know When We Don't Know?

In rapidly shifting circumstances, individuals are pressed to make reflex-like decisions, often without adequate time to prepare and limited knowledge. To do so quickly and maintain a sense of intentionality, Jens Zinn claims *trust* is required.[327] An essential aspect of a much larger concept, *self-trust*, in this case, is defined by Trudy Grovier as "a sense of one's own competence especially as regards control, judgment,

and adaptability; and self-confidence and hopefulness about the future as it involves oneself." [328]

This begs the question, without any certainty to speak of, where does such self-trust find anchor? Zinn claims that trust in oneself emerges in relationship to one's *tacit knowledge* or "underlying experience-based knowledge." [329] Tacit knowledge is what Dorothy Leonard and Sylvia Sensiper refer to as the "capacity of the human mind to make sense of a lifetime's collection of experience and to connect patterns from the past to the present and future." [330] All knowledge, they claim, has a tacit dimension. While related to information, true knowledge is subjective, linked to meaningful behavior, and internalized over time through experience.[331] Notably, Alex Bennet and David Bennet link knowledge to one's potential or actual capacity to take effective action in uncertain situations.[332] Moreover, while *explicit knowledge* is that which can be consciously drawn from and expressed through the exchange of information, tacit knowledge resides beneath the level of awareness, rendering it not readily describable.[333] Bennet and Bennet caution that its deeper placement does not make it necessarily inaccessible but that one may not be able to articulate why or how they know what they know.[334] Knowledge, both explicit and tacit, can be thought to live on a spectrum of awareness from completely unconscious to fully conscious.[335]

Useful to this study, Bennet and Bennet take a multi-dimensional and transdisciplinary approach to the study of tacit knowledge, gathering data from neuroscience, evolutionary biology, psychology, competency theory, and knowledge management. They argue that tacit knowledge dwells and expresses itself through four primary sources or aspects: *embodied, intuitive, affective*, and *spiritual*.[336]

Embodied or *somatic* tacit knowledge is kinesthetic and sensory, stored in the body in neuronal patterns. These neuronal patterns represent knowledge that has become "embedded within long-term working memory where they become automatic when needed, but lost to consciousness." [337] For example, a master guitar player may be able to lose themselves in complex technique but still not be able to explain what they are doing or how they are doing it to a beginner. The physical senses can transmit knowledge. For example, the smell of burning communicates fire, which would convey urgency to take some form of action.

Intuitive tacit knowledge write Bennet and Bennet is "the sense of knowing coming from inside an individual that may influence decisions and actions; yet the decision-maker or actor cannot explain why or how the action taken is the right one." [338] They tie this form of knowledge transmission to the *unconscious*, where information in the form of memories, concepts, and other mental constructs remains inaccessible to awareness. Bennet and Bennet explicitly state that this form of tacit knowledge requires leaders to tap into the wisdom of the unconscious mind if they are to move in complexity effectively. Notably, knowledge of this kind is formed over time through experience, contemplation, and unconscious processing and is tied to experiential learning. "Intuitive tacit knowledge," they assert, "is the result of continuous learning through experience." [339]

Affective tacit knowledge includes those feelings that are *preconscious*, that is, those that are not expressed and named as emotions. Neuroscience recognizes that information produced from external stimuli moves through the amygdala where it receives an emotional "tag." [340] Bennet and Bennet argue that stimuli that are perceived

as life-threatening provokes that part of the brain to take control, prompting quick decisions and actions before one may be aware of the threat. This form of tacit knowledge is so central to the brain's information processing that it is directly tied to other forms of tacit knowledge. They explain, "when an individual thinks about recent occurrences like an argument or a favorite sports team losing in the Rose Bowl, feelings are aroused." [341] For them, feelings as a form of knowledge can lead to effective action, playing an "informing role in decision-making," and, "producing insights in a non-linguistic manner." [342]

Perhaps lesser known and lesser still acknowledged, spiritual tacit knowledge, describe Bennet and Bennet, pertains to what they call, "matters of the soul," which they describe as representing the "animating principles of human life." [343] They write:

> While there is a knowing related to spiritual knowledge similar to intuition, this knowing does not include the experiential base of intuition, and it may or may not have emotional tags. The current state of the evolution of our understanding of spiritual knowledge is such that there are insufficient words to relate its transcendent power, or to define the role it plays in relationship to other tacit knowledge. Nonetheless, this area represents a form of higher guidance with unknown origin.[344]

Bennet and Bennet offer the example of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of *flow*, where one enters a subjective state of complete absorption, able to "channel or streamline information" otherwise outside of one's normative experience.[345] This concept can be likened to *ecstasis*—an experience that moves a person outside of the confines of the familiar self into a place where more information (more feeling, more creativity, more perspective) becomes available.[346]

This premise finds some resonance with the theory and approach afforded to 4E cognition which asserts that thinking is *embodied, enacted, embedded, and extended*.[347] It is embodied because cognitive processes are distributed throughout the network of the entire organism. Such organisms are *embedded* in larger socio-cultural and environmental systems that shape and impact the individual agent. It is *enactive* because such a relationship between an organism and its environment is mutually shaping. And finally, it is *extended* because such interrelationship creates integrative connections between an organism and the tools or objects in the environment. For example, a musician could be thought to "offload" their expertise into the instrument they are playing.[348] Though there is not the space in this dissertation to fully do these concepts justice, such thinking offers a critical shift away from mechanistic input-output knowledge models, to one that is, suggest Dylan Van Der Schyff et al., "distributed across the entire body of a living system and its surrounding environment, and as continuous with the fundamental adaptive biological processes required for survival." [349]

Useful to this study, all forms of knowledge acquisition and exchange, taken together, serve to put aspects of human knowing in relationship to a more inclusive, even transcendent, perspective, and demonstrates the anomalous, integrated, and fully embodied nature of knowledge. Zinn argues that the common dichotomy placed between *rational* and *irrational* processes "neglects a whole range of everyday approaches to risk that are neither completely rational nor irrational." [350] These *in-between* functions, many claim, while increasing in importance, remain difficult to measure and harder still to explain.[351]

Intuition

Intuition has long perplexed and fascinated researchers, educators, psychologists, neuroscientists, and practitioners alike, and is often bandied about in the literature as a catch-all for knowledge that arises precognitively. Yet, in taking a transdisciplinary approach, it becomes clear that the concept, function, and importance of intuition remains sloppy and convoluted across various fields. Lisa Osbeck argues that "the conceptual development around this notion remains meager and problematic, suffering from vague and multiple uses of the term, association with diverse experimental phenomena, and from minimal effort to integrate those in a consistent way." [352]

Contributing to its ambiguity, intuition in a myriad of studies manifests itself along a continuum.[353] On the one extreme, intuition as conceptualized by scientific psychology, for example, was thought to be an aberrant mental illness, or denigrated mental function, operating "on a lower plane of intellectuality." [354] Osbeck, in summarizing William McDougall, wrote that such a function was "exhibited by some who have limited powers of abstract thinking, most notably women, young children, and dogs." [355] Indeed, a review of twenty-four leadership and management texts published between 1974 and 1977 revealed that only three claimed intuition should not be ignored, and those only lightly with no further development of the subject. Drawing on Ray Brown, Issack Thomas offers that one possible reason that intuition may have gotten such little attention lies with its antithetical nature to the scientific method. He writes that intuition "cannot be produced at will," nor can it be effectively "probed" through a positivist lens.[356] Like tacit knowledge, intuition is too often defined in contrast to what it is not—that is, to explicit, or logical thinking.[357]

Such sentiments reverberate in more contemporary approaches to intuitive decision-making, rendering them at their worst fundamentally untrustworthy, and resulting in decisions that John Patton writes are "instantaneous, purely emotional, and often irrational." [358] More subtle, but still reflecting partiality, is the idea that intuition is that which, Patton continues, "complements and augments thorough analytical reasoning" by storing and helping to habituate lessons of past experience.[359] In exploring leadership decision-making, for example, Herbert Simon famously contended that "intuition and judgment are simply analysis frozen into habit." [360] Such a perspective, though partially true, only serves to elevate the intuition to a mechanistic "processing system" that acts in parallel (but not in unity) with the conscious mind—whose primary role is to augment or support rationality.[361] For Viktor Dorfler and Fran Ackermann, intuition has not featured heavily in the management literature specifically because it is conflated with judgment.[362] Even Einstein, whose love and trust of the imagination is well-known, wrote that the "intuition is the summation of prejudices acquired up to age eighteen." [363]

On the other end of the spectrum, intuition is seen as a foundational part of all cognitive activity, akin in many ways to Bennet and Bennet's four aspects of tacit knowledge. Emerging studies in neuroscience demonstrate intuition to be, writes Charles Laughlin, "the very nature of our brain, and its modes of producing our world of meaningful experience." [364] It is the function that allows for a complex sorting and storing of information through experience in such a way that it becomes easily retrievable again.[365] Through it, writes Thomas, "knowing can occur without conscious awareness or rational thinking […] a pattern is presented as a complete whole without

our being able to explain how it arrived." [366] It moves free of boundaries and touches the meaning or significance of something—the deeper coherence in complexity, without relying on an analytical process.[367]

Influential to the contemporary psychological understanding of the intuitive function, Jung, in his early explorations of spiritualism, believed intuition afforded a person a profound gift: the ability to see, hear and feel things that lie outside of the boundaries of normative experience.[368] This early fascination, suggests Nathalie Pilard, "allowed Jung to turn esoteric intuitions into psychological intuitions, or better to make intuition alone a major psychological component of his future psychology." [369] A central psychoanalytic method in Jung's psychology, *active imagination* details a process by which the conscious self opens to, and engages with, the contents of the unconscious through the imagination.[370] Jung believed that intuition was that which oriented and directed perception to the images that stirred beneath the level of awareness.[371] One of four of Jung's psychological functions, Marie-Hélène Raidl and Todd Lubart write that he eventually defined intuition as an "unconscious, internally-oriented mode of perception, as opposed to sensation which he viewed as a conscious, externally oriented mode of perception that relies on one's sensory organs (e.g., visual or auditory perception)." [372]

In reviewing the philosophical and psychological orientations to intuition, Osbeck argues that unified across the literature is the understanding that intuition "involves unconscious processes but that it provides some form of cognitive acquisition that is direct, epistemologically irreducible, and unjustifiable." [373] For Marie-Helene Raidl and Todd Lubart, consistencies across domains reveal intuition as that which

generally connects disparate elements of information. While the nature of the information and the method in which it comes into play remains unclear, they argue the intuitive function may unearth "a pattern or coherence that is [either] unconsciously perceived in the outside world, or a stored pattern that gets activated, or a new structure of information that is constructed and gives rise to meaning." [374] Such a short but dense review reveals just how difficult it is to utter the word intuition and have it mean something clear, concise, and consistent. Yet, for many intuition is worthy of greater consideration in times of not knowing and warrants a focused effort to arrive at a more fully developed, transdisciplinary, and integrated theory.

Seeing Wholeness, Touching Coherence: Deep Intuition as Perception

> There is an inner wisdom that has long been lost. Not only has it been long lost but when it pokes its head into our awareness, we have all learned to shun it, deny it, and to discount it. That inner wisdom is not a book, as our present intellect would have us believe. It is not a bank of knowledge, or a storehouse of formulas. It is a living dimension of our very selves, and in its livingness, it is in the moment, so that in order for us to tap that ancient deep inner wisdom we must engage it directly in its aliveness, we must be willing to be present with it on its terms, we must be willing to let it teach us its language rather than demanding that it speak in our own.

~ E. S. Gallegos[375]

For this study, intuition as it is presented in the Research Problem refers to *deep intuition*. Where *shallow intuition* may gesture to one's ability to quickly retrieve and employ stored information from past experiences, deep intuition remains unconstrained by experience and can touch or sense coherence in what may be emerging into awareness. Such a definition draws on Stephen Gallegos' conceptualization of intuition

who, like Jung, believed it to be an internally oriented mode of perception. Gallegos

defines the four aspects, or *windows of knowing,* as thinking, sensing, feeling, and

imagery.[376] Although the first three align with Jung's four functions of consciousness, in

the last Gallegos diverges from Jung to replace intuition with imagery. Notably,

Gallegos believed intuition moves through any of the four windows, warranting its place

outside of the four psychological functions. For some, intuition moves through feeling,

and for others, through physical sensation. For still others, like Bennet and Bennet's four

aspects of tacit knowledge, intuition can draw on all four windows of knowing

simultaneously.[377] Because, as Bortoft asserts, "logic is analytical, whereas meaning is

evidently holistic," deep intuition becomes a way to perceive wholeness, to arrive at a

comprehensive understanding that cannot be reduced to logic alone.[378] It draws on

sensing, feeling, and imagining together.

In explicating Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's scientific method, Bortoft outlines

two primary modes of consciousness.[379] The dominant *analytic mode*, as has been

established, is that which sees parts as objects; it is verbal, sequential, and logical. In

contrast, the *receptive mode* "emphasizes the sensory and perceptual instead of the

rational categories of action mode." [380] It is, posits Bortoft, nonverbal, nonlinear,

holistic, and intuitive. Positivist science, by focusing on the external appearances and

measurable qualities of objects—a thing's *primary qualities*—will never allow for the

immediate and holistic impression of its *secondary qualities*, which cannot be

represented in any direct way but rather require sensing into with the receptive mode of

consciousness.[381]

Goethe sought a more cohesive and holistic approach to observation that drew from both the analytic and receptive modes of consciousness at once. "Goethe's method," writes Bortoft, "was to extend and deepen his experience of the phenomenon until he reached that element of the phenomenon which is not given externally to sense experience." [382] Intuitive perception is akin to touching the whole in a given part—to see or sense the universal in the particular. The *authentic whole*, he claims, can be reached by moving into a deeper, more intimate, and receptive (intuitive) relationship with what is being observed, rather than viewing it at a distance.[383] This way of receiving another is a highly aesthetic act of intimacy that Buhner calls *non-physical touching,* a "merging of sensory mediums." [384] The aesthetics of such nonphysical touch result in *feeling* as distinct from emotion. Feeling, he writes, is a "much more comprehensive phenomenon…it includes an object of attention of some sort, a nonphysical touching of that object, all the emotions that arise in response to that touching, and all the thoughts, experiences, and memories that you have about that particular thing (or any similar things in your past experience) that you have touched." [385] This way of intuiting evokes a "complex grouping or gestalt of responses," altogether physiological, emotional, spiritual, and psychological.[386]

Artful Leadership

The corridors of intuitive perception begin to lead this inquiry out of the center of leadership and decision-making literature, and into the purview of the poet, the artist, the magician, and the mystic. This section explores the literature that attempts to combine leadership development with known principles and practices in the arts,

arguing for the aesthetic dimension of leadership development. Throughout, it becomes clear there is a small but emerging consensus that contexts beset by uncertainty require a shift in leadership praxis from leadership certainty to leadership-as-artistry. Houston, for example, claims that the inadequacies of complexity leadership today cannot be confined to a lack of skill or motivation but rather from a lack of resourcefulness, which she describes as a narrow or outdated "field of awareness" that limits a leader's ability to act.[387] Jones offers the perspective that leadership in uncertainty requires the humility to resist having all the answers and instead become adept at holding ever greater questions. He writes, "much of a leader's work today is not about playing the notes, but listening for what is emerging in the space between." [388]

The second half of this section follows the aesthetic into relevant literature on beauty. It briefly positions beauty as a difficult-to-define, yet powerful orienting principle then goes into beauty's transformative impact. This final section closes with an exploration of beauty's potential for catalyzing new cycles of learning.

A Leadership Aesthetic

Nancy Adler identifies five trends that have necessitated a shift in leadership praxis.[389] These trends include rapid and accelerating global interconnectedness, the domination of market forces, increasingly complex contexts, advancements in technology, and an acute yearning for societal significance.[390] For many, a profound longing to contribute in meaningful ways and to show up with what Gary Hemel calls "the very essence of our humanity" intact is beginning to eclipse motivations for mere monetary achievement.[391] These trends, Adler argues, upend discrete domain-specific

strategy implementation, clear planning, and linear reasoning. They press leaders to acquire skills grounded in collaboration, improvisation, intuition-based innovation, design-thinking, and a leadership aesthetic that orients to possibility rather than predictability.[392] Houston refers to such leaders as *social artists*—those who can enhance and draw forth human capacity in complex contexts by bringing "new ways of thinking, being and doing to social challenges." [393]

It becomes incumbent on individuals, organizations, and whole societies, many argue, to allow the poet to influence the pragmatist. While this remains a minority view, evidence of the future of leadership education reveals promising advancements in an aesthetic direction. For a few examples, Adler cites the development of numerous arts-based MBA programs, blended art and leadership executive education initiatives, shifting recruitment priorities (from MBAs to MFAs), and new organizational development strategies that prioritize creativity and collaboration.[394] Even still, Steven Taylor points out that while the phrase "the art of leadership" is becoming ever-more fashionable, little attention is given to its implications.[395]

Useful to this exploration is the distinction between *craft* and *art*. In citing David Barry and Stefan Meisiek, Taylor points out that the quality of a person's craft is rooted in the accumulative knowledge of past experience. It entails a "disciplined process of drawing on a variety of skills to produce a desired end result." [396] The destination is therefore known, and the skill to arrive there honed over years of practice. In contrast, Taylor offers, art—or in this case *artistry*, is less about destinations than it is about departures.[397] Art is a process that brings everyone involved, including the artful leader, to a place they have never been before.

While it is a falsehood to claim that one's imagination and creative skill are not necessary for their craft, it could be said that leadership artistry relies entirely on such imaginative faculties. In reflecting on the "uncertainty, calamity, and crises that define twenty-first-century society," Adler argues leadership artistry requires the reclamation of what she calls the artist's "first essential skill," the ability to *see*.[398] For Adler, this kind of imaginative seeing partners with science and logic while simultaneously acknowledging the *unknowables* or mysteries of life, rather than life's certainties. Such an approach allows one to see "reality accurately, yet differently," equipping leaders with the insight to transform or create from a fresh perspective.[399] Jones speaks to the conceptual space that he believes new leaders must inhabit. He writes:

> In times of uncertainty, we need to look to the spaces between for order and coherence—to gifts, beauty, grace, voice, and wholeness—what may be called the *commons of the imagination.* Awakening to the presence of the commons in both the person and the public imagination is our new art form. It is also the leader's new work. [400]

Such artistic perception has been described as the capacity to sense the underlying essence that Buhner describes as the *secret kinesis of things*.[401] It can open one, writes Frederico Garcia Lorca, to *duende* which he describes poetically as "the spirit of the earth:" a force that baptizes the seeker with "dark water," that "kindles the blood," that "gives a sense of refreshment unknown until then," and is "truly alive" with meaning.[402] The root of creativity and the vitality that imbues power in all artistry, it was this kind of insight that, like Adler, Lorca believed would bring change to old form, suffusing a person with "totally unknown and fresh sensations." [403] Such a receptive state of consciousness must be sought out through what Buhner calls an "attentive

noticing of the soul," and Hillman describes as a "simultaneous knowing and loving…a third possibility between mind and world." [404] In doing so, everyday leaders become artists, tasked with transforming what Adler describes as the 21st century's "long experiment with ugliness" back into beauty.[405] She writes, "Art invites us, as leaders in any domain, to open our eyes and our minds to the beauty camouflaged within everyday ordinariness and to transform what is back into what could be." [406]

It is no surprise that Adler's reflections on artistry and beauty come as a wedded pair. Inclusive of a vast number of derivative forms, the field of aesthetics is a branch of Western philosophy that has long grappled with notions of taste, beauty, judgment, ethics, and art. Deriving from the Greek *aisthetikos* meaning "sensitive, sentient, and pertaining to sense perception," its inquiry spans both the subjective evaluation of beauty as an attribute (*artistic judgment*) and one's internal, affective experience.[407] While artistic judgment can give rise to a dispassionate critique of exterior appearance, aesthetic experience examines the interior, intuitive, and sensory response to an event, a being, or an object. Thus, Adler's artistic capacity to see invites a double vision—an inner and an outer gaze, at once analogical and analytical. This kind of artistry, claims Jones, is untethered from the field of fine arts and from societies' fickle aesthetic judgments. To hold the double vision is to inhabit a "third way of knowing," or, as Jones suggests in drawing on David Bohm, a "subtle intelligence that seeks the wholeness behind all things, and invites into awareness whatever might normally seem vague, ambiguous, or unclear." [408] It is a practice that would allow one to witness and act from, as Adler and Andre Delbecq encourage, "the power of the beautiful whole." [409]

Beauty: A Mixed Bag

> I am not one of those who neglect the body in order to make of it a sacrificial offering for the soul, since my soul would thoroughly dislike being served in such a fashion.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke [410]

The perennial quest to discover what exactly constitutes beauty has long bewitched philosophers, artists, feminists, evolutionary biologists, physicists, mathematicians, architects, and cosmeticians alike. And yet, Steven Taylor quips, we are "no closer to reaching any sort of definitive answer [than] when the Greeks took it up thousands of years ago." [411] Reflected in the literature from philosophy to psychology, physics, and humanities, this time-worn variability presents itself in mixed arguments—from concerns of elitism, bigotry, judgment, superficiality, and materialism that arise out of what Nancy Etcoff describes as modernity's *cult of beauty*, to notions of virtuous beauty that extoll quality, essence, universal harmony, ethics, and aliveness.[412] Humanities' fluctuating disposition toward beauty, suggests Etcoff, is "entwined with our deepest conflicts surrounding flesh and spirit." [413] While Platonic thought centered on beauty as the core sensibility of the cosmos, the most common contemporary response to the study of beauty is apathy, believing its power to bring nothing or little to bare on whatever the subject may be at hand.[414] Etcoff writes:

> Many intellectuals would have us believe that beauty is inconsequential. Since it explains nothing, solves nothing, and teaches us nothing, it should not have a place in intellectual discourse. And we are supposed to breathe a collective sigh of relief. After all, the concept of beauty has become an embarrassment. But there is something wrong with this picture. Outside the realm of ideas, beauty rules. [415]

Similarly, Frederick Turner concludes that the Western conception of beauty has been sidelined to the "realm of the subjective and private" while society attempts to pass on cognitive and moral values alone. Beauty has become reduced to a "leisure activity, a decorative hobby, a status symbol, a narcotic form of entertainment, or worst of all," Turner argues, "a consolation prize for those whom the educational system has failed to teach serious knowledge and skills." [416] John O'Donohue wrote that Hillman, in characteristic fury, called modernity's assessment of beauty a "naïve" approach that represses its truth, diminishing it to the pretty, simple, pleasing, mindless, and easy.[417] "Sadly, whether from resentment, fear, or blindness," O'Donohue agrees, "…beauty is often refused, repudiated, or cut down to the size of our timid perceptions." [418] Some contend that without beauty, modernity finds itself trapped in a poverty of perspective, entranced by the artificial, tawdry, and mechanistic that does little to inspire creative action. By considering beauty not as an attribute but as in the Greek *aithesis*— a gasp, or breathing in of the world, then, Hillman argues, beauty is "one of the most repressed and taboo concepts in our secularized and materialistic times." [419] And yet, as Jeanette Winterson asserts, "neither art nor beauty are optional in a sane society." [420]

What Can We Make of Beauty?

Plato believed beauty to be not just a subjective evaluation but to have a *common character*—a form or universal principle that can be recognized by a purified mind.[421] This proposition is not unfounded. Multiple contemporary studies on the visual complexity of art have revealed that the human eye consistently finds beautiful shapes in the margin between chaos and order—a statistical data point intimated by Ralph Waldo

Emerson when he writes, "the secret of ugliness consists not in irregularity, but in being uninteresting." [422] Meanwhile Turner, in pursuit of an evolutionary aesthetic theory, saw the arts not as arbitrary but as humanity's natural and biological inheritance—the result of living in and evolving alongside an aesthetic universe. He argues that one's experience of beauty arises out of a profound and intuitive recognition of the underlying organizing pattern of the universe. He concludes, "Beauty in this view is the highest integrative level of understanding and the most comprehensive capacity for effective action. It enables us to go with, rather than against, the deepest tendency or theme of the universe, to be able to model what will happen and adapt to or change it." [423]

Remarkably, many in the hard sciences would agree. Physicist and mathematician Ben MacArthur indicates that beauty and truth do indeed share a connection, elevating the attraction to visual form to something more than superficial cultural conditioning.[424] In a study that measured the brain activity of mathematicians asked to judge the beauty of formulae, it was revealed that such perceptions of beauty stimulated the medial orbitofrontal cortex—an emotional center of the brain that is equally aroused by music and the visual arts. More importantly, the participants did not need to cognitively understand the equations for their brains to register beauty. MacArthur suggests that this connection to an underlying elegance of form also represents a deeply held belief in physics, that you can register truth by beauty and simplicity. He argues that many of the "great discoveries in physics have been fundamentally guided by a faith in beauty as a guide." [425] On the other hand, MacArthur further proposes that the field of biology sees beauty not in elegant simplicity but in the endless, "here-and-now diversity of nature." [426] The intricacy and interconnection of

vast, complex ecosystems offer physicists an opportunity to temper premature simplifications, while an elegant mathematical equation can remind biologists to seek beauty in coherence. Either way, MacArthur confirms, beauty can and should "play an important role in science." [427]

And yet shallow conceptions of physical beauty can and have impacted many in damaging and oppressive ways. Feminist scholarship, for instance, has long contested the relationship between judgments of beauty and the female body. These judgments unfold both as a tyrannical and fundamentally disempowering dynamic in women's lives, and as a source of agency or pleasure. Such debates have given rise to a binary or dualistic frame that privileges cause and effect logic that Toni Ingram calls the *oppression/empowerment dichotomy* in feminist discourse.[428] To move beyond dualistic thinking and reframe the field's discursive understanding of beauty, Ingram argues that beauty would best be conceptualized as an emergent process or phenomenon that arises in and through continually shifting relationships. In this way, beauty would be not a fixed quality "ascribed to bodies and identities" but rather an affective, emergent process "grounded in a politics of entanglement." [429] Such a reframe looks to shift how beauty is understood and engaged, away from good/bad, subject/object binaries to beauty as becoming.

Beauty that Transforms: The Soul's Aesthetic

Consideration of beauty's connection to both truth and goodness is what John Levi Martin describes as an "orienting, analytic scheme" explored in philosophy, social theory, and psychology alike, dating far back into antiquity.[430] This triad has been

framed in a variety of ways including as a triad of reason, the tripartition of the human

soul, universal principles, or as cultural value spheres.[431] Martin claims that what

remains "most fundamental" is that beauty, truth, and goodness form a "triadic structure

of human engagement with the world." [432] Wilber defines *beauty* in this light as the

aesthetic and subjective domain of the self; *goodness* as the realm of ethics, morals, and

justice or the domain of the intersubjective; and *truth*, to objective truth—the

"dispassionate truth" that transcends one's ego, social affiliation, or religious doctrine.[433]

The conceptualization of beauty as an emergent phenomenon would resonate

with the poet John Keats who famously equated truth with beauty. His work exemplified

the Romantic impulse to infuse reality with the vitality of the imagination. For him,

beauty both exists concretely as the essence of beautiful things—in trees, flowers, rivers,

and birds—and emerges through one's inward experience of those things. Beauty is

therefore the meeting place between the tangible world and one's imagination.[434] Ziaul

Haque and Nazneen Rahman assert that this meeting invites one to fully accept and

engage in life's pleasures and pains, and to seek meaning and therefore pleasure in life's

transient intensity. A beautiful experience is true in the sense that it consequently

increases a felt sense of aliveness, regardless of whether that sensation is judged "good"

or "bad." [435] Paradoxically, Wenchu Zhang suggests that for Keats beauty contained

destruction, and is produced in an effort to confront life's terror and cruelties.[436]

A deceivingly simple statement from Hillman underscores an analogous

proposition worth exploring in this research. He writes, "the soul is born in beauty and

feeds on beauty, requires beauty for its life." [437] These profound words, while also poetic

and enigmatic, serve to place beauty back into the center of the psyche, connecting the

aesthetic with the soul and therefore with the sacred dimension of experience. "Psyche,"

he claims, "is beautiful," and creative actions taken from such a deep place are always

"marked by imagination and beauty." [438] In this light, beauty can be conceived of as both

a means and an end. Through the taking in of beauty, Moore explains, one opens

themselves "to the power of things to stir the soul." [439] The soul reveals its passionate

nature, both affected by beauty and vulnerable to it.

Deriving from the Latin root *pati*, which means to suffer, opening to the soul's

passion requires, as Andreas Weber argues, a deep surrender to "a bodily existence that

is never truly at peace." [440] The experience of aliveness is predicated on the fact that

"within itself, life is already carrying death" and, therefore, to enliven is to make the

"conscious choice to abide in the face of terror." [441] For O'Donohue, this fundamental

uncertainty requires the courage to know beauty through its opposite. He explains,

"Beauty is the sister of all that is broken, damaged, stunted, and soiled. She will not be

confined in some untouchable realm where she can enjoy a one-sided perfection with no

exposure to risk, doubt, and pain. Beauty dwells in the palace of broken tenderness." [442]

Such perspectives on beauty and truth demand attention to what is—the inner

and outer sensations and events that comprise the present. This perspective begins to

chip away at any vestige of beauty's superficiality in contemporary thought. Keats, like

others, believed beauty and melancholy to "dwell in the same temple," gesturing to the

transience of life, and the certainty of death, which is the ultimate truth. Beauty without

the passion of the heart—the rage, melancholy, sorrow, and loss that accompany full

living—is, according to Hillman, analogous to living in an anesthetized fog. [443]

The differentiation of art, morals, and science has been thought to be the defining feature of modernity, "responsible," argues Wilber, "for the rise of liberal democracy, the end of slavery, the growth of feminism, and the staggering advances in the medical sciences…" [444] Compellingly, Wilber makes the argument that such efforts to differentiate what he calls the "Big Three" has gone too far, resulting in "dissociation, fragmentation, and alienation." [445] A growing emphasis on scientific materialism and rationalism began to sequester and denigrate the other spheres, leading to rampant reductionistic thought and behavior, divorced from the interior, individual, and collective life. Beauty and goodness, both exiled to the arts and to religion respectively, were unable to bring their particular intelligence to world affairs. For Wilber, good leadership would be informed through the integration of the interior subjective and intersubjective experience, "…interiors," he writes, "that are just as real and just as important as the exteriors themselves." [446]

Beauty as Affect

Though little attention has been given to the psychology of beauty by emotion theorists, Thomas Armstrong and Brian Detweiler-Bedell argue that beauty is a fundamentally emotional experience.[447] They draw a useful contrast between the pretty and the beautiful. *Beauty*, they establish, is able "to create a psychologically novel truth out of a particularly demanding object or experience." [448] *Pretty* things, on the other hand, can be defined as superficially pleasing, with simple and familiar attributes that are processed by the mind with ease, are quickly understood, and adhere to conventional rules of aesthetic judgment. They write, "pretty, fluently processed stimuli lack

complexity and hence the capacity to inspire an intense aesthetic response." [449] Beauty,

in contrast, elicits what Immanuel Kant called a *feeling state* that draws the mind toward

potential, possibility, and meaning—an experience of beauty that he called

purposiveness without purpose.[450] Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell continue:

> Beautiful objects resist fluent processing, thwarting conceptual understanding
> while nevertheless offering the prospect of such understanding. Although we
> may not understand a beautiful object (insofar as its features do not come in a
> familiar bundle), we sense that perhaps we could and that such understanding
> would be particularly meaningful to us. [451]

The feeling state that beauty inspires has ontological and epistemological

implications. Recent findings in the field of neuroscience demonstrate that beauty's

partial revelation is rewarded by the brain. Though comprehension and recognition (of

the pretty), they write, is "undoubtedly pleasant," the processing system of the brain

finds even more enjoyment in the act of seeking out and discovering clues that could

configure eventually into meaningful understanding. Citing Vilayanur Ramachandran

and William Hirstein's work, Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell explain that art

stimulates the mind with as many "potential object clues as possible." [452] They continue,

"beautiful artwork is loaded with featural relationships that suggest the applicability of

concepts, yet fall short of triggering concept application." [453]

In other words, beauty is how one is affected in the presence of something that

evades immediate apprehension. It is the feeling sense of future possibility, an

exhilarating epistemic goal that one senses is profound and meaningful, the pursuit of

which may yield future wisdom. Congruent with Keats' conception of beauty as a

"harbinger of a reality to come," beauty motivates and inspires a person to seek out

novel and complex experiences that could trigger the formation of new cognitive structures.[454] Where experiences of the pretty indicate avoidance of the unknown and the consolidation or confirmation of knowledge one already has, in contrast, beauty "indicates progress toward expanding knowledge." [455]

Recent studies by Jennifer Stellar et al. postulate that experiences of *awe* promote the cultivation of greater *humility*. They define awe as a mixture of wonder and amazement in the presence of something vast that challenges one's current mental schema. Humility is defined as a "complex sentiment about the self in relation to others and the outside environment." [456] Beautiful vistas, experiences in nature, religious awakening, or impactful pieces of art that are considered "vast and conceptually challenging" stimulate awe, which they describe as an epistemological emotion, able to track changes in one's understanding of the external world. Though such encounters are often absorbed as a positive subjective state, moments of awe can induce equal feelings of threat, fear, and discomfort when the gap between one's current mental models and the vastness of what they are experiencing is wide.[457]

The way awe generates humility happens through two primary patterns of appraisal. The first is a *perception of vastness*—physical size, complexity, number, power, or prestige, and the ensuing *need for accommodation*, in which a person is stimulated to revise or accommodate their mental schemas to account for the immensity of what they are witness to.[458] In this way, this study of awe and humility becomes closely aligned with Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell's work on beauty-as-affect, stimulating both ontological and epistemic revision, and promoting in some cases both psychological and physiological well-being and development.[459]

Though few empirical studies have focused on the link between experiences of beauty and moral development, some scholars believe there are indeed links to be found.[460] *Moral development*, initially defined by Jean Piaget and then furthered by Lawrence Kohlberg, can be understood as the sequential transformations in a person's structure of thought in response to increasingly complex ethical dilemmas. Moral judgment is spurred, in part, by the need to take in diverse points of view which expands empathy.[461] Such transformations result in what Kohlberg and Hersh describe as an "increased sense of moral autonomy, and a more adequate conception of justice." [462] Rhett Diessner et al. believe beauty to be a developmental steppingstone, stimulating a felt sense of "unity-in-diversity," which they define as an experience of "various diverse elements that are integrated into unities." [463] This can be generalized, they believe, to extend to human collectives where the need to understand and engage with a diverse human constituency is one of the "greatest moral issues of our historical age." [464]

Conclusion

The literature on beauty is vast and conceptually complex. Its reach extends through a diversity of domains, from the arts to psychology, to mathematics. However, it remains rare within the leadership development literature. An extensive review yields no formalized studies on the phenomenon and effect of following beauty amidst uncertainty. Yet humans are generally moved by beauty, nourished, and inspired, while uncertainty is increasingly pervasive.

Nascent studies, such as Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell's work on beauty as an affect, Anderson and McNeil's study of awe and humility, and Imaginal Transformation

Praxis, are just a few that link such feeling-states with capacity development. Such

pedagogical insights are becoming ever more critical as contexts shift and press fresh,

weighty demands on individuals and collectives.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

This study examines the intersection between leaders' experience of beauty in uncertainty, and their capacity to take creative action. The methodology for the study is Imaginal Inquiry, developed by Aftab Omer and situated within the *participatory paradigm*.

In the participatory worldview, all being and knowing is predicated by an embodied, experiential encounter with the living world. Its emphasis on experience, claim John Heron and Peter Reason, "allows us as human persons to know that we are a part of the whole." [1] It encourages collaboration and holds the view that humanity participates in a wide ecosystem of relationships.[2] This reciprocal participation gives rise to what Heron and Reason describe as a *subjective-objective reality* or knowledge held within an "intersubjective field" of shared, experiential meaning.[3] Perhaps such an entangled perspective can best be grasped through the words of Nora Bateson who suggests: "Biology is history is communication. Anthropology is architecture is agriculture is what some old women have known all their lives." [4]

It feels important to note that such approaches to making whole, according to Reason, are significant in times of peril and division. To make whole, he explains, is also to *make holy*. Within a participatory worldview, he writes, "meaning and mystery are

restored to human experience, so that the world is once again experienced as a sacred

place." [5] Robert Romanyshyn refers to research done in this way as *re-search*, or a

searching again "for something that has already made its claim upon us, something we

have already known, however dimly, but have forgotten." [6] Such is research that enquires

into an ensouled universe, contextualized in a particular time and place.

Congruent with Imaginal Psychology, Imaginal Inquiry starts from the belief that

participative consciousness is one's true nature. With a bricolage of research methods

including active, heuristic, phenomenological, naturalistic, and art-based approaches,

Imaginal Inquiry seeks to inspire the formation of new knowledge that can stir creative

action and catalyze transformation. As such, it necessarily encourages researchers to seek

out knowledge that is heavily restricted within dominant ideologies.[7]

Correspondingly, the Research Problem looks to the link between a leaders'

experience of beauty and their intuition in uncertainty, which traverses transgressive—or

at the very least—contested terrain in dominant theory and practice.[8] It asks in what ways

might beauty serve as a catalyst in promoting leaders' relationship with deep intuition as

an enabling condition for creative action amidst uncertainty? It is this researcher's

hypothesis that engaging beauty can stimulate a felt sense of intimacy with the edge of

what is known; a deepening of experience that can seed creative action.

Such a presupposition arises out of a personal, living inquiry that finds likeness in

Romanyshyn's conceptual framework. *Re-search* he concludes, ushers the researcher into

a gap between the conscious and unconscious, the known and the unknown…into the

terrain of the soul. To assume the role is to be a "border figure" pressed to surrender

one's fixed and determined position and allow oneself to be shaped.[9]

Rainer Maria Rilke offers solid advice for those looking to temper the desire to know all the answers. He wrote, "be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves…" [10] In doing so, it can be certain that the mindsets, biases, and internal structures that constitute one's worldview will be vulnerable to challenge and therefore to change. Rather than correcting for bias, Imaginal Inquiry consequently emphasizes the reflexivity of the researcher to see and speak to biases when they inevitably arise. In this way, validity is not reliant on positivist criteria, but rather is indicated through the researcher's capacity to be authentic.[11]

The research relied on the qualitative experience of a diverse group of educators, practitioners, entrepreneurs, and facilitators (all leaders) working on and within complex challenge domains in North America. Research participants were expected to speak English; have access to a computer or laptop with a camera, sound, and strong internet; be familiar with personal reflection and exploration; and be immersed in a complex vocational environment characterized by uncertainty. Because the methodology applied the expressive arts, participants were screened on their willingness to express themselves through verbal, written, and nonverbal (artistic) mediums.

The data collection occurred over eight weeks and included one individual meeting with each participant and two group meetings conducted using a video conference software called Zoom.[12] Each meeting was spaced approximately two weeks apart, allowing for the participants to reflect between sessions. Each participant was sent journaling prompts through email or text, designed to help them focus on the research topic. The prompts are listed in Appendix 12.

Imaginal Inquiry is structured into four distinct research phases. The first phase, *Evoking Experience*, is designed to invite the participant into the specific experience the research is investigating.[13] The emphasis on experience adds validity within the participatory paradigm by engaging the whole person in the moment.[14] This phase of the research took the form of one-to-one meetings. To evoke their experience of beauty in uncertainty, Deborah Koff-Chapman's *Soul Cards* were used, first inviting participants to choose an image that resonates with their current experience of uncertainty, then of beauty.[15] By guiding participants to be intuitively drawn to an image, each was able to experience uncertainty and beauty in ways both familiar to them and unfamiliar. Working with the imagination, participants were prompted to speak both from the perspective of the image and for themselves while tracking any emerging sensations, emotions, and images. All data was collected in the form of video and audio recordings, as well as written responses when appropriate.

The second phase, *Expressing Experience*, was intended to track participants' responses relative to what had been evoked in the first phase by inviting the participant to express themselves freely with little intervention or direction.[16] This phase spanned two meetings. During Meeting One, each individual was assisted in exploring what their images had evoked through imaginal dialogue and somatic exploration. Participants were asked drawing-out and deepening questions that intended to seek out what felt new or at the edge of the known. The participant was then helped to engage in a dialogue between the two images (uncertainty and beauty), and left with a final invitation to stay close to the feelings, sensations, and images that were stirred between sessions through light journaling.

Meeting Two involved the entire group over three hours. The meeting focused on expressing their experience of beauty and uncertainty; how the two were interacting for them in the moment, and any insights that arose between the sessions. The core experience was twofold. The session began with an expressive arts sequence that allowed participants to explore through verbal, written, and artistic mediums using the chat box in Zoom, group sharing, and on paper using pastels. The artwork the participants produced was not included as a direct data set in the study, but rather served as a way for participants to explore their experience with uncertainty and beauty in a nonlinear, non-rational way.

Secondly, participants were invited into a group process that prompted them to bridge their experience of beauty into an act of creative leadership. Journaling was encouraged at the close of this session and between Meeting Two and Meeting Three. Data was recorded for the Expressing phase through video and audio recordings, written responses in the chat box in Zoom, and between sessions via email or text.

Interpreting Experience is the third phase of Imaginal Inquiry, designed to enable shared understanding and meaning.[17] Interpreting moments for the participants were interspersed throughout Meetings One, Two, and Three. For example, participants were prompted to reflect on moments that were powerful or memorable at the end of Meeting One and to journal what felt effective or ineffective regarding the leadership enactments at the end of Meeting Two. During Meeting Three, participants were asked to share key moments from the previous sessions through short journaling and verbal discussion. Initial learnings from the study were shared, after which participants were invited to take

time to respond and provide any reflection on how the experience of being in the research had affected them overall.

This researcher also engaged in regular intervals of interpretation by identifying key moments in each meeting; reflecting on how I had been affected by such moments; exploring convergences and divergences; and sifting through the theoretical and archetypal resonances that arose throughout Meetings One, Two, and Three.

Interpreting Experience comes closely allied with the final phase of Imaginal Inquiry, *Integrating Experience*.[18] Integration was woven through the study. For example, opening and closing each meeting with a simple ritual act was intended to support integration. Journaling between sessions and creating moments that were appropriate for questions or sharing served to metabolize the experience. Meeting Three was largely dedicated to integration, designed to facilitate a group discussion of any element that did not yet feel addressed. Some time was spent exploring how the personal and collective learnings of the study might carry forward into each participant's personal and professional lives.

Limitations and Delimitations

The research design imposed particular limitations on this study. While the original intention had been to work with participants in person, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift to an online format. Limitations caused by this change included a greater challenge to building group connection, intimacy, and trust; increased distraction and interruption in the home or work environment; and once scheduled, a higher

likelihood that one or more individuals would cancel or drop out of the session due to emergent circumstances at work or at home.[19]

Similarly, imposed time constraints during the group meetings were likely to have reduced freedom of expression. Containing personal shares to a specific amount of time and calling on individuals directly rather than having them volunteer to share might have forced participants to rush or speak, rather than to feel what might be said or done organically.

The eligibility criteria and the way research participants were chosen is another such limitation. A handful of colleagues had been sought out to make appropriate introductions to potential research participants who exhibited high levels of awareness and who were working in complex contexts. Many participants joined because they admired or respected the colleague who had introduced them to the study. In more than one case, the participant had worked intimately with this researcher's colleagues who had familiarized them with the importance of personal reflection in systems change work. It is worth mentioning the possibility of a self-selection bias, born out of interest in the topic and, in some cases, out of admiration for my colleagues. Participants were therefore very amenable to this inquiry and may have been eager to do well. All participants held a similar baseline of understanding about the important connection between personal development and complexity leadership.

Finally, simply holding the awareness that one is being researched can also present a limitation to the data gathered, as it may shift or change how participants respond in the moment.[20]

Delimitations to the study include restrictions or boundaries that were fabricated by the research design. Scripted questions were used in the Evoking phase to draw a clear line between what might be perceived as therapy and what constitutes research.[21] In a more therapeutic or coaching context, attending to each person's unique experience would have necessitated catering questions to what was emerging at the moment, which may have been more effective. Instead, to provide trustworthiness and consistency across each session, the research design worked with scripted questions that did not account for divergent experiences.

The second is that verbal narratives (sharing, journaling, writing in the chat box) were emphasized, rather than somatic or artistic artifacts (video of movement or images of the drawings) during the Expressing sequence. This choice allowed for more consistency in the data analysis and ease with tracking patterns across the data, but it also meant considerable information that could have colored the learnings in a more nuanced way was not captured.

Finally, the images on Deborah Koff-Chapman's decks, while mysterious and highly interpretive, all contained one or more characters in human, human-animal, or human-plant form. The presence of a human figure in the images could have stimulated the imagination toward seeing beauty and uncertainty as relatable, personified figures. This relatability may have skewed the data, making it easier for participants to see and experience beauty as a quality of relationship.

Participants

This section details the process followed to select and recruit research participants, and the contact this researcher had with them prior to data collection. Demographic information, eligibility criteria, and the selection process are explored here, as well as participant motivation, screening, and the obtainment of consent.

Participant Pool and Demographic Data

The participant pool for this study included a diverse group of nine complexity leaders spanning in age, gender, and race across four decades. Eight of the participants lived at the time of the study in Canada and one in the United States. Although the participants hailed from different sectors (both public and private) and domains of practice, it could be said they were all situated within three broad categories.

The first group sought were leaders acting as *systems transition guides*. These were people actively using systems change tools, skills, and processes to engender whole systems shifts in their various issue areas (such as in Indigenous reconciliation, addressing community-wide poverty, or climate change, for example).

The second group could be called the *capacity builders,* or the practitioners who were actively designing curriculum and educating for systems change. These people had a sense that personal development was becoming increasingly important in curriculum design. This group also included those who had been offering inner work for decades but did not feel like they could be explicit about it for fear of being dismissed.

The final group was the *funders* who were poised and willing to give money in support of capacity building. These included those who believed it to be critical and were ready to put their weight behind new leadership initiatives. These three groups shared an expansive curiosity about the link between leaders' state of being, and their capacity to engage complexity. They also engaged in personal development and found themselves enveloped in complex challenges and initiatives.

Participants were additionally screened for their capacity to hold a moderate to high level of psychological awareness, and for their willingness to express both dialogically and artistically. This occurred by first asking the participants what their practices entailed and then by inviting a few reflective questions that provided sufficient insight as to their comfort with personal inquiry. This fluency was important due to the focus of the research question, which sought to explore beauty's relationship to deep intuition and to adequately gather data in the Evoking and Expressing phases of Imaginal Inquiry.

Participant Recruitment and Motivation

This researcher's proximity to all three broad categories of complexity leaders stemmed from work at the Wolf Willow Institute for Systems Learning, an educational institution that inherited the Banff Centre's System's Leadership department when it closed its doors during the COVID-19 pandemic.[22] At the time of this writing, the Institute defined itself as "a community of systems educators, practitioners, guides, activists, and artists that exists to serve those dedicated to building a flourishing future for all. It does this by cultivating the systems leadership capacities needed to affect social

change in a complex world through education, research, and community building." [23] The

Institute also inherited the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience

(WISIR) legacy program, *Getting to Maybe*, which was a four-week social innovation

residency founded by Frances Westley. The Wolf Willow Institute, in part, had

committed to carrying this work forward and maintaining a connection with a large

alumni network of complexity leaders. This researcher consequently maintained a

professional connection to a considerable number of leaders in North America who fit the

ideal participant characteristics, and, in collaboration with colleagues at the time, held an

insider perspective on what motivated and inspired this same group.

     To find participants, three key colleagues were engaged, two of whom

participated as core faculty for *Getting to Maybe*, and one who identified as a systems

coach and consultant for complexity leaders. These colleagues sent a letter out to their

networks that detailed the focus of the study and the eligibility criteria to seek out interest

and fit. In some cases, these colleagues invited individuals they thought would be

motivated to join the study directly. Both the letter to colleagues and the letter to potential

research participants are detailed in Appendix 5 and 6 respectively. Although a few

names were familiar, I had little prior knowledge of the research participants. For

example, one participant had attended a webinar that I had also attended the year prior. In

that case, I knew the person's name and had heard them introduce themselves on the call,

but we had no other interaction. Another participant was actively coached by my

colleague. In the normal course of business, their name would occasionally come up, but

again, I had no personal connection to them before the study began.

Personal involvement in multiple discussions, program initiatives, and action-research projects with *Getting to Maybe* alumni helped inform what might motivate participants to join this study. For example, a peripheral involvement in an action research project that called itself the *Transformational Leadership Node* served to unveil a great interest in Canada's systems change and social innovation fields for bridging the gap between inner and outer change. The final session of the research centered on a discussion about what was needed to continue to train and steward transformative leaders in contexts of complexity. Unanimously, the discussion revealed the need for shared understanding and language around what was called *inner work*, which served as a catch-all phrase for practices, processes, and conceptual tools that focused on both individual and collective capacity building.[24] The presence of such enthusiasm across domains indicated a readiness to collaborate and participate in projects that may help further the goals that the group had articulated. Although not every research participant was involved in this action research initiative, it appeared as though there were many more who would be similarly intrigued.

In the end, participants joined this study for reasons that included interest and even deep curiosity in the topic, a desire to further collective learning, and out of respect and admiration for those who had introduced them to the study. In the recruitment letter, care was taken to not unduly influence the outcome of the study by ethically withholding details deemed unnecessary.[25]

Screening

After receiving a potential participant's interest in the research, each was followed up with individually via a short screening video call over Zoom where they were assessed for fit and provided with further logistical details. No promises were made as to any benefits that may flow from the participant's potential involvement, but rather the emphasis was on the fact that their participation would be helpful to this researcher, a graduate student, and might provide no additional benefit to them personally or to the field as a whole. A questionnaire for the screening interview can be found in Appendix 8.

There was a considerable response from interested participants but in some cases the timing, or commitment required prompted some to pull back. Surprisingly, those who could commit and had the desire to do so also appeared to be a good fit for the study. Immediately following the interview, a follow-up letter went out confirming the logistics, the Informed Consent form, and confidentiality agreement attached for e-signing through the web software program, Docusign.[26] Included in the follow-up letter was an invitation for each prospective participant to take a day or two to decide if they were truly interested in participating. It was made clear that the signing of the Informed Consent form and confidentiality agreement signaled their final decision. Also included was a mailing address intake form so that art supplies and a deck of Soul Cards could be shipped to each participant following their confirmation. These supplies were used in Meeting One and Meeting Two. See the follow-up letter in Appendix 9 and the Informed Consent documentation in Appendix 4.

It was indicated both in the interview and later in the follow-up letter that their signing of the Informed Consent form was an agreement to participate. It remains

important to note that one participant who agreed to the research requirements later

needed to excuse themselves from the second and third meetings. Their data was kept in

the mix to provide more nuance to the first meeting's data set.

The Art of Qualitative Research

> What we wish most to know, most desire, remains unknowable and lies beyond
> our grasp.

~ James Hollis[27]

According to Denzin and Lincoln, the positivist sciences are commonly seen as

the "crowning achievements of Western civilization." [28] The empirical methods that

scaffold them hold the assumption that truth can transcend the messy variabilities of the

human mind. *Qualitative research,* in contrast, sits not outside but "in the world of lived

experience…where individual belief and action intersect with culture." [29] It locates the

researcher in the inquiry and relies on "a set of interpretive, material practices that make

the world visible." [30] Shaun McNiff contends that this gap between what can and cannot

be known or expressed "is the most basic energy of the creative spirit" – a tension

between scientism and artistry that needs no resolution.[31]

Weaving together threads from qualitative research and the creative process,

McNiff's conceptualization of art-based research has influenced this study's research

design. Drawing on Mary Caroline Richards, McNiff differentiates *artistic knowing* from

intellectual knowing, describing it as "intuitive, mysterious, and renewable," like an

underground river.[32] Its guiding intelligence is the faith that the river will lead to deeper

insight, and the cultivation of knowledge relevant for all people.[33] Similar to the creative

process, he argues, research that honors artistic knowing will inevitably yield to the dark waters of uncertainty, for the embrace of the unknown is the "truly distinguishing feature of creative discovery." [34]

This study's research design sought to slip into the generative tension of that gap, to draw out and employ both intellectual and artistic knowledge, and to honor the emergent nature of the creative process. The four phases of Imaginal Inquiry, described in detail below, could be conceptualized as a broad creative arc or an isomorphic representation of a life cycle that moves from seed to flower, to fruit, and back to seed. The four phases include evocation, expression, interpretation, and integration.[35]

The Four Phases of Imaginal Inquiry

The efficacy of the Evoking phase of Imaginal Inquiry is entirely dependent on the researcher's ability to presence the experience of the phenomena being studied.[36] Omer claims that careful design precipitates a departure for both researcher and research participant from dialogic conditioning to *talk about* experience in order to open into an imaginal landscape that brings experience to life.[37] Doing so, emphasize Omer et al., allows for true learning, a perilous act because of its ability to disrupt what is already known.[38] The engagement of the imagination is central, for it is the imagination, McNiff suggests, that allows an inquiry to touch new margins of experience and to revise and adapt understanding and meaning along the way.[39] Similarly, write Omer et al., it is the imagination that "integrates and amplifies" all aspects of experience, including its cognitive, affective, and physical dimensions.[40] It is not a stretch to say that for both researcher and research participant, working with the imagination requires an acute

surrender at the edge of chaos and order—a creative disintegration exacted on the trail to greater coherence.[41] Both must get out of the way to allow for something new to emerge. For, as Hillman claims, "it is not we who imagine, but we who are imagined." [42]

The core experience the research design intended to evoke was two-fold. Because the Research Problem inquired after one's experience of beauty in uncertainty, uncertainty was evoked first. Once participants had been affected by their particular experience of uncertainty as it emerged in the moment, then beauty was evoked. The moment or metaphorical place where beauty and uncertainty met was the focus of the research design.

In Meeting One, Deborah Koff-Chapman's Soul Cards were used to evoke the experience of both uncertainty, then beauty. Each card deck contains 60 of her paintings, created by *Touch Drawing*, an artistic methodology by Koff-Chapman that employs the pressure of both hands on the paper at the same time over wet paint.[43] For Koff-Chapman, the hands "are extensions of the soul, moving in response to the sensations of the moment." [44] The paintings become records of passing experience, "honest and direct." [45] Her images are colorful, abstract, and contain no words or predetermined meaning. Each reveals some combination of human-plant, or human-animal figures, with many in motion and multicolored. Some of the images appear comforting and gentle, others are fierce and disturbing, and still others are curious and alluring. A wide range of images are present in each deck of Soul Cards.

These images were chosen because, in previously facilitated processes, this researcher had found them to be quite impactful for diverse groups of people, able to evoke strong emotion or association. Their abstract nature enabled them to be widely

representative and contained relatable imagery from the natural world. Because the

format for the data collection was held online, it also felt important to provide

participants with something tangible and sensory—something they could hold and touch.

The physical contact and the continuous presence of their images in and around

participants' homes or offices were presumed to help to deepen their experience across

distance and time.

At the beginning of Meeting One, participants were asked to spread all 60 images

face up on a surface nearby. After a few initial questions intended to build trust, comfort,

and rapport, participants were invited to close or soften their eyes and turn their attention

to their breath. As they followed their breath with their attention, this researcher spoke of

the intention of the sequence, which was to explore both uncertainty and beauty by letting

the images speak in what might feel like a new way. This personification was intentional.

In framing this way, the intention was to depersonalize one's experience of beauty and

uncertainty, shifting from an internal feeling state to a source of intelligence with both

autonomy and sentience. In the practice field of the expressive arts, this method is known

as *decentering*.[46] Decentering allows each person to engage the content of their

experience and their history without meeting it directly. It can help to avoid the

reinforcement of old narratives by speaking from them in habitual ways while allowing

for marginalized aspects of the psyche to guide the process. It can help a practitioner

move through any pain or resistance that might accompany the process without being

subsumed by those affects or memories.[47] Finally, decentering has a spatial dimension to

it. In working with images and letting the images speak, a person can find themselves in

an intersubjective dialogue with a voice that may or may not feel like their own.[48]

After a few cycles of breathing, participants were invited to open or focus their eyes. When they did so, the instruction was for them to be instinctively drawn to an image that resonated with their current experience of uncertainty. They were cautioned that it was best not to try to figure it out or to analyze each image, but to be drawn in quickly and without significant premeditation.

We then engaged in a series of deepening and drawing-out questions designed to bring the participant into a more intimate relationship with the image they chose. Some of these questions prompted the participant to notice features or colors or shapes; others were intended to engage surprising or unfamiliar aspects of the image, and still others inquired into the emotional or physical sensations present as they gazed at the image. Also included were questions that invited the participant to speak from a part of the image—as if the image itself could speak. For example, I asked, "if that [particular aspect of the image] were to have a voice, what would it say?" [49]

This element of the Evoking sequence draws from the lineage of Depth Psychology and included concepts and methodologies from Archetypal Psychology and expressive arts praxis. Drawing on Carl Jung, it was presumed that experience is grounded in image, for "image is psyche." [50] The study was consequently designed to avoid the imposition of participants' pre-existing thoughts about uncertainty onto the image, but rather to come into fresh relationship through spontaneity; an experience beyond control, grounded in the senses and lacking in comprehensive understanding.[51] Archetypal Psychology holds that images, whether fabricated by the psyche as in a dream image or exterior, as in an evocative painting, writes Hillman, are the "primary psychological datum," unable to be interpreted because they don't stand for anything.[52]

Rather, Hillman continues, they are irreducible—a part of "the psyche itself in its imaginative visibility." [53] Each painting was held in this way as more than a symbol—not inert, but best conceived of as what James Hollis describes as *energy systems*; the cosmos revealing itself "by way of the image foreign to consciousness." [54] Expressive Arts practices, like the Evoking sequence employed here, work with visual images as "fields of energy" that can engender an interaction constituted by a sense of letting go and creative discovery.[55]

The sequence was repeated for beauty, beginning this time with a recital of the poem, "When I Met My Muse" by William Stafford, while participants brought their attention to the way their breath moved in and out of their body.[56] This poem was offered to further evoke a feeling or sense of beauty, as influenced by the words and images of the poem. It was also offered to soften any analysis or judgment that may have arisen in the first exploration and to provide a marked transition from uncertainty. The research then moved through the same sequence as with the uncertainty image. See Appendix 10 for a full list of drawing-out questions for both uncertainty and beauty.

The final Evoking element in Meeting One followed with an invitation to place both the uncertainty image and the beauty image side-by-side. A series of questions prompted participants to work with both images as a pair, bringing them into relationship together. These questions included a prompt to explore a dialogue between beauty and uncertainty as if both images could speak to each other. The core experience of the research design allowed this researcher to observe how participants were affected by the bridging of the two, whether they saw or felt any connection, and how they voiced what

each had to say. This initial Evoking sequence laid the foundation for Meetings Two and Three.

Meeting Two began over video conference with a short Evoking segment that included a slideshow of photographs of natural features and landscapes. Every other photograph in the deck had an overlay of a colored geometric pattern known in mathematics generally, and chaos theory specifically, as *strange attractors*.[57] In the mathematical field of dynamical systems, an attractor is a state or set of states into which a complex system evolves.[58] Visually represented, each attractor may contain a finite number of points, curves, and fine lines, which together exhibit a fractal structure. These images played as a screen share over the conference software (Zoom) while participants joined the meeting and settled in. They were intended to stimulate the imagination and to seed the meeting with a subtle, and nonverbal experience of beauty and complexity. After everyone had arrived and the arc of the session was presented, another poem was recited, this time by Robinson Jeffers, called "Fire on the Hills":

> The deer were bounding like blown leaves
> Under the smoke in front the roaring wave of the brush-fire;
> I thought of the smaller lives that were caught.
> Beauty is not always lovely; the fire was beautiful, the terror
> Of the deer was beautiful; and when I returned
> Down the back slopes after the fire had gone by, an eagle
> Was perched on the jag of a burnt pine,
> Insolent and gorged, cloaked in the folded storms of his shoulders
> He had come from far off for the good hunting
> With fire for his beater to drive the game; the sky was merciless
> Blue, and the hills merciless black,
> The sombre-feathered great bird sleepily merciless between them.
> I thought, painfully, but the whole mind,
> The destruction that brings an eagle from heaven is better than mercy.[59]

This poem served as a short Evoking element that precipitated a round of introductions and shares. Participants were prompted to speak their names, the essence of their work, and any reflection that they carried forward from Meeting One. Also invited was a short response to what was evoked for them in listening to the poem.

While the poem reading lands squarely in the Evoking Experience phase of Imaginal Inquiry, the additional three phases of the research design were also woven in. It can be helpful to think of all four phases as distinct, yet interrelated. Inviting participants to share early in Meeting Two was intended to offer an early opportunity to explore the additional three phases of Imaginal Inquiry at once.

Phase two, *Expressing Experience* marks any moment in the research design where participants are invited to share in both verbal and nonverbal ways, how they were affected by the elements that they were evoked by, such as the poem or something that may have taken place between sessions. Good data collection begins with the researcher's ability to ask open-ended and nondirected questions where participants can feel free to share a wide range of responses through different mediums.[60] For this section of Expressing, participants were invited to share their feelings and experiences verbally. All data for this segment was collected using audio and video recordings over Zoom.

Phase three of Imaginal Inquiry, *Interpreting Experience*, can be conceived of as moments in the research design where participants are invited to identify key "happenings" that have constellated for them through reflection over time. Omer defines such moments as "the soul's punctuation of time," or the "soul's experience of a unit of time. Moments make time meaningful," he writes, "the way grammar makes speech meaningful." [61] To help with interpreting, verbal sharing can be beneficial, especially as a

way of inquiring into the essence or core of how one has been affected. It allows a space for participants to surface questions or identify affects they may be feeling that are not yet fully comprehensible. As they shared, it is possible that participants were able to arrive at new meanings or insights precipitated by what occurred in or after Meeting One.

Lastly, phase four of Imaginal Inquiry, *Integrating Experience*, includes elements of the research design that help participants reflect on the experience so that those insights can be integrated, embodied, and carried forward.[62] Because Meeting Two was the first time the entire group met together, some care was offered at this early stage to build a sense of trust, shared intent, and common purpose. The ritual elements that mark the beginning and end of each session fall under Integrating Experience, for they help to punctuate and contain what may be vulnerable or new experiences for each participant and for the researcher.

After group introductions and initial shares, the group entered into an *expressive arts* sequence. As a field of practice, the Expressive Arts has formed as a unique methodology that intersects Depth Psychology, gestalt therapy, psychosynthesis, and somatics.[63] Participants were instructed to have their pastels and drawing paper in front of them. The arc of the sequence was explained in broad contours and included Evoking moments when they were to follow verbal guidance with their eyes closed or soft, and times when they would be instructed to express what was evoked for them as a drawing or an image on the paper. Instructions included a caution to soothe any aspect of the self that may want to "get it right" or "produce great artwork." The focus, in contrast, was on allowing for the drawings to be an authentic expression of their experience, which may

not only arrive as images but also as sounds or kinesthetic sensations, subtle shifts in awareness or emotion.

The sequence began with an *induction*, which is a moment in guided imagery that serves to shift a participant out of the analytical mind and into a natural, altered state where one might be more open to imagery and sensation.[64] Participants were invited to allow for an arrival into their experience of uncertainty and were instructed to represent what they saw and felt on the paper with pastels. Afterward, the group returned to the guided imagery. The second time participants were invited to be with their uncertainty. While offering all of their senses to that feeling, they were to imagine beauty joining them and to notice what happened. A second-time participants were prompted to express what they saw or felt on the same piece of paper. Participants again were invited to return to the place where beauty and uncertainty came together. For one final time participants were invited to sense to what they saw and felt, prompting them to notice what might be happening in their heart or their body. They were then asked to close the imagery experience in an appropriate way for them and to draw any additional figures on the paper. The guided imagery served to Evoke experience while the representation on the page with pastels in the form of artwork fell into the phase, Expressing experience. See Appendix 11 for the full guided imagery script.

As a continuation of Expressing Experience, participants were then invited into a time of reflection, working with their artwork as an energy source, much like the sequence in Meeting One. This time, participants were asked to express themselves in the chat box on Zoom, which was downloaded and saved. Drawing-out and deepening questions were offered that included general questions, such as, "how did it feel to invite

beauty into uncertainty?"; and questions that invited participants to get more curious about their drawings, such as, "when you look at your drawing now, what immediately surprises you? Anything feel disturbing and confusing?" Finally, a few prompts were offered to explore any connection between beauty and uncertainty.

It could be said that all previous processes in the data collection, including the imagery work in Meeting One, and the expressive arts sequence in Meeting Two were designed to support the final Evoking-Expressing segment in the research design. For this, a ritual process was set up for participants to take turns leading the group, each for three minutes. The specific instruction was for each to help the group focus on beauty in some way. Because the Research Problem inquires not only about complexity leaders' experience of beauty in uncertainty, but the potential for beauty to catalyze creative action amidst uncertainty, it was central to the research design to move reflection into leadership action.

Participants were given little warning with only three minutes to prepare. While they were reminded that their expression of leadership could be interpretive and did not need to make sense to anyone else, (nor was it to be considered a performance), no concrete direction was prescribed. This was intentional, for the design was intended to immediately presence a felt sense of uncertainty. As opposed to conjuring an imaginal experience of uncertainty, the prompt itself and the lack of time to prepare became the background in which leadership into and from beauty was to occur.

Interpreting and Integrating Experience followed in the form of journaling questions. Participants were asked to reflect on their leadership actions and write down what felt effective and what felt ineffective. They were also asked about their experience

of being led by others: "What was most affecting? What was least affecting? What are you aware of now, if anything, about beauty and leadership?" These reflections were captured over email or in the Zoom chat box and saved.

Between Meeting Two and Meeting Three, this researcher engaged in early interpretation. To do so the transcribed audio recordings from the first two meetings were used. I began to identify key moments. Reflections from this are discussed in the Learnings Chapter, under the subsection, *How I was Affected*. I also engaged in a first round of exploring differences and parallels. Early patterns began to appear that were held as possible learnings. Some of these patterns were simple observations, others were quickly contextualized in both theory and myth. At this stage, and after the data collection was complete, an intuitive method was utilized to explore the data. Omer had suggested the data be approached as a poem, guided by the soul's longing to see where I as the researcher might be drawn in.[65] I found this early method of integration and interpretation generated useful insights.

Before Meeting Three, which was designed to primarily serve the Interpreting and Integrating phases of Imaginal Inquiry, I gathered the raw learnings—which were more intimations than concrete certainties. Because the research participants are the ones immediately impacted by the research process, Meeting Three attempted to assist the Interpretation and Integration phases by exploring early learnings and key insights.

To begin the session, a poem by Wendell Berry called "Our Real Work" was recited.[66] Participants were then asked to share their names along with a physical gesture or reflection that encapsulated their research experience. Going deeper, each was then prompted to identify key moments of the experience that stayed with them, and any

questions they may be holding. This section was recorded over audio and video and later transcribed.

The Research Problem was then revealed, and the initial learnings were presented one by one. A hearty, unscripted discussion ensued. Participants were given space to respond to how the initial learnings landed for them and whether the learnings resonated with their experience. Notably, the collaborative exploration in Meeting Three did shift the initial learnings, bringing them closer to the final learnings found in the Learnings Chapter. I gained a greater understanding and together we arrived at more nuance than I could have alone.

Toward the end of Meeting Three, the focus shifted to Integration. Participants were asked if there was anything else that didn't yet feel integrated. The session closed with a final reflection on how this exploration of uncertainty and beauty might carry forward into leadership. The closing ritual included a sharing of gratitude and a recital of a final poem, "Spring" by Mary Oliver.[67] Each participant offered one word to close that best described their emerging relationship to beauty.

CHAPTER 4

LEARNINGS

Introduction and Overview

This research arises from a desire to deepen the discourse on what constitutes impactful leadership so that it might include marginalized ways of knowing, doing, and being, and acknowledge the presence of the soul. The question that drives it asks: *In what ways might beauty serve as a catalyst in promoting a leader's relationship with deep intuition as an enabling condition for creative action amidst uncertainty?* Drawing from emerging leadership praxis, the hope embedded in such a question informs the research hypothesis which posits that the catalytic nature of beauty seeds creative action by increasing a leaders' connection to their deep intuition when certainty is not available.[1] *Intuition* can be defined as a pre-discursive or preemptive knowing that arises well before one's ability to ascertain its meaning. Intuition is experienced differently by different people, arriving as a somatic or sensory feeling, an affect, an image, or a constellation of various sensations, images, and feelings.[2]

The learnings presented in this chapter are less prescriptive certainties than pools to slip into and swim around in, each awash with new questions. That said, the possibilities that this small study reveals generally affirm the research hypothesis. The Cumulative Learning, *Ensouling Leadership*, suggests that experiences of beauty hold the potential to inspire *ecstasis*, a state that moves a person outside the confines of the

familiar self into a place where more information (more feeling, more creativity, more

perspective) becomes available. Such movement appears to initiate greater feeling and

deeper reflection, catalyzing creative action from a place of vulnerability, connectivity,

and fresh possibility. This core proposition arose out of the subsequent learnings.

While limited in scope, this study is contextualized by a pressing need for

ensouled leaders that can be agile, adaptive, ethical, and heart-centered visionary artisans.

This sentiment, while widely shared, is my own. As such, the following learnings are

necessarily shaped by my own beliefs, which I spend some time unpacking in the

sections titled, *Imaginal Structures in Use*. It is my wish that the Learnings in this chapter

be useful for leadership development praxis in a time characterized by large-scale

systemic breakdown. At the very least, may they stimulate conversation and catalyze the

imagination, turning us toward what is possible. Each of the participants (Olivia, Sani,

Julia, Eli, Aria, Vivienne, Mia, Sophia, and Sebastian), has been given pseudonyms to

protect their confidentiality.

Cumulative Learning: Ensouling Leadership

> Look beyond the things and focus on the connections between them, he says.
> Then look beyond the connections and see the patterns they make.

~ Tyson Yunkaporta[3]

Taken together, the four learnings described below suggest that experiences of

beauty hold the potential to inspire *ecstasis*, a state that moves a person outside the

confines of the familiar self into a place where more information (more feeling, more

creativity, more perspective) becomes available.

As discussed in the Literature Review, *complexity leadership* is required in contexts constituted by ambiguity, nonlinearity, paradox, emergence, and uncertainty. Complexity leadership strategies often involve seeking out intervention points in a system that may be vulnerable to small disturbances, thus shifting the pattern of the whole. As such, they tend to focus their attention on the relationships between constituent parts and wander the proverbial fertile edges that are often more open to change. Additionally, it is understood that complex challenges will not be solved with more information. It is transformation—of both self and system—that is required.[4] Given this unique leadership landscape, many leaders, including this study's participants, find their experience demands something of them that customary logic cannot deliver.[5] This study attempted to evoke a leader's deep intuition through beauty to see if it was indeed a requisite, but perhaps missing, aspect of whole-person intelligence.

The title of the Cumulative Learning, *Ensouling Leadership*, speaks to what Omer, Plotkin, Sardello, Moore, Baring, and Houston would describe as one of the tasks of postmodernity, which Omer describes as "reenchant[ing] human culture by reclaiming the vision of an ensouled universe." [6] Like Imaginal Psychology, Omer claims that ensouled leadership would necessarily work toward "the recognition that the entire world is ensouled," and that is, therefore, "deserving of our respect," in right relationship.[7] It is understood within ITP that the soul has an *ecstatic imperative*, requiring the unfettered expression of its "passionate and plural nature." [8] For Omer, ecstatic states are those in which a person is liberated from the constraints of identity.[9]

The soul's nature to be wildly affected (moved, touched, stirred) by beauty, as appears to have been the case in this research, demonstrates that a leader's engagement

with beauty may be a catalyst for transformative learning that could lead to greater capacity over time, while simultaneously freeing individuals and collectives from the limiting constraints of identity. For leaders entangled in the complexities of relationship at scale, such learning is critical.[10] This gets to the heart of the Research Problem: In what ways might beauty be a catalyst for creative action amidst uncertainty?[11] It could be said that beauty begins to dissolve the singular and the separate self, opening one to a more complex landscape where deep participation and collective learning can begin.

Learning One, *Exile and Ecstasy*, suggests that beauty, when evoked in a field of uncertainty, has the potential to animate a *pre-discursive knowing*, experienced as a disruptive form of inner guidance. By following where the experience of beauty led them, participants found themselves able to access perspectives, sensations, and emotions that fell outside of their normative experience and familiar identity. In Learning Two, *Betwixt and Between*, participants expressed that following beauty's guidance was seldom easy, and seemed to precipitate a liminal state where leaders appeared able to access a multiplicity of perspectives both startling and familiar. The third learning, *Where the Worlds Touch*, suggests that creative action that flows from beauty has the potential to stimulate an experience of deep connection. Participants found themselves moved by every individual's expression of leadership as an essential thread woven into the collective whole. Finally, Learning Four, *Becoming Visible*, suggests that creative action taken from the experience of beauty may require conscious sacrifice. Conscious sacrifice requires a person to be open to difficulty, failure of identity and belief, and loss of personal privilege.[12]

Each learning builds upon the one prior, which was an unintentional outcome in the research study. As participants' experience with beauty and with each other deepened, the learnings unfolded cumulatively, revealing themselves to be not separate but decidedly entangled with one another.

It is widely known that overly simple or partial perspectives and siloed information will not aid the complexity leader seeking change at scale. Whole systems require whole-person, multi-faceted approaches. Tracking beauty in moments of uncertainty not only drew participants into a reflective space that offered a more robust scope of information; but the act of doing so also situated the leader squarely inside of the "problem." This resonates with another known principle in complexity and systems sciences: Changing the system "out there" demands a requisite change in ourselves.[13] Cogent Indigenous perspectives, long held at the margins, also recognize as Yungkaporta states, that "…any attempt to control the system from a fixed viewpoint outside is a misaligned intervention that will fail." [14]

Learning One: Exile and Ecstasy

Beauty is not always lovely.

~ Robinson Jeffers[15]

Learning One conveys the idea that beauty, when evoked in a state of uncertainty, has the potential to animate a *pre-discursive knowing*, experienced as a disruptive form of inner guidance. Pre-discursive knowing can be thought of as a largely affective impression, arising prior to one's comprehensive understanding and ability to ascertain a

clear sense of meaning.[16] In this respect, participants demonstrated a wide range of

feelings, sensations, and images in relationship to beauty that in many cases defied

simple constructs and conjured a palpable presence of something beyond the boundaries

of the individual self. Nearly all participants named this meeting of *other* explicitly,

referencing various forms of guidance by name, or through a diffuse sense of being called

to unknown edges, or even into less savory or socially sanctioned affects such as rage,

grief, or anxiety.[17] The form of guidance on offer was not concrete but rather metaphoric,

slippery, and often confusing. Participants often spoke to the need to pause, to deeply

listen, to feel, and to engage the intangible surround of emergence and ambiguity.

Unsolvable questions gave rise to a spacious posture of not-knowing that opened into

epistemic trust in the integrity and wisdom of the guidance on offer. Epistemic trust can

be understood as a participant's way of appraising incoming information, that at face

value seems unknowable, as trustworthy and relevant.[18] This was not always easy or

settling.

1. What Happened

In session one, conducted individually with participants via virtual conference call

(Zoom), each participant engaged in a guided imagery exploration using Deborah Koff-

Chapman's Soulcards.[19] Participants were prompted to spread the deck of cards out with

the images face up so they could see them all at once. They were each invited into two

minutes of centering into the body by focusing on the breath with the gaze softened or

eyes closed. Toward the end of the centering experience, participants were told that when

their eyes opened they would allow themselves to be drawn instinctively to an image that

most resonated with their relationship to uncertainty at that moment. All nine participants easily found their way to an image in silence, with two of the nine drawn to two images.

Participants were then asked to consider a series of deepening questions that invited them into an exploratory relationship with the image itself and what it evoked in them. Participants' responses were nuanced, and yet all spoke to uncertainty as an experience in motion: A "portal," said Oliva, a "tension," said Sani, a "vortex," said Julia. Such descriptions often pointed to an energy between things that presented on a meta-level as benevolent—even inspiring or hopeful—and on a personal level as anxiety-inducing. Mia said that what struck her was "the continuity, the implication of infinite generation regeneration." In that "familiar swirl" she identified a vulnerability or "fear point" that she described as a "smaller fear" of the ego. In relating to uncertainty, she asked, "am I okay?"

Eli described the "contrasting parallels" he saw in hot and cold or "the depth and the surface," a tension that felt very familiar to him. He likened the experience to "a metronome going from side to side" or the "middle space" between "intertidal zones in his life and his feelings." The "peaceful resolution" he identified in the figure in the image was aspirational to him. He asked, "what has allowed them to be in that way?"

Another participant, Aria, named the part of her that "wants to look, and the part that wants to look away." Aria identified uncertainty as an aspect of complexity, and complexity as "a nice word for the sacred intimacy or interdependency of creation." Drawing from her Indigenous cultural heritage, she spoke to the "song of the cosmos" that is the "heartbeat connecting all of creation." This song line reminded her of collective, ancestral healing and the "liberation we carry through each other." But, she

offered, uncertainty is "multidimensional" and it also conjured "patterns of persecution" for her, such as the burnings in Peru of the medicine people by the Spanish, and her self-persecution. She asked, "where did I exile my gifts? Where did I exile love?"

All participants identified uncertainty as a familiar companion in some form. Vivienne strongly stated, "whether you embrace uncertainty or not, it's happening," it is an "act of creation" that is "not static."

Participants were then invited to soften or close their eyes and focus on their breath. They were prompted to allow themselves to be pulled to an image that closely resonated, or in some way inspired, a sense of beauty. Again, all nine participants settled on one or more images. Their countenance in doing so was contemplative, present, and careful as they entered an exploration of what was evoked in the beauty image. Eight of the nine participants explicitly named a form of guidance or connection to something greater than the self. For Mia, it was the "lunar wisdom" of the moon, for Sebastian, the "wisdom of horses and the power they embody," and for Olivia, it was "an angel, a higher self, Nut the Sky Goddess, a cosmic presence, and a guardian presence." Aria named an "omniscient being in between the realms" that "pulls me forward," while Julia spoke to the ever-present possibility of connection with the "wider cosmos." Two participants identified it as a guide to the inward journey. Aria spoke about the challenges she faced when she was younger, diagnosed with schizophrenia, and hospitalized. In the beauty image, she saw the "spirit or guide of the wind," turning inward, which she identified as one of the ways she broke through the "deeper parts of uncertainty" at that time. She said, "I could hear them telling me what they knew, but not what was true, so I went internally to listen to [this] guidance…to be at peace, to play, to be able to listen."

Equally ubiquitous was the sentiment that the guidance they had touched in beauty was not entirely benign or straightforward, but rather had an unsettling side. Sophia was surprised by her choice of image. After some time spent deepening into it, she described it as "uncomfortable" and "a little disturbing" how the characters in the image appeared to have a "lack of personal identity…a mass of bodies where you can't really tell where one ends and the other begins." Her physical posture shifted in her seat. When pressed she said that beauty was in the imperfections. Sani, who titled her image, "She Feels Ecstasy," named two distinct subjectivities in herself that were evoked in her "deep sensing of passion." One, she said, "really wants to feel that." The other said, "oh, that's a lot. I'm going to close my eyes." Eli and Vivienne both acknowledged the concomitant pain and pleasure of encountering beauty, the longing and the fear. While drawn to the mystery that called Eli into the "cavern," he named that he was also feeling his heart race faster, and a trembling in his body. He said, "I'm drawn, but I don't think it's necessarily going to be a happy encounter." In contrast, Vivienne felt some relief in beauty's ambiguity. She said it is "beautiful in that it integrates all of the pain and pleasure, connection and disconnection. Beauty is all of it, not a rarified goal." She went on to explore what she identified as "the ancestral pain," the beauty, and the strength of "women holding up the earth, the sky." She said, "anger is still a cosmic connection."

In the final section of session one, I asked participants to place their uncertainty image and their beauty image side-by-side to see how they might be in relationship with each other, or if they might have something to say to one another. Seven of the nine participants agreed that beauty and uncertainty belong together. Olivia said, "they do more together than they do apart," while Sebastian offered the perspective that they are

"mixed whether they want to be or not. It does not take away their distinctness." Sani believed them to be "in harmony" with one another, which resonated with Vivienne's sense that they "flow together quite well." One participant diverged slightly from the rest with the sentiment that they "could be friends or foe. It's a complex relationship."

Strong statements in this section further revealed the pattern that presented beauty as a guide in uncertainty. Aria described beauty's wisdom as that which "awakens our inherent knowing…when we have beauty around us, the pathway can shine even in uncertainty." Again, drawing from her cultural tradition, she offered that the beauty card revealed an "inherent structure, natural law, or spirit walk" in uncertainty, and that "it allows us to move or awaken our good mind or inherent knowing in times when we can't see." For Sani, beauty asked, "look around you, do you feel that around you, sense that around you?" She reflected, "there's a comfort that comes from knowing that there's more going on that's not about me. I had to… learn to trust in that bigger power." In a tender moment, Olivia said, that beauty offers "essential truth," and a way to rediscover what is already known. Beauty said to her, "seek connection to source to navigate in complexity. You are not alone."

Participants carried the experience of beauty-as-guidance into Meetings Two and Three. In opening Meeting Two, participants were invited into a guided imagery and expressive arts exploration intended to first evoke their experience of uncertainty, then beauty. In the chat after the activity, participants spoke about the way they were affected by beauty entering the space. In many cases, beauty's entrance was experienced psychosomatically as a tangible shift in state, as if they could feel beauty's presence. Eli and Julia both experienced a calming sensation or a "calm presence." For Vivienne

beauty felt "warm." Sani felt "energized," but was also apparently unsettled by her drawing, unable to describe it or place it within a conceptual framework. She said, "it's a heady feeling." Aria felt joyful, and Sophia, despite feeling as though beauty felt like an opening up that "can be hard and painful, but also warm and exciting," also described feeling queasy and "a little scared." Looking at her drawing she said she saw fear and grief "swirling with love and light and life." Sebastian reflected that it was easier for him to evoke uncertainty than beauty, which came slowly and softly. When beauty did arrive, he felt its "unique essence." Mia said that "inviting beauty invited healing."

These reflections were coupled with statements that appeared to indicate beauty continued to be experienced as a kind of guidance. Eli mentioned that beauty offered him a way to release the tension of uncertainty. He said it was "a source of heat amidst the crystal blue water" and later felt "carried by something beyond [his] body." Julia also felt soothed, saying beauty "added a sense of relaxation, like everything would be OK amidst the uncertainty." Aria felt an "ancestral force," a "guidance" that "was like a song [her] heart already knew." Mia said beauty showed up as a "pathway through a challenging dynamic."

Participants were asked if they were aware of any desire to move or to act after the experience. Seven participants named the impulse to pause, to be still, to listen deeply, and to act less. In closing reflections, Aria named that she often felt "at the edge of her vulnerability" with "mystery guiding."

As the study evolved, participants in Meeting Two were asked to lead the group from beauty, into a collective experience of beauty. Sophia drew from her early reflection of feeling equal parts alive and vulnerable and invited others into a practice of sitting in

discomfort in a wild place. She guided the group to a place in our imagination that speaks of beauty at the edge between the familiar and the uncomfortable. "Build spaciousness there," she said, "embrace that discomfort." In the poem she wrote in the two minutes prior to leading the group, Julia reminded us that beauty lies, in part, in the "letting go of the familiar," and in the "courage to feel."

Participants in Meeting Three began to speak about beauty as synonymous with authenticity. In a group dialogue, Sani said, "it flows because it's organic, it's authentic, it's harmonious, it's real." Aria reminded us of the Indigenous perspective that sees beauty as something that "comes through the land, and comes through culture and context" that "allows us to walk through in a way that's beautiful." She said, beauty "originates from the center in which we all belong." Throughout the study, she likened beauty consistently to that which can "awaken our inherent knowing." As if in agreement, Mia referred to beauty as "a placeholder for something that's powerful and potent and life-giving."

2. How I Was Affected

Entering an in-depth aesthetic process with these nine insightful leaders was nourishing. Their forthright, evocative shares and the fluency with which they accessed pre-discursive spaces melted any initial concerns that I felt as a novice researcher. Would I be able to create the conditions I felt were needed for an artistic process in my seat as a researcher? Despite this anxiety, I quickly found an authentic place in myself in which to dwell, guided by my genuine curiosity, care for the people who had joined me, and the

passion I have for this landscape of inquiry. Moving through their imagery, and tracking their experience was immediately intimate and I felt my heart and mind open.

Surprise became a constant companion for me in session one. In designing the research, I had expected participants' responses to both uncertainty and beauty to be less nuanced. Uncertainty, I had assumed, would be approached warily, while beauty, in contrast, would be a welcome guest. My primary concern preceding the research was that beauty would be trivialized or reduced to an exterior, objective superficiality. The varied and interpenetrating nature of the participants' responses came up against my assumptions, ushering in delight and joy in the learning. This surprising turn was eagerly received and prompted a great deal of contemplation for me in between sessions, stimulating an enduring intrigue. I noticed my wariness of superficial beauty, and the profound longing I had for a collective exploration of beauty's true power. I wondered about the cultural and systemic forces at play that maintain a neutered and potentially destructive narrative, and in these moments, I felt anger. Like the participants, I too felt evoked into a wide range of feelings in beauty's presence—vulnerable and awake in unfamiliar territory.

3. My Interpretations of What Happened

Learning One conveys the idea that beauty, when evoked in a field of uncertainty, has the potential to animate a *pre-discursive knowing*, experienced as a disruptive form of inner guidance. The word *animated* has been carefully chosen to emphasize that beauty offered itself as less an exterior thing that catches one's gaze, but rather as a relational quality, alive and potentiated through connection with 'other.' I draw from ITP to

position *otherness* as an encounter with a subjectivity, a state, or structure of consciousness that is perceived to be outside the boundaries of the known self.[20] This relational dialectic engendered an intimacy that did not present as neutral or unanimously benign, but rather revealed itself to be multi-faceted, changeable, risky, and capable of evoking a wide range of affect. Paradoxically, the guidance that came rarely arrived with, or as, certainty. Rather, by allowing themselves to explore how they were affected by beauty, participants entered deeper into a space of unknowing. Drawing from the participants' expressions, such guidance demonstrated beauty's potential to disrupt what Omer et al. describe as the "comfort zone of familiarity." [21]

In this way, beauty presented itself in all its complexity as a curious, alluring, and Janus-faced soul guide evoking a paradoxical mix of longing and fear.[22] The appellative *soul guide* is intentionally used here to gesture towards the alive and passionate nature of the participants' contemplations throughout the study and to elucidate beauty's enigmatic impact. While unanimously alluring, beauty equally drew participants into unfamiliar or lesser-known terrain that was exemplified by their surprise, and at times discomfort, with perspectives, insights, and strong feelings that appeared outside familiar boundaries— whether those boundaries were conceptual or experiential.

For example, participants each wrestled conceptually with modernity's introjected ideals of beauty as indicated by the way they grappled with its plurality, its slippery nature, and the destabilizing power of its presence. Throughout the study, those who did not reduce beauty to loveliness represented a notable quorum. It was as if the soul-centric nature of the exploration immediately undermined any tendency toward a too-simple story.[23] Vivienne said, "I've struggled with the concept of beauty in our work here

because I feel like we have to own the rugged beauty, we have to own the really chaotic beauty or else we're just moving somewhere else into more poems and more starlight, and it doesn't resonate with me anymore that way, I want to hold both."

For others, the vista that beauty opened was deeply affecting—an experience that unsettled as much as it soothed—and was colored by discomfort and confusion as much as it was by awe and grace. Throughout the study, participants were evoked into a mix of emotions that did not always appear easy to experience as evidenced by their psychosomatic responses and oftentimes lengthy, contemplative pauses in describing how beauty affected them. In nearly every case the energy of the participant rose as if they were more aware of their emotional state in a heightened intensity of experience. For example, on two occasions Aria found herself reflecting on a vulnerable biographical moment when she was institutionalized briefly for schizophrenia. This reflection did not appear premeditated, but rather it was as though the way she now knows beauty was shaped by that painful experience, associated with the risk of vulnerability.

Others also expressed the intensity of the experience. Eli's body trembled and his heart beat faster when he gazed at his beauty image, as if readying himself for a difficult and profound encounter. Sani felt drawn in, even ecstatic, but also overwhelmed by the passion she felt there, needing to close her eyes and pause. Sophia was both open and queasy. At times, she expressed discomfort and even the first intimations of fear. Vivienne appeared to easily connect through beauty to the disruptive, yet repressed side of women's rage. These sentiments did not seem to arrive without an equal longing to follow beauty, wherever its guidance may lead.

The more participants were affected by beauty, the more they could access beauty's guidance. Its availability as a guide, therefore, appeared to be of a different, pre-discursive order; an aesthetic knowing that comes with the capacity to surrender to and engage the unfamiliar—to sit in it and tentatively explore it. This was further exemplified by the participants' ability throughout the study to dip underneath the rational mind to touch other, lesser-known subjectivities in the psyche and/or in the land.[24]

Yet despite beauty's ambiguous and disruptive directives, participants continued to express trust in their relationship to it in the moment. Though some resistance was present (for example, in the form of Sani wanting to look away, or Eli and Sophia's expressions of fear or confusion), many participants could be with the disturbance and surrender to it. Even amidst moments of confusion or other powerful affects, beauty was not questioned as a useful and powerful guide. In Meeting Three during a period of reflective dialogue on the study, Sebastian offered the metaphor of delivery. He said, "birth is so often considered a beautiful thing, and yet, it's also incredibly painful and traumatizing to a body. There's something about the duality of that, of the deep beauty and the deep pain that is also about bringing something forth."

Trust did not appear as a fixed notion, but rather as a *way of knowing through trusting*; a backdrop or attitudinal posture that enabled participants to listen, receive some form of guidance, and integrate that guidance as best they could in the moment. If one can sit with not knowing and trust it, as disruptive as it may feel, then perhaps, as Sebastian later described, beauty's particular guidance might be a way for complexity leaders to discern—to slow down, open up, and feel their way in and through the mire.

4. Imaginal Structures in Use

As a woman who has been raised in a culture that conceptualizes physical beauty as something external, ephemeral, synonymous with youth, and a key form of female power, I have endured a long and complex relationship with beauty. Throughout my developmental journey, I have become increasingly aware of just how acutely the larger cultural story has had me. While rejecting trivial beauty on the surface, I can also identify that at a deeper level I often feel trapped by it. For example, caring how I look and present when I really do not want to care. These introjected narratives continue to live in me, even though I have a much broader and richer understanding of beauty's true power. As an artist and a dancer, I often felt reduced to an object of performance and had an internal experience of having to fight my way to carve space for the radical impact that art can make when offered from a deep place. For these reasons, I find I am wary of others' understandings of beauty, fearing that the experience will remain shallow and will elude the kind of impact I truly long to feel and make. The surprise and joy I felt during this study reflect a fear that the focus of this study itself would be engaged superficially, denying the deeper, more complex, and far more transformational force that beauty can open into.

Notably, the surprise I felt was a mirror of what appeared to be happening at times for the participants. Beauty did not deliver expected or familiar outcomes, but rather guided me as a researcher into less familiar territory. My expectation that beauty would be engaged superficially through familiar cultural constructs was challenged. After each session, I sat with my surprise.

In the time between that first meeting and this writing, I have come to realize that just as I hold two parallel stories about beauty, I equally hold two conflicting stories about this research. The first is that engaging beauty through artistic process is a powerful, important, and potentially disruptive contribution to the field and practice of complexity leadership. The other actively undermines this work, especially when looking at it through the eyes of those I consider to be authority figures—internalized as hyperrational, results-based, positivist, and arrogant. When I give in to that imaginal structure, this study becomes impotent, cut off at the knees, and reduced to moments of reprieve between the "real work." Both stories are held in dynamic tension.

5. Theoretical Concepts Upon Which Interpretations are Based

Richard Gabriel and Jenny Quillien, in describing design-theorist Christopher Alexander's search for an underlying pattern language in built structures, write, "When we look too deeply into chaos, we find only disorder; when we look too deeply into order, we find only the botfly of boredom; when we look in between, we find Beauty, poetry, life." [25] It is this in-between, and a leader's capacity to dwell in it, that frames my understanding of Learning One. *Negative capability*, a state of presence first articulated by the poet John Keats, is held within Imaginal Transformation Praxis as an individual's capacity to perceive and be open to complexity.[26] In times of overwhelming complexity, it is negative capability that allows one to inhabit the unknown in a generative way, and to help unfold what is there. Keats describes this as a state of poetic creativity in which one is "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason." [27] A sustained reflective inaction and sensing into that, is made

possible in part, through a suspension or disidentification with one's identity and preconceived certainty.[28] As a form of refined and intentional receptivity, negative capability was engaged in this study, allowing participants to tap into a fundamentally aesthetic form of guidance. The result was more space for emergent possibility and an affordance for connection and identification with "other".[29] ITP asserts that engaging otherness is a natural consequence of deepening and diversifying experience. Where experience becomes both diverse and deep, there is the opportunity to work with a multiplicity of "selves"—voices, states, and structures of consciousness that are unfamiliar—and the invitation to explore the symbolic depths underneath what might be observed on the surface.

In the case of this study, participants were able to experience a relationship with the otherness of beauty by consciously inhabiting the unknown without immediately reaching for concrete solutions or actionable outcomes. Doing so was not without discomfort, surprise, or the presence of overwhelm. Within the framework of ITP, such sentiments accompany a learner in transformative learning settings that bring them to the edges of familiarity. Omer et al. write, "there is an underlying threat intrinsic to intense experience, which is perceived as a perilous threat to one's normative identity," a baked-in peril that is analogous to "losing one's mind".[30] In reflection, I am reminded of Aria's association between uncertainty, beauty, vulnerability, and her experience of schizophrenia—an example from the data that lands with considerable weight.

While it is understood that transformative learning experiences open the door to fresh experience, such unfamiliarity is not often immediately allowed entry. Useful to this learning is an understanding of the adaptive forces that prevent or bar intense experience.

ITP refers to these "protective measures" as personal and cultural gatekeepers. Gatekeeping, Omer writes, denies "individuals and systems new experience" by attempting to protect the individual from hurt or threat. One view of the participants' discomfort is that intense affect may gesture toward the forces of resistance that seek to protect what is static and familiar in the face of uncertainty.

Artistic process can be a powerful way to create the right conditions to practice negative capability. Inviting participants to speak from the point of view of images that exist outside of one's normative identity decenters their personal history and habituated identity from the immediate exploration, thus making space for emergence.[31] As practiced within ITP, artistic perception and expression can be a way of stepping outside of the ego's fixed vision to experience other lesser-known subjectivities and potentialities in the moment.

Hillman conceives of images as a *psychopompos*—a guide to the soul. In decoupling the image from the conscious mind—whether it be a dream image or a piece of art—the invitation becomes entering a relationship with it; to be at the effect of the image as an other.[32] This act means both parties are shaped in relationship. It is as Weber argues, "the world is not an aggregation of things, but rather a symphony of relationships between many participants that are altered by the interaction." [33] Notably, this intersubjective dance between subject (you) and object (not you), as potentiated by negative capability, is precisely where Alexander, among others, places a recognition of beauty amidst complexity in human-centered design. In the liminal space between self and other, we touch on a *Quality Without a Name* (QWAN) which he describes as "the root criterion of life," that is "objective and precise, but cannot be named." In this place

of beauty, there is deep feeling; "eternal sadness" and "bitterness" that has the "power to remind him of his own fleeting existence." [34] Beauty is not simple, it is complex.

The epistemological question that arises in an emergent space is some version of, "ought I to trust this?" Without objective, concrete reason, how might we know what is worthy of our trust? In his poem, "Ode to a Grecian Urn," Keats states, "beauty is truth, truth is beauty," disrobing beauty of modernity's attire to reveal something far more powerful. For Keats, beauty touches the essence of things, encapsulating both delight and melancholy, while delivering one into a greater dimension of reality nearest to source, accessed not through the reasoning mind but through the imagination.[35] It is here, in this coherence, that we touch truth—a truth that can only be encountered by resisting any temptation to avoid or escape life, however pleasant or unpleasant.[36]

6. Validity Considerations

Notably, not a single scripted question in the research design framed beauty as a form of guidance; a fact that adds to the surprising consistency of participants' experiences. Similarly, neither prior to the study nor during the study was the term beauty ever described to participants, but rather it was left open for participants to self-interpret. The pluralistic nature of beauty and its capacity to evoke strong emotions that spanned longing and fear, allurement and confusion, was entirely unprompted. The consistency of these two aspects of Learning One can be found at length in the raw data.

While participants did perceive beauty and express its impact on a spectrum of pleasure and pain, the exact nature of their unfamiliarity was never explored in great

detail. To arrive at the interpretations required reliance on what participants communicated through body posture, tone of voice, length of pause, and on their anecdotal associations. Additionally, beauty was always evoked after uncertainty in all meetings, which may skew the results toward a strong association between beauty and not-knowing. It is not at all evident that a different methodology would yield the same results.

Learning Two: Betwixt and Between

> Wandering back from the crossroads, bereft of all former habits and reliances, one faces the paradox of identity: "am I dead, mad, or a poet?"

~ Daniel Deardorff[37]

Learning Two suggests that following beauty's guidance may precipitate a liminal state that has the potential to provide access to a greater fluidity of perspective. This state was characterized by the presence of strong emotion, disorientation, and a sense of being moved. Liminality can be understood as a threshold state of ambiguity that Turner calls an *interstructural situation* entailing "few or none of the attributes of the past or coming *state*." [38] In such liminal moments, participants both verbally reported and affectively demonstrated a malleability of perspective; able to identify and surrender to a loss of steady equilibrium, resonant with moments in transformative learning that Omer et al. conclude involves "disorientation and de-integration." [39] Many participants offered spatial metaphors (such as a journey, a stretch moment, or a fulcrum) to describe a sense of movement from a steady state to a state of being in motion, reaching from one mindset, vantage point, way of knowing, or node of identity to another. In such in-

between spaces, it was not uncommon for participants to be rendered vulnerable to new

uncertainties and painful insights, as evidenced by their halting and at times confused or

disoriented responses, and their ability to name parts of themselves that were holding

them back. Indeed, struggle of some kind appeared as a liminal companion that could be

described as equal parts desire to change and resistance to change.

1. What Happened

In session three participants spent time exploring their initial learnings together

through dialogue. In her opening share, Vivienne focused the conversation on the

changeable nature of beauty. She said:

> I struggle with beauty being just in presence, because the becoming space is
> where we keep growing, and [where] the next space of being comes in. The
> becoming is also beauty. I think that's where the real work is and that's where the
> uncertainty is.

Her words were spoken with a fierceness and passion that appeared to reflect the nature

of her struggle as a woman in a society she believed to privilege stasis. Grief and rage,

she reflected, are affects that move people and therefore have the power to shift structures

and states. These catalyzing affects live in-between—in the becoming space that felt for

her like the "opposite of sterile." Throughout the study, Vivienne remained committed to

her experience of beauty as that which can shatter the anesthetic veneer. Her words and

presence offered a similar gift to the group, inviting each to be with and to feel beauty's

intensity and changeable nature as a generative, yet destructive power.

In session one, Sophia said that beauty for her too lived "in the middle…the part where it feels yucky and uncertain. I think you need to go there." In her introduction to the group in session two, she shared that she feels beauty comes from the "edge" where one hovers "on this fulcrum of acting out of love or tipping over the other way toward anger, shame, hurt, and fear." Later between sessions one and two, she wrote the following passage in her journal:

> When I was 16, my cousin, who was more like a sister…died in a car accident. I turned inward for a few years, but then when I eventually left home, I lived recklessly, imagining every day could be my last…so I ate them up. I tested the boundaries of human kindness by putting myself at risk in various ways. I learned that most people are broken, not just me. I learned that some of the time they will act from a place of love, and some of the time they will act from a place of hurt, shame, and anger. It can go either way for people. The potential for both lives in every moment for every person. I learned that a lot of harm-doing and resulting suffering is just the slow bleed of this brokenness. I also learned that these broken places are also where the light comes from, and how we let the light in. That interface, that edge, is what beauty is made of. It is how love knows that it is love. It's the place where all of the possibility lies.

Sophia's account highlights her journey through pain and brokenness and uncertainty to arrive at a deeper appreciation of beauty. The generative destruction of the edge was reflected in her mixed responses to beauty throughout the study. Beauty was that which she both wanted to move from and with, and that which invited discomfort and fear as necessary passages into aliveness. In her leadership enactment in session two, Sophia invited others to be on the edge between something (like beauty) that feels good, but also uncomfortable. "Use it," she said, "to dig a little deeper into yourself."

In bringing the uncertainty image and the beauty image next to each other, Mia shared that she was experiencing what she called a "developmental stretch moment" where she found herself "clinging to certain parts that have given [her] so much energy."

She went on to ask beauty, "how do I release those knowing that there's a deeper sourcing that will be there for me…?" Later, in session three during group dialogue, she shared that for her "beauty is in the journey into the heart of things. It's the heart of things, and even the recognition of how far we are from the heart of things…there's beauty there too." Mia offered gratitude for the way she could reflect on what in her life is changing and needs to change, catalyzed by the reflection on beauty, and what in herself resists that very same impetus to shift.

Other participants also expressed how they were moved by beauty into a liminal space that was de-integrating. In session one, Sani asked of her beauty image, "how can I feel…and still be in the environment," as if the passion she saw or felt, moved by beauty, was too much. She expressed concern that moving from a high intensity of passion in her daily life felt risky and unfamiliar. Later, in session two, Sani expressed that it was difficult to see beauty during the guided imagery and artwork piece. She wrote in the chat that beauty was "hard to catch" and ephemeral like the clouds. Slightly unsettled, she wrote that she was left feeling pulsing through her body that did not come with immediate, clear action. She wrote in the chat, "can't separate myself from my visualizations."

Opening session two, Eli found himself surprised that he could find beauty in his body between sessions. Long connected to dance and movement and the feelings that are evoked for him in the act, he recognized beauty there, which he felt constituted a "big shift" in his self-view. He offered a reflection that beauty felt like a source of strength, hope, and vitality. He appeared more confident and quite moved when he shared his insight with the group.

Olivia said in Meeting One that she was aware of her "ego getting in the way." She told me that she felt "cheesy" speaking from the perspective of beauty and released a big breath as if to shake off her discomfort. Like others, Olivia named that she was drawn to the study because she felt the landscape of inquiry would drop her "down into a space of awareness that is revealing and vulnerable," a place she did not get to tap into as often as she would like. This vulnerable space was clearly uncomfortable as if it pressed her to see and speak from perspectives or nodes of identity that were not as rehearsed or integrated for her. Similarly, Aria shared that the uncertainty image in session one reminded her of her schizophrenia diagnosis. She said, "this woman has no clothes on. I'll feel everything. That feels familiar…the nature of vulnerability." In session three, she brought this difficult experience to the foreground again, claiming that though she had never seen that part of her struggle as beautiful, it was through learning to be really present with "the mud" of herself that she was able to heal naturally, "Like a snake shedding its skin," she said.

Vulnerability and pain were often looped into participants' reflections of beauty, and it was not uncommon to hear or see some resistance to being so moved. In session two, participants were invited to explore uncertainty and beauty through a guided imagery experience. They were then asked to draw their experience on a piece of card stock using pastels. In reflecting on their drawings, participants were asked what questions they found themselves holding. Sophia wondered, "how do I stay alive as I live? How do I not let fear stop me from exploring that edge?" Mia asked, "how can I melt away cages that hold back new growth?" Both expressed an equal longing to move and concern about what that inner movement may ask of them.

Participants experience of beauty's permeability between forms or states also showed in reflections on perspective throughout the three sessions of the study. In exploring her beauty image in session one, Mia said, "I feel there's concentric rings of perception and connection to worlds that surround this figure, and flows in different rivulets or lines…those are the things that I experience as beautiful and life-giving." She shared that the wisdom the beauty image offered uncertainty was of a "permeable boundary" or a "membrane" that forms between the "uncertainty of the whole" and the "beauty of my way of seeing and being" that can "give and take." Mia said, "my unique way of looking at things carries me through different evolutionary forms." In her beauty image, Julia was drawn to "the nature connection and the permeability, the lack of barrier between human and nature, below and above…it's all just a kind of continuous flow." Although she found herself uncomfortable with what her beauty image evoked for her, Sophia was prompted to think about perspective, "I think about the way we perceive things from our place, whatever that might mean." Relating her reflection to the way she approaches her leadership, she said, "I am always trying to see [beauty] through other people's eyes." She titled her beauty image, "Worldviews."

Others found beauty in blurring perceived boundaries between humans and nature. In his image in session one, Sebastian saw beauty in the "blended nature" of the figure, part human-angel, part horse. He told me the image felt "life-giving" in that it presented a "broader expression of life," and "more than one kind of beauty," not just human and not just animal, but "woven." In beauty Aria saw a human face "emerging…like it's coming out of the land, like it's inside the mother." In session two's

drawing exercise, Vivienne drew a cheetah family with "one adult female keeping an eye on the landscape with wild protection, creating the space for calm connection."

Similarly, all of the participants' journal entries between sessions contained poetic reflections of beauty dwelling in liminal spaces in nature. In the dawn and dusk, in "the morning lake ice releasing into the water after a long winter" for Aria, the "way the tree plays with the light and the wind" for Sophia, and "a flower unfolding, a moment in time" for Julia. Beauty appeared to open into an exploratory space with many doorways of possibility, perception, edges, and connections.

2. How I Was Affected

Apropos of the landscape of inquiry, the vulnerability of uncertainty danced in me as I guided the participants into emergent processes. Not being "in control," or able to curate the experience for leaders I respect is a familiar vulnerability; one that moves as a subtle wariness in me during processes where there is no fixed outcome, little dialogue, and even less information. What if they touch something in themselves that deeply disturbs them? What if they leave the study? What if I do it wrong, or say the wrong thing? What if my ego gets in the way and I try too hard to direct rather than let it come?

These sentiments are traveling companions every time I enter an emergent process. Alongside the wariness lives deep respect for the potency of such explorations, which I do not take lightly. I also marry beauty and vulnerability for it is through such vulnerable and emergent processes that I see the true beauty of another, or of my deeper self. It is, therefore, equally true that curiosity and allurement for the beauty of

emergence were equally present as I traveled with each leader through their sense-making. Time felt as though it had disappeared and my sensitivities opened a tender place of compassion and deep understanding of the risky edges that emergent processes can evoke. As I invited participants into the art-based processes in sessions one and two, I found myself oscillating between wariness and wonder, breathing through moments of doubt and over-effort to a more open place where my intuition could flow.

3. My Interpretations of What Happened

Learning Two suggests that following beauty's guidance may precipitate a liminal state that has the potential to provide access to a greater fluidity of perspective. This state was characterized by the presence of strong emotion, disorientation, and a sense of being moved.

These disorienting spaces of "becoming," as one participant called them, were colored by uncertainty, struggle, vulnerability, and a shared sense of transition between forms. Consistent throughout the study, participants did not problematize the way they were evoked but rather appeared eager to more curiously explore the various possibilities—both joyful and difficult—that the liminal space made visible. The word ambivalence is useful here. Drawing from the Latin suffix *ambi*, meaning "both sides," and *valentia* meaning "strength," participants appeared to center themselves in a many-sided, many-formed, many-voiced field of possibility; a landscape that Sebastian described as a "kaleidoscope of exploration." It was as if the participants found themselves inhabiting a *betwixt and between* place where they were rendered

"permeable" to an immensity of unseen interconnections and flows of information that they were largely open to exploring.

Disequilibrium appeared equally present as evidenced by participants halting responses, and their willingness to name disorientation, fear, wariness, confusion, and vulnerability as constants. In many cases, beauty was described and experienced as analogous to motion, locating it in the messy middle, accessed, and constituted by strong affect. For Mia, Vivienne, Sophia, and Aria beauty was linked to a vulnerable shattering or awakening. It could be said that such moments of intensity (such as the death of a loved one or a painful diagnosis) affected them deeply, catalyzing a kind of inner movement, a period of reflection, a time of disintegration or disorientation, a journey of difficult struggle and of pain and extreme vulnerability. In reflection, each participant spoke to (and embodied) some of the ways they have grown, gained perspective, and developed capability for having been so stretched. Sophia and Vivienne in turn invited others to sit in the discomfort and the pain, to welcome it and be changed by it. Their recommendations gesture to the trust that emerged from times in their lives that were challenging. Beauty in the eyes of many of the participants appeared as both a generative and destructive power.

As in Learning One, participants did not enter such a liminal space cerebrally, but rather appeared to open into other ways of knowing through the senses; feeling, embodying, and imagining their way. The surface senselessness of disequilibrium was paradoxically navigated by skillful sense-full-ness; a time of listening, looking, feeling, and sensing with all modes of perception open. Participants *attended* to multiple sensations and perspectives at once, deriving from the root *ad*, meaning to move toward,

and *ten*, to stretch. In liminality, one may stretch toward a multitude of latent possibilities and marginalized perspectives.

This multidimensionality came with struggle. Mia, Sani, and Olivia, for example, held a multitude of concurrent inner voices—some of which could see and name the way they were changing and the beauty there, and others that actively undermined expansion. Mia was able to get on the balcony of her experience, identifying that the delta between where she was and where she wanted to be was beautiful in and of itself. She expressed a desire to pay more attention to how new growth is stymied, both internally and externally, and to attend to the edges of her becoming. Sani was overwhelmed and enveloped by the intensity of beauty's affect, both drawn to it and unable at times to stay connected to it, as in the expressive arts exploration where beauty proved to be ephemeral and hard to catch. Her disorientation could be understood as an inner struggle between a destabilizing and as-yet unintegrated experience, and her everyday sense of self. Olivia verbally named feeling cheesy speaking from beauty, while equally naming how much another part of her wanted to drop into a revealing and vulnerable personal inquiry.

Sophia had seen naked, identity-less figures in her "Worldviews" image that left her uncomfortable, which was communicated in the tone of her voice and her body posture. The figures in her image were unidentifiable to her, amorphous and indistinct as if in transition or struggle. Beauty for her dwells in cracks of brokenness and pushes her, she said, to take many perspectives. Her journal entry markedly describes the long, arduous personal journey she went through to arrive at her understanding of the edge as a generative place of possibility. In it, she offered the perspective that beauty may be accessed through a wound or wounding event, in the transmutation of horror and pain and

the struggle that comes with such cataclysmic life events. Beauty is therefore not neutral but awakens and provokes. If the opposite of aesthetic is *anesthetic*, then the aesthetics of beauty arrive with full feeling—the ability to be moved, however difficult. It is this movement that may soften perceived boundaries and neat categories of siloed experience. For Sophia, this softening invited her to truly experience beauty in difficulty.

It became apparent that to get to the place where participants were able to feel more, see more, take more perspectives, and hold conflicting viewpoints, an element of surrender was demonstrated. Participants surrendered to the uncertainty of beauty—the seemingly nonsensical whimsy of pre-discursive experience—while simultaneously suspending the fixity of reason, identity, and outcome. They appeared to enter what Deardorff calls "the lived realization of contradiction-as-reality."[40] Alongside was a recognition that complexity (and uncertainty) necessitates a conscious exploration of connections between things; an encountering of subjectivities and possibilities that are currently not integrated into one's normative identity or mindset.

If complexity necessitates a conscious exploration of connections between things, then perhaps following beauty's guidance is a way to enter a liminal field of possibility; a disorienting stretch moment full of feeling where one might not just understand complexity, but experience it in its fullness and become vulnerable to it. The shattering of simple narratives and narrow perspectives that are anathema to thriving in complexity may be one of beauty's greatest strengths.

4. Imaginal Structures in Use

This research inquiry required me to enter into emergent processes with no fixed outcome or expected result. Although such transformative learning experiences are the core of my work, I all too often come up against various imaginal structures that de-potentiate and actively seek to undermine them.

The first does not like to upset people or disturb a lovely experience with unruly sensations and unwelcome emotions. This part finds the emergent process to be unduly risky and would seek comfort in maintaining a safe distance from anything that felt edgy or uncomfortable for others. This structure is unconsciously accompanied by a mindset that privileges superficial niceness over truth, and loveliness over loving fierceness. Although I may hold the view that disequilibrium and struggle are a requisite and beautiful step on the way to greater capacity, the "good girl" part of me can exchange generative learning opportunities for shallow belonging.

A second imaginal structure I hold seeks control. Her strategies include having a list for everything, obeying the rules, and keeping herself apart to not be too deeply affected. She also dislikes the amorphous nature of transformative learning opportunities, and will often retreat from rich territory prematurely.

Both of these subjectivities are personal to me, and also culturally shaped. As one who facilitates transformative learning, I have had to navigate tacit cultural protocols that request women be gentle, agreeable, and nurturing rather than fierce and sharp—even at times when the latter would be more loving. To facilitate experiences that decenter informational learning, I have also felt increasing pressure to protect myself from others'

natural resistance, critiques, and doubts. Remaining in control serves to manage and insulate a sensitive and passionate heart.

Finally, as a performance artist working with young women coming into their bodies and their sovereignty, I had long apprenticed to the myriad of ways that we, as human beings, know and feel the world around us. The affinity and trust I have developed for the intuitive, pre-discursive streams of intelligence flavor my interpretations here. I am predisposed to see and champion sensing, feeling, and imagining in a quest to validate, or at least center, marginalized aspects of our full humanity.

Through these kaleidoscopic perspectives, I can identify with and align with the mix of possibilities in myself, and the edges I live and guide from. While these structures create tension in me as both a novice researcher and a guide, they also sensitize me to see and feel resistance in others and teach me how to trust and honor that intelligence.

5. Theoretical Concepts Upon Which Interpretations Are Based

Beauty was accompanied by the presence of strong emotion, a sense of inner movement, and disorientation in many cases. Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell suggest that beauty is a word used to describe a demanding or exhilarating emotional experience that has the potential to generate a psychologically novel truth. While pretty things are pleasing, they lack complexity and do not challenge the mind. Beautiful experiences, on the other hand, are complex and elicit a *feeling state* that draws the mind toward potential, possibility, and new meaning. Beauty might be seen, as it was for Kant, as a "harbinger of a reality to come," inspiring a person to seek out novel experiences that

could trigger the formation of new cognitive structures.[41] Where experiences of the pretty

may move one to avoid the unknown and confirm the knowledge one already has,

Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell argue that beauty "indicates progress toward expanding

knowledge." [42] It can both catalyze and encapsulate a change process or a shift from one

mental model to another.

In Imaginal Transformation Praxis, as practiced at Meridian, such movement is

understood to be precipitated by the *failure* of preexisting belief systems, mental maps,

and identities. It is, therefore, not surprising that participants experienced beauty to be

both alluring and profoundly difficult. Experiences that liberate and engage new

perspectives and those that engage a learner at depth are often resisted for their perceived

threat to the *wall of identity*, which Omer defines as the "core beliefs, deep assumptions,

mindsets, and specific perspectives that constitute identity." [43] Bringing discipline to the

experience of failure becomes paramount to navigating change processes in a way that

builds capability. Such discipline, writes Omer et al., requires a learner to surrender to the

inherent risk of change while navigating and attending to a natural inclination to contract,

pause, resist, and gate profound experience.[44]

Because transformative learning catalyzes periods of disorientation and

disequilibrium, the concept of *liminality* is useful. Originally coined by Van Gennep to

describe the threshold phase between significant life stages, the liminal is a time

constituted by de-integration and the loosening or reversal of familiar customs, norms,

and narratives.[45] Turner likens liminality to a process of becoming, drawing on the

analogy of a pupa changing from grub to moth. This *betwixt and between* time is marked

by ambiguity, where the subject in transition resembles or maintains "few or none of the

attributes of the past or coming state." [46] They are, instead, dwelling in what Turner calls an *interstructural state*, ripe with paradox, and fraught by a pervasive "confusion of all the customary categories." [47]

A useful handful of properties of liminality, posits Turner, include an atmosphere of "transition, homogeneity, anonymity, nakedness, humility, sacredness, continuous reference to mystical powers, and foolishness," among others.[48] To arrive at the transition phase, an individual will first have undergone a period of separation, or detachment from, one's fixed position in the social milieu, and by extension a suspension of personal identity. A widening or shattering of perspective as a result of transformative learning can likewise suspend a person between frames of reference, enabling one to access and employ a more complex web of perspective and feeling.

The "uncommon outlook" that Deardorff presents as a quality of liminality, he writes, "can be taken to imply a multi-perspectival consciousness that is not monological, rigid, or fixed, but virological, open, and kaleidoscopic." [49] In engaging the myriad of voices within themselves during the study, participants demonstrated *psychological multiplicity*, which Omer defines as "the existence of many distinct and often encapsulated centers of subjectivity within the experience of the same individual." [50] To work with multiplicity in life-enhancing ways requires *imaginal capability*, which he defines as the ability "to creatively engage with otherness." [51]

Turner reminds us that liminality is "frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon." [52] It is worth noting that many of these symbols, images, and properties were present in the participants' shares and enactments. Van Gennep's three phases offer

us a spatial and dynamic image; a sense of movement from one state into another state that Grimes reminds us is "based on the obvious fact of change." [53]

While such transitions are commonplace enough in the natural unfolding of a human life, Omer et al. evocatively claim that transformative learning, because it requires the failure of one's belief systems, mental maps, and identity, presses a learner to dwell in the liminal, *generatively*. To dwell generatively is to inhabit it in such a way that simultaneously hospices the old, and brings forth the new. Julian Norris defines generativity further by saying it is through generative processes that individuals, groups, and human systems actualize latent potential, resulting in a metamorphosis from "one order of being to a higher order of being." [54]

6. Validity Considerations

Participants' observations and experiences of beauty as motion and transition were consistent in all sessions as documented in both Learning One and Learning Two. Consistent with Learning One, a possible validity consideration to note is that an art-based process can create an experiential surround that is profoundly liminal in and of itself, thus rendering participants' responses to beauty worth reviewing again in future studies. That said, in Meeting Three and in their journal entries, when participants engaged largely through reflection and dialogue, the same themes appeared.

Similarly, because the research design included working with images—both supplied and constructed in the moment, participants' imaginations were stimulated, likely contributing to the fluidity and intuitive nature of their insights. However, participants' experiences were not simply cerebral. There was a coherence between the

nature of the images participants chose and the elements they chose to emphasize, which were themselves liminal.

Finally, it feels important to note that although participants inhabited a seemingly transitional space between states, the study was not set up to track whether participants did or did not move through the liminal spaces into new frames of reference. The interpretations on offer here show that such interior development was possible and had some of the characteristics inherent to transformative learning theory. My inclination, as a transformative leader, will always be to seek out such possibilities and focus my attention on them.

Learning Three: Where the Worlds Touch

> Unity is not about oneness. It requires the process of uniting, which requires relationality.

~ Nora Bateson[55]

Learning Three posits that creative action that flows from beauty has the potential to stimulate an experience of deep connection. If complexity is another way of describing relationships, and beauty is a cohering or underlying structure in complexity, then in tracking and leading from beauty participants could enter a generative interpersonal space. In such a space, a participant's leadership invitations for the group were invariably *transformational* in form and intent: experiential, open-ended, multi-faceted, and grounded in deep participation. ITP suggests that transformational, as opposed to purely informational approaches, indicates that the experiences the participants invited the group into each involved the possibility of shifted consciousness, potentially enabling

participants to "inhabit new, more complex and emergent landscapes."[56] While some resistance was present, the resounding impact of meeting each other in and through beauty resulted in the widespread celebration of each person's uniqueness in relation to the whole.

1. What Happened

The navigation of relationships was a strong theme braided throughout this study. Meeting One invited participants to reflect on the ways their work is complex. Six of the nine leaders directly related complexity to relationships in some way. Julia said; "human beings are by nature complex, our relationships are complex…it's the web of relationships, and how we navigate interpersonal dynamics that ultimately create whatever change we're seeing in the world." Sani mentioned that "cookie-cutter racism" was one element of complexity she dealt with daily in her work. The "multi-level or fractal aspect of our human experience on an individual, collective, and systems-level" was the backdrop of Sebastian's life and work, which he described as "inherently complex." The relationships, he said, were one of the more difficult aspects. "How to be good humans together?" was the central question he held in his work, and a "big hurdle."

Olivia reflected on the context that she works in as "interjurisdictional" and transcultural, where she's constantly navigating incongruous meeting places between colonial governance and hereditary, First Nations governance systems. Similarly, Sophia mentioned that the complexity for her was in working with Mi'kmaq communities beset by "postindustrial poverty" who had been "left to the wayside." The distrust of outside involvement, she said, is real. As mentioned in Learning One, Aria was clear that

complexity is another word for "interrelationships" and likened her work to "reweaving" what Chellie Spiller describes as "the woven universe." [57] Aria said, "when we are able to express what we need to, to be in a natural flow, the elders talk about that creating relational conductivity, currency across our relations despite our different worlds."

Given this backdrop, the way participants illustrate their experience of and with beauty takes sharp relief. As exemplified in Learning One and Two, for most participants, beauty had with it a power to connect both relationships and disparate parts. Sani, Julia, Aria, Mia, Vivienne, and Sebastian saw this quality in their beauty image, describing it as "connection," (Sani and Julia), "deep communion, and understanding," (Aria), "connection to worlds and flows," (Mia), "wholeness" (Vivienne), and as a "meeting place" for Sebastian who titled his image: "Liberated Connection in Authentic Expression." Aria, in reflecting on her beauty image, said, "we're all related like this is here. Complexity. Interrelationship. Inter-dynamicy [sic]." These reflections were supported by the overall feeling of Meetings Two and Three where the group appeared to truly appreciate one another, enjoy each other's comments and embodiments, and express the ensuing joy and connection with each other through their words and actions.

In Meeting Two, after participants had reflected on their drawings of beauty and uncertainty, Julia mentioned that beauty in her drawing stirred "compassion" in her without a push toward any particular action. Vivienne felt a "high level of energetic pull toward family—my children and grandchildren." Aria said she "heard homeward, or home," saw "unity," and a "breaking through and open [sic] into oneness—webbings." Sophia wondered about the difference between creativity and beauty. She said beauty is

"like a deeper level…like when you perceive your environment and yourself as not external to it. You're a part of it."

Notably, Vivienne opened the door to a more nuanced understanding of beauty as a mediator of relationships when she named that she felt the spiritual community too often "bypasses" difficulty in relating with "love and connection." In challenging times, she said she feels "we move very quickly to resolution" rather than dwelling longer in "transition" together. Sebastian added that the "shadow side of beauty" is that it can be dangerous and used manipulatively in relationships because of one's natural allure to it.

These findings are important for context and backdrop, and yet the heart of Learning Three finds its roots in participants' leadership enactments and the reflections that stemmed from them. In Meeting Two the group met together and participants were prompted, without any prior knowledge, to step into creative action by leading the group from and to beauty. Participants had three minutes in silence to collect their thoughts and retrieve any prop they thought they might need before they began their exploration together. The full presentation of participants' enactments can be found in the appendix; however, it is worth offering a few short examples.

Julia and Sebastian invited everyone to notice what was evoked for them in their hearts and bodies in reading poetry. Mia took her computer outside to the deck near the ocean so that the group might listen to the sound of the waves and reflect in silence. Eli guided the group into an embodied exploration of a tree with strong roots, able to bend and dance in the breeze. Sani facilitated the group into co-creating a song through rhythm, clapping, and humming. Eli, Mia, and Sebastian offered a prompt to notice what was happening for everyone in the body. Sophia described a snowy mountainside to the

group in great detail with "big, fat snowflakes hitting [her] face and melting" that spoke to her of beauty and discomfort, and then invited all to imagine themselves in a place on the land that evoked the same discomfort in us. Aria offered a song with her drum from her tradition, guiding the group to root into a place at the "life waters" that "feels of homecoming." As leaders who have a "very deep commitment to cultural transformation," Vivienne asked, how do we bring "the experience of beauty to be discerning about what we say yes to and what we let go by?" She continued, "does it expand into beauty, or does it just pass through?" Sebastian asked that the group to contemplate what it means to "tend a sacred fire in regard to one's work and our leadership at this time in the world." Altogether, participants' enactments wove poetry, contemplation, embodiment, land-based invitations, music, humor, and invitations to explore longings and edges.

Unfailingly, what impacted participants the most was the power of witnessing and leading from, unique expression in connection. When asked how they were affected by the enactments privately through chat, Sani shared, "I feel so much more connected to everyone now than when we started. I feel blessed and enriched. I give thanks." Mia wrote, "I feel woven into a fabric of beauty with many starting points and celebrants, and feel the enoughness [sic] of my own offering and a path alongside that of others." Aria said, "a witnessing of beauty and gifts of everyone, interconnection." Sophia, in describing what was most impactful, shared, "I like that we come from different places and experiences, but I felt a lot of commonality [sic]…and trust." Eli shared that "the connection to each person's story, their place, and their own experience of beauty" resonated with "that experience" in himself. He said it was "a sort of coming together, a

feeling of solidarity and support." Sani wrote that the diversity in how each person led was what she would take away from the experience. She said, "it's interesting how we can be distinct and connected and be one." She later reflected in a journal entry that it felt important to her that "we do something together…co-created." She wrote, "I was looking at each person and observing myself…I was feeling the feedback loops we were generating across, between, and amongst each other." Vivienne reminded us that the "expression of beauty is deeply personal *and* collective." In closing the session, Sebastian told the group he was leaving with a "strong back with you beside me."

2. How I Was Affected

As in so many other moments in this study, I found myself touched by the participants' courage, openness, and vulnerability when faced with a surprising bend in the road. The moment in Meeting Two when I prompted each leader to step into the circle and lead was in many ways the apex of the study. It enveloped us in a living field of uncertainty by turning the leadership function over to the participants, and allowed me as the researcher to focus on the heart of my research question. To do this well, I felt some initial pressure to be sure I was prompting the exercise with precision and care. I did not want to overly frighten the participants with too little prompting, but I equally did not want to give too many examples of how they might lead. I was therefore both nervous and energized with anticipation.

I was surprised to find that the participants did not appear put off by the sudden shift in leadership. I had expected to feel more resistance or shyness, which would have

been more familiar based on my experience. The presence of laughter and courage warmed me and helped me to relax in the moment.

During the enactments, I found myself inspired and hopeful for the field of leadership by what I was witnessing. I felt honored to be in the presence of such diverse and vulnerable strength. Like the participants, I also felt my heart open to seeking a deeper, more intimate connection with the group. It was as if their vulnerability and authenticity touched mine, resulting in a feeling of camaraderie and shared experience.

Concurrently, I also found myself longing for more risk-taking from the group. I had an inner voice that was constantly offering encouragement to the participants, saying things in my ear like, "go for it, take your time, there's more you're wanting to say or do," etc. This voice helped me touch my longing to see and taste the radical authenticity of the soul's expression in each person. Having worked with individuals and groups for decades, it has been my experience that few spaces feel safe and encouraging enough for individuals to express themselves fully without judgment. Yet, when these moments do occur, I have perceived a real sense of togetherness, and with it, fresh possibilities for growth. The longing I felt in that moment came out of a desire to be in such a space and out of an ethos of care.

3. My Interpretations of What Happened

Learning Three posits that creative action that flows from beauty has the potential to stimulate an experience of deep connection. Drawing from participants' reflections, beauty could be thought of metaphorically as an emergent place, situated in context, a "rugged landscape," or a "gathering place" where differences are both intensified and

permeable. Creative action, in the form of leadership from and to beauty, appeared to open this place in a similar way for all the participants, as if it were there all along yet invisible. Entering this shared space elicited a sense of tentative trust and deep connection between the research participants, and appeared to encourage a desire to connect with other, important relationships outside the room. For example, Vivienne's "strong energetic pull" to her grandchildren arose spontaneously in reflecting on her drawing of beauty and uncertainty in Meeting Two, while Mia expressed a desire to use the opportunity of the research study to examine difficult relational dynamics at work. Sophia's reflection on the difference between creativity and beauty indicated that beauty evoked an experience of being an active participant in the system, unable to act upon it from the outside.

Nora Bateson, in describing complexity, writes, "there is no language to define the spiraling processes of the vast context we are participants in. We do not have names for the patterns of interdependency." [58] And yet, participants in this study were able to gesture toward the ubiquitous nature of entanglement in their descriptions of complexity, however brief. Not insignificantly, complexity and beauty constellated into a symbiotic pair throughout the study. If there is a place of meeting between multiple ways of knowing, doing, and being, across time, space, and form, complexity might be one way of describing that meeting. Beauty might be another. Perhaps both complexity and beauty are ways of describing deep structures; connections, relationships, feedback loops, and reciprocal exchanges at different scales. When asked, all nine participants suggested one of the more complex aspects of their work entailed incongruities—between worldviews, stakeholders, cultures, and people—in relationship. Sebastian, Mia, Sophia, and Vivienne

expressed the difficulty they had experienced throughout their careers in navigating diverse intersubjective and collective spaces. Such relational complexities often appeared to take their toll on the participants, requiring each to actively build connection in the face of fragmentation at some personal cost. Overwhelm, spoken and unspoken, often accompanied participants' verbal shares, providing affective credibility to their reflections on complexity and relationship.

Strikingly, when beauty was evoked throughout each meeting, all nine participants again saw beauty in the connection between things, as if beauty is that which seeks the underlying wholeness in complexity. The elders, Aria said, talk about the "natural flow" of personal expression being that which creates "relational conductivity… currency across our relations despite our different worlds." The evocation of beauty appeared to reveal connection without removing the potency of difference.

This aesthetic was carried into the leadership enactments in Meeting Two, all of which had a few similar qualities. The first is that leaders invited participants into an open experience without aiming for a particular outcome. Leadership invitations were not directive, nor did they narrow the possibilities for where the group might end up at the end of their session. Instead, they each offered a minimum viable structure, as if weaving small cocoons for experience to emerge from. In this way, their enactments were widely inclusive and centered in provocation rather than dictation and dialogue.

Second, leaders' invitations to the group invited multi-faceted exploration, both individual and collective in focus. Of the eight enactments, two were land-based invitations, two were somatic explorations, two were poetic, and two were musical. Consistent with other phases of this study, the leaders engaged the group through the

physical senses, the deep imagination, and the feeling heart. A few of the enactments blurred any preconceived boundary between humans and nature, by contextualizing each person's place on the land and offering moments to shapeshift into other beings, as in Eli's tree. Notably, not one participant invited the group to reflect on their experience through discourse. This could have had to do with the short time constraint each leader was working within, but it bears gesturing back to Learning One; that beauty, as a guide into a subtle intelligence, first arises pre-discursively and loosens the bonds of anthropocentrism.

Lastly, leaders' enactments enlisted deep participation. Deep participation, as it is meant here, is a kind of whole-person presence; attendance of the soul and the system at once, or a concurrent inner and outer gaze. This researcher's observations coupled with the responses from participants were that each leader offered something spontaneously authentic. There was an atmosphere of truth and transparency that seeped into the meeting, made more real by the equal presence of tenderness, slight trembling, vulnerability, care, and fierceness. For the leaders, enactments were not polished or rehearsed but required an unveiling of the soul, however slight. In offering from that place, each invitation included something of the edge for those being led. This edge state, similar to Learning Two, was liminal, potentiated by disorientation, not-knowing, undoing, listening, dreaming, moving, and noticing. Even the most humorous and extroverted of the enactments, what Sani called her "strange music," landed as an attempt to expose us to the musicality of our particular collective dynamic in a way that was not without challenge. Yet there was an eagerness to seek that out together; to know how each individual part might together make a song.

While it could be said that enactments were not informational, but transformational in form and intent, it is worth noting that the potency of their impact felt dialed back.[59] Present in the room was a familiar rushed feeling; a quickness that, informed through experience, comes at least in part from vulnerability and exposure. Only a few of the leaders, I felt, fully inhabited the time they were allotted, and offered an invitation of considerable risk—to themselves and the group. This is understandable for a group that is new to each other, in a strange, blended context of ritual and research. This could also have been reflective of the process itself, and the amount of time and attention given to weaving the group field prior to such an experience, but it is equally worth wondering if participants succumbed to personal resistance, or defaulted to tacit collective norms that privilege politeness, niceness, and pleasantness above authenticity.

Nevertheless, deep participation and the attentive witnessing that comes along with elicited intimacy. Reflections afterward included a sense of feeling deeply connected to everyone else, enriched, blessed, and opened. Eli, for example, felt that witnessing each other provided an opportunity to see or feel resonance with another's experience in himself. An equal trust of difference, love, and appreciation for uniqueness in unity was shared by all. Eli, for example, felt that witnessing each other provided an opportunity to see or feel resonance with another's experience in himself. If beauty is a meeting place, then in that place there is connection through relatedness with life. A place that is imbued with what Bohm calls "a new form of insight" that seeks out implicit wholeness; a place for soul to be evoked and expressed across divides of otherness; a place where the worlds touch.[60] Sophia, in reflecting on the differences between creativity and beauty said beauty

is what happens when you are a part of what you are creating. Creative action, in beauty, clears an inclusive space for transformation.

4. Imaginal Structures in Use

At the time of this writing, I find myself living and working in a small, rural community in southwest Colorado. It is a beautiful place, bordered to the east by the San Juan and La Plata Mountain ranges, and to the west by the red rock deserts and rocky buttes of the Colorado Plateau. Sagebrush, juniper, and piñon pine hide robust populations of grey fox, deer, mountain lion, bear, and marmot, and the descending warble of the canyon wren competes with the call of raven, and the cackle of the piñon jay. It is impossible to be where I am and not be affected by the wild landscape and the beings that live on it.

Perhaps more shaping is the relationship I have to my local human community. Bordered to the south by the Weeminuche Ute people, to the west by the Diné, and on the ancestral homelands of the Pueblo people, I find my kinship with place to be fraught with the living history of colonial conquest and intergenerational privilege. My being where I am is not neutral. Adding to this complexity, the county population, driven by big agriculture, oil, and gas, is a politically conservative seat. The liberal views I hold, present in some numbers in the canyon, are minority views. The diversity that I am enmeshed in is rich and varied and my living here is contoured and shaped by the relationships—both those I have an affinity for, and those I find challenging.

This brief anecdotal indulgence feels important, for it is precisely this complex, interpersonal milieu that shapes what I see here in this data. For most of my life up until

this point, leaning into relationship across difference has not been a primary shaping ground— but rather a dynamic to avoid. As an adaptive, protective measure, I spent the majority of my early life shirking deep connection, concerned closeness to others would demand I give something up of myself…that I would get lost in the fog of intersubjectivity. A strong fear I carried was (and sometimes still is) that I will lose agency, be taken advantage of, and ultimately wounded for having been so vulnerable. A fierce independence took root early in my life to mitigate such fears, leading to, eventually, exhaustion from keeping it all together and a deep ache for intimacy. It could be said that the softening of this imaginal structure has led to a converse affinity for deep connection. Now, one of the primary ways I experience aliveness is through intimacy with both human and other-than-human beings – with a special focus on bridging connection in complex environments. I am a passionate advocate for the beauty I see and feel that comes through transformative relationship and the vulnerability it requires. No doubt this perspective has shaped what I see here.

5. Theoretical Concepts Upon Which Interpretations Are Based

A vast majority of contemporary people, Weber claims, are currently "neglecting reality" precisely because their way of describing and understanding the world are "directed away from the experience of being alive and being in relationship." [61] While modernity has been largely shaped by this colonial mindset, habituated over thousands of years to reduce, isolate, and see fragmented parts, this study is taking place amidst a burgeoning understanding of a systems view of life, fed and enhanced by Indigenous wisdom traditions around the world. [62]

Relational Systems Thinking, coined by Melanie Goodchild, is an eco-centric way of sensing into complexity that privileges relationship and centers mutual benefit for human and other-than-humans alike.[63] This emphasis on connection allows for increasing awareness of complexity as an emergent property of interrelationship.[64] Navigating such complexity with ethical skill is a distinctly postmodern challenge that, Omer reminds us, is both a highly aesthetic process and cannot be engaged without personal development.[65] "The transformation of culture, and consciousness," he writes; "are inextricably intertwined." [66] Similarly, Diessner, Rust, and Solom claim that one of beauty's philosophical definitions held across the literature is "unity-in-diversity" where various elements of a whole appear integrated.[67] The emotions that such experiences of beauty elicit, they suggest, may act as a developmental bridge, enabling people to close the gap between the "knowledge of beauty and moral action," connecting beauty with justice.[68]

The participants in this study are complexity leaders. Held within Imaginal Transformation Praxis, complexity leaders, concludes Omer, "are integral practitioners who lead through facilitating transformative learning and are transformative learners themselves." [69] ITP includes the understanding that transformative learning that results in greater internal complexity can only be catalyzed through experiencing.[70] Experience, for the exploration here, is congruent with what I mean by deep participation. It is that which arises, Omer describes, through "interconnection between interior and exterior, individual, and collective," where one is able to access and include new perspectives and lenses that have been exiled to the edges of self or system.[71] It is precisely that access that liberates the potential for a broadening of one's internal perspective and a widening of experience.

ITP claims that one of the primary barriers to thriving in complexity are rigidly held identity frames that place the complexity challenge "out there." Rather, it becomes important to view the distinction between self and other as primarily conceptual. In doing so, everyone can be viewed as both attempting to shift a complexity challenge, and as a complexity challenge themselves. Engendering a healthy relational dynamic then requires a leader to not only develop trust and intimacy with other people but perhaps more importantly, with one's interiority. Without that reflexivity, claims Omer, a bottleneck with others can easily occur. Relational development is inextricably bound to personal development.[72]

Useful to Learning Three is the understanding that the self, embedded in a larger network of relationships, is presented with opportunities to be shaped (develop) while holding to an essential continuity. Drawing from the work of Francisco Verela, ITP claims that *autopoietic capability* is not only central to the transformation and liberation of identity, but the complexification of the self. Autopoiesis infers that the self exists nowhere but in a dynamic relationship with the world, in a perpetual dance with the environment, metabolizing experience and relationship in an ongoing process of self-recreation. The softening of identity frames—or at the very least, their permeability—becomes a critical complexity competency.

Creative ritual, such as the leadership enactment that participants were guided into in this study, can be thought of as an enabling structure or a container that can hold the instability and heat of a transformative process so such shifts can occur.[73] Omer describes creative ritual as "imagination in action," that has the potential to release "the transformative potentials of our collective life." [74] He continues:

In this way, creative ritual engenders a context and container for principled and imaginative transgression so that the exiled, rejected, devalued, and difficult parts of our experience can express themselves in ways that have new meanings. Through creative ritual, we are carried towards the future in spite of ourselves, even past our own resistance. Creative ritual is imagination in action, allowing us to tap into our Indigenous knowing, thereby releasing the transformative potentials of our collective life. [75]

In creative ritual, it becomes easier for one's identity framework to expand, at least temporarily, and for something more to come through. This act, precisely because unfamiliarity is present, can feel simultaneously rich, thrilling, and vulnerable. Because such feelings often arise with some form of resistance in transformative learning, it is worth noting that the presence of personal or cultural gatekeepers during the leadership enactments was likely in the room. Omer defines gatekeeping as an "adaptive dynamic" or protective measure that can "help a living system thrive" under duress, but becomes "maladaptive when the circumstances change." [76] The presence of gatekeeping could be one way to understand the hesitancy or quickness that was also present during the leadership enactments.

Importantly, creative ritual can engender an experience of *ritual trust*, which Omer describes as "a temporary suspending of fear, suspicion, indifference, conflict, and even hatred." [77] In a ritual context, feelings of belonging, intimacy, and mutuality can arise among people that can help shift narrow frames of reference and bridge across differences. Jones' *commons of the imagination* can help to elucidate this learning. He writes:

In times of uncertainty, we need to look to the spaces between for order and coherence – to gifts, beauty, grace, voice, and wholeness—what may be called the commons of the imagination. Awakening to the presence of the commons in both

the personal and the public imagination is our new art form. It is also the leader's new work.[78]

The intelligence of the deep imagination for both Jones and Omer is central to the formation of such a relational space. Drawing from Goethe, Jones describes the imagination as a "kind of sense organ" that seeks wholeness and draws into awareness that which was previously unseen, exiled, or ambiguous.[79]

The softening of rigid identity frames through creative ritual resulted in a deep experience of connectivity in Learning Three. That connectivity is rooted in the aesthetic dimensions of feeling, image, and sensation, which, proposes ITP, holds the potential for lasting, internal and external transformation. Senge offers a nuanced perspective of how beauty may help that softening to occur by asking, "when you experience something beautiful what happened to the 'you?' He answers:

> You are not even around anymore. Whatever you see is still there, but something happens to transcend that object or phenomenon and you, and beauty just exists. So that's the interconnectedness, that's when that sense of us as separate, our embodiment which is how we navigate the world, somehow is held in abeyance. And something else emerges." [80]

Not only did participants feel connected, but they also felt able to offer something spontaneous and authentic—of their deeper or more essential self. The celebration of uniqueness and the gratitude participants felt gestures toward a particular quality of the collective space that is accessed through creative ritual, and a willingness to witness and be moved by one another.[81]

6. Validity Considerations

There is substantial evidence that suggests a leader's capacity to reach across divides of otherness with reflexivity is not ingrained but developed over time.[82] This brings up an important validity consideration for this study. My participant requirements included familiarity with uncertainty and complexity and at least moderate reflexivity. Given their work, they also came in with considerable interpersonal skills and an acute awareness of systemic oppression, cultural differences, and marginalized worldviews. Therefore, an argument could be made that this group was not acting in ways that were at all unique to this study or to the prompt, but rather as an expression of an existing capability developed over time. A too-simple interpretation of the leadership enactments and their result would herald beauty as a panacea for the complexities of relationship, and the nuanced demands those relationships make on individual and collective development.

Learning Four: Becoming Visible

> You must begin with the part of you that feels. And that abandonment of the statistical mentality, that reliance on feeling, in and of itself, will bring you into conflict with the culture in which you live.

~ Steven Buhner[83]

Learning Four suggests that creative action taken from the experience of beauty may inspire conscious sacrifice. Omer defines conscious sacrifice as a "willingness to experience difficulty, failure, and loss of privilege" as a result of actions that transgress or go against the grain of a social system.[84] Perhaps not unsurprisingly, participants all

framed their work as that which required counteractions that move against the hidden, habitual dynamics of the system they found themselves within. This frame demanded participants not only hold a vision for a possible future that was life enhancing but to sit in discomfort and to be at the effect of the very same problematic dynamics they were attempting to shift. Participants expressed the tension of holding such a position, sometimes communicated through paradoxical emotions such as concurrent hope and despair, and other times as an apparent inability to fall into good/bad binaries. This orientation appeared to give some participants access to capabilities such as commitment, courage, and fierceness, enabling them to take risks, be with complexity, evoke others, and deepen the group's collective reflection in the moment.

For some participants, this experience appeared to be connected to historical moments in their lives that were deeply wounding, or intensely emotional personal experiences that in turn shaped their perspective and bestowed meaning to their actions. During the study, the moments where such sensitivities were revealed were generally thought to be beautiful to others, related closely to the authentic, to truth, or to what is genuine and heartfelt. These were also moments punctuated by strong emotion. Participants appeared able to work with such emotions in the moment in generative ways, inspiring others, catalyzing new reflections, and leading effectively. Many participants reflected on such actions, both in life and in the study, as acts that draw from something deeper and more powerful under the surface. They repeatedly demonstrated and described moments when they were pushed to take risks, work on the edges of culture, face difficulty, and experience failure on behalf of the actions they found most beautiful.

1. What Happened

In Meeting One I asked Vivienne why she was drawn to this study. She

responded:

> "I feel like we have been working from a veneer of what is possible in a world
> that is deeply connected… I only see the reinforcement of this veneer. I feel like
> we're surrounded by diviners, but no one's listening to [those who know] there's
> something deep to go down into."

Vivienne's response, although unique in its description, was echoed by other participants.

Strikingly, all the participants in the study offered a contextual backdrop that helped them

see and make sense of the pertinent challenges they felt they were facing. The "veneer,"

Vivienne explained, is a systems-wide, baked-in reactivity, engendered from "6,000

years" of "deep misogyny." It is an approach that is devoid of curiosity and a deflection

of deep understanding which she called "counter wisdom." Counter wisdom structurally

functions as a "colonization of the mind," largely operating through the subtle

enforcement of taboos that "mean you cannot think." She concluded, "I feel like we've

been living in a child's tantrum for 6,000 years." While she spoke, she exhibited

fierceness and confidence, as if these insights were hard won. It was clear to me that

Vivienne had come up against what she understood to be oppressive, structural dynamics

throughout her career and felt very strongly that she needed to speak to them regardless

of how it came across.

For Eli, work as a structural engineer came alive in knowing that the "biggest

challenge…is the reality of our planetary devastation, alongside the expectation for

capitalist growth [in] a publicly traded corporation." His calling, he explained in Meeting

One, is to work "in solidarity with the living earth" on big infrastructure projects, which requires him to inhabit the archetypal role of the trickster in the engineering profession. For Eli, being "authentic and truthful to what I believe" in a corporate setting is a sobering tension. He articulated two poignant questions that drove him, "do we as a species have the capability to navigate through this time and survive? Is it possible for the engineering profession to evolve out of this incredibly patriarchal, racially-biased, colonial method of work?" The "cascade of uncertainties" that flow from these questions were mirrored in his uncertainty image in Meeting One, with which he felt both negativity and hope. Again, Eli spoke with a passion that supported his view. It was clear that the tension that came with his questions both drove and overwhelmed him.

In Meetings One and Three, Sani shared that her experience of systemic racism and misogyny have been a burden she has borne as a young black woman in the pharmaceutical industry and later as a social entrepreneur. She said, "when you go after a complex problem you actually do need systems thinking. You have to have the humility to recognize that you actually can't solve this problem alone. But then when you're a [young] black woman, there's a way that society makes that harder." The way the system is constructed upholds "the bias and the discrimination." Throughout the study, Sani regularly gestured toward the challenges she faced as a black woman working on systemic change and the personal risk and conscious sacrifice she had experienced doing so. Like Vivienne, she exhibited fierceness, courage, and determination as she spoke of the hardship she had experienced.

Mia described our current planetary moment as a cacophony of different stories, many of which, she said, are "not going to help us survive on this planet." She spoke

clearly, and slowly, demonstrating an awareness of how complexity requires personal accountability and demands a relationship to disharmony. She offered, "there's beauty in all of [the stories] in a certain way, but they're actually killing us, right? There's a process there of coming into relationship with something that almost has a disharmony…what's the role of beauty…to become creative in relationship to that chaos, and that disharmony?"

In reflecting on her uncertainty image in Meeting One, Aria identified patterns of persecution that operate in the background and can be internalized, which she understood to create life-destroying uncertainties for so many people. Her work, she explained, had been dedicated to revealing colonial structural dynamics that harm, and then offering ways to "realign" with ways of being, doing, and knowing that promote life. For example, her work in Indigenous youth suicide prevention and decolonization are ways that she felt she can help heal, align, and build more life-enhancing systems of care, connected with the spirit of the land. Her intergenerational journey with an early diagnosis of schizophrenia, which, though profoundly challenging, was an experience that she understood to have shaped her understanding of her work. Despite Aria's deep sense that a difficult face of uncertainty includes persecution, she said, underneath uncertainty is a knowing that people have "the right to life."

The immensity of the structural challenges each participant described was woven into their experience of uncertainty and catalyzed a passionate response; a mixture of hope and despair that offered them a handhold into the kind of structural change they were committing to. Vivienne, like many others, described the challenge of uncertainty less as a state than "a whole being; a baton that gets handed that I didn't ask for, but I

have it, and I can't be anything else but it." It is a powerful connection she has that pushes her to "never play it safe" and to inhabit the cutting edge of the social change sector.

As a part of their integration, participants began to describe beauty as something already present in the system, waiting to be uncovered. In working with his uncertainty image in Meeting One, Eli articulated his calling as that which helps to "unearth a vision" for a way of being in a community "before colonial times, and before the energy sector arrived." In a group discussion in Meeting Three, Sani linked creative action that arises from beauty to authenticity. She said, "it's sort of like an unearthing process…a process of uncovering something that's already there, that's authentic, and…we're just unpacking whatever layers we've put on top of it." The creative action, she said, is making that invisible layer "something we can all perceive." Sani's comment prompted Vivienne to reflect on beauty as a transition of states, from the sterile and the taboo to their opposite; a transgressive act that confronts the "taboos which camouflage as culture" in lived experience.

Many participants' journal entries post leadership enactments in Meeting Two mentioned seeing beauty in what felt "genuine" and "heartfelt." For example, Aria mentioned that it was "people speaking truth, from the heart" that was most beautiful. Sophia wrote that leading from her own, intimate experience with nature felt most effective. Sebastian wrote that he was affected by the openness he felt that enabled him to show up with something "real and authentic" with a desire to be of service. He noted that other's leadership enactments struck him as genuine.[85]

Perhaps, as Sophia pointed out, the process of unearthing an invisible layer of beauty might not be possible to articulate in the English language. She said, "maybe there is no word in English for the thing you're trying to capture." Reflecting on the "missing pieces" in her cultural heritage due to the cultural genocide in Indigenous residential schools, Sophia found resonance with a word she found through Robin Wall-Kimmerer. *Puhpowee*, articulated her experience of beauty exactly. "It's a spiritual word," she said, for "when a mushroom bursts through the soil. It embodies the magic that's missing in our worldview." [86]

And yet acting from a deeper beauty in structures of oppression appeared to come with significant personal, collective, and systemic consequences for many of the participants. Sani offered a stark juxtaposition. She said, "there's the uncertainty of shifting career roles...and then there's the uncertainty of what happens when you go messing around with a system." Referencing her current social change initiative in Nigeria, she said, "the last woman who came up against counterfeit drugs was shot." Later, in a group discussion on unearthing authenticity, Sani reiterated that she feels beauty is authentic but reminded us that living that way carries "real-world consequences." She said the "uncertainty is not just the work itself and the complexity from the work. It's also between me and the work, and what I represent in the work." Later, in her journal entries, Sani wrote that for many black women, "there is old fashioned cookie-cutter patriarchy and entrenched misogynist-style religiosity" baked into the system. She saw these structural inequities as designed to oppress the "abundant source of power" that is authentic pleasure. She wrote, "black female pleasure, beautiful as it is, in this world is Rebellion."

As the conversation deepened, Vivienne reflected on losing her parents very close together. She said the "lightning moment" in the study for her is rooted in authenticity and the deep intimacy that is required to connect "our lived experience and varied states." The "inability to be able to show up authentically" is linked with a larger cultural milieu that drives out and locks down emotions. "Where is the culture that we can mourn together? Where is the culture that the women can wail?" For Vivienne, the opposite of beauty is the repression of emotion. Connection and authenticity grounded in lived experience form the nexus of her work. Liberated emotion, she said, is "the wisdom and the power providing direction and connection."

Aria offered, in contrast, that some structural forms, such as the traditional governance systems she was promoting, far from being oppressive, illuminate beauty, coming through the land and culture and context. These forms "allow us to walk in a way that is beautiful." In her work in suicide prevention and life promotion, she said, young people are looking to culture, and language, which they feel strengthens them. Certain structural forms promote life, but all too often, as Vivienne said, "the deep wisdom is not heard."

2. How I Was Affected

By the time the group had arrived at our final integration session, there was intimacy and a budding familiarity in our group field. This closeness allowed for an honest and wide-ranging discussion that needed little prompting from me. I was aware, as the conversation deepened, of my intrigue in what was on offer. I felt drawn in to the wisdom the leaders in the group held, sparked by their insights, and challenged to expand

my understanding, blind spots, and biases. Any awareness I had of my situational power in the group was fleeting, coming and going only in moments of prompting the next question, tracking the time, or asking for clarification. I had begun to feel something precious and rare for me, which is to be met soul-to-soul in a shared inquiry that appeared to be relevant and engaging, not just for me, but for these leaders whom I had begun to admire.

It was in Meeting Three that I fully acknowledged a sacred presence in the study—a meta-awareness that we just might be unearthing something beautiful and whole, invisible, yet felt as we spoke. Perhaps more important was a growing felt sense that this 'something' was not neutral, or frivolous in the context of systemic breakdown, but perhaps central to our thriving in the middle of it despite the dangers involved. Participants' shares and the group atmosphere struck me as beautiful. The more honestly and vulnerably they shared—especially of taboo subjects and challenging dynamics, the more moved I became.

I told the participants at the end of our meeting that I am indebted to them in a way that cannot be repaid, only paid forward…only given away. It feels appropriate then, to say, as I write these words, what lingers is profound gratitude for this life, these leaders, and the mysterious nature of the thread we're all following.

3. My Interpretations of What Happened

Learning Four suggests that creative action taken from the experience of beauty may inspire conscious sacrifice. I draw from ITP to understand conscious sacrifice as that which moves a person to be open to difficulty, failure of identity and belief, and loss of

personal privilege.[87] Often this sacrifice connected participants with strong emotions such as grief, rage, hope, despair, and a sense of personal danger that, though uneasy, nevertheless appeared to catalyze action. During the study, the actions that were most affecting for others were those that struck them as genuine, vulnerable, and from the heart. Many participants reflected on such actions, both in work and in the study, as authentic acts that draw from something deeper, more hidden, and powerfully subterranean. They repeatedly demonstrated and described moments that pushed them outside of their personal comfort zone. They exhibited courage and fierceness when speaking to and embodying the perspectives and vulnerable actions they found most beautiful.

Vivienne's use of the word *veneer* is a poignant articulation of the layered, complex experience that beauty appeared to bestow. To see the veneer requires seeing the wood that lies beneath it. From the German *furnieren* which means to "cover," a veneer presents as an outward show of quality; a visible part that hides the invisible nature of the whole.[88] Invariably, participants spoke with passion, vision, and a strong sense of purpose born of difficulty when prompted to speak of their work. And yet, the extraordinary vantage point they held, while affording them a generative drive to participate, was equally that which situated them, (and at times, implicated them), in systems of oppression whose intended or unintended consequences result in life destruction. These moments were punctuated by strong emotion often gained through difficult, personal experience or traumatic historical events. It was as though perceiving wholeness necessitated being affected by fragmentation.

Mia felt that it is important to align with the disharmony; to acknowledge the cacophony of stories that, in their distinctness, were beautiful to her, but overall, were destructive. For Vivienne and Sani, it required state shifts and shapeshifting in and out of subjectivities to navigate the fragmentation while serving something deeper. To see the veneer requires seeing what lies beneath—an expansive perspective that carried with it the burden of awareness. Some participants expressed this layered awareness through contradictory emotions, such as hope and despair, and others as a wariness of what their work may ask of them mixed with a principled commitment to do their part regardless.

It appeared to be this complexity that enabled participants to make decisions and act, placing them in the perilous and sometimes painful position of moving against the grain. The participants' sense of calling, or being called to do their work regardless of consequence appeared to be born of the unique sensitivities of the soul. It also meant that participants were not able to do their work without being deeply affected. What they found most beautiful was also personally painful. Vivienne spoke about the death of her parents and what she experienced as an ugly, lockdown of emotion that her cultural surround expected of her at that time. It was clear in her sharing that she believed this freezing of emotion was a face of the veneer that kept emotion, and therefore beauty, at bay. Her later work was largely shaped by this personal struggle. Connected throughout the study with her rage and able to express it, Vivienne indeed catalyzed others, thus doing her part to shape the outcome of the study and promote connection.

Similar to Vivienne's metaphor of the veneer, participants spoke of dipping beneath the surface or "unearthing" as an act of beauty throughout the study. Eli connected his work to "unearthing a vision" that went counter to the norm, for example.

Sani felt beauty was a process of bringing something unseen up from the depths and

Sophia found resonance with the Anishinaabe word *puhpowee* which refers to a spiritual

force that pushes something heretofore unseen up from the earth. Together, such

metaphors link beauty to that act of bringing something precious up from the depths; to

excavate, expose or dredge up layers of reality that had been lost or hidden. Doing so, for

Sani, was an act that unleashed a source of repressed power that the dominant system

might experience as open rebellion. Vivienne offered in Meeting One that the hope and

despair, grief, and rage she held was a powerful connection that pushes her to play at the

edges of the social change sector. She described this work as "not playing safe."

Sani, Vivienne, and Aria felt that such acts of beauty were related to *authenticity*.

In Greek, *authentikos* means "original, genuine, or principled." These two words,

unearthing, and authenticity appear to converge in gesturing toward that which is of the

earth, protected by the earth, natural, and of a deeper order. Notably, in Meetings Two

and Three when the entire group convened, there were moments when participants

offered something of their depths—a vulnerable moment, an intense passion, or

perspective, and in those moments we each experienced beauty and were touched. I was

regularly affected by moments of revelation in the same way I am by a beautiful sunset. I

felt moved, drawn into intimacy, and able to stand outside myself. Perhaps this sentiment

aligns with Aria's insight when she reminded the group that for her beauty, "arises from

the center, in which we all belong."[89]

Concurrently, participants made equally clear that to hold an authentic and

passionate perspective, while beautiful, does not demand conscious sacrifice on its own.

It is taking action from beauty, from the authentic, that appeared to require one to move

against the strictly-patrolled norms, beliefs, and taboos that undergird a given system, and therefore to render vulnerable one's beliefs, identity, and personal safety. Native to the edges, the archetypal trickster came up twice in this study. Once, when Eli was describing his deeper role at the engineering firm (aligning with the "living earth" on infrastructure projects), and again in the chat just before the leadership enactments in Meeting Two. In that instance, Aria was honoring the role of the trickster for my handing over the leadership function.[90] In both cases, the trickster appeared as a contrarian, moving against the stream or the established pattern. For Vivienne, taking action in contrary ways was both "a baton she was handed" and a lonely position. For Sani, given her social location in the system, it was a move that carried the very real risk of physical consequence—even death.

Given the risks, action taken from beauty becomes engaged as if it were one way to upend or act upon structural dynamics in life-enhancing ways. To stand for a possibility in the tension between inherent wholeness and damaging partiality required participants to see themselves as a part of the system they are attempting to change. This appeared to make it difficult for participants to fall prey to simple good-bad binaries. For example, Eli identified his place of work as a part of the capitalist machine that sees no boundaries to growth. Holding that tension, and choosing to engage from within the challenge presented him with an ongoing ethical dilemma, but one he held with awareness.

It could be said that it is the nature of the soul to transgress across artificial boundaries that denigrate life.[91] Revealed through body posture, attentiveness, and clarity, the voice of the soul of each participant rang clear in their commitment to change.

In these moments of revelation, theirs were not tame voices, but had something of *puhpowee* in them, which translates as "the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight." Kimmerer writes that the makers of this word "understood a world of being, full of unseen energies that animate everything." [92] If soul generally could be defined as life being its fullness through relationship, then to live in a system that requires partiality and isolation is oppressive to soul. It could be that the space of the complexity agent or, in Houston's terms, the *social artist*, is to be found in this tension.[93] If the artist's sensibilities enable one to perceive and create from beauty and to liberate the soul, then their art becomes the art of world-making, the art stepping forth across the threshold of change whatever the cost.

4. Imaginal Structures in Use

Some years ago, as I began my doctoral journey, I had gone into the Santa Monica mountains to a remote rock outcrop above a natural spring to inquire into the question that was mine to ask. The day was warm and dry. Groups of raucous students played in the pools below, unaware of my contemplative presence. Toward the late afternoon, a sleepy stretch of reverie was interrupted by a flock of red-headed woodpeckers who perched and pecked on the high branches all around my rock. With my inner ear, I heard, "you will tend to the largest network of relationships possible."

I still do not entirely understand the meaning of the *koan* I was gifted that day, but something of this learning speaks to the invisible web of relationships that had claimed me.[94] At the time, complexity and systems principles were as yet a nascent intellectual interest. But my body knew the language. It still does. As I sit back from Learning Four, I

realize I see data as a chaordic painting. Meaning hovers in the balance between order and chaos. It strikes me in nonlinear, largely intuitive, and associative ways. One participant's insight is not isolated, but rather entangled in "the largest network of relationships possible." The system lives in us. To change the system, we must change ourselves.

This imaginal structure affords me an ability to see the whole in the part, the coherence in the madness, and the connection between things. It also makes it difficult to herd my insights into tidy, conceptual cages. They keep misbehaving, attempting to leap out to say, "everything!"

For the whole of my life, I have walked with a peculiar and blessed angst that had long ago kindled an awareness in me of the life-destroying nature of the dominant, Western, cultural trance.[95] In my earlier years, this angst expressed itself in unripened ways, pushing me into the cultural margins through a reactive impulse to self-exile and shrug off what I experienced as soul-sucking, overbearing, and unquestioned strictures that wanted their way with me. I wanted to question and test them all. As I've grown, I've learned to enter the angst, identify the anger and the grief there, and to channel those fierce emotions into constructive action. I made a conscious decision to wade back into the murky waters of modernity's cultural center, bringing with me the gifts and insights I had accumulated all my years in exile. This imaginal structure is the one of me that most influences how I understand my work. It springs up in me at times when I sense there is, as the poet Morgan Farley writes, "another way to live."

5. Theoretical Concepts Upon Which Interpretations are Based

Unearthing beauty to touch a deeper authenticity is a phenomenological process that resonates with Bortoft's conception of entering the *authentic whole*. Drawing from Goethe, Bortoft defines the authentic whole as that which is reached through a moment of "intuitive perception where the universal is seen within the particular."[96] To do so requires a sensitivity and a "contemplation" that Bortoft describes as a "way of seeing" that "illustrates the simultaneous, reciprocal relationship between part and whole."[97] It also requires entering an intimate relationship with the fragments in such a way that one is not separate from what one is observing, but rather mutually entwined in a complex web of relationships. Evolutionary biology, somatic psychology, and relational development, among other fields of study, understand that to be in contact is to be changed, moved, touched, and enlivened.[98] It could be said this way of presencing the whole is antithetical to the predilection of modernity, which favors reduction, and isolation. In this sense, the participants in this study demonstrated a divergence from modernity's trance, which Omer evocatively describes as a "collective state of complacent passivity and loss of individuality" that "deadens us to what is possible."[99] To see the whole in the part requires intimacy with the fragmentation, and in that relationship, one is presented with the possibility to take creative action.

Creative action writes Omer, paradoxically requires surrender to the "necessities, meanings, and possibilities inherent in the present moment."[100] Surrender of this sort presses a leader to feel fully and deeply without getting trapped in a back loop of raw emoting. Instead, writes Omer, creative action requires one to "transmute the way they are personally affected" and channel the result into action that "midwives the future."[101]

It is through taking in the full impact of the fragmentation, and surrendering to the full range of experience it evokes, rather than avoiding it, numbing, or dissociating from it, that allows for new potentialities to become clear. Omer et al. write:

> Creative action, when it is pragmatically transgressive, transforms culture, enabling new experience that shapes the next cycle of learning. In this way, cultural transformation supports the complex generational learning cycles that constitute the emergence of collective wisdom. [102]

To transgress means to step or move across. The analogy of cultural center and cultural margin may be useful in this exploration. If culture can be understood as a collective mindset, then the center of culture, during times of homeostasis, holds and reinforces the status quo through taboos, rules, policies, and at its most concrete, institutions. The margin, in contrast, holds transformative potential. It is on the edges where innovation begins and creativity is concentrated. Invariably, the artistic works, initiatives, movements, and wayward folks that inhabit the cultural fringe represent a contrarian, or entirely alternative and never-seen-before view or way of being. In this way they hold the power, at times of unrest, to upend the stability at the center. For these reasons, the center of culture tends to marginalize, ostracize, disenfranchise, and scapegoat the instigators of such potential disruptions. Creative actions hold the power to weaken the veneer because they transgress or step across the patrolled boundary, (conceptual, institutional, spiritual), that upholds the cultural center.[103] Those who take creative action are the cross-pollinators and free radicals in the system, able sow the seeds of the thoughts, ideas, and values of the margins to create new opportunities for cultural transformation.

In light of this study, the kind of transgression that the participants spoke to, and the personal risks they identified, bring us to explore the three distinct features that Omer suggests constitute a creative transgression. First, creative transgressions are principled actions that are aligned with the truth. Learning One indicated that participants were able to contact a deep experience of truth through their own, and each other's authenticity. It is this potent contact that Omer posits gives principled actions their efficacy. Second, creative transgressions draw from the intelligence of the deep imagination. It is this imagining that "evokes a new and unexpected experience that requires others to reorient and make new meanings." [104] Participants' ability to communicate a powerful counter truth, and then take action toward it, requires the faculty of the imagination. Finally, transgressions that allow for the emergence of cultural sovereignty demand conscious sacrifice, "requiring the willingness to experience difficulty, failure, and loss of privilege," Omer claims. [105] To go against the grain, point out the partiality of the veneer, and plant new seeds of imaginative potential is risky and can be a heavy burden to carry.

At the center of the status quo are those who "personify the restrictive and resisting forces within a culture that maintain the dominant ideology and ensure conformity with that culture's rules, norms, values, and taboos." [106] Omer identifies these people as cultural gatekeepers—those who "restrict experience." [107] Like the participants in this study, the need for leaders who will meet the gatekeepers of a life-destroying ideology and way of being becomes paramount in systems of oppression.

Distinct from other forms of leadership, those who consciously and creatively transgress rules that restrict life find resonance with Houston's social artistry. She writes, "too many of the problems in societies today stem from leadership that is ill-prepared to

deal with present complexity." [108] Houston describes this leadership gap as "a lack of human resourcefulness…when the usual formulas and stopgap solutions of an earlier era will not help." [109] A social artist then, brings the same creative potentials and sensitivities that one would bring to the creation of artistic work to "the canvas of our social reality." Social artistry writes Houston, "is the art of enhancing human capabilities in light of social complexity. It seeks to bring new ways of thinking, being, and doing to social challenges in the world." [110]

6. Validity Considerations

Meeting Three, from which a large portion of the data for Learning Four was uncovered, was structured as a loose, open-ended discussion on our individual and mutual learnings over the course of the study. Participants were first prompted to share what they had learned about beauty and uncertainty, and how that learning might catalyze creative action in their life and work. This study's Research Problem was then shared, along with a few framing principles that would serve the discussion. This evoked the participants, who then picked up on keywords I had used like 'transgression,' and 'culture.' The result was a conversation that focused more heavily on the system than it did on the individual. While a systemic perspective is a fluency these leaders embodied prior to the study, it bears saying that the group likely arrived where it did because of the framing concepts and principles I made visible. While it remains true that these participants are independent and critical thinkers themselves, they inevitably picked up on my biases and interests. Nevertheless, there remained a strong coherence with earlier

statements and experiences, suggesting that my prompts did not so much shape their responses as catalyzed them.

Conclusion

Leadership that employs a singular, deductive intelligence which reduces wholes to parts and privileges objectivism, decisiveness, and control over uncertainty, is at best inadequate and at worst outright dangerous in complex contexts.[111] Even still, modernity's archetypal leader remains fixed to an omniscient viewpoint, located somewhere outside of the system it seeks to change, and exercises power through top-down, individualistic coercion. For complexity leaders, such approaches decisively flounder.[112] Leading in complexity demands that one acknowledge how one is embedded in the systems one seeks to change. As the research hypothesis indicates, this will require a whole-person approach that draws from a wide range of capabilities. The research hypothesis posits that the catalytic nature of beauty seeds creative action by increasing a leader's connection to their deep intuition when certainty is not available.

Learning One, *Exile and Ecstasy*, suggests that beauty, when evoked in a field of uncertainty, has the potential to animate a *pre-discursive knowing*, experienced as a disruptive form of guidance.

Learning Two, *Betwixt and Between*, suggests that following beauty's guidance may precipitate a liminal state that has the potential to provide access to a greater fluidity of perspective. This state was characterized by the presence of strong emotion, disorientation, and a sense of being moved.

Learning Three, *Where the Worlds Touch*, posits that creative action that flows from beauty has the potential to stimulate an experience of deep connection. Finally, Learning Four, *Becoming Visible*, suggests that creative action taken from the experience of beauty may require conscious sacrifice.

The Cumulative Learning, *Ensouling Leadership*, weaves these four learnings together to suggest that experiences of beauty hold the potential to inspire *ecstasis*, a state that moves a person outside the confines of the familiar self into a place where more information (more feeling, more creativity, more perspective) becomes available. Called in this study by various names including authenticity, power, wholeness, or the act of creation itself, each participant's experience of beauty appeared to make available a greater, more inclusive set of possibilities for creative action in the moment, made visible through intuitive perception. Participants found themselves both developmentally stretched at the edges of the known, and able to tenuously trust the images, affects, and sensations that bubbled up as a kind of a priori guidance through the mires of uncertainty. These findings directly address the Research Problem at the heart of this study, which asks: In what ways might beauty serve as a catalyst in promoting a leader's relationship with deep intuition as an enabling condition for creative action amidst uncertainty? It could be said that beauty begins to dissolve the singular and the separate self, opening one to a more complex landscape where deep participation and collective learning can begin. For leaders entangled in the complexities of relationship at scale, such learning is critical.[113]

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS

Introduction and Overview

This chapter explores the significance and implications of this study—both for this author's work in leadership development and for those who find themselves leading in complex contexts. The first section provides an overview of learnings against the backdrop of the working hypothesis. The discussion deepens to examine what creative action means in the context of this study, and how it may differ from conventional conceptualizations of leadership action. The second section explores the deeper mythic and archetypal patterns of the learnings that give further life and relevance to this inquiry. And finally, section three offers a few closing thoughts on beauty's perennial relationship to goodness and truth, along with recommendations for future research.

Significance of the Learnings

In old medieval maps, past the point where the ocean's edge marks the extremity of the known, dragon-like creatures are depicted breaching out of the depths. These evocative images are accompanied by text that reads as one-part warning and one-part mysterious invitation; *here be dragons*.[1] Complexity leaders regularly wander in this mythic *terra incognita*—catalyzed by times where the fierce face of complexity demands a deeper pause, or in moments subsumed by the despair that arises when habitual

strategies fall hopelessly short. This study aspired to attend to the place where the former certainty of known reference points gives out and leaders no longer know what to do. The learnings from this study indicated that an unlikely ally in uncertainty, beauty, may present a doorway; a beguiling invitation to turn toward the unknown and explore in new, at times uncomfortable, ways the life-giving conversation between *what is* and what *could be.*

In contexts beset by perpetual, pervasive, and exponential change, Chima and Gutman suggest that customary logic does not deliver definite outcomes.[2] This research was shaped by the intimation that beauty may help leaders access a deeper reservoir of knowledge when certainty is not available, thus inspiring creative action. The cumulative learning suggests that experiences of beauty hold the potential to inspire ecstasis, a state that moves a person outside the confines of the familiar self into a place where more information (more feeling, more creativity, more perspective) becomes available. It could be said that beauty begins to dissolve the singular and the separate self, opening one to a more complex landscape where deep participation and collective learning can begin.

Learning One suggests that beauty, when evoked in uncertainty, has the potential to animate a *pre-discursive knowing*, experienced as a disruptive form of inner guidance. Such guidance was not placid, but instead appeared to disrupt what Omer et al. call the "comfort zone of familiarity."[3] Beauty, therefore, did not offer directives that were immediately apprehensible by the rational mind but instead delivered participants into a kind of liminal disequilibrium. Learning Two suggests that this state of disorientation was characterized by a sense of being moved or made permeable; providing participants with greater access to more complex vantage points. Learning Three gestures to the way

that witnessing beauty in others may help to craft a sense of intimacy and deep connection. From that place, participants offered invitations to each other in their leadership enactments that held transformative potential. Lastly, Learning Four proposes that creative action taken from the experience of beauty may require leaders to willingly sacrifice comfort, prestige, fixity of identity, and conceptions of success for a more life-enhancing vision of the possible.

Burdened by modernity's preference for the concrete objective, these learnings may appear to some to be impractical. One might rightfully ask how any leader beset by internal and external demands for competent action could feel supported in that moment by experiencing beauty. How, in a world fraught with intense political division, social inequity, and ecological devastation might beauty illuminate a way? Through a particular lens, such a suggestion appears preposterous. The intuitive function, when it was evoked in this study, did not offer linear, analytical, or concrete directives. It did not support the participants in the reinforcement of known narratives or provoke the kind of confident action that comes with clarity. It also did not appear to collude with dominant leadership ideology or best practices.

Instead, beauty *unsettled*. It saddled itself, and the participants who surrendered to it, to even greater uncertainty, a sense of instability, vulnerability, and permeability, and it appeared to evoke a myriad of intense emotions. From that place, participants in this small study appeared to feel more connection, touch the edges of a tentative trust, and invited each other into experiences that held transformative potential. Based on the way leadership action is often understood, one might find it wanting. These findings, therefore, demand a deeper look.

Creative action is held within Imaginal Transformation Praxis as that which springs out of experience; where one can hold the unconscious personal, social, and cultural dynamics that undermine learning with awareness. The knowledge that is liberated through such experiences results, over time, in fresh competencies that Omer et al. believe "travel with the learner because they have become the learner." [4] ITP claims that such competencies include new leadership capacities like courage, compassion, clarity, and reflexivity. They also include perceptual shifts, such as the development of new values or insights, and qualities of being, such as humility and discernment.[5]

In recent decades, there has been a small but notable upswell of research that links a leader's capacity to make a generative impact to exactly these kinds of capacities. It is almost ubiquitous in the leadership literature to find extensive lists of inner qualities that are exhibited by effective leaders, but rare to find any substantive discussion of what it takes to develop them. In 2018, this author reviewed 167 international leadership programs that were offering a whole-person approach, and while many of them spoke to the need for strong, interior leadership capacity, it was rare to find a well-integrated and clearly articulated pedagogy intended to cultivate it.[6]

This gap between aspiration and application may exist, in part, because transformative learning—the kind that results in creative action—requires a learner to experience failure, come up against biases and blind spots, sit and work with discomfort, and be generally unsettled for a time. For obvious reasons, a state of disequilibrium fraught with confusion and a periodic lack of clarity is antithetical to swift leadership action. Invariably, such learning meets resistance both in individuals and, presumably, inside the halls of what Deardorff aptly called "reason's castle." [7] Or it could simply be

because, as psychologist Virginia Satir proposed, "the strongest human instinct is to keep things familiar." [8]

The kind of action that beauty inspired in this small study could be held as catalytic in a different (i.e., nonobvious or traditional) way. Far from offering participants clear direction, beauty invited an attentive inward turn that had the potential to inspire fresh insight and directionality. Participants appeared willing to surrender to that turn; to listen, to feel, to reflect, and to touch into other ways of knowing, doing, and being, however uncomfortable. Intuition appeared to move participants toward what was arising for them, and into an aesthetic act of ecstatic intimacy with the soul that resulted in greater sensing and feeling. It also seemed that beauty brought people together, and the leadership action that arose amplified and invited a departure from the rational and known.

Because creative action holds the potential to unsettle, it can equally rattle the habitual trappings of a cultural trance. ITP suggests that such actions are then able to inspire new learning in such a way that personal, and collective wisdom might emerge.[9] Though the short timeline of the study prevents me from making generalizing statements about capacity development and cultural transformation, it could be said that the kind of experience beauty inspires fits squarely inside a transformative theory of change. In a world where we are all, "in over our heads," as characterized by developmental psychologist Robert Kegan, there is perhaps no timelier act than subjecting ourselves to the terrible beauty of dragons that await far offshore; who hold the transformative potential to shape us into wiser stewards of change.[10]

Mythic and Archetypal Reflections

Molded contextually in culture and place, the oldest myths endure because they speak to essential truths without the use of facts. Pulled as a slender thread of truth across time, mythologist Martin Shaw reminds us that they have little to do with the past, but rather arise as "a kind of magical present that can flood our lives when the conditions are just so." [11] Months after this study began, I, as the researcher, am now able to soften my gaze to see the deeper mythic and archetypal striations that give further life and relevance to this inquiry. One of the most compelling themes that have stuck with me is the idea that, in some obtuse way, beauty is tethered to something present but hidden beneath layers of taboo and dominant, habitual norms. Inspired by the participants' reflections, creative action taken from beauty can involve seeking out and then revealing a life-enhancing power that is already there—a process two participants called "unearthing."

This descent into the nether regions of the earth and psyche to seek something of great import for the day world is woven into some of humanity's oldest stories. The myth of Inanna tells the tale of an extraordinarily powerful and accomplished woman who chose to sacrifice prestige, power, and authority for something more mysterious. Much less well known than later myths with a similar theme—such as the Greek story of Persephone—the *Descent of Inanna* reveals the essential human capacity to turn toward the interiority of things and the dark, rich humus of shattering possibility.

Inanna's journey begins not in the throes of a personal crisis, but with a sovereign choice. The tablets tell of a luminous queen, shaped by the trials and tribulations of youth, wizened by the initiatory power of romantic love, and sobered by the weight of the royal robe. Inanna had the power, prestige, and security of high accomplishment. But like

many of the women and men I work with who have battled long and hard for security and prestige, the veils of accomplishment often mask the bones of a too-small story. Learning One begins with the participants in this study encountering beauty as a form of disruptive inner guidance. This guidance offered itself as an affective impression, more like a slippery siren song than a twelve-step plan. Inanna's story too begins with a call. The original text opens with this line: "From the Great Above [Inanna] opened her ear to the Great Below." [12]

In ancient Sumerian, the word for 'ear' and the word for 'wisdom' are the same. [13] The opening line of the poem can be likened to the beginning of a conversation in which Inanna readies herself for a transformative journey. She makes herself available for fresh wisdom by opening her ear to the gap between what she knows and what she does not yet know. This is the very essence of the story and this study; cycles of learning are initiated in the act of opening the ear and building a channel of perception to allow that which is unknown—the *other*—to have a voice.

This is of course easier said than done. Learning Two suggests that participants were guided into a state of liminal disequilibrium that made them more permeable to lesser-known perspectives and feelings. This vulnerable betwixt and between place appeared to set something in motion, as if at the beginning of a long adventure. Notably, as participants set out, it became clear that beauty enjoys a unique relationship to uncertainty. Its catalytic impact appeared to amplify a sense of mystery, intensifying both a longing to explore outside the boundaries of the familiar and a resistance to doing so. This paradoxical relationship is mirrored in Inanna's story. In preparing for her departure, Inanna abandoned her temples across the land to ready herself for her journey to Kur (the

Underworld). Her friends, subjects, and loved ones advised against her going. All of Sumer asked in fear, "How will we petition her favor if she has abandoned her temples? Who will we look to in the heavens without her light? What will befall us if she does not return?"

It is one thing to turn an ear to the Great Below, and another to follow it. Accompanied by a tentative trust, participants appeared disoriented, and some experienced resistance to beauty's guidance. At times, some were able to name subjectivities within that were actively warning them against further movement. Others expressed an intensity of emotion that did not always appear easy to experience. Some were met with difficult biographical memories that appeared to lay in wait at the threshold. Later in the study, participants also identified challenging and potentially dangerous collective forces—such as taboos, rules, habits, and strong cultural narratives—serving to enshrine the status quo and prevent change. Like Inanna's people, many voices actively warn against embarking on such a learning journey. They wonder what will befall them if we do not return, or if we return utterly changed. Gatekeepers of all sorts invariably collude to petition and lay claim to one's familiarity.[14]

And yet, Inanna continued. Down across the great dome of the sky she journeyed to the gates of the Underworld. Not once, but seven times Inanna beseeched Neti, the chief gatekeeper of Kur, for entry. At each gate, she was admitted but only after the surrender of one of her seven royal vestments. At the final threshold, the royal robe, her last vestment and the only garment left to cover her naked body disappears into the abyss. Her life force drains and she enters the kingdom of Kur bowed low.

A great deal of time could be spent exploring this archetypally rich scene in Inanna's story. It is a moment where she more fully surrenders to liminal ambiguity—no longer who she was (having sacrificed the vestments of heaven), but not yet what she is becoming. Like the participants in this study, Inanna turns toward this profound uncertainty with halting courage. The image of removing the jewels and garments of prestige is particularly striking and indicates that the transformative ordeal can exact a high toll. Conscious sacrifice requires one to trust in the unmaking of things, to offer themselves to the tricky, underlying poetics that makes transformation possible.[15] As participants in this study subjected themselves to the catalytic effect of beauty, like Inanna they surrendered to beauty's power of decomposition, rendering them naked and vulnerable.

To extract the relevance for leadership development, it would be useful to indulge in further analogical thought. The garments that cover Inanna's body could be understood as symbols of what falls within a leader's known world and personal identity. Yet, developing complexity skillsets presses a leader to disembed themselves from the prevailing perspectives, conventions, and assumptions they have been subject to. Doing so Omer cautions, "entails a disciplined surrender in which we sacrifice what we wish were true for what is actually true." [16] Though difficult, the benefits outweigh the costs. The result of such transformative processes engenders a higher uncertainty and ambiguity tolerance, more perspective, more choice, and stronger interpersonal skills.[17] Inanna, naked and out of her depth, therefore assumes an immeasurably apt posture for the emerging leadership avatar. Referring to recent developments in human and technological interactivity, the "new normal," argue Chima and Gutman, makes urgent

the need for *anti-heroic leaders* who are authentic, humble, and vulnerable, and who exhibit their fundamental humanity in the face of change.[18]

It feels important to wonder how beauty as a guide elicited a similar, disrobing vulnerability from participants; and equally useful to explore the implications of such an effect. Of the growing lists of leadership qualities that are becoming more critical in contexts of complexity, humility has received increasing attention.[19] Bradley Owens, Michael Johnson, and Terence Mitchell suggest that humility, as one of the "core organizational virtues," could be defined as an interpersonal characteristic identified by three primary behaviors: engagement in an ongoing process of increasing self-awareness, an appreciation of other people's gifts, and an open-minded orientation to learning.[20] Such a posture, they argue, counters traditional ideations of leadership that have historically reinforced hubris, entitlement, self-importance, and certainty. Markedly, the presence of humility in a team also reliably predicts their ability to learn, a fundamental collective capability worth developing in complex contexts.[21] We might recall that etymologically, humility derives from *humus*, meaning earth.[22]

Stellar et al. gesture to the connection between beauty, awe, and humility.[23] They argue that it is through encountering "an entity that appears to be vast and conceptually challenging," such as a beautiful vista, an experience in nature, a religious awakening, or an impactful piece of art, that leads to a diminished sense of self and ultimately to the cultivation of greater humility.[24] Awe, though generally considered a positive emotion, can induce equal feelings of threat, fear, and discomfort, loosely aligning with participants' experiences of beauty in this study. Conceptions of vastness, such as a thing's complexity, physical size, or prestige, and the way awe requires one to revise

their mental schema to account for the delta between the stimuli and their current understanding of the world, together generate humility.[25] If beauty, as this study indicates, is a way into an experience of awe, then beauty too undergoes a shift to find itself a relevant player in the field of leadership development. An authentic experience of beauty may catalyze the kind of humility required to divest ourselves of the restraining perspectives that prevent creative action.

For three days and three nights, Inanna's lifeless body hangs on a meat hook in the Underworld. Sent from allies above, buzzing fly-like creatures slip below to petition the Queen of the Underworld for Inanna's release. Revived by the food and water of life, Inanna rises. Back through the seven gates she goes, but this time not alone. Clinging to her robes are the *galla*, the demons of the Underworld.

Etymologically the word demon derives from the ancient Greek *daemon* or *genius*, thought to be a tutelary spirit, inner attendant or life force, or an ally of the soul.[26] These daemons can be said to represent the new powers that Inanna gained in the numinous below. With her now journey beings who do not succumb to the pleasures and pastimes of the day world, holding the middle way of the trickster, or the liminal qualities of ones who operate outside the known order of things. Therefore, she carries with her not only renewed vitality but the revelatory wisdom of the Great Below.

Again, I am reminded of the connection participants expressed between beauty and something powerful, authentic, or whole that was felt to be just under the surface. Inanna, in returning with the galla, presents a mythic motif through which to explore this theme. In many interpretations of Inanna's tale, storytellers describe her return as a rebirth, marking spiritual and developmental maturation. Drawing from this study's

theory-in-practice, we can look with more specificity. Inanna could be thought to have

returned endowed with *authentic power*. ITP understands authentic power, also referred

to as Soul Power or the Power of Being, as the ecology of hidden qualities and capacities

that are able to respond in life-enhancing and never-seen-before ways to the challenges of

leadership.[27] Yet this kind of power only emerges, alleges Omer et. al. "through enduring

and transmuting the vulnerabilities we experience when we turn toward the sensitivities

that embody the soul's passionate nature." [28] In other words, authentic power is forged

through conscious sacrifice; through one's ability to lean into the skid on behalf of truth,

beauty, and justice. In this way, the authentic power that beauty may deliver tethers it to

its perennial companions: goodness and truth. When held with integrity, the

transformative ordeal is not just a way of becoming better at perpetuating or coping

inside systems of injustice, it is as Houston suggests, to bring the fruits of such power

back through creative action to "the canvas of our social reality." [29]

      The story concludes with Inanna sentencing her ex-lover, Dumuzi, to take her

place below, thus fulfilling an agreement she had made with the Judges of the

Underworld. Her return to the Heavens is, therefore, marked not only by a recognition of

Inanna's newfound powers but by the way such powers catalyze others to surrender into a

similar descent.

      Complexity leaders may have much to learn from Inanna's story. It demonstrates

that it is not primarily skill and knowledge that influence others into creative action, but a

leader's state of being. Inanna touched the very source of her own deep vitality and

creative intelligence, and to get there she had to relinquish old ways of seeing and being

in the world. She returned charged with a kind of authentic power and in a new

relationship with uncertainty, truth, and goodness. In all this, even if she never utters a word of her story, she models another way to live and lead. In the end, Inanna reminds us that leaders cannot guide anyone somewhere that they are not willing or able to go themselves. For systems theorist Kathia Laszlo, it is this embodiment that enables us to move from dissociated *thinking about* change, to *being* the change, suggesting:

> The expression of systems being is an integration of our full human capacities, the expression of an evolving humanity. It involves rationality with reverence to the mystery of life, listening beyond words, sensing with our whole being, and expressing our authentic self in every moment of our life. The journey from systems thinking to systems being is a transformative learning process of expansion of consciousness—from awareness to embodiment. [30]

Implications of the Learnings

Encountering beauty does not resolve uncertainty, which remains the primary goal of virtually every leadership strategy.[31] Beauty's power is precisely the opposite; turning towards beauty amplifies uncertainty. One might argue that, in the short term, it makes things worse! Whether beauty is experienced as magnificent or overwhelming, it does little to resolve tension and paradox. Instead, beauty, as in Inanna's story, can *open the ear* to the aesthetic undercurrent beneath experience. It lets something new in, something of the soul, initiating a process of deeper reflection where important learning can begin. Paradoxically, it could be that the distress that accompanies such an ecstatic turn is not at variance, but critical for the type and quality of leadership that complex times demand.[32]

Yet, turning toward beauty in anything less than a guided environment (such as this research study), may not only be counterintuitive but counter instinctive. On paper,

the practice beauty invites is lovely, but in reality, very few leaders would stay on the trail of it past the point of personal equilibrium. Far fewer, in a culture that has exiled the passions of the soul to irrationality's corner, would see the benefit in sitting with anger, fear, awe, terror, or longing.

Up until this point, my role as both researcher and co-guide to beauty has not been explored at length, but it could be presumed that my presence, questions, encouragements, and the research design itself served as additional scaffolding for the participants that kept them within beauty's reach. For example, Sophia had been drawn instinctively to an image in Meeting One that struck her as beautiful, but as we deepened into the particularities of the image, it began to disturb her. She wondered aloud why she chose that particular image as if it were an accident. Yet the research design required her to stay with it long after the initial beauty she experienced began to shift into something less expected. In the end, Sophia did see beauty in the very aspects of the image that she deemed disharmonious, but the whole process left me wondering whether, if left to her own devices, she might have stopped at the onset of discomfort. This dynamic was not unique to Sophia. A similar reluctance was experienced, with varying degrees of intensity, by more than half of the participants in the study. Taken together, I wonder if beauty as a guide may do its best work with an assistant.

This reflection has profound implications for pedagogical approaches to leadership development. Pierre Gurdijan, Thomas Halbeisen, and Deven Lane write that of 500 executives polled by McKinsey & Company, two-thirds identified leadership development as their number one priority, yet only seven percent thought they were executing on that priority effectively.[33] Examining this field over recent review decades,

many believe that while leadership contexts have changed exponentially, the methods employed to develop leaders had largely remained the same.[34] Increasingly, the future of leadership development must look to mindset transformation and human maturation to adequately meet the challenges at hand.[35]

But facilitating transformative learning effectively is not for the faint of heart. Robert Kegan reminds educators that "people grow best where they continuously experience an ingenious blend of challenge and support," but the right blend can be tricky to deliver.[36] Many learning institutions and experiential programs (workshops, retreats, conferences, trainings, etc.) aspire to the nebulous yet ubiquitous goal of transformation, but few are able to create the conditions such learning requires. Instead, novel, feel-good, and peak experiences often masquerade as transformational—and indeed, feel to be in the moment—but with few exceptions rarely require the learning community to turn toward the more difficult or disorienting dynamics at play.[37] "Connecting with the whales, the sun and the moon and not with the shit," argues Indigenous scholar and activist Vanessa Andreotti, bypasses the possibility of learning outcomes that engender responsibility and accountability.[38] Too often, learning initiatives that aspire to transformation hold the learner to a prison of self-interest.

A key question for leadership coaches, facilitators, and educators might be how to best support people to become vulnerable to the full impact of beauty as a catalyst for learning, and therefore growth. If beauty indeed amplifies uncertainty, and uncertainty is most often experienced as an aversive state leading to maladaptive coping strategies, then what might the right kind of support look like? What qualities, or skills, or capabilities are required by those who find themselves co-guiding with beauty?

Meridian University, the Wolf Willow Institute, and the Animas Valley Institute are a few examples of organizations working with transdisciplinary, integral, and practice-led approaches to training for what could only be considered an emerging profession. Each, while distinct, share certain methodological similarities. Each emphasizes the critical importance of a supportive learning environment that can hold the heat of challenge; each is working with ritual forms that have historically belonged more to religion than to education; each work with shifting states and structures of consciousness in deliberate, non-recreational ways; and each, when appropriate, skillfully amplify the dilemmas and crises of those they believe to be at the edges of more complex developmental vistas. Each is building theory in their wake, acting as cartographers at the edges of transformative practice with practical applicability. Each insists that the learner must not only learn the techniques and sensitivities of their vocation but must also learn to submit themselves to the difficult, initiatory power of the very journey they seek to guide for others.

While a leader's experience of beauty did indeed appear to be catalytic, these reflections have allowed for a more nuanced look at the kind and quality of support required for true, lasting, transformative change. The kind of guide that can be good company at the edges and leads with their own paradoxical mix of precision and surrender, may require a courageous and widespread reinvention of many of the helping professions—blurring the lines between education and initiation. I am heartened to know that this work is situated within a lineage of people attempting to do just that. Transformative learning and the skillful and delicate facilitation it requires has never been more urgent.

Beauty is as Beauty Does: Beauty, Goodness, and Truth

> There are things in this life that we must endure which are all but endurable, and yet I feel that there is a great goodness. Why, when there could have been nothing, is there something? This is the great mystery. How, when there could be nothing, there is love, kindness, beauty?

~ Bill Moyers[39]

While beauty, and aesthetics more generally, focuses this inquiry on the individual participant's subjective experience, by act and definition leadership deals in wider webs of relationship.[40] While it has been shown that experiences of beauty hold the potential to inspire affective and reflective interior states, it is not enough to claim that one who is sensitive to beauty is also a good leader. Goodness, in the case of leadership, requires both efficacy and ethics, both acuity, and relationality. It follows, then, that where beauty stirs at the level of the interior subjective, goodness is perhaps beauty's impact in action, extending beyond the individual to touch the collective.[41] Complexity leadership that can inspire generative change in a time of social, political, and ecological fragmentation, demands not only personal transformation at beauty's hand but an obligation to goodness and truth.

Perhaps the integration of these three cultural values is at the heart of new leadership.[42] It has certainly been argued that while the differentiation of art, morals, and science heralded modern progress, (enabling freedom from religious intervention in scientific advancement, for example), too much isolation has resulted in widespread dissociation.[43] Much of contemporary culture is characterized by an over-emphasis on

exteriors (the objective, empirical, or concrete) at great cost to society's individual and collective interior experience. This has resulted in the shallow materialism that fuels so much social and ecological destruction. Not only that, but as it has been argued in this dissertation, skillful navigation of complex contexts is dependent upon arational, non-concrete, and highly aesthetic ways of knowing.

It is certainly the case that experiences of profound beauty and their effect are not counted among useful learning experiences in most (if not all) current leadership training. Sardello writes that perhaps this omission is in fact a widespread, learned inability to "experience the beauty of the soul of the world." [44] In his estimation, this is "an illness so wide in scope, so pervasive, that it constitutes a normal abnormality." [45] Nevertheless, the desire for beauty, which for Sardello is equivalent to the desire for soul, remains unconscious and unattended, leaking into human society in eruptions of violence. These eruptions, Moore agrees, can be characterized as one's "repressed life force showing itself symptomatically." [46] In other words, the dearth of soul in the dominant culture has real, felt effects, and may be one way of understanding contemporary society's apparent obsession with ugliness. Yet, submitting to beauty alone, without goodness, and truth may further entrench modernity's pattern of labeling aesthetic experience as something only worthwhile at the level of the individual, with little to contribute to a larger, collective context. Staying with the subjective experience, looking only within may at best inspire short-term insight, and at worst exacerbate narcissistic or self-referential behavior. Sardello offers a useful caution:

> Depth psychology has been one-sided, seeking to give attention to these soul forces as occurring only within. This tends to foster an imitation religion and the elevation of subjectivity to the status of religious experience. It produces bad art

and a form of ritual in which individuals worship themselves thinking that they are honoring some deity within. Because the world is left out of the picture, not only does the soul of the world go unrecognized and neglected, but the exclusive concentration within cannot sustain itself without turning into a system of dead thought. [47]

Through the lens of Imaginal Psychology, care of the soul is always about both self and other, situated in time and place. It is that which draws one not just deeper into themselves, but deeper into the world. Sardello argues: "We have for too long now confined the notion of soul to the interior of the human being, leaving the world to the exploitation of need and greed. If there is no soul in the world, then the notion of the human being as having soul is nothing more than pious abstraction and bad theory." [48] In this light, the care of the soul has within it an ethical directionality. It blossoms forth in the crucible and sanctuary of one's familial, romantic, and social relationships; and in a felt connection with the living world, one's vocational calling, and the quality of attention one brings to life's most difficult and glorious bends in the road.

While the scope of this study limits this author's ability to draw concrete conclusions, it was certainly the case that in following beauty, every participant accessed a greater range of emotions that in many cases defied simple constructs and conjured a palpable presence of something beyond the boundaries of the individual self. Might the practice of beauty stimulate one's ability to empathize? Adam Cohen, June Gruber, and Dacher Keltner posit that experiences of profound beauty can increase "other-focus," and result in an increased understanding of self in the world—a finding that resonates with Kant and Hegel's earlier intimation of beauty's link with goodness.[49] In exploring moral beauty, Diessner, Rust, and Solom suggest that beauty's tendency to inspire a felt sense of "unity-in-diversity" may act as a bridge or catalyst to moral development, perhaps

giving rise to an experience of knowing *bothness*. Bothness is a perceptivity that enables

one to sense and move from both sides; to be self, other, and the world simultaneously.

Diessner, Rust, and Solom write, "encouraging sensitivity to, and recognition of beauty in

the natural world and in art may be a developmental steppingstone to recognizing moral

beauty in the human social world." [50] In short, when held as one expression of the

triumvirate of beauty, truth, and goodness, beauty's guidance is experienced and

expressed as wholeness—as *love*. It is brought to bear on these times through right action,

in the giveaway of the fruits of one's rich, inner life. Not insignificantly, many in the

field of Imaginal Psychology argue that it is connecting with the soul in the self that

enables one to connect with something much larger than the self. [51] In doing so, leadership

actions are guided by a more holistic and multi-perspectival intelligence.

Beauty's guidance in this study appeared to evoke the passionate nature of the

soul, providing an opportunity for participants to become aware of and transmute their

unique sensitives into creative action. [52] Resonant with Goodchild's decolonizing

perspective on systems thinking (what she calls Relational Systems Thinking), a

leadership praxis that recognizes the presence of soul in all things would fundamentally

shift the form and the quality of actions taken in positions of power. [53] It would,

presumably, shift the focus from an egocentric, top-down leadership approach, to an

ecocentric approach that privileges relationships and mutual benefit. [54] Action that moves

from this deeper authenticity may expand the boundaries of experience, thus enabling

fresh learning and catalyzing greater interior complexity. Omer reminds us that it is

precisely this kind of cultural leadership that can scaffold "the complex generational

learning cycles that constitute the emergence of collective wisdom." [55] Utilizing one's

intuitive perception to touch and then lead from a deeper coherence in complexity, while individually risky in systems of oppression, may be the complexity leader's most decisive and powerful act.

Further Research

> In the same way that to become a social human being one modifies and suppresses and, ultimately, without great courage, lies to oneself about all one's interior, uncharted chaos, so have we, as a nation, modified or suppressed and lied about all the darker forces in our history.

~ James Baldwin[56]

Effective complexity leaders learn how to bring awareness to the largely unseen connections between things, the invisible and dynamic interrelationships that characterize complexity. For many, this way of viewing the world requires a profound perceptual shift—a systems sensibility involving an ongoing practice of looking deeper.

The learnings offered here are situated in time and place and have been engaged in through a particular lens. They too invite a deeper look. Because this study captured a few moments in time during a global pandemic, further research into beauty and creative action might take place in person, where the presence of beauty could be more tactile, tangible, and embodied. Notably, beauty in these learnings appeared to initiate new learning for the participants, but the study did not explore whether such explorations would eventually apply in a direct way to their systems work. It would be interesting for future studies to explore if beauty's guidance might be engaged as a practice and if an ongoing apprenticeship to beauty might lead to more effective leadership action. At a time that urgently requires the maturation of individuals, collectives, and societies, it

would be prudent to track and draw connections between beauty, creative action, and moral development.

At this juncture, it becomes important to state that the learnings explored here—and the way they have been explored, have been shaped by the particular worldview of the researcher. In the academy there has been a long tradition of mistaking a certain paradigm for a singular reality.[57] Dominant culture is marked and upheld by the fragmentary and individualist paradigms that have shaped it, and this research is situated within that lineage of thought even while attempting to free itself from its harmful constraints. In exploring the kaleidoscopic ways wisdom is encountered by engaging the whole-person through beauty, the learnings of this study further encourage a clumsy stumbling-alongside Indigenous knowledge systems that have long challenged the myth of individualism, anthropocentrism, and the unbroken tenure of disassociated mentation. It demands a recognition that the way knowledge is packaged through the power structures of settler colonialism continues to rationalize and uphold unjust and oppressive social structures.[58]

This research should therefore be held very lightly, with the hope to engage in deeper, cross-cultural conversations that may continue to shape shared understanding. Ermine's concept of *ethical space* is useful here. Ethical space forms in the intersections between diverse constituents that hold distinct worldviews poised to meet each other. It is "the unstated, unseen level of thought and feeling" that provides a substantive, but often unacknowledged backdrop in which parties relate.[59] To navigate such spaces ethically, that is with positive regard for difference, careful observation is required to see how "hidden values and intentions can control our behavior, and how unnoticed cultural

differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring." [60] Therefore, it feels incumbent on this researcher and those that find resonance in these pages, to hold these findings with epistemic humility, and to continue to examine and evolve the lenses through which we have made meaning. The more personal perspective is tempered in the collective crucible of cross-cultural exchange, the greater the wisdom that will come to bear on the tumult of these times.

Final Thoughts

As I write I sit facing north. North, the place where the Pueblo ancestors of this land built their handcrafted stone towers in red rock alcoves. The place where, looking now, my eyes wander through the crevasses and hallows carved out of the pressed rock over eons by water and wind. High above, three turkey vultures bleed the dark patina on the cliffs upward into the vertical columns of the sky. The beauty here is a shaping force. It is harsh and austere and forever on the move. It has shaped me as it has shaped this inquiry.

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted my plans to host the research gatherings in person. Instead, I have sat in this chair, looking north through each video session, poring through transcripts, emails, books, and academic articles. I have sat here, at times staring at the canyon wall, stuck in my thoughts and unable to proceed. In those moments I would get up, pull on my shoes, and wander out into the canyon, allowing the beauty here to ordain me with a new insight I could not have achieved alone at my desk. I have come to understand beauty as an emergent property of intimate relationships, found on the edges of longing and fear where certainty gives out. Its impact is of a feeling-kind.

This study has further led me to believe that one of the tasks before leaders today is the reclamation and restoration of the interior—our capacity to imagine, to sense, to feel, and to think in an integrated way so that we can more skillfully move into creative, ethical action.[61] In reclaiming that fluency, the goal is not to be sentimental, it is to be *sentient*. To be fully alive, animate, engaged, aware, and turned on. If we cannot feel what moves us, angers us, inspires us, and tears us open in grief; we are numb and can only do the kinds of things that numb people do. Buddhist scholar and activist Joanna Macy reminds change makers of the toll it takes to refuse to feel. In such moments, she writes:

> Not only is there an impoverishment of our emotional and sensory life, flowers are dimmer and less fragrant, our loves less ecstatic but this psychic numbing also impedes our capacity to process and respond to information. The energy expended in pushing down despair is diverted from more creative uses, depleting the resilience and imagination needed for fresh visions and strategies.[62]

It rings equally true for me that if we do not deeply understand that acts of leadership are always contextual, entangled, and embedded within a wider ecosystem of relationships, then we perpetuate separation, isolation, and fragmentation—and our leadership will be equally partial. The *law of requisite variety* states that to function effectively a system must exhibit complexity equal to that of its environment.[63] The learnings of this study show that a leader's experience of beauty is complex and multifaceted, allowing for more permeability, perspective, ambiguity, and connection. In design thinking, and in studies of visual complexity, beauty is marked as the coherence in the chaos, the midpoint between rote repetition, and unfathomable nonsense.[64] Perhaps, in endowing a leader with greater access to the aesthetic through beauty, our ways of

engaging uncertainty become both adequately complex and coherent, drawing from a deeper, or more authentic source of power. Perhaps this risky restoration of our interior— both individual and collective—may equip us with the blessing and burden of leading artfully; leading from the heart, able to feel, and then transgress against the harmful parts of the system that live in us. In doing so, I hold the hope that leaders will release the myth of the heroic individual and assume greater accountability and responsibility for the benefit of all. Their new work? To be humble, courageous guides of the collective learning that is now required on a global scale. In the words of Wendell Berry, "This is no paradisal dream. Its hardship is its possibility." [65]

APPENDIX 1

ETHICS APPLICATION

1. Participant Population

I will search for eight to ten research participants who are a) currently leading and/or working in complex contexts, and b) have some previous experience with personal reflection. I will identify potential participants through colleagues who I identify as connectors in the social innovation/systems change field. The letter to my colleagues is shown in Appendix 5, and the letter to potential participants in Appendix 6.

Once identified, I will follow up with each potential participant with a request for a 10-20-minute screening interview so that I may determine their eligibility.

2. Procedures Involving Research Participants

Meeting One begins with an overview of the study's guidelines and a review of informed consent. I remind participants that their participation is voluntary and that their identities will be confidential throughout the study. I will pause to answer any questions the participant may have.

We will begin with a brief discussion of the nature of the participant's work. I will ask a few questions about how they handle complexity and uncertainty. Following the discussion, I will ask participants to choose an image that best represents their relationship to uncertainty. We will spend some time exploring the image with deepening

questions (see Appendix 10). I will then ask the participant to offer five words that best describes their experience with their uncertainty image.

I will then offer a short poem (William Stafford, "When I Met My Muse") as a transition to beauty. The sequence with the images will be repeated, inviting participants to choose an image that resonates with their experience of beauty. The sample deepening questions can be found in Appendix 10.

I will then ask the participants to place both images (uncertainty and beauty) next to each other. We will explore the two images together. Is there a connection they can see? How are beauty and uncertainty in relationship to each other, if at all? We will discuss both images together.

At the close of Meeting One, I will ask the participant to bring a heightened quality of attention to the way beauty shows up in their work and leadership – particularly in times of uncertainty. I will invite them to think of beauty as a kind of mentor or guide walking with them. I will also confirm the participant's commitment to journaling (three prompts over a two-week period before the next session) as a way of tracking their insights and reflections for the researcher. I remind them that they can respond with anything that comes to mind via text or email. I will also confirm Meeting Two's date and time.

Meeting Two takes place over Zoom with the whole group together. Before the meetings starts, a brief slide show of nature images overlayed with complex geometric patterns runs in the background. The meeting begins with a description of the arc of the meeting and a reminder of confidentiality, followed by an evocative poem called "Fire on the Hills" by Robinson Jeffers. Will then invite each participant to introduce themselves

with their name, the essence of their work, why it is important to them, and the particular dimension of uncertainty they are facing now. I will also invite any reflections on the poem if they have any to share. After each participant shares, we will take a short, five-minute break.

I then ask them to gather their art supplies nearby. I remind them that their artwork is for their eyes only, offered as a way for them to explore their experience without using words. Over the following 15-minutes, I guide them into an exploration of their relationship to first uncertainty, then beauty. I invite them to notice what images are occurring to them, what sensations in their body, and what emotions might be present. Each time, I pause to allow them to capture something of their experience on the paper with pastels. After a short break, I then invite them into a series of reflection questions about their artwork, and their experience more broadly. Participants will be instructed to respond in the chat box on Zoom, or to me privately. I will then pause to see if anyone has any reflections they would like to offer to the group before we move on.

For the third section of Meeting Two, I will invite the participants to each take three-minutes to lead the group by helping the group to focus on beauty in some way. I let the participants know that their leadership enactment is not a performance, and can be spontaneous, and to resist the urge to enact something they are very familiar with and do often. I remind them that this form of research aims to work with what is emerging right now. I also let them know that they could work with a prop of some kind if they would like to. We then pause for 10-minutes of silence to prepare.

After the leadership enactments, I then invite a second round of reflection questions, beginning first with their experience of leading the group, and then with their experience of being led. Between each question, I pause for journaling.

Meeting Two closes with a reminder of Meeting Three, and the journaling prompts between sessions. I will also invite participants to close with a word or gesture of how they feel as they close the session.

Meeting Three begins with a description of the session and the poem, "Our Real Work" by Wendell Berry. I invite participants to share their responses to the poem, along with their names and any other insight or question that has been with them since the last meeting. I then offer my initial learnings by describing key moments during the first two research sessions, and pause between each for group discussion. I invite the participants to also share their learnings and key moments. The meeting closes with an invitation to reflect on anything that doesn't yet feel integrated, and some time discussing how the study may have impacted their leadership. I then read Mary Oliver's poem, "Spring," and offer the participants the Summary of Learnings when it is completed.

3. Consent Process

Each participant will receive an Informed Consent form that they will sign and send back to me before the research begins. A sample can be found in Appendix 4.

4. Risks

Participants may have a strong emotional experience which could be perceived as disturbing or uncomfortable.

5. Safeguards

I will make clear that the personal and reflective nature of this study may touch sensitive areas for some people during the screening interview. I also let them know that I, as researcher cannot offer psychotherapy and that the research design is not intended to be therapeutic. The Informed Consent form additionally cautions participants to request professional help if they are disturbed in any way by the study.

6. Benefits

The study may be beneficial to participants who are looking to take some time to reflect and gain insight into their leadership, and the field of complexity leadership as a whole may find some benefit from the study's learnings.

7. After the Study

I will contact each participant after my defense to offer them a Summary of Learnings, written with clarity and compassion.

APPENDIX 2

CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE

All meetings will take place on Zoom and will be recorded. Decks of Soul Cards will be mailed to participants prior to the first research session.

<u>Evoking Experience</u>

Meeting One

- Opening ritual and grounding

o Read William Stafford Poem "When I Met My Muse" aloud.

- Guided Soul card drawing

o One that represents the uncertainty and complexity the leaders face

o One that evokes beauty/allure/other

Meeting Two

- Slide show pre-meeting

- Poem Robinson Jeffers "Fire on the Hills"

- Guided imagery

Meeting Three

- Poem "The Real Work" Wendell Berry

<u>Expressing Experience</u>

Meeting One

- Imaginal dialogue and somatic exploration of each card

- Drawing out and deepening questions to look for the edge

- Dialogue between the two cards

  Meeting Two

- Opening ritual and grounding as a group

o Introductions and shares of their reflections on uncertainty and beauty

- Expressive Arts sequence

o Connecting again to uncertainty

o Guidance on art making

o Participants invited to create a visual representation of what they are present to now after a week-long apprenticeship to beauty in uncertainty.

- Break

- Researcher prompts further exploration and deepening questions to bring participants closer to their drawing

- Participants offer insights and responses to questions to the researcher over chat

- Bridging into creative action (Drawing on the Well of Beauty)

o Framing of a ritual to invite each leader to draw from the well of beauty and then move or act.

▪ Offer time for contemplation or for participants to get any props or items for their expression.

o Each leader leads moving into creative action within a time limit

- Closing ritual, reflection, and remarks

o Close the ritual space

o Journaling impressions on what felt effective and ineffective.

o Closing words and gratitude

Between Meeting One and Meeting Two

- Journaling prompts

- Invitation to 'apprentice' to beauty amidst uncertainty between sessions

<u>Interpreting Experience</u>

Meeting Three

- Participants share new learnings and key moments from the previous session first through short journaling, and whole group shares.

- Participants give their responses to researcher's initial interpretations and queries about how the experience of being in the research study has affected them.

<u>Integrating Experience</u>

Meeting Three

- Discussion on any element that does not yet feel integrated.

- Reflection of how this approach might integrate into their life and leadership.

- Closing ritual for the study

APPENDIX 3

CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

Meeting One (75 minutes - Individuals)

I.   Informed Consent and Orientation (10 minutes)

      a.   Welcome and review study guidelines and informed consent.

      b.   Greetings and guided breath to drop in.

      c.   Discussion of guidelines.

            i.   Participation is voluntary

            ii.   Researcher will keep all identities confidential

      d.   Obtain or confirm participant signature on consent form

      e.   Respond to any questions the participant may have

      f.   Researcher provides general orientation to the study

            i.   Schedule

            ii.   Reminder to eliminate distractions (phone, email, privacy etc.)

            iii.   Review of materials on-hand (art materials, journal, soul cards)

            iv.   General overview of the phases of the experience

II.   Introduction and Initial Reflections (10 minutes)

      a.   Bridge to the daily reality

III.   Discussion of the nature of the participants work, the complexity or uncertainty they are facing, and why they were drawn to the study.

IV.   Evoking-Expressing Sequence (45 minutes)

    a.   Invitation to arrive in the body with breath.

    b.   Soul card one

    c.   Participant is asked to spread out the soul cards and instinctively chose

    one that best evokes/represents their experience of uncertainty.

        ii.   Deepening into the image: researcher invites participant to let the

        image speak or move them and asks deepening questions staying "true" to

        the image.

        iii.   5 minutes of journaling to capture essence of dialogue between

        image and the not-knowing self.

    d.   Centering, poem, and soul card two

        i.   Participant draws another card that speaks to them of beauty.

        ii.   Deepening into image two: again, researcher invites participant to

        let the image speak or move them.

        iii.   5 minutes of journaling to capture essence of dialogue between self

        and image of beauty.

    e.   Dialogue with Beauty and Uncertainty

V.   Participant is invited to put to the two images in conversation with one another –

to speak or move from them.

VI.   5 minutes of dialogue to capture the essence of the conversation between beauty

and not knowing.

VII.   Closing Sequence and Ritual to Transition (10 minutes)

a.   Participant and researcher together identify how the participant might 'stay close' or 'apprentice' to beauty (as experienced in this session) in the midst of the uncertainty they are facing. This might include an invitation to journal, a particular practice or ritual, or some other organic way that emerges from the session. Ask participants to copy researcher in their journaling.

b.   Review of next meeting (time and date). Confirmation of journaling practice.

c.   Closing gesture and gratitude

Meeting Two (Three Hours – Whole Group)

I.   Welcoming back and setting the scene (35 minutes)

    a.   Welcome (5 minutes)

    b.   Review of materials and sequence of this session. (5 minutes)

    c.   Poem (5 minutes)

II.   Group introductions including positioning this session in the context of participants work, and their reflections on uncertainty to build a group field and sense of intimacy. (20 minutes)

III.   Expressive Arts Sequence (20 minutes)

    a.   Guidance on art-making. (5 minutes)

IV.   Researcher invites participants into their body, breath, and presences their daily reality, their time with beauty over the past few weeks. (5 minutes)

V.   Participants are invited to represent what has emerged as insight, feeling, memory, affect, or image during their apprenticeship to beauty in uncertainty. (10 minutes)

VI.   Break (5 minutes)

VII.   Aesthetic analysis: recognizing the imaginary reality. (40 minutes)

    a.   Researcher offers deepening questions to the group that invite further

exploration of their images. Participants are prompted to place brief

answers/responses in the chat box. (40 minutes)

VIII.   Bridge to Creative Action (20 minutes)

IX.   Researcher frames a ritual space where each leader will have the chance in the

moment to draw from the well of beauty they have encountered and then lead

from there. Where will you take this group? (10 minutes)

    a.   Researcher offers 5 minutes time for contemplation or for participants to

get any props or items for their expression/leadership. (10 minutes)

X.   Ritual – Drawing on the Well of Beauty (30 minutes)

    a.   Each participant is invited to express in some way the very next step that

beauty may have invited them into – to lead with creative action. (25 minutes)

    b.   Ritual is closed with a breath and a gesture of gratitude. The candle is

blown out. (2.5 minutes)

XI.   Closing (25 minutes)

    a.   Journaling impressions (10 minutes)

    b.   Participants will be prompted to journal about their experience of leading

the group. What felt effective? What felt ineffective? What felt important?

What was their experience of uncertainty in regard to their leadership?

How did beauty inform their choices?

    c.   Participants will be prompted journal their experience of being led by the others. What (who) was most affecting? What (who) was least affecting? What (who) was most effective? What (who) was least effective?

    d.   What might be emerging, surprising, disturbing or exciting that you are aware of now?

    e.   Closing words from each participant (10 minutes)

    f.   Review of next meeting time and date (5 minutes)

Meeting Three (1 Hour - Whole Group)

I.   Opening and Welcome (15 minutes)

    a.   Welcome (5 minutes)

    b.   Opening gesture and reflections from last meeting (5 minutes)

    c.   Review of materials and sequence of this session (5 minutes)

II.   Researcher prompts five minutes of journaling to catch new learnings and key moments from the previous group session. Participants to email reflections in real time to researcher. (5 minutes)

III.   Participants give their responses to researcher's initial interpretations and queries about how the experience of being in the research study has affected them. (15 minutes)

IV.   Discussion on any element that does not yet feel integrated. (10 minutes)

V.   Reflection of how this approach might integrate into their life and leadership. (10 minutes)

VI.   Closing Ritual for the study

APPENDIX 4

INFORMED CONSENT

To the Participant in this Research:

You are invited to participate in a study on complexity leadership and beauty. The study's purpose is to better understand how a leader's deep relationship to beauty might affect their abilities at handling complex leadership challenges.

Participation will involve three meetings: A 75-minute, individual meeting with me, a three-hour group meeting with the study's other participants, and a final, 90-minute meeting, again with the other participants. The commitment includes three journaling prompts that I will send you for your response in-between the meetings.

These three meetings will take place over an eight-week period. These conversations will be recorded and later transcribed. During these meetings, you will be asked to explore imagery, emotion, and body sensation through artistic process in addition to engaging in discussion. Meeting dates will be the week of February 21st, the week of March 14th, and the week of March 28th.

For the protection of your privacy, all tapes and transcripts will be kept confidential and your identity will be protected. The collected information will be stored in a locked file and only a professional transcriber, two co-researchers and guiding academic dissertation advisors will have access to the material. In the reporting of information in published material, any information that might identify you will be altered to ensure your anonymity.

This study is of a research nature and may offer no direct benefit to you. The published findings and any subsequent publications, however, may be useful to you as a practitioner and may benefit the field of complexity leadership as a whole. This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. However, parts of the research design that include personal reflection may touch sensitive areas for some people. If at any time you develop any concerns or questions, I will make every effort to discuss these with you. I, the researcher, cannot provide psychotherapy, but at your request or using my personal judgment, will facilitate referrals to an appropriate mental health professional, if such a need should arise.

If you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time and for any reason. Please note as well that I, the researcher, may need to terminate your participation from the study at any point and for any reason.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call me at (720) 208-6702, or you may contact the Dissertation Director at Meridian University, 47 Sixth Street, Petaluma, CA, 94952, telephone: (707) 765-1836. Meridian University assumes no responsibility for any psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

I, _____, consent to participate in this study on complexity leadership and beauty. I have had this study explained to me by Laura Blakeman. Any questions of mine about this research have been answered, and I have received a copy of this consent form. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

Participant Signature _____   Date_____

APPENDIX 5

LETTER TO COLLEAGUES

Laura Blakeman
15491 Road J
Cortez, CO 81321
Cell: 720.208.6702
Email: laurapage108@gmail.com

(Date)

Dear, (Name).

I have identified you as a connector in the social innovation/systems change field who may be able to make a few introductions to potential research participants for my doctoral thesis.

I am investigating the intersection of inner capacity and systems impact. An important focus of the study is to explore a potential relationship between the experience of beauty and dealing with the challenges of complexity leadership. The theoretical foundation for this work includes systems and complexity science, imaginal transformation praxis, expressive arts therapies, and depth psychology.

I am particularly interested in practitioners, educators, and facilitators (all leaders) working at systems change. Ideally, potential research participants would not be entirely unfamiliar with personal reflection and exploration, nor would they be foreign to experiences of uncertainty in complexity. Because my methodology includes the expressive arts, these folks would be likely to be open to expressing themselves through verbal, written, and non-verbal (artistic) mediums.

The commitment would be six hours of their time (three meetings), over a period of eight weeks, starting on (start date). Strict confidentiality, ethical considerations, and anonymity are guaranteed.

If you feel you may know of one or two leaders who would be a good fit for this study, please contact me via email.

Thank you for your consideration!

Laura Blakeman

APPENDIX 6

LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

<div align="right">

Laura Blakeman
15491 Road J,
Cortez, CO 81321
Cell: 720.208.6702
Email: laurablakeman@gmail.com

</div>

(Date)

Dear, (Name).

Greetings and thanks for your time. I am writing with a personal request. I have identified you as a potential research participant for my doctoral work due to your involvement in the Transformative Leadership group hosted by Cheryl Rose and Social Innovation Canada or in *Getting to Maybe—a Social Innovation Residency.* My dissertation research seeks to explore the intersection of inner change and systems impact, specifically the relationship between beauty and leadership. My intended demographic includes practitioners and facilitators working in the field of leadership and systems change.

An important secondary focus of the study is to explore a leader's relationship to the challenges of leadership involving condition of complexity. The theoretical foundation for this work includes systems and complexity science, imaginal transformation praxis, expressive arts therapies, and depth psychology.

The commitment would be three total meetings over Zoom over a period of eight weeks, starting on (start date). The first session would be one-hour long, the second three-hours, and the third two-hours. Strict confidentiality, ethical considerations, and anonymity will be observed. If you feel aligned with the intention of this study, and are able to participate, please contact me via email.

Thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this research.

Best,

Laura Blakeman

APPENDIX 7

SCREENING INTERVIEW REQUEST LETTER

Laura Blakeman
15491 Road J,
Cortez, CO 81321
Cell: 720.208.6702

(Date)

Dear, (Name).

Thank you for your interest in participating in research to help me fulfill the requirements for a doctorate in Psychology with an emphasis in Complexity Leadership. I am researching the relationship between beauty and leadership. My work is situated in a participatory research methodology.

I would like to set up a time to talk to you on the phone for a screening interview to establish the fit of this study for you. This call will take about 10-20 minutes of your time.

Thank you.

Best,

Laura Blakeman

APPENDIX 8

SCREENING INTERVIEW

Hello, (Name).

I'm Laura Blakeman, I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with me today. This call should take about 10 minutes of your time.

As you are aware, I am in an PhD program and as part of that I am conducting research. Today I want to give you an idea of what the commitment is and to ask some questions to determine if you are a good fit. Does that sound ok?

1.   Are you able to commit to three meetings? The first will be 75-minutes long, the second three-hours, and the third two-hours. Meetings 2 and 3 will be group meetings. These sessions will take place over Zoom and will be recorded. These will be spaced out over eight weeks and are ideally scheduled when you are not at work.

2.   Are you able to commit to responding to three journaling prompts in between these sessions?

3.   Are you able to be at a computer or laptop during these times, one that has a camera and sound so that we can conduct the interviews as a video conversation? I will use Zoom. I would record these conversations. The only people who have any access to these interviews and the things we discuss, including the video recordings, would be you, me, my co-researchers, my dissertation committee, and a transcriptionist. To start the video conferences, I would send you a link that you simply click.

4.   Can you share with me a little about the nature of your work? What does it really entail to do what you do?

5.   I want to ask you to remember, or imagine, a time in your life characterized by ambiguity, not knowing and uncertainty. Have you picked a time? Great. What can you tell me about how you functioned during this time? How would you describe your relationship to not-knowing?"

6.   My research question focuses on complexity leadership and what happens when you place beauty into the mix. The methodology I will use includes the expressive arts. The sessions together will require you to explore through movement, art, personal reflection, and practice. Are you comfortable with that?

7.   Thanks so much for your time. Based on what we discussed, I [believe/don't believe] you to be a good fit for this study for [x] reasons.

APPENDIX 9

FOLLOW-UP CONFIRMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear ,

I want to thank you again for your generosity and the time you have offered to explore this research project. As promised, here is a follow-up note with the logistical details spelled out. Following this email, you will see a message from Laura Blakeman (Wolf Willow Institute) that includes a link where you might e-sign the research consent form.

As a way of stepping in, if you so choose, the underline consent form will need to be signed and sent back to me along with your mailing address.

Data Collection Zoom 'Events':

Session I: Individual
February 20th – 27th (75 Minutes)
You can book your session with me at this link: https://calendly.com/lauralp/beauty-research-session-i?month=2021-02

Session II: Group
Proposed day/time: Sunday, March 14th from 11am – 2pm MST (3 Hours)

Session III: Group
Last week of March/early April (90 minutes)

As a reminder, each session will take place on Zoom, and recorded. Please ensure you have a strong internet connection and can minimize distractions for our time together.

If you absolutely cannot make the session on Sunday, March 14th, please do let me know and I can propose another date and time to the group.

With heart,
Laura
720.208.6702

APPENDIX 10

SAMPLE DEEPENING QUESTIONS MEETING ONE

What do you notice?

How does this image sit with you?

If this image were to have a name, title, or headline, what would it be?

If that [particular aspect of the image] were to have a voice, what would it say?

Anything else that comes up for you as you look?

What surprises you about this image? Feels new, fresh – even edgy?

What is most familiar to you about this image? What does that remind you of?

What is least familiar?

Is this image a friend or foe?

What emotions are you present to?

Where do you feel that in your body?

If this card offered you a gesture in your body, what would it look like?

What else is happening for you right now?

What is the most difficult thing about this image?

What is the best/worst thing about that?

Out of this experience right now, what feels most insightful or important to carry forward?

Is this still resonant with your experience of [uncertainty/beauty]?

Name 5 words that encapsulate your experience here with [uncertainty/beauty].

With both beauty and uncertainty images together:

What do you notice when these two images come close together?

What shapes or patterns strike you or surprise you?

How are they in relationship if at all?

What might beauty say to uncertainty?

What remains unsaid or unknown or unresolved in this moment?

What questions, if any, are you holding?

Anything need to be said or done before we chime out and close our ritual for this session?

APPENDIX 11

GUIDED IMAGERY SCRIPT MEETING TWO

Induction

Begin by noticing your breath. Breathe in and out through the soles of your feet, surrendering your particular heaviness to the earth.

Notice the choreography of your body in relationship to the earth body. Feel into solidity, fluidity, motion and stillness.

I want to suggest that with each out breath you might feel yourself being drawn just a bit deeper into the heart of uncertainty. Surrendering your particular heaviness to it. Notice its contours and boundaries, its limitations.

You might find you're in a familiar scene that is rife with uncertainty, or you could be totally surprised. But trust your heaviness to take you to the heart of uncertainty as you know it now.

Uncertainty

Allow for an arrival into a space of uncertainty.

As you take this place in, allow it to perceive you to take you in. You might let this place know how it feels to be here. What's authentic for you.

How do you feel here? What do you notice? See if you can evoke more detail, more sensation…amplify what is subtle and off to the side. Offer all of your senses to this place.

How much can you perceive?
- Temperature
- Medium
- Feeling
- Texture
- Atmosphere

When you're ready, please open your eyes and go to your paper. Please represent the essence of you experience here.

Remember this doesn't have to be a line-by-line representation, but could be abstract – capturing a feeling, or a sensation, or a color. Whatever might help you touch back into that experience later.

[pause for drawing]

Beauty

Let's all return to standing in the center of uncertainty. Just let your experience call you back there.

Softening or closing the eyes and breathing into this now-familiar space. While you stand or move here, in whatever way feels right to you, I'd like you to invite your relationship to beauty to join you.

As if you could make yourself irresistible to beauty so beauty appears. Just opening up space for beauty whom you have been apprenticing to over these last weeks to enter the scene.

You could do that through a gesture, or an internal welcome or by touching into your longing or by making yourself irresistible to it. Whichever way feels right to you, evoke beauty.

Notice how it arrives, how it moves, how it interacts with you or with this space.

Noticing Imagery

Focus your attention on imagery. What images do you see? What shapes? Perhaps one figure or memory stands out now. What colors or contours?

Let yourself come into focus with what you see – even if what you see is nothing. See if you can invite your deep imagination to perceive more of what is happening here.

When you're ready, open your eyes and move to your paper. Find a way to represent the experience you just had – the flavor or essence of the images that appeared to you.

[pause for drawing]

Noticing Physical Sensation

Please return to standing in the center of uncertainty with beauty. Allow yourself to simply slip back in through your breath.

As you observe and/or interact with beauty, focus your attention again on your body. What sensation do you feel? Where is your attention drawn? What smells? What touch? What tastes?

Just notice how your body responds here to beauty.

When you're ready, open your eyes and move to your paper. Find a way to represent the experience you just had – the physical experience of beauty.

[pause for drawing]

Noticing Emotions

One final time, offer all your senses to this place of beauty and uncertainty. Perhaps by now it has gotten richer or more lucid, or equally possible foggy and less clear. You are inhabiting a space of uncertainty alongside beauty. Breathe into that. Trust where you are. Settle there.

If you are lost, invite beauty to help you see, or arrive more deeply. You can ask questions of what you see or are experiencing at any time. If you see darkness or nothingness, what kind of darkness or nothingness? Trust what you see.

For this last experience here for now, we'll turn our attention to emotion. What emotions are you present to as you interact with beauty here?

They might be very subtle, or hard to catch. You might invite more clarity there. What does your heart feel? It could help to gaze more deeply into the center of beauty, or get closer to it physically.

When you're ready, open your eyes and move to your paper. Find a way to represent the experience you just had – the emotions that made themselves known to you.

[pause for drawing]

Completion

What needs to happen now to complete in a good way?

Notice how you come back to this place.

APPENDIX 12

JOURNAL PROMPTS

Between Meeting One and Meeting Two

Journal Prompt 1 (of 3):
Respond to some or all…
A few days later, how has your experience of beauty stayed with you? What are you noticing?
Can you describe what beauty you have seen around you? In your work? In times of uncertainty?
What, if anything, does beauty have to say to you now?
What else are you wondering about? Stirred by? Moved by?
If beauty fell silent (hard to find, easy to forget) where is it dwelling now?

Journal Prompt 2 (of 3):
Bring to mind a time in your life where you felt deeply changed/shifted/transformed or moved by beauty.
Then set a timer for five minutes, and without stopping, respond to the following beginning with:
Beauty is…
If you get stuck, continue writing '*beauty is*…' until the next line comes to you.

Between Meeting Two and Meeting Three

Journal Prompt 3 (of 3):
Respond to some or all…
Let's begin with your experience of leading the group.
What felt effective?
What felt ineffective?
What felt important?
What was your experience of uncertainty when you heart the invitation to lead the group?
Did beauty inform your choices and if so, in what ways?

Next, I'll invite you to journal your experience of being led by the others.
What was most affecting?
What was least affecting?
What are you aware of now, if anything, about beauty and leadership?

APPENDIX 13

SUMMARY OF DATA

This section contains selected transcript excerpts and journal entries from Meetings One, Two and Three. These meetings took place in February and March of 2020.

Meeting One

Uncertainty Image Exploration:

Olivia's responses:
I think what drew me to it was this hand that sort of like reaching out of the shadow into the light. It feels like they're crossing a divide or a portal of some kind.

It just sort of struck me as like there's a collective wisdom and history and context. And from that place of support, there's the reaching across the divide to illuminate.

Insights gets synthesized and reflected back through a collective process

Reaching for insight isn't always done by one person.

Sani's responses:
I think something about it feels soothing, it feels like the comfort that comes from knowing that there is more to what's going on that's not about me necessarily.

It's taking me a process to unlearn that I actually can't do everything when I'm working in this way that there's more to life that there's a flow to it that I need to trust that they need to work in the right time. I think maybe that's what it's invoking this comfort in actually, you don't have all the power and you have to trust in that is bigger power, this comforting light energy.

It feels familiar, it feels invigorating. …Blue and orange, red of dusk and Dawn. I'm not sure what it is, but suddenly because it also made me, I like the circular... I love water. I love... Yeah, something about it just feels just generally like water, ocean…movement.

Julia's responses:
I think I was drawn to the spiraling nature of it.

It's spiraling into something that looks unknown.

You've got layers of things. And then depths at the center that's going down and in. There's something about that, like the circular nature of it that caught my eye and the colors and the colors. They're just earthy.

Now the more I look at it, it looks a little bit like a vortex that I could get sucked into. I'm like, "Oh wait, maybe I don't want to go down there because I might not be able to get back out."

There's a depth to it that I hadn't noticed before. When I look at it one way, it does just look like kind of a spiral that's on one plane and then the more I look at it, like I can see the depth, how far down it goes.

When asked what the image was evoking now:

It actually is creating a little bit of anxiety. I don't know. That's interesting.

Like there's something that is both at the same time, like calming and also disturbing about this to me.

Do you think that's resonant with your experience of uncertainty, like both calming and disturbing?

Yeah, I mean, I think there's a part of me that's kind of like, very matter of fact, like yes, everything is uncertain. We have no idea what's going to happen can be anxiety provoking when I think about the future. And I think my children in relationship to the future and the world that they're going to inhabit.

Mia's responses:
This spiral—the ouroboros eating the tail…it's a feminine face. It strikes me—the continuity, the implication of infinite generation regeneration. The light at the top edge and then a more of diving inwards on darker uncertainty, but path or sense of motion or being drawn forward through the spiral and unknown or direction.

There's a really beautiful ambiguity between where the mouth and the end of the tail of the snake or, a breath…there's ambiguity there…that interpenetration of the world and the face. I feel in that some of that vulnerability and what's being taken in and what's being breathed back and an exchange between self and universe, so that in that part feels really generative but I can notice in myself a fear point…

I think it's the place where the... It is so much about the ego, the identity, the sense of self in all of this uncertainty, chaos in the universe… I feel that dualism of there's a knowing of being held and a knowing that draws me forward that feels like purpose and there's also a fear that sometimes the fear it's a smaller fear. It feels like ego fears and fears about, am I doing it right? Am I okay? Who am I to do this or to not do this?

Eli's responses:
I feel drawn to this person in the card. And it strikes me that there is some wisdom here, that this person has discovered how to be with both the icy depths and the heat, in a way that is allowing them to be calm and present and centered. I feel curious about that and what has allowed them to, yeah, to emerge and be in that way.

I would say definitely what feels most familiar is that contrast of the hot and the cold, the heat, or the depth and the surface, the contrasting parallels.

A metronome going from side to side and feeling pulled from one direction to another, from one side to the other. …Imagery of tides and intertidal zones and being able to find life in that transition space between the extremes that I often find myself in, in my life and in my feelings. And so yeah, this again takes me back to that, to those extremes of heat and cold and what to find there in both and in that middle space.

It feels like how I want to be in the uncertainty, but not necessarily how I am. So, it feels aspirational in a way, but the navigation of the extremes very much feels familiar in the uncertainty that I am navigating.

Sebastian's responses:
I think this language will make sense, but it feels like a very full spectrum image, or expression.
There's something fresh about that. There isn't... it feels like there isn't something being held back, like there's something being fully expressed in this expression, and that feels cool.

…I think part of the intention, either spoken or not spoken, is to become more fully ourselves, or more fully myself, and express that through how I show up, and how I express a broader spectrum of my own self. This feels like an expression of that, and so there's something fresh in the sense of... like not new or fresh in the sense of not known, but also as a reminder of it actually... it feels good when that's the case.

Is this still resonant with your experience of uncertainty?

I guess within uncertainty is the opportunity to show up as fully as we choose to or are able to, and be as creative as we would like to, which is a pretty cool thing about uncertainty actually.

Aria's responses:
…I used to hear this voice saying, "I hate you"… it was like this multi-dimensional thing. And when I followed it yesterday, for some reason it came back because someone asked me about the part that wants to run away. And that might be the uncertainty part, as I kept seeing patterns of persecution.

And I could see part of myself that had felt like this when I saw it in the hands. …Because I had asked myself where inside myself had I exiled. People ask me, where did you exile your gifts? And I say, well, where did I exile love?

I get a dual feeling... One like a connection to our ancestors, and for some reason it also brings up in me our time of collective healing around our ancestors—the liberation we carry through each other.

I remember in Peru, when the medicine people were burned by the Spanish. How many people over time had faced…those types of cycles. …I guess what I hear behind the uncertainty, when I just asked, it was this feeling about a right to life—so many having the right to life.

Yeah, there's part of me that wants to look and then look away. …This sounds really funny, but this woman has no clothes on for me. …When I was younger, I was hospitalized a few times, they thought I had schizophrenia, like my grandma. Well, my grandma was diagnosed. And I remember at that time coming out, I thought, Oh, I want to live with it in a different type of sense, like there's no clothes on. That I'll feel everything, I want to see everything that's moving inside so that I can be present. Especially because I didn't want to be on medication when I was young, at first, that was about that, but that's just been... So I really appreciate that does feel familiar, that feeling. I don't know if that's what they talk about the nature of vulnerability is like.

Vivienne's responses:
It's deep, deep. Well, so it's sitting for me, whereas I was talking to you, I was sort of floundering or felt a little bit... I feel like this is what uncertainty is. And it's very creative. It's very nourishing and creative and it is kind of omnipresent. Whether you embrace uncertainty or not, it is happening. It's happening. There's deep wisdom in it. I think of this image of the woman, like so much of it is fluid, all the fluids of birth and menstrual, like there's a fluidity and strength.

I was attracted to some angry ones, like one's that were really raging. And this one is just like, "Oh right." The boat is kind of rocking, but that's just superficial. It's the depth of the beauty of uncertainty and that it's emotion. There's nothing about this woman here that isn't omnipresent.

It's beautiful because it's creation. Uncertainty is an act of creation, but it's being held and it's not static. It's being inspired by the divine.

Uncertainty Headline:

Olivia: Reaching into the light, or reaching across the darkness, or reaching for insight.
Julia: The endless vortex. The vortex of uncertainty.
Mia: Taking and sending and the universal coil. We'll go with that. With tonglen.
Eli: Find me in peaceful resolution.
Sebastian: Surrender to contribution.

Vivienne: The abundance of uncertainty.

Beauty Image Exploration:

Olivia's responses
It's very much like the inward journey.

I just love the colors …might be most drawn with this person who like is the night sky. …Is it the Egyptian goddess? Like Nut, or something who was like the sky goddess, it's just like this really infinite character, cosmic presence, enveloping this other figure who looks really content.

It kind of reminds me angels or something. it seems like there's sort of this angelic figure above with wings and the paint is sort of just flowing and enveloping behind these figures and the figure of the foreground looks like they're walking or earthly. And yeah, they don't know they've got their hands raised and there's a connection. Maybe it's like a higher self or again, like I have more of a guardian angel-type of presence, but it's sort of striking and I couldn't really figure out what was going on. It kept pull[ing] me… this mystery about it.

There is this thread around …peace and stillness of the night and this like higher self and … the contentment that is felt within that.

When asked if contentment is familiar to her:

No. Never.

Contentment is not typically the way I operate in the world. And in fact, quite the opposite, I'm usually challenging, usually striving, usually put in more of a boundary challenging way. So, yeah, I guess it's just surprising and interesting that this is what surfaced.

Sani's responses:
Beauty for me, there's definitely … a deep sensing of passion. She has her eyes closed. …It's like looking away from whatever it is that she's also enjoying. But it could also just be closing her eyes to sense it more deeply. It could be both. It could be…that's a lot I'm going to close my eyes or, Oh, that's a lot. I want to really feel that.

When asked to speak for her beauty image:

How I can feel it—or she can feel it, and also be in the environment?

Further reflections…

It feels like her connection to whatever she's enjoying. Like a connection to something timeless.

This is probably now completely in my head, but this time around these colors, the ones that really stand out are like the orange, goldish, yellow sort of color. And then juxtaposed beside these green, bluish …sort of colors. I sometimes make jokes that if I was born over a hundred years ago, that in my childhood I would have worshiped Oshun, and as an elder, I would have worshiped Yemoja. In my culture Oshun is the goddess of the river and fertility. And when she got syncretized in Cuban cultures, they gave her orange, and yellow, and gold sort of the sun colors as her colors. And then Yemoja is the goddess of deep-water bodies like oceans. And when she got syncretized she's way more mature, she doesn't dance as crazy as Oshun does. And she is motherly and protective. A lot of things I don't think of as myself right now…maybe in the future.

When asked if her beauty image had a headline:

She Feels Ecstasy.

Julia's responses:
I think there was something about like the nature connection and like the permeability maybe. …Like the lack of barrier between human nature, ground above ground. Like it's all just kind of some continuous flow almost.

I think there's something about like the image of the belly and like birth and again like renewal, like a sense of just the cycle of birth and rebirth. That's like there isn't, what's coming up is like this continuously, like remaking continuously, like starting over, not some destination.

I have this sense of it's just like a little bit more lightness. Like what's coming up is like hope, right? That's like, there's always a new beginning. Always. … It's not the death spiral, actually this is reaching up and out. I have the sense of like, right. The connection to everything, like the kind of the wider cosmos … consciousness.

Growth is always possible. And deeper connection is always possible.

Mia's responses:
I feel there's concentric rings of perception and connection to worlds that surrounds this figure and flows in different rivulets or lines. For me when I'm talking about the dynamism and the balance and the movement, those are the things that I experience as beautiful and life giving.

It has a harmony to it. Many of them aren't geometrically harmonious but this one is and that pleases me from an aesthetic point of view as well. When you ask me that and I look again, one of the things that I'm struck by really powerfully is the connection between the hand and the hearts and the eyes, the beauty of the gaze and the beauty of the openhandedness and then there's wisdom in the lines of the hand, there's a quality of kind wisdom in the eyes that helps to frame this energy and that those things all really feel

beautiful to me and that awakened guidance and the soft open handed offering, those feel very beautiful to me.

Eli's responses:
I noticed the spiral, the circular nature of the card and the depths that seem to be present.

I think the surprising aspect is probably the face that almost, that there's this exasperated expression of the eyes, and it almost appears calling out for help through the shape of the cavern mouth. So that feels surprising. And then the coloring around the edges, I'm curious as to where that came from, or what's beyond the scale of this card and where this cavern mouth is located.

I feel drawn to it, but I also don't know that it's ... Yeah, I don't think it's necessarily going to be a happy encounter, if that makes sense.

I can definitely notice my heart is racing a little bit faster. I feel almost a sense of adventure, so a being called to move inward to that place and into that cavern. Yeah, still a sense of hesitation.

Although there's that desire that's there, there's a part that's uncertain and maybe cautious of what, yeah, what the mouth is asking for this person. A sense of not necessarily sadness, but almost a fear of what I might discover that they are experiencing and what that might mean for me.

What's the most difficult thing about this image?

The face, for sure. Yeah. And the eyes more specifically, what they are expressing, like a sense of grief and anguish and, yeah, and not knowing why.

When asked if the image still resonated with his experience of beauty…

I think it feels resonant with a certain kind of beauty. Yeah, maybe I'm not so sure of a certain way of looking at things. But this card feels beautiful to me in its intrigue and uncertainty and how it's mysteriously calling me in.

Sebastian's responses:
I'm noticing that there's a sense of freedom in this image, and a sense of movement, and that it's both sort of human and ecological, and that it's a horse, and sort of a human-angel kind of thing.

I'm noticing that because it feels life giving in that way, like it's more than just one kind of beauty perhaps. …It's not an image, for example, …just of a human face, or just of an animal, but there's a broader expression of life in this image. …I guess in beauty, for me, is something that has many, many expressions, … and that feels present.

There's a sense of power, and joy, and there's a sense of... I mean, the word unbridled comes present for me, …there is a horse in this drawing, and horses are a big part of my life, or they have been, and so it could be that that's... it's an association, but I think actually it's more than that in the sense of in this image there is a sense of unbridled ness.

There's also a blended nature in this image where literally it's a beautiful image, and there's beauty in how this horse and this being are actually woven in together. There's not a separation, but actually a real connection and woven nature, and it's actually just a very beautiful image of that, and I think that in beauty... I think beauty is something that on a deeper level is connecting.
Beauty has the opportunity to be a very connecting, both expression, and also meeting place.

I don't think that if something feels beautiful to me it doesn't mean that it's not going to have the shadow as well. And so loving that, or being aware of that in appreciating beauty, and recognizing that there's also the shadow side, I think there's something super genuine about that experience of beauty, and that can also be very reflective for the viewer, in this case me, or any of us is what I mean by that.

When asked if his beauty image had a headline:

Liberated connection in authentic expression.

Aria's responses:
The one thing that I see is that what appears to be a human face is actually emerging. For me, it looks like it's coming out of the land, like it's inside the mother. …I do love that it shows like a rugged landscape

And I think the last word that I mentioned about listening, for some reason I feel like she's listening. I don't know why, but I feel like there's this deep commune or commune in listening.

For some reason, the very first word that I heard in my relationship to was the wind. Like it feels like that. You know how sometimes there's a type of spirit or a guide inside the wind of renewal?

Omniscient being in between the realms.

I can feel my mind expanded. I can feel something deeply nurtured and held and lift, pulling me forward I guess you could say. And that feels beautiful and I love that. …It's multi-dimensional.

Vivienne's responses:
There's such a fluid feel to it, and it's not like I'm just not happy all the time. It's sort of like on one side, you can feel the weight of that on her. Especially this purple that comes through, but also the lightness so it's kind of uncertainties of dance of love.

It integrates all of the pain and pleasure and connection and disconnection. It's like beauty is all of it. It isn't just a rarefied or a goal. It is what it is. And I love her feet on the ground.

Thinking about the ancestral pain of women of holding up the earth, holding up the sky. There's also an absolute strength and beauty in it. I wouldn't choose otherwise. I wouldn't choose a different experience in my life. And the red to me is like, if I looked at some of the angry images here, the reds there, it's all there, but it's still love. It's still some kind of cosmic connection.

After placing their beauty and uncertainty image next to each, and were prompted to reflect on the relationship between them:

Olivia's responses
There's definitely a theme around sort for the mentorship that I mentioned. Then the one with the vessel is sort of inner guidance.

There's that theme around essential truth or something like that, right? Maybe it's like learning through discovering is more accurate, but it feels like what is revealing itself was already known to some degree. It's more about rediscovering that.

There is some similarity, it feels like there's some similarity. But it does feel like the three beauty cards are kind of reaching within or connecting within, and uncertainty is reaching outside… So, in that way, I would say that there is some tension.

Sani's responses:
I was just paying attention to how I feel energetically. Yeah. Same sort of invigorating, alive sort of feeling. Something about just the eye open, just looking back at me and I'm not clear about that, but they feel in harmony and they definitely have this alive invigorating feeling for me, both of them.

Julia's responses
There's definitely something about cycles that comes to mind, different kinds of cycles. And there's something about like animal spirit, nature connection. And growth, like the like upward, outward there's like some upward outward motion.

They could be friends. …or foe…it feels like it could be a complex relationship.

Mia's responses
The edges of my way of being …I feel like I am in a developmental stretch moment and the way that I'm clinging to certain parts that have given me so much energy and then it's this quest for how do I release those knowing that there's a deeper sourcing that will be there for me but clinging to so that gets really evoked by the fiery. Because I don't want to leave that behind but I also know that there are new refinements to that and so even feeling into the wise kind eyes and the humble giving and those elements that they're all

there that I resonate with this image from maybe both of those developmental stances or it can provide me and I am doing some interval coaching right now.

My unique way of looking at things carries me through different evolutionary forms. …it brings up a lot of questions but a lot of feelings of feeling affirmed.

Eli's responses:
I think I notice almost a calling between [them]. The cavern face seems to be calling to the being in this middle space between the heat and the cold. And in some ways, it feels like the being between the hot and the cold is somehow peacefully offering reassurance. And I think for me, what's coming out is a sense that this being [uncertainty image], even when faced with the tragedy or the anguish and the potential difficulty of this cavern face, they're just remaining really reassured. And they don't have a big grin on their face or confidently stating things are going to be okay, but they're just there and peacefully, powerfully present, which feels really, yeah, like something I admire and feels like it is in service to the cavern being [beauty image] in some way.

Sebastian's responses:
I guess I would say in both of the images there is a sense of expression, and also surrender, or expression and allowing, or expression... like leading and following at the same time, in both of them, for different reasons.

I think on one level it feels like they're two different things, and on another level, like in essence they also feel that there's a lot of overlap in terms of things that I said in both seem to show up in both, and yet they are, they do feel like two distinct things.

Aria's responses:
They feel deeply. Yeah, it's quite intense actually.

I don't know if we were talking about complexity in the beginning or parts of interrelationship across leadership and the interdynamicy [sic] of it, even when people come together in a circle and everyone is there related, and we're all related, like this is here. You can almost see the larger song…anyone can be at that tree. …Those types of song lines that are at the center, …of every moment. I think that would be for me, the complexity and the …uncertainty.

Now that I look at it again, for me, she is going inside. Internally, because I was hospitalized when I was younger. I knew I could hear at the time they telling you what they know, but not what is true. So I went internally, I would listen to that type of guidance, but I had to listen deeply inside. And in order to be at peace, I guess, and maybe to play, to be able to listen into that lean in, but there are moments where I do feel very much like this picture when you're in the middle of uncertainty or especially high when there are certain types of moments when there people [inaudible] turning points where the earth is breaking open in work or even when we're up in [inaudible] first nation when they had so many suicides there, that the land wasn't breathing.

I remember going a lot inside. It went inside and I kept hearing, you have to pray to the ancestors with the water, [inaudible] support and the beings. And I had to come to terms with my own feelings of suicide when I was younger. When I look at it, I can see that when I was in moments of, I don't know if I'd use the word leadership, but when …I had the responsibility of leading where I felt like this [beauty image] was my way through those uncertainties.

Vivienne's responses:
There's a sense of liquidity. One is kind of in the act of uncertainty in the complexity and it's almost like the need for a higher power to join. And the other one is more an acceptance of the higher power. So, it's more like this happens [uncertainty image] before this [beauty image].

Recognizing that you're not alone and you're being held and that you're being directed to like you're been asked. And in the acceptance of that comes this to flow together quite well.

When asked what might Beauty have to say to uncertainty?

Olivia's responses:
I feel cheesy, my ego getting in the way. Yeah, I think the beauty cards are like very trusting and advising to source, connection to self and connection to the universe and connection to higher... I'm not like I'm actually not like a religious person at all. So, it's weird that I keep talking about angels. But yeah, this particular winged figure is just reminding me of that higher power. Just that reconnection to, I'll just call it source.

I would say that the beauty cards are... I would say like seek connection to source to support in navigating uncertainty.

I would just say it's kind of like you are not alone type message.

Sani's responses:
Look around you, do you feel that around you, can sense that around you? [the energy]

Julia's responses:
Come play with me. Let's see what we can do.

Mia's responses:
The word that I was using to denote this place of, boundary wasn't the right word, membrane was the word so that idea of there being that stasis that happens so that their membrane can move things between but it's a permeable boundary and it's dependent almost it feels like on having, what's the word when the salination equals over, there's something about just the movement…

Relating with the uncertainty of the whole and then relating with the beauty of my way of seeing and being, and how do those two things meet each other in a way that the

membrane can give and take… And so that tells me that there is a way to do it and it's about tending the fire with wise intention and humility.

Eli's responses:
I think one question is what is inside the anguish? And another question is how did you find this way of being?

Sebastian's responses:
I guess I would say, beauty would say, take action, and uncertainty would say, let happen, let it happen.

They're mixed whether they want to be or not... and yet that doesn't take away from distinctness.

Aria's responses:
I believe it [beauty image] awakens our inherent knowing. I do believe that when we have beauty around us, whether that's in people or other pieces being in the land that it brings out that part, even in uncertainty, no matter what dimensional aspects might be there with us. It actually calls a spirit forth or inherent structure. … I do believe it allows us to move through that with can awaken our good mind or inherent knowing in times when we can't see.

Vivienne's responses:
I have a lot of questions about women's anger and rage. I worry about bypassing that..not saying it as necessary energy to experience this [beauty image]. It's like, are there correct emotions in the spiritual movement? It strikes me that women's [rage] are not facilitated in any way.

This one to me, is this all-encompassing rage. And then this one is like, "Don't fuck with me." It's expressing. And this one is like, "Okay, I'm standing solid here." I feel like I'm doing this a lot in work and personal life. Yeah. I feel like this is probably my stance, but I'm attracted to this, right? This is to me resolution. This is transition. And I feel like we move very quickly to resolution spiritual space, yeah.

Journal Entries Between Meeting One and Meeting Two

A few days later, how has your experience of beauty stayed with you? What are you noticing?

Sophia's Responses:
Interestingly, I have had a hard week. When we last spoke, on a sunny day full of positive flow, it was easier to reflect on uncertainty as a spicy friend lol. Today is soooo wintery, inside and out, and I feel more fragile…and it is beautiful…if I could float outside of myself, it would be a beautiful thing to witness. That edge.

[quote by Zelda Scott Fitzgerald]

I think Zelda lived very close to that edge. She had a particular hunger for life that almost seemed to give her a sense of immortality. It reminds me of a chapter in my youth…when I was 16, my cousin, who was more like a sister—she lived with me, we were born only a month apart, we lived in parallel—died in a car accident. I turned inward for a few years, but then when I eventually left home, I lived recklessly, imagining every day could be my last…so I ate them up. I tested the boundaries of human kindness by putting myself at risk in various ways. I learned that most people are broken, not just me. I learned that some of the time they will act from a place of love, and some of the time they will act from a place of hurt, shame, and anger. It can go either way for people. The potential for both lives in every moment for every person. I learned that a lot of harm-doing and resulting suffering is just the slow bleed of this broken-ness. I also learned that these broken places are also where the light comes from, and how we let the light in. That interface, that edge, is what beauty is made of. It is how love knows that it is love. It's the place where all of the possibility lies.

Eli's Responses:
I've been noticing the experience of beauty in movement and music. It's (surprisingly) something new for me. I think I've always felt movement and being in my body as something that I enjoy and feels great, but not necessarily as something that is beautiful. When the right song and the right movement align, there is a certain sense of presence that emerges for me. It is similar to what i notice outside myself when I am on the land, but I can find it at home, sometimes more regularly than I am able to be out in wild spaces.

Sani's Responses:
Apprenticing beauty these past few days have expanded my awareness to how abundant my life really is. I also am understanding more what Lorde meant when she wrote: "it is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire for having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and reorganizing its power in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves."

It is really an abundant …source of power, and I see why and how …this source is the first to be repressed for Women to be successfully oppressed. And for many Black women there is old fashioned cookie-cutter Patriarchy and also entrenched misogeny style religiosity. Black Female Pleasure beautiful as it is, in this world is Rebellion.

Julia's Responses:
Beauty saying to me it needs to be recognized, treasured, held, appreciated, it's always there I just need to look for it.

Wondering about change, the future of this country, where we are headed.
Wondering about next steps, my passion, my soul's calling, how and where I can best contribute
It's dwelling somewhere—perhaps locked in my heart.

Pay attention. Always there, in the perspective I/we choose (or not) to take. Am I paying attention?

Meeting Two

Responses to the poem, "Fire on the Hills" and any reflections since Meeting One:

Vivienne's response:
I love the poem because it resonates. I live in a community that is on fire every year. We're starting to move into the fire preparation and so almost every summer, there is a fire coming over the horizon and the ash falls and it is stunningly beautiful. There's no question about the beauty of fire. This is a community that will eventually be raised by fire, it's not a matter of if it's when.

And it's just really interesting how people embrace the fire or refused to even believe that it's actually part of our lives. So from a perspective of the question around beauty, I have a real drive to understand how rage and beauty work together. I feel a lot of rage around a whole host of things, and I'm not frightened of rage, I actually see the joy in rage. But I wonder how that fits with how beauty we, define or embrace, imagine beauty to be.

Mia's response:
What's coming up for me is, even early on, a recognition that beauty isn't actually a concept or an entry point that I'm often familiar with using to describe what maybe transcendent or transformative or spiritual or whole experiences are. And yet it feels like a very blank access word that invokes all of those things, but it wouldn't be my label…What is beauty? What isn't it? What sort of settling into a sense of, if there was another experience for me that is around beauty, it probably is just close to presence.

Julia's response:
I am realizing that the concept of beauty isn't something that I naturally orient toward, and so I really had to think about, what is beauty? How do I define beauty? How come I don't pay attention to it if I'm not being asked to journal about it.

And just…reflecting on this deep sense of connection and presence, interconnectedness and that's beauty.

Eli's responses:
What I've discovered is that I can actually find beauty in myself and what I'm experiencing in my body, which I had never sort of given word to or actually conceptualized. So like dancing and movement is a big part of who I am and what I experienced every day with my family. And so being able to consider that as beautiful and the feelings of beauty has been a big, big shift.

Aria's response:

I had, similar to a fire on the hill moment when I was young, where I was hospitalized for schizophrenia, and it's something my grandmother went through and we talk about collective healing. And it put me on that journey that we talked about.

…An elder said that, we were doing an Indigenous governance offering and we're building our governance around the clan system and the star blanket. It's an extension of how we relate, these governance systems. I was really resonating with [Eli] there about how that can feel in the sense of how we relate in our identity, because Adora was saying, "I think about my grandchildren." She's in her late seventies. She's like, how important is it for me, for us, to leave our traditional governance here? Because I know that's how my children will grow into their nature and those sorts of things. So I was really reflecting on the power of that beauty of those traditional governance systems that align and continue to deepen the capacity to be present and to grow in powerful ways together.

Sophia's response:
It's like in all of our relationships or in any sort of moment in life, there's this potential to ... we're hovering on this fulcrum of acting out of love or tipping over the other way toward like anger, shame, hurt, and fear and all of those things that are sort of on the other side, but they're just right there and you're hanging on that point.

I started calling it the edge in my mind and in my journaling, but I feel like that's where beauty comes from, it's that edge. That's the place where it lives, and it's a part of love and it's a part of all of those other feelings that we see as being like the other side of love.

Sebastian's response:
I feel that the poem for me, when we did the prompt in our journaling around beauty is, beauty showed up for me in that moment as both like a hearth fire, like a cooking fire, but also a wildfire. And that sort of broad spectrum of how beauty can be very, very comforting, but also very, very raging just has been really present for me over the last couple of weeks.

I would say that the [images from Meeting One] have been with me the whole time very much. And they've been, I guess I would say like constant companions, is the way that I would say it. It feels relational.

In reflecting on the guided imagery session:

How did it feel to invoke beauty into that space?

Sebastian's response:
it was easier to invoke uncertainty than beauty, beauty came slowly and softly
beauty felt centering

Sani's response:
I couldn't understand what I saw
Seemed ephemeral … like trying to make sense of clouds

Or trying to see shapes in clouds.

Eli's response:
It felt both metaphorically and physically like this folding inward. The inward spiral. Taking a. Noticing of tension in my hips and my neck, and finding comfort in tension of both the physical places and the mind space of uncertainty.

But my heart was still racing somehow beating strongly and powerfully in a receptive sense. Intense release amidst the calm cave waters.

And that through the noticing the tension somehow released, or there was an appreciation for it, a source of heat amidst the crystal blue water I found myself.

Aria's response:
It was a scented wind from within and throughout, effervescence, like turquoise waters
It was like a song my heart already knew.
I also hear homeward .. or home

Julia's response:
Calming
Beauty added a sense of relaxation, like everything would be ok amidst the uncertainty

Mia's response:
Tender, vitalizing
like a pathway through a challenging dynamic I'm facing
Inviting beauty invited healing

Sophia's response:
I am feeling very "alive" and vulnerable today …it makes this experience vivid and almost overwhelming…I feel a little queasy actually lol. I feel a bit scared? Not sure what that is.
Welcoming beauty—felt like an opening up. That can be hard and painful, but also warm and exciting.

When you look at your drawing now, what immediately comes up for you? This could be an emotion, a memory or image, a physical sensation…

Vivienne's response:
the image was of the conscious protective space created surrounding—inside this space was calm, presence. I saw a cheetah family with one adult female keeping an eye on the landscape and with wild protection. And at the same knowing she was creating the space for calm connection.
Wildness and presence

Sani's response:
It is a heady feeling… I am not sure I can describe it

Like a lot of love … like when I am really into music

Aria's response:
It reflects the past present and future
Unity
Breaking through and open into oneness—webbings
I also heard and wrote "ancestral force" so I did … lol

Julia's response:
Heart, fluidity, unknowable here now presence

Mia's response:
uncertainty

Sophia's response:
I see fear and grief (purple/blue) swirling with love and light (yellow) and life woven throughout it (green)

What questions are you aware of right now?

Vivienne's response:
interesting disassociation from my heart. It felt outside the protection space—my womb was core of my sense of emotion and presence. And was protected by a mothering being.

Sani's response:
How is it that I feel so beautiful in a world that often doesn't see that beauty?

Aria's response:
Understanding the nature of life and my relational experience … why am I hear in relation to what I saw … or tried to transcribe …my responsibilities here

Julia's response:
What is the impact of not tending to beauty?

Mia's response:
How can I melt away cages that hold back new growth?

Sophia's response:
How do I stay alive as I live? How do I make space for that…and not let fear stop me from exploring that edge?

Any verbal shares?

Aria's response:
I had an image come up with a mountain, and it was like a sun behind it, is what I saw. And then it switched to Upreti. …He was like the eye of the mountain. I wasn't expecting

that, so maybe I'll just say that's what struck me… the power of presence…and the embodiment of something.

Julia's response:
I was really struck looking at the progression of my drawing. So the first one, just the experience of uncertainty, just this sense of needing to control but not wanting to, just feeling this tension in my body, but then the experience of bringing in beauty to that, just relaxed everything. It just allowed me to feel like I could be, and so it was interesting. Then just noticing what I drew when I added the experience of beauty, and then intensified that, it just really became this sense of just being able to be with the uncertainty in a different way. So, that was really interesting to notice.

Sani's response:
I was surprised at my drawing for uncertainty, because it looks more beautiful than what I saw when you asked, so I really found it really like ephemeral what I was seeing when you were asking about beauty, so that's a curious thing.

Like less tangible to you or less clear to you than uncertainty?

Way less tangible, just forms, like things moving around and not really... Like seeing something and then it disappearing and then seeing something else that could be something and then it disappearing, just not being able to catch it. And how much of myself is in all of it. Like sort of, I wonder about that a lot, about not being able to separate myself necessarily from each of the experiences or feelings or visualizations.

Eli's response:
At the end of the last question, when you invited us to sort of return, there was a sense of almost like floating up and seeing a different vantage point of where I was that felt really alive and energizing.

Mia's response:
My experience is very personal and connected to a lot of stuff that I feel sort of sticky with right now, in terms of relational things. I noticed a sort of like a yearning that there was maybe a mountain and a spiritual form that spoke to me, but it was a lot more the sticky shit that I'm kind of struggling with. And so it actually felt way more personal as a journey. And yet, the containers of uncertainty and beauty have actually helped me tease apart some dynamics that I think are very old in my own life. And my ending image really helps capture something for me about the way that I have felt kind of caged by an old story, like sort of a founding story.

Leadership Enactments:

Sophia:
I went for a long walk up the mountain, I live on Hunter's Mountain, before we started. And there's a snow squall today, and so I found this spot I love going to, that's kind of sheltered. And when it's a clear day, you can see across to the Bras d'Or Lakes. And just

feeling these big fat snowflakes hitting my face and melting, to me, that spoke to me of beauty, that discomfort, that edge that I mentioned between something that feels familiar and good, but also something you're uncomfortable with. And then just that place of safety for me up there on the mountain.

I guess my prompt to you is to sometime in the coming days, find your place. Maybe you live on the land you're from or maybe you don't. For me, snow brings me back to the land I'm from, so that's part of why it's so meaningful for me. But find some discomfort in a place in the natural world that helps you sort of call on that discomfort, and then spend some time there, build some spaciousness into it. And spend enough time that you can sort of call on that moment again in your future. So, keep it in your heart so that you can call on it when you need it. Maybe when you're feeling numb or busy or tired or closed off. Use it to dig a little deeper into yourself when you need it most and use it to embrace that discomfort that we come up against in our work, but in our personal relationships and in other ways. So yeah, that's all.

Sani:
[A group percussion experience that she called "Uncertain Music"]

Julia:
I felt compelled in my five minutes to write a poem, which is something that I never do.

"Beauty is the courage to feel, deeply feel, to trust what emerges, what is, what needs to be said, done, experienced, in this here now moment. Beauty is taking that step, that very first step, when every cell in your being says, "No, I can't. I won't. I don't know how, what if..." Beauty is the something that allows something new to emerge. It's the hot fire that creates action and reaction. It's the letting go of what's familiar, safe, old, what's keeping me back. Beauty is allowing what needs to emerge to emerge, without thought. It's in the interconnection. It's in the smile, the pause, the intimacy between two people. What's said, what's not said, between me and nature, between the plants and the sun and the moon and the stars. It's in the pregnant pause of uncertainty. It's in complexity. It's the light, the sound, the moon, the stars, the birds, the breeze, all around. Beauty is what I choose to see and what chooses to reveal itself."

Sebastian:
What's arising for me in this moment is to extend an invitation. And my invitation is, if you feel comfortable, to place your hands on your body, where you're feeling what you're feeling. And that could be in that one's neck, one's head, one's heart, belly, wherever you're feeling whatever you're feeling, I'm going to invite you to place your hands on that space.

And what arose for me in these moments here is a question around what does it mean to tend a sacred fire, a spiritual, sacred fire, in regard to our work and our leadership at this time in the world? And as part of this moment, I'm just going to invite you to breathe into the place where you're feeling what you're feeling through your hands. And I'm going to

share a poem with you that I haven't revisited this in a very long time. It's a poem by a 15th century poet named Hafez. And these are the words.

"Don't surrender loneliness so quickly. Don't surrender your loneliness so quickly. Let it cut deeper. Let it ferment and season you as few humans or even divine ingredients can. Something missing in my heart tonight has made my eyes so soft, my voice so tender, my need for God absolutely clear."

Mia:
I'm sitting here staring at the ocean and I really need to feel nourished by that. I arrived here last night. And so I'm going to take us out. And so I encourage you to put your screen on a speaker view so that you can enjoy the songs of the ocean on the rocks.

While I'm here, I'm going to allow myself to feel the mist of rain on my face, and my head and allow the breath and the moisture in the air to flow through me and allow myself to feel the healing aspects of [the water].

[Invites silence and listening to the water]

Vivienne:
Each one of us as leaders, [make a] very deep commitment…to cultural transformation…it's like a flood. So how do we bring beauty and the experience of beauty to be discerning about what we say yes to and what we let just go by without any obligations since of I should, but how do we truly feel what comes towards us as ours and what is not ours.

Where in the body am I reacting to? What's coming at me? And is there a sense that deep sense of belonging connecting to it? Does it expand into beauty or does it just pass through me? Offering an invitation to consider care for self through this time and allowing beauty to come towards us in our work.

[Invites silence to feel]

Eli:
[Offers description of an Oak tree near his home]

It actually happens quite often where I just feel a sense of awe and serenity and appreciation for this tree that has branches extending across the street. And what I imagine must be this incredible root structure that goes underneath the house and underneath the road. What I'd love to invite you to do if you feel comfortable is to stand where you are tall, like that tree, I'm going to do that right now, turn off your video or adjusted as you need. And I want you to extend your feet wide, feel your toes planted. Imagine yourself as this tree extend your arms high into the air, and now feel the wind perhaps blowing at you and causing shifts in your branches and notice the rootedness of your roots, extending deep, holding you strong, present, purposeful, and perhaps notice what's moving, notice where you're finding strength. And remember that.

Aria:
[offers a story about her drum and the drum skin breaking]

And when the skin opened, I offered that to the people that were sitting there in ceremony with me as a skin opened. And here are some of the bells and we talk about our ancestors and would that sound that sweet bell. And here are some of the shells that my mom picked up on her last journey to the ocean before she was getting prepared to transition in this life. And so she transitioned about 15 years ago, and this contemplation about beauty brought me back to my mom's suffering as a woman, brought me back to my mom's contemplation about how to be present my grandmothers. And it brought back my own healing around just being here, being connected to all of creation as you've talked about. And so as an offering to each and every one of you and to you, Laura, and your inquiry into what this means in our integral design as humans and why we're here.

I just wanted to offer two rounds of a song. …I offer that to our lifewater. So if you want to reflect on whether it's that tree of life that Eli talked about, if you want to sit at that tree at doorway of life or the waters that you've come from, the land that you're in, wherever you feel called of that homecoming. And I just wanted to offer a song of gratitude and also for that, the beauty of my mother and of course mother earth and all of creation.

[singing]

Leadership Enactment Reflections (Journaling)

What was the experience of your own leadership like for you?

Sani:
I feel so much more connected to everyone now than when we started. I feel blessed and enriched. I give thanks.

Eli:
Heart opening. A reminder of my why. A sense of connection and energy and love.

Mia:
I feel woven into a fabric of beauty with many starting points and celebrants, and I feel the enoughness of my own offering and path alongside that of others.

Julia:
Initially anxiety!And then a natural following the thread of what came to me in the moment.

Aria:
Deep listening into what was calling for myself / all and a witnessing of the beauty and gifts of everyone, interconnection.
Stillness and yet wildness.

Sebastian:
It felt good and right to honor spiritual fire in relation to leadership and loneliness link connecting that fire with beauty and uncertainty.
It arose naturally.

Sophia:
Natural. Communities built around leadership are so important. I love the chance to share and learn with others in this sphere of work around complexity.

Vivienne:
The wholeness of sharing. Not one voice but all voices. Erin's reflection on mother and grandmother—how can beauty not bypassing expression but be an entry point into the pain and grief of healing. This is deeply on my mind and body.

Being led by others: what felt most impactful?

Julia:
Having a window into everyone's unique expression.

Jody:
I liked that we come from different places and experiences, but I felt a lot of commonality…and trust.

Mia:
How much love and appreciation welled up for each person.

Eli:
The connection to each person's story, their place, their own experience of beauty and feeling a resonance with that experience myself. A sort of coming together, a feeling of solidarity and support and love and connection.

Sani:
How truly different the experiences of leadership/ enactments were. Some through generations and some in the moment. Some through words and others through movement. It is interesting how we can be distinct and be connected and be one.

Vivienne:
That the exploration and expression of beauty is deeply personal and collective.

Sebastian:
impactful = the blend of embodied, creative, soulful, nature, tenderness—the mix of it all across what each person shared.

<u>Meeting Three</u>

Reflections on the poem "The Real Work"

Vivienne:
I had this idea of the being, which is more the presence of beauty. And we spoke about that, but I also feel that the becoming is also beauty. And I think that's where the real work is and that's where the uncertainty is. I struggle with the sense of beauty being just in the presence, because the becoming space is where we keep on growing, and the next space of being comes in.

I've struggled with the concept of beauty in this in our work here because I feel like we have to own the rugged beauty, we have to own the really chaotic beauty or else we're just moving somewhere else into more poems and more starlight, and it doesn't resonate with me anymore that way, I want to hold both.

Sani:
There's real world concrete consequences to trying to actually flow and be beautiful in an uncertain space. There's real world consequences in trying to be authentic. And I happen to think authenticity is one of the key features I kept stumbling into as something that's beautiful, is also authentic, it's... So it flows, because it's organic, it's authentic, it's real, it's harmonious, right?
And it's really hard to be yourself when you're in a world that has those sort of... That part of the complexity and the uncertainty is also the bias and the discrimination.

My uncertainty is not just the work itself and the complexity from the work. It's also like between me and the work, and what I represent in the work.

In discussion on key moments and learnings from the study…

Aria:
One of the elders would say, when we release or are able to express what we need to, we actually when we talk about all these natural systems flows, but that's actually when we release things that's something else someone else needs, maybe it awakens them, maybe something else happens here. But it actually creates conductivity, you could say, or currency across our relations that are there despite the different worlds.

For me, there's little things that illuminate who we are, and I think that a lot of it comes through the land and comes through culture and context that allows us to walk through in a way that is beautiful. Because for me, it is beauty in that way is not... Doesn't feel too messy. It actually feels crystal clear, because it originates from the center in which we all belong.

Mia:
The beauty is in the journey into the heart of things, it is the heart of things, and even in the recognition of how far we are from the heart of things that there's beauty there too, right?

Last thing I guess is just the feeling of how that we embodied or enacted that through our relationship with each other as we each showed each other or invited each other to participate, that that multiplicity really came through and I felt woven into other people's stories and supported in my story.

Vivienne:
So much as I feel is transgression at this moment are taboos which camouflage as culture. So when I think about beauty, I'm thinking of more about transitioning states or something. There's something in the lack... It's the opposite of taboo. It's the opposite of sterile. It's the opposite of using structures to hold something that is pulling apart. To me, in the reflection since last time that feels more like the state of beauty.

Sani:
I actually think of beautiful things as I mentioned, they're authentic. So I think of them as sort of being there as just we're not seeing it yet. So it's sort of like this unearthing process, I think of imagining that the painting is already there, it's just you're not seeing it quite yet, until we actually start painting in the places that are not.

And it's the same thing in dialogue. So what needs to be thought and what needs to be said is there, it's in the collective, it's just we need to get to it. We go past all the superficial layers to get deeper into it, but it's there. So I think of it as this process of uncovering something that's already there, that's already authentic, and somehow just it's there and we're just unpacking whatever layers we've put on top of it.

Maybe it is that we spend so much of our time being superficial and not digging deeper, that perhaps the digging deeper and the unearthing and the uncovering of what is there is actually the transgressive element too. …And just the action then becomes making that a thing that we can all perceive and sense and enjoy.

Mia:
The majority of the stories that are propelling humanity right now are not stories that are going to help us survive on this planet.

And then yet we're sort of responding to a call of something to unearth or to make form. And there's a process there of coming into relationship with something that almost has a disharmony, and what can we do to kind of surface something that might offer wholeness or offer healing or offer a new bridge to a different cultural expression, right? What's the role of beauty in ourselves to become creative in relationship to that chaos, and that disharmony?

Vivienne:
There's something in our inability to be able to show up authentically because emotions have been driven out and are seen as uncertain, create uncertainty and create chaos and create disruption, unwanted disruption.

I think about I lost my parents very close together. And I'm like, "Where's the culture that we can mourn together? Where is the culture that the women can wail? The emotion is so private and locked down. And so I find the opposite to beauty is that lock down of emotion. And emotion is the richness, it's the wisdom, it's the power of providing direction and connection.I would say that the pathway to beauty, again, as a little tiny lightning moment is to connection, to deep, deep connection that our lived experience and its varied states can connect.

Aria:
Some of our creation stories would say that we came here with all the knowledge of the universe. So sometimes when we're in those types of spaces and there's something beautiful, it doesn't matter which culture across Mother Earth, but something that emanates from that relationship. It calls for something that I think transcends beyond.

APPENDIX 14

SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS

Today's leadership is shaped by the demands of increasing global volatility and exponential rates of change. Leadership interventions in such contexts often result in acausal, nonlinear, and unpredictable outcomes, demanding more than customary logic can deliver. This research was shaped by the intimation that experiences of beauty may help leaders access a deeper reservoir of knowledge when certainty is not available, thus inspiring creative action. Creative action can be understood as that which initiates new cycles of learning. Such learning holds the potential to counter, and then transform, dominant mindsets, beliefs, and values so that fresh, collective wisdom might emerge.

Learning One: Exile and Ecstasy

Throughout the study beauty was engaged consistently as a form of guidance that led participants into new interior spaces. Eight of the nine participants explicitly named a connection to something greater than the self. Beauty was referred to as a "lunar wisdom", a "higher power", an "angel", a "guardian presence" and a "guide to the inward journey" for a few examples. The form of guidance on offer was not concrete but appeared to invite participants to encounter aspects of themselves, emotions, or perspectives that were unfamiliar. Participants often spoke to the need to pause, to deeply listen, to feel, and to proceed slowly. Many articulated unsolvable questions that they

held with spacious, not-knowing coupled with tentative trust. This was not always easy or settling.

Learning Two: Betwixt and Between

Following beauty's guidance precipitated an experience of movement from a steady state, fixed position, or singular perspective, to a more permeable, in-between state of "becoming".Many participants offered spatial metaphors (such as a "journey," a "stretch moment," or a "fulcrum") to describe a sense of movement from a steady state to a state of being in motion, reaching from one mindset, vantage point, way of knowing, or node of identity to another. In such in-between spaces, it was not uncommon for participants to be rendered vulnerable to new uncertainties and, at times, painful memories, or insights. Experiences of beauty appeared to increase a sense of permeability; providing participants with greater access to more complex vantage points.

Learning Three: Where the Worlds Touch

Strikingly, when beauty was evoked throughout each meeting, all nine participants saw and felt beauty in connection between things. There was therefore a particular quality of relationship that emerged when participants were able to express, lead, and take action from their experience of beauty. Learning Three gestures to the way that witnessing beauty in others may help to engender a sense of vulnerable intimacy and deep connection. From that place, participants offered invitations to each other in their leadership enactments that held transformative potential. In participants journaling post

Meeting Two, all expressed a sense of feeling inspired, connected, open, and appreciative of one another. The evocation of beauty appeared to reveal connection without removing the potency of difference.

Learning Four: Becoming Visible

Because beauty appeared to move participants into new, personal terrain, it also became clear that to take action from that place required a willingness to experience difficulty, discomfort, and vulnerability. During the study, the moments where such sensitivities were revealed were generally thought to be beautiful to others, related closely to the "authentic", to truth, or to what is "genuine" and "heartfelt". Participants began to describe beauty over time as a "deeper layer" that is already present, waiting to be uncovered.

Yet acting from beauty appeared to come with significant personal, collective and systemic consequences for many of the participants. In imagery explorations these consequences arose as difficult emotions, memories, and/or painful insights. For others it was the mixture of hope and despair that comes with confronting a personal growth moment. Later, in discussion of the impact of the study on participants' work and leadership, it was expressed that living from beautiful authenticity carries "real world consequences," including the potential for career loss – even physical or psychological harm.

Cumulative Learning: Ensouling Leadership

Taken together, the cumulative learning for this study suggests that experiences of beauty hold the potential to move a person outside the confines of the familiarity into a place where more information (more feeling, more creativity, more perspective) becomes available. Called in this study by various names including authenticity, power, wholeness, or the act of creation itself, each participant's experience of beauty appeared to make visible a greater, and more inclusive set of possibilities for creative action in the moment, made visible through intuitive perception. Participants found themselves both developmentally stretched at the "edges" of the known, and able to tenuously trust the images, affects, and sensations that bubbled up as a kind of a priori guidance through the mires of uncertainty. It could be said that beauty begins to dissolve the singular and the separate self, opening one to a more complex landscape where deep participation and collective learning can begin.

NOTES

Chapter 1

    1. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, "The Natural World" (installation). http://www.okeeffemuseum.org/exhibitions/the-natural-world/ (accessed February 7, 2021).

    2. This perception is widely shared in the literature across various fields of study. See Chapter 1: Literature Review.

    3. I borrow the words *feeling state* from Immanuel Kant. Such a state draws one, according to Thomas Armstrong and Brian Detweiler-Bedell, toward new potential, possibility, and meaning. Many theorists claim one's experience of beauty arises in relationship to or emerges as a product of interrelationship. Andreas Weber, inspired by Fritjof Capra's conception of love as a "characteristic of a productive relationship," describes beauty as the result of an intensive degree of interrelationship within a biosphere, as exhibited in intense, yet balanced predator and prey relationships. Michael Jones suggests that "beauty dwells in relationships among things," claiming it is through beauty that we touch a deeper harmony through the "intimate encounter with the things of the world." Mary Coolidge, "Purposiveness without Purpose in a New Context," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4, no. 1 (1943): 85-93. See also, Thomas Armstrong and Brian Detweiler-Bedell, "Beauty as an Emotion: The Exhilarating Prospect of Mastering a Challenging World," *Review of General Psychology* 12, no. 4 (2008): 309; Michael Jones, *Artful Leadership*, *Awakening the Commons of the Imagination* (Trafford Publishing, 2006), 106; Andreas Weber, *Matter and Desire: An Erotic Ecology* (Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2017), 7.

    4. Keats believed beauty to reside both as the essence of something and as an emergent inward experience. Wenchu Zhang, "On the Understanding of Beauty by Keats," *Comparative Literature: East & West* 8, no. 1 (2007): 93-101.

    5. Keats believed beauty to not be good or bad, but to deliver one into life's intensities. James Hillman and Thomas Moore speak of beauty's capacity to stir the soul. Moore argues it is through beauty that soul "reveals its passionate nature," a sentiment that is resonant with this study's Theory-in-Practice, Imaginational Transformative Praxis. Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell go further in conceptualizing beauty as an affect itself. Ziaul Haque and Rahman Nazneen, "Beauty Is Truth, Truth Beauty: The Core of Keats's Romanticism," *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature* 1, no. 6 (2013): 59-64; James Hillman, *The Thought of the Heart and The Soul of the World*, 5th reprint (New York: Spring Publications, 2007), 39; Thomas Moore and Peter Thomas, *Care of the Soul* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 280; Karen Jaenke, "Soul and Soullessness," *ReVision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation* 31, no. 1 (2010); and Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell, "Beauty as an Emotion."

    6. For example, James Hillman, "The Practice of Beauty," in Bill Beckley and David Shapiro, *Uncontrollable Beauty: Towards a New Aesthetics* (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 261-274.

    7. Frederick Turner offers a fierce perspective on how beauty is commonly held in Western culture. See, Frederick Turner, "Toward an Evolutionary Ontology of Beauty," *Oral Tradition* 6, no. 1 (1991), 2.

8. Lisa Osbeck, "Conceptual Problems in the Development of a Psychological Notion of Intuition," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 29, no. 3 (1999): 229-249. See also, Charles Laughlin, "The Nature of Intuition: A Neuropsychological Approach" in *Intuition: The Inside Story*, ed. Robbie Davis-Floyd and P. Sven Arvidson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 19-37.

9. This sentence is my paraphrase of a dense body of literature. Marie-Helene and Todd Lubart sum up the consistencies they see in an empirical study on the nature of intuition and creativity as that which connects diverse flows of information. Marie-Helen Raidl and Todd Lubart, "An Empirical Study of Intuition and Creativity," *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 20, no. 3 (2001): 219.

10. Henri Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature* (Steiner Books, 1996), Kindle Location 264.

11. Stephen Harrod Buhner, *Ensouling Language: On the Art of Nonfiction and the Writer's Life* (Simon and Schuster, 2010), 58-59.

12. Aneel Chima and Ronald Gutman, "What it Takes to Lead Through an Era of Exponential Change," *Harvard Business Review*, October 29 (2020), https://hbr.org/2020/10/what-it-takes-to-lead-through-an-era-of-exponential-change (accessed June 15, 2022).

13. Imaginal Process is an approach to transformative learning at Meridian University; it is part of *Imaginal Transformation Praxis*, which has three primary components: Imaginal Process, Imaginal Inquiry, and the theory and practice of Cultural Leadership. Imaginal Transformation Praxis is the theory-in-practice for this dissertation and is explored in greater detail in Chapter 1: Literature Review.

14. Aftab Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey: The Role of Experience and Culture in Transformative Learning Praxis," *10th International Conference on Transformative Learning* (2012), 378.

15. Ibid.

16. Frances Westley, Katharine McGowan, and Ola Tjörnbo use the term *counter-truth* to describe a shared principle found in innovators who lead truly transformative initiatives. They define it as a capacity to articulate a powerful and appealing counter-truth that presents a compelling alternative vision to the current reality. Frances Westley, Katharine McGowan, and Ola Tjörnbo, *The Evolution of Social Innovation: Building Resilience Through Transitions* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017), 239.

17. "Research," Online Etymology Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=research (accessed December 20, 2021).

18. Jones, *Artful Leadership*, 91.

19. Bill Pasmore and Tom O'Shea, "Leadership Agility: A Business Imperative for a VUCA World," *People and Strategy* 33, no. 4 (2010), 32.

20. "The Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2021," United Nations, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/ (accessed December 20, 2021).

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. See, Benyamin Lichtenstein, Mary Uhl-Bien, Russ Marion, Anson Seers, James Douglas Orton, and Craig Schreiber, "Complexity Leadership Theory: An Interactive Perspective on Leading in Complex Adaptive Systems," *Emergence: Complexity and Organization* 8, no. 4 (2006): 2-12; Brenda Zimmerman, Curt Lindberg, and Paul Plsek, *Edgewhere: Lessons from Complexity Science for Health Care Leaders* (Dallas: VHA Inc., 1998); John Forman and Laurel Ross, *Integral Leadership: The Next Half-Step* (New York: Excelsior Editions, 2013); and Daniel Goleman, *Focus. The Hidden Driver of Excellence* (Bur, 2014).

25. David Snowden and Mary E. Boone, "A Leader's Framework for Decision Making," *Harvard Business Review* 85, no. 11 (2007), 2.

26. Ibid, 3.

27. Ibid, 5.

28. Ibid.

29. Chima and Gutman, "What it Takes to Lead Through an Era of Exponential Change."

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Nora Bateson, *Small Arcs of Larger Circles: Framing Through Other Patterns* (Triarchy Press, 2016), Kindle Location 1169.

33. Adler, Nancy J., "The Arts & Leadership: Now That We Can Do Anything, What Will We Do?", *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 5, no. 4 (2006): 486-499.

34. "Social Artistry," Jean Houston, http://www.jeanhouston.org/Social-Artistry/social-artistry.html (accessed December 20, 2021).

35. For example, Aftab Omer, "Climate Crisis and the Challenge of Collective Transformative Learning," *Linking Science to Society*: 2159.

36. Turner, "Toward an Evolutionary Ontology of Beauty," 2.

37. Adler, "The Arts & Leadership." See also, Jones, *Artful Leadership*.

38. Nancy Adler, "Leading Beautifully: The Creative Economy and Beyond," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 20, no. 3 (2011): 208-221.

39. Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Patton. *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed* (Vintage Canada, 2009).

40. Jones, *Artful Leadership*, 1.

41. Ibid, XIV.

42. Ibid, 14.

43. Adler, "The Arts & Leadership."

44. Adler, "Leading Beautifully."

45. William Stafford, "The Way It Is" in *The Way It Is* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 1998).

46. For example, *Process-Oriented Coaching* looks to the weak signals—the dreams, longings, and visions that appear inconsequential at first, but often demonstrate transformative potential when engaged at depth. Jennifer Garvey Berger and Carolyn Coughlin's *Growth Edge Coaching* looks to capacity development for leaders who face increasing complexity by guiding them toward their growing edge, the part of themselves they can almost see, but not quite.

47. Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006), Kindle Location 363.

48. "About Animas," Animas Valley Institute, https://www.animas.org/about-us/ (accessed December 20, 2021).

49. Ibid.

50. The mission statement of the Animas Valley Institute reads: "Our mission, in its widest scope, is to contribute to cultural transformation by fostering nature-based personal development and thus the maturation of individuals and the human species. We support each participant to access and embody the world-changing and vital creativity at his or her core." And goes on to say, "Animas' central purpose is to assist people through the initiatory process that leads to visionary leadership and cultural artistry. Our primary work is with those ready to undergo the joys and challenges of the underworld descent to soul, which flowers into a life of meaningful service and abundant fulfillment—or a deepening for those already on the journey." See, "About Animas: Our Organization: Mission," Animas Valley Institute, https://www.animas.org/about-us/our-organization/mission-statement/ (accessed December 20, 2021).

51. "About: Why We Exist," Wolf Willow Institute, https://www.wolfwillow.org/why-we-exist (accessed December 20, 2021).

52. "About: Our Approach," Wolf Willow Institute for Systems Learning, https://www.wolfwillow.org/our-approach (accessed December 20, 2021).

53. Jack Mezirow, "Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* no. 74 (1997): 5-12.

54. Omer, "Climate Crisis and the Challenge of Collective Transformative Learning," 162.

55. Aftab Omer, *Imaginal Transformation Praxis: Key Definitions* (Petaluma, California: Meridian University, 1991-2022).

56. Aftab Omer, "Imagination, Emergence, and the Role of Transformative Learning in Complexity Leadership," *Enlivening Edge Magazine* (2017): 312.

57. Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 378.

58. Omer, *Imaginal Transformation Praxis*.

59. Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 378.

60. Omer, "Climate Crisis and the Challenge of Collective Transformative Learning," 160.

61. Omer, *Imaginal Transformation Praxis.*

62. Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 384.

63. It is my understanding that the integration of pre-discursive, intuitive ways of knowing allows for more impactful decision-making and creative action precisely because such actions would draw from a person's innate wholeness and their full perceptive faculties. In complexity, decisions and flows of information are not immediately clear or linear, making it necessary to sense into systems and relationships between parts. As Omer wrote, "transforming complex challenges is always an aesthetic process." See, Aftab Omer and Zak Stein, "Complexity Capabilities in Human Systems," Meridian University (fall 2018), course notes.

64. The participatory paradigm espouses all being and knowing is predicated by an embodied, experiential encounter with the living world. Therefore, participants' experience became the focal point for the research design.

65. Cliff Engle Wirt, "The Concept of the Ecstasis," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 14, 1(1983): 81.

66. Omer, "The Spacious Center," 32.

67. Chima and Gutman, "What It Takes to Lead Through an Era of Exponential Change."

68. This central competency for *adaptive learning* is a core feature and characteristic that implies the "capacity to alter or change—the ability to learn from experience." Donella Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008), 159. Omer describes complexity leaders as those who undergo transformative learning themselves, and who invite others to do the same. Julian Norris and Laura Blakeman, "Learning as Social Innovation," *Social Innovations Journal* 5 (2021).

69. Wirt, "The Concept of the Ecstasis," 79-90.

70. Robert Sardello, for example, argues that the concentrated focus on the soul in the theory and practice of depth psychology can exacerbate a sense of self that is isolated from the world. In this way, the wider collective is unattended, left to "the exploitation of need and greed." Robert Sardello. *Love and the World: A Guide to Conscious Soul Practice* (SteinerBooks, 2001), Kindle Location 103.

71. Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, Kindle Location 2241.

72 . Lawrence Kohlberg and Richard Hersh. "Moral Development: A Review of the Theory." *Theory into Practice* 16, no. 2 (1977), 56.

73. Adam Cohen, June Gruber, and Dacher Keltner. "Comparing Spiritual Transformations and Experiences of Profound Beauty." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 2, no. 3 (2010), 128.

74. Rhett Diessner, Teri Rust, Rebecca Solom, Nellie Frost, and Lucas Parsons. "Beauty and Hope: A Moral Beauty Intervention." *Journal of Moral Education* 35, no. 3 (2006), 306.

75. Omer, *Imaginal Transformation Praxis*.

Chapter 2

1. Omer, *Imaginal Transformation Praxis.*

2. Ibid.

3. For those that have greatly influenced Imaginal Psychology, see Henri Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal," *Spring 1972* (Zürich: Spring Publications, 1972). Information on Imaginal Psychology as a discipline can be found here: Polly Eisendrath and James Albert Hall, *Jung's Self Psychology: A Constructivist Perspective* (Guilford Press, 1991). See also, Michael Vannoy Adams, "Deconstructive Philosophy and Imaginal Psychology: Comparative Perspectives on Jacques Derrida and James Hillman," in *Deconstruction: A Critique*, ed. Rajnath (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1989), 138-157. Thomas Moore, a student of Hillman, is also a major contributor.

4. Omer and Kremer, "Between Columbine and the Twin Towers."

5. Ibid, 39.

6. Aftab Omer, "Imagination, Emergence, and the Role of Transformative Learning in Complexity Leadership," *Enlivening Edge Magazine* (2017): 312.

7. Aftab Omer, "When Imagination Leads." *Transformative Imagery: Cultivating the Imagination for Healing, Change, and Growth* (2016): 312.

8. Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal," 5.

9. Ibid, 5.

10. Charlotte Buhler, "Basic Theoretical Concepts of Humanistic Psychology," *American Psychologist* 26, no. 4 (1971), 378. See also, Sandford Drob, "The Depth of the Soul: James Hillman's Vision of Psychology," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 39, no. 3 (1999): 56-72.

11. Judson Davis, "Active Imagination in Psychotherapy," *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, (2019), 1.

12. Janet Kaylo, "Imagination and the Mundus Imaginalis," *Spring* 77 (2007): 107-124.

13. Hillman, James, *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

14. Douglas Thomas, "Dream Tending and Play: The Vital Dimension," *Journal of Jungian Scholarly Studies* 14 (2019): 95-112.

15. Ibid, 98.

16. James Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology* (Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2004), 6.

17. Hillman's perspective that the soul is the true subject matter of psychology is well-recorded. For a comparative look at Hillman's orientation vs. the orientation of the humanistic psychologies see, Drob, "The Depth of the Soul." For an overview of the soul's role in Imaginal Psychology see: Jaenke, "Soul and Soullessness."

18. Omer and Kremer, "Between Columbine and the Twin Towers."

19. David Elkins, "Psychotherapy and Spirituality: Toward a Theory of the Soul," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 35, no. 2 (1995): 78-98. See also, Drob, "The Depth of the Soul," and Daniel Anderson, "The Soul's Logical Life and Jungian Schisms." *Psychological Perspectives*, 64, no. 1 (2021): 40.

20. Anderson, "The Soul's Logical Life and Jungian Schisms," 39.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Robert Sardello and Robert Simmons, *Love and the Soul: Creating a Future for Earth* (North Atlantic Books, 2008), Kindle Location 22.

24. Omer, "Imagination, Emergence, and the Role of Transformative Learning in Complexity Leadership," 312.

25. Omer and Kremer, "Between Columbine and the Twin Towers," 39.

26. Francesca Merlan, "Indigeneity: Global and Local," *Current Anthropology* 50, no. 3 (2009): 303-333.

27. Melanie Goodchild, personal communication with author, March 2021.

28. Merlan, "Indigeneity: Global and Local," 303.

29. Goodchild, Melanie. "Relational Systems Thinking: That's How Change is Going to Come, From Our Earth Mother," *Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change* 1, no. 1 (2021): 87.

30. Joe Sheridan and Roronhiakewen "He Clears the Sky" Dan Longboat, "The Haudenosaunee Imagination and the Ecology of the Sacred," *Space and Culture* 9, no. 4 (2006): 365-381.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Hillman, James, "Suicide and the Soul," (Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 1973).

34. Bill Plotkin, "Hillman, Jung, Plotkin v2," unpublished essay, 2017.

35. James Hillman, *Thought of the Heart, Soul of the World* (Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 1998), 40.

36. Moore, Thomas, *Soul Mates: Honouring the Mysteries of Love and Relationship* (Harper Collins, 1994), 5.

37. Ibid, 18-19.

38. Bill Plotkin, *Wild Mind: A Field Guide to the Human Psyche* (New World Library, 2013), 13.

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325. Allen and Boulton, "Complexity and Limits to Knowledge: The Importance of Uncertainty," 179-180.

326. The notion that the rational, analytical, and conscious aspects of the mind operate in distinct and independent ways from the irrational, tacit, and intuitive is itself a fallacy. See, Lisa Osbeck, "Conceptual Problems in the Development of a Psychological Notion of Intuition," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 29, no. 3 (1999), 229-249; Peter and Boulton, "Complexity and Limits to Knowledge: The Importance of Uncertainty," 164-165.

327. Jens Zinn, "Heading into the Unknown: Everyday Strategies for Managing Risk and Uncertainty," *Health, Risk & Society* 10, no. 5 (2008), 439-450.

328. Trudy Govier, "Self-Trust, Autonomy, and Self-Esteem," *Hypatia* 8, no. 1 (1993): 99.

329. Zinn, "Heading into the Unknown," 439-450.

330. Dorothy Leonard and Sylvia Sensiper, "The Role of Tacit Knowledge in Group Innovation," *California Management Review* 40, no. 3 (1998), 112.

331. Ibid, 112.

332. Alex Bennet and David Bennet, *Organizational Survival in the New World* (Routledge, 2004).

333. David Bennet and Alex Bennet, "Engaging Tacit Knowledge in Support of Organizational Learning," *VINE* 38, 1 (2008), 72-94.

334. Bennet and Bennet, "Engaging Tacit Knowledge in Support of Organizational Learning," 6.

335. Ibid, 6.

336. Ibid.

337. Ibid.

338. Ibid, 7.

339. Ibid, 7. The concept of intuition is vast, and extends well beyond Bennet and Bennet's study, so more time will be spent exploring the literature, contrasting definitions, and uses of the term in the following section.

340. Ibid.

341. Ibid, 8.

342. Ibid, 8.

343. Bennet and Bennet, "Engaging Tacit Knowledge in Support of Organizational Learning," 6.

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, 6.

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346. Cliff Engle Wirt, "The Concept of the Ecstasis," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 14, no. 1 (1983), 79-90.

347. Dylan van der Schyff, Andrea Schiavio, Ashley Walton, Valerio Velardo, and Anthony Chemero, "Musical Creativity and the Embodied Mind: Exploring the Possibilities of 4E Cognition and Dynamical Systems Theory," *Music & Science* 1 (2018), 1-18.

348. Van Der Schyff et al., "Musical Creativity and the Embodied Mind," 2.

349. Ibid, 5-6.

350. Zinn, "Heading into the Unknown," 439.

351. Ibid, 439.

352. Osbeck, "Conceptual Problems in the Development of a Psychological Notion of Intuition," 229-249.

353. John Patton, "Intuition in Decisions," *Management Decision* 41, 10 (2003), 989-996.

354. Osbeck, "Conceptual Problems in the Development of a Psychological Notion of Intuition," 229-249.

355. Ibid.

356. Thomas Issack, "Intuition: An Ignored Dimension of Management," *Academy of Management Review* 3, no. 4 (1978), 917-922 and 917-918.

357. Marie-Hélène Raidl and Todd Lubart, "An Empirical Study of Intuition and Creativity," *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 20, no. 3 (2001), 217-230.

358. Patton, "Intuition in Decisions," 989.

359. Ibid, 989.

360. Herbert Simon et al., "Decision Making and Problem Solving," *Interfaces* 17, no. 5 (1987), 11-31.

361. Patton, "Intuition in Decisions." See also, Osbeck, "Conceptual Problems in the Development of a Psychological Notion of Intuition."

362. Viktor Dörfler and Fran Ackermann, "Understanding Intuition: The Case for Two Forms of Intuition," *Management Learning* 43, no. 5 (2012), 545.

363. Bennet and Bennet, "Engaging Tacit Knowledge in Support of Organizational Learning," 6.

364. Robbie Davis-Floyd and Sven Arvidson, "The Nature of Intuition," in *Intuition: The Inside Story* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

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366. Issack, "Intuition: An Ignored Dimension of Management," 919.

367. Ibid, 917-922. See also, Osbeck, "Conceptual Problems in the Development of a Psychological Notion of Intuition."; Kenneth Bowers, Glenn Regehr, and Claude Balthazard, "Intuition in the Context of Discovery," *Cognitive Psychology*, 22 (1990), 72–100; Kenneth Bowers, Peter Farvolden, and Lambros Mermigis, "Intuitive Antecedents of Insight," in *The Creative Cognition Approach*, eds. Steven Smith, Thomas Ward, and Ronald Finke (Cambridge, Ma: Bradford/MIT Press, 1995), 27-51.

368. Nathalie Pilard, "CG Jung and Intuition: From the Mindscape of the Paranormal to the Heart of Psychology," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 63, no. 1 (2018), 2-3.

369. Ibid, 10.

370. Ian Irvine, "Jung, Alchemy, and the Technique of Active Imagination," *Alchemy and Imagination*. Lecture to the Bendigo Writers' Council, (2008).

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372. Jung's other psychological functions include thinking, feeling, and sensation. Marie-Hélène Raidl and Todd Lubart, "An Empirical Study of Intuition and Creativity," *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 20, no. 3 (2001), 218.

373. Osbeck, "Conceptual Problems in the Development of a Psychological Notion of Intuition," 244.

374. Raidl and Lubart, "An Empirical Study of Intuition and Creativity," *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 20, no. 3 (2001), 219.

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385.   Ibid, 59.

386.   Ibid, 58-59.

387.   "Social Artistry," Jean Houston, http://www.jeanhouston.org/Social-Artistry/social-artistry.html (accessed September 6, 2021).

388.   Michael Jones, *Artful leadership: Awakening the Commons of the Imagination* (Trafford Publishing, 2006), 4.

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390.   Ibid.

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392.   Ibid.

393.   "Social Artistry," Jean Houston, http://www.jeanhouston.org/Social-Artistry/social-artistry.html (accessed September 6, 2021).

394.   Adler, "The Arts & Leadership," 189.

395.   Steven Taylor, "Little Beauties: Aesthetics, Craft Skill, and the Experience of Beautiful Action," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 22, no. 1 (2013), 69.

396.   Taylor, "Little Beauties," 72.

397.   Ibid.

398.   Adler, Nancy J., "Finding Beauty in a Fractured World: Art Inspires Leaders—Leaders Change the World," *Academy of Management Review* 40, no. 3 (2015), 481.

399.   Ibid, 481.

400.   Jones, *Artful Leadership,* 1.

401.   Buhner's concept of *the secret kinesis of things* refers to a thing's interiority, which can be touched through a blending of sensory mediums or a *sensory experiencing*. See, Buhner, *Ensouling Language,* 125.

402.   *Duende* in Spanish translates directly as "lord" but is used colloquially to mean "life force," "charm," or "magnatism." Frederico Garcia Lorca, "Theory and Play of the Duende," trans. AS Kline (2007).

403.   Lorca, "Theory and Play of the Duende," 4.

404.   Buhner, *Ensouling Language,* 7.

405.   Adler, "Finding Beauty in a Fractured World," 482.

406.   Ibid.
407.   "Aesthetic" Online Etymology Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/word/aesthetic/ (accessed January 7, 2022).

408.   Jones, *Artful Leadership,* 3.

409.   Nancy Adler and Andre Delbecq, "Twenty-first Century Leadership: A Return to Beauty," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (2018), 124.

410.   Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet,* trans. MD Herter Norton. (New York: WW Norton & Co, 1993).

411.   Taylor, "Little Beauties," 70.

412.   For a few examples of critique see, Susan Sontag, "An Argument About Beauty," *Daedalus* 131, no. 4 (2002): 21-26; Nancy Etcoff, *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* (Anchor, 2011). Many philosophers and intellectuals across domains have extolled beauty's positive qualities going as far back as Plato and Plotinus. See, Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin: 1944-1947* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971).

413.   Etcoff, *Survival of the Prettiest.*

414.   Hillman, *The Thought of the Heart and The Soul of the World.*

415.   Etcoff, *Survival of the Prettiest.*

416.   Frederick Turner, "Toward an Evolutionary Ontology of Beauty." (1991), 2.

417.   James Hillman as cited in John O'Donohue, *The Invisible Embrace: Beauty* (2004), 4.

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421.   Joseph Maguire, "Beauty and the Fine Arts in Plato: Some Aporiai," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 70 (1965), 171-193.

422.   Alex Forsythe et al., "Predicting Beauty: Fractal Dimension and Visual Complexity in Art," *British Journal of Psychology* 102, no. 1 (2011): 49-70; Jay Friedenberg and Bruce Liby, "Perceived Beauty of Random Texture Patterns: A Preference for Complexity," *Acta Psychologica* 168 (2016): 41-49; Turner, "Toward an Evolutionary Ontology of Beauty,"; Matjaž Perc, "Beauty in Artistic Expressions Through the Eyes of Networks and Physics." *Journal of the Royal Society Interface* 17, no. 164 (2020): 20190686; Richard Gabriel and Jenny Quillien, "A Search for Beauty/A Struggle with Complexity:

Christopher Alexander," *Urban Science* 3, no. 2 (2019): 64; Samy Lakhal, Alexandre Darmon, Jean-Philippe Bouchaud, and Michael Benzaquen, "Beauty and Structural Complexity," *Physical Review Research* 2, no. 2 (2020): 022058; Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays & Lectures*. Vol. 15. (New York: Library of America, 1983).

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424. Ben MacArthur, "Truth and Beauty in Physics and Biology," *Nature Physics* 17, no. 2 (2021), 149-151.

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428. Toni Ingram, "'I Feel Pretty': Beauty as an Affective-Material Process," *Feminist Theory* 23, no. 2 (2021), 285-300.

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436. Zhang, "On the Understanding of Beauty by Keats," 93-101.

437. Hillman, *The Thought of the Heart and The Soul of the World*, 39.

438. Ibid, 40. See also, James Hillman, *On Psychological Creativity* (Rhein-Verlag, 1967), 54.

439. Thomas Moore and Peter Thomas, *Care of the Soul* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 280.

440. Weber, *Matter and Desire*, 103.

441. Ibid, 67.

442. O'Donohue, *The Invisible Embrace*, 194.

443. Hillman, *The Thought of the Heart and The Soul of the World,* 125.

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445. Ibid, Kindle Location 265.

446. Ibid, Kindle Location 2428.

447. Thomas Armstrong and Brian Detweiler-Bedell, "Beauty as an Emotion: The Exhilarating Prospect of Mastering a Challenging World," *Review of General Psychology* 12, no. 4 (2008), 306.

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451. Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell, "Beauty as An Emotion, 309.

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463. Diessner et al., "Beauty and Hope," 314.

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Chapter 3

1. John Heron and Peter Reason. "A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm." *Qualitative Inquiry* 3, no. 3 (1997), 2.

2. Ibid.

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4. Bateson, *Small Arcs of Larger Circles,* Kindle Location 175.

5. Peter Reason, *Participation in Human Inquiry, Chapter 1,* Sage Publications, Inc, (1994), http://www.peterreason.net/Participationinhumaninquiry/CHAPTER1.htm/ (accessed September 10, 2022).

6. Robert Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind* (Routledge, 2020), 4.

7. "The Four Phases of Imaginal Inquiry," internal Meridian University document, (2016).

8. Much of the literature on the intuition and leadership decision-making acknowledges a split between what is perceived as rational and irrational. Thomas Issack writes that this split likely has to do with how antithetical the intuition is to the scientific method, rendering it very difficult to poke, probe and prove. See, for example: Thomas Issack, "Intuition: An Ignored Dimension of Management." *Academy of Management Review* 3, no. 4 (1978): 917-922 and 917-918, and Lisa Osbeck, "Conceptual Problems in the Development of a Psychological Notion of Intuition." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 29, no. 3 (1999): 229-249.

9. Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher,* 49.

10. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet,* (Merchant Books, 2012), 30.

11. "Dissertation Handbook," internal Meridian University document, (2013), 86.

12. See www.zoom.us/

13. "The Four Phases of Imaginal Inquiry," internal Meridian University document, (2016).

14. Ibid.

15. For a few examples of Deborah's Koff-Chapman's imagery, see: "Soulcards" Center for Touch Drawing, accessed December 21, 2021, https://touchdrawing.com/soulcards/.

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17. Ibid, 3-4.

18. Ibid, 5.

19. Student attrition in online environments has been well documented. For example see: Maureen Garland, "Student Perceptions of the Situational, Institutional, Dispositional and Epistemological Barriers to Persistence." *Distance Education* 14, no. 2 (1993), 181-198. See also, Chere Gibson, "The Distance Learner's Academic Self-Concept in *Distance Learners in Higher Education: Institutional Responses for Quality Outcomes* 45, no. 3 (1998), 65-76.

20. Heron and Reason, "A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm," 274-294.

21. For a sample list of drawing out questions, refer to Appendix 10.

22. For information about the Banff Centre, see; www.banffcentre.ca

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25. See Appendix 6.

26. See www.docusign.com

27. James Hollis, *The Archetypal Imagination*. Vol. 8. (Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 3.

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29. Ibid, 12.

30. Ibid, 12.

31. Shaun McNiff, *Art-Based Research* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1998), 31.

32. Ibid, 37.

33. Ibid, 36.

34. Ibid, 15-16.

35. "The Four Phases of Imaginal Inquiry," internal Meridian University document, (2016).

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 378.

39. McNiff, *Art-Based Research*, 31.

40. Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 378.

41. Stephen Levine, *Philosophy of Expressive Arts Therapy: Poiesis and the Therapeutic Imagination* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 278.

42. James Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology* (Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2004), 8.

43. "Touch Drawing" Center for Touch Drawing, https://touchdrawing.com/touchdrawing/ (accessed December 21, 2021).

44. Discovery" Center for Touch Drawing, https://touchdrawing.com/touchdrawing/discovery/ (accessed December 21, 2021),

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49. See Appendix 10 for a full list of questions.

50. Carl Gustav Jung, *Collected Works of CG Jung, Volume 4* (Princeton University Press, 2014). See also, Judson Davis, "Active Imagination in Psychotherapy," 1.

51. Knill, Levine, and Levine, *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy,* 10.

52. Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology*, 6.

53. Ibid.

54. Hollis, *The Archetypal Imagination*, 11.

55. McNiff, *Art-Based Research*, 107.

56. William Stafford, "When I Met My Muse" in *The Way It Is*, (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 1998).

57. David Ruelle, "What is a Strange Attractor." *Notices of the AMS* 53, no. 7 (2006), 764-765.

58. Ibid.

59. Robinson Jeffers, "Fire on the Hills" in *Thurso's Landing and Other Poems* (New York: Liveright Inc., 1932).

60. "The Four Phases of Imaginal Inquiry," internal Meridian University document, (2016), 2-3.

61. Ibid, 4.

62. Ibid, 5-6.

63. "Expressive Arts in Therapy," Meridian University course, author's notes, Winter 2018.

64. Robert Bosnak, "Embodied Imagination." *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 39, no. 4 (2003), 683-695.

65. Aftab Omer, personal communication, June 2021.

66. Wendell Berry, "The Real Work" in *Standing by Words* (Counterpoint, 2011).

67. Mary Oliver, "Spring" in *New and Selected Poems* (Beacon Press, 1993).

Chapter 4

1. It is my understanding that the integration of pre-discursive, intuitive ways of knowing allows for more impactful decision-making and creative action precisely because such actions would draw from a person's innate wholeness and their full perceptive faculties. In complexity, decisions and flows of information are not immediately clear or linear, making it necessary to sense into systems and relationships between parts. As Omer writes, "transforming complex challenges is always an aesthetic process." See, Omer and Stein, "Complexity Capabilities in Human Systems," author's notes (fall 2018).

2. Gallegos defines the four modes of knowing that arise in embodied imagery as thinking, sensing, feeling, and imagery. Although the first three align with Carl Jung's four functions of consciousness, the last Gallegos identifies as imagery rather than intuition—which he believes shines through every mode rather than one alone. Eligio Stephen Gallegos, *Animals of the Four Windows: Integrating Thinking, Sensing, Feeling, and Imagery* (Moon Bear Press, 1991), 6.

3. Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*, Kindle Location 929.

4. Omer, "Climate Crisis and the Challenge of Collective Transformative Learning."

5. Many theorists across leadership, social impact, human development, environmental sustainability, and the evolution of consciousness agree that we face unparalleled complexity in this time that our leaders are underequipped to meet. See, Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey, "Complexity Leadership Theory."

6. Omer and Kremer, "Between Columbine and the Twin Towers," 39.

7. Ibid.

8. Omer, *Imaginal Transformation Praxis*.

9. Ibid.

10. Omer, "Climate Crisis and the Challenge of Collective Transformative Learning"; Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 378; Adler, "The Arts & Leadership"; Garvey Berger and Johnston, *Simple Habits for Complex Times*.

11. As discussed in Chapter 1: Literature Review, *aesthetics* in the context of this study draws heavily from the etymology of the word as related to sense-perception, sentience, sensitivity, feeling, and less to judgments of taste or critical reflection on art generally. See also, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/aesthetics

12. Omer, "The Spacious Center," 32.

13. W. Ross Ashby's law of requisite variety is a principle originally derived from the field of cybernetics that states that a system must exhibit complexity equal to that of its environment to function effectively. Ross Ashby, "Requisite Variety and Its Implications For the Control of Complex Systems," *Cybernetica* 1, no.2 (1958): 83-99. This principle is also congruent with Indigenous perspectives, for example, Yunkaporta writes: "there is no way to be an outside observer of this system—you have to place yourself in it in order to see it in three dimensions, and you must move around and connect within it in order to see multiple other dimensions." Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*, Kindle Location 493.

14. Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*, Kindle Location 526.

15. Robinson Jeffers and Tim Hunt, "Fire on the Hills," *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers: 1928-1938.* Vol. 2. (Stanford University Press, 1988).

16. Foucault's pre-discursive functions as a *signifier*. A knowing of this sort does not necessarily specify how something should be interpreted, but rather offers clues or characterizations that, over time and taken together, can constellate into an assessment of meaning. The pre-discursive can be thought of as the overall impression that a painting may offer—something that words and meanings can never fully grasp. In this way, the pre-discursive flavors and supports the discursive—the way one can speak about things. See, Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

17. I say *other* because the experiences that participants had could be characterized as *transpersonal*; extending beyond the individual notion of the self. See, Inine Calijornia, "On Transpersonal Definitions," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 25, no. 2 (1993): 199-207.

18. Trust in beauty's directives appeared as a backdrop that allowed participants to come to further understand and further *know*, something that at face value seems unknowable. Epistemic trust can be defined as the ability to appraise incoming information from the social world as accurate, reliable, and personally relevant, allowing for the information to be incorporated into existing knowledge domains. See, Peter Fonagy, Patrick Luyten and Elizabeth Allison, "Epistemic Petrification and the Restoration of Epistemic Trust: A New Conceptualization of Borderline Personality Disorder and its Psychosocial Treatment," *Journal of Personality Disorders* 29, no. 5 (2015), 575-609.

19. As discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology, Soulcards are crafted using a Touch Drawing methodology created by Koff-Chapman that she describes as an "act of creation [that] unleashes vibrant healing forces that guide the psyche toward wholeness." Paper is set over wet paint, and both hands are utilized at once to reveal the drawing on the underside of the paper. The hands, Koff-Chapman explains, "are extensions of the soul." The cards themselves carry no specific meaning, interpretation, or text. See, https://touchdrawing.com/touchdrawing/

20. Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 378.

21. Ibid, 378.

22. As discussed in Chapter 1: Literature Review, soul in this case points to the essential life force that drives an individual's unfolding uniqueness, grounded in abiding oneness. Plotkin's metaphor can be useful to us in this instance; soul as one's particular ecological niche in the network of interdependent relationships that comprise its true place.

23. Developmental psychologist and leadership coach Jennifer Garvey Berger, among others, evocatively states that too-simple stories are one of many leadership mind traps that prevent leaders from making sound judgments and decisions in complex environments. This phenomenon, while endemic to human neuro-psychology, is also the product of decades of reductionist, overly-rationalistic thought and can be counter-productive if not dangerous given the complexity of our time. See, Garvey Berger and Johnston, *Simple Habits for Complex Times*.

24. I also reference land here as an ensouled, animate entity to include Indigenous perspectives on the imagination and the co-active, interpenetration of psyche and earth. This is also closer to my experience of the soul's relationship to a sacred ecology of being. See, Sheridan and Longboat, "The Haudenosaunee Imagination and the Ecology of the Sacred."

25. Gabriel and Quillien. "A Search for Beauty/A Struggle with Complexity," 27.

26. Omer and Stein, "Complexity Capabilities in Human Systems," author's notes (fall 2018).

27. Keats, *The Letters of John Keats: A Selection*, 43.

28. Simpson, French, and Harvey, "Leadership and Negative Capability," 8.

29. Ibid, 8.

30. Omer et. al., "Wisdom Journey," 378.

31. Shaun McNiff, *Art as Medicine: Creating a Therapy of the Imagination* (Shambhala, 1992), Kindle Location 42.

32. James Hillman and Michael Ventura, *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy—and the World's Getting Worse* (Routledge, 2018).

33. Ibid.

34. Gabriel and Quillien, "A Search for Beauty/A Struggle with Complexity," 8.

35. Walter Jackson Bate, *Negative Capability. A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1998).

36. Haque and Nazneen, "Beauty Is Truth, Truth Beauty."

37. Daniel Deardorff, *The Other Within: The Genius of Deformity in Myth, Culture & Psyche*. (North Atlantic Books, 2009), 8.

38. Victor Turner and Roger Abrahams, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. (Routledge, 2017), 94; See also, Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage." *The Forest of Symbols* 93111 (1967), 4.

39. Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey."

40. Daniel Deardorff, *The Other Within: The Genius of Deformity in Myth, Culture & Psyche* (North Atlantic Books, 2009), 176.

41. Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell, "Beauty as An Emotion," 319.

42. Ibid, 320.

43. Omer, "Climate Crisis and the Challenge of Collective Transformative Learning," 160.

44. Ibid.

45. Norris, "Crossing the Threshold Mindfully: Exploring Rites of Passage Models in Adventure Therapy."

46. Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 5.

47. Ibid, 7.

48. Ibid, 106.

49. Deardorff, *The Other Within*, 9.

50. Lucas N. Plumb, *Unseen Gifts: Turning Toward the Marginalization of Anomalous Experience* (PhD diss., Meridian University, 2008), 11.

51. Omer and Stein, Complexity Capabilities in Human Systems, author's notes, (fall 2018).

52. Turner and Abrahams, *The Ritual Process,* 91.

53. Ronald Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*. (University of California Press, 2000), 105.

54. Julian Norris, *Going Deeper: Cultivating a Generative Approach to Personal Transformation and Systems Change in Outdoor Education.* (PhD diss., University of Calgary, 2009), 248.

55. Bateson, *Small Arcs of Larger Circles,* Kindle Location 1438.

56. Omer, "Climate Crisis and the Challenge of Collective Transformative Learning," 159.

57. Aria spoke about Spiller and mentioned her understanding of the woven universe in relationship to complexity. I have since found a few published articles that describe Spiller's woven universe as the Maori *kaitiakitanga*—a "wisdom position" that understands wisdom is "consciously created through reciprocal relationships." See, Chellie Spiller, Edwina Pio, Lijijana Erakovic and Manuka Henare, "Wise Up: Creating Organizational Wisdom Through an Ethic of Kaitiakitanga," *Journal of Business Ethics* 104, no. 2 (2011): 223-235.

58. Bateson, *Small Arcs of Larger Circles,* Kindle Location 120.

59. While informational experiences help to increase knowledge or skill at a particular developmental stage, transformational experiences help to catalyze a movement to an entirely new stage or new perspective. See, Susanne Cook-Greuter, "Ego Development: Nine Levels of Increasing Embrace," *Unpublished Manuscript* (2005), 7.

60. David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* Vol. 10. (Psychology Press, 2002), 14.

61. Weber, *Matter and Desire: An Erotic Ecology*, xiii.

62. See, Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*; Senge et al., *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*, 190-191.

63. Goodchild, "Relational Systems Thinking."

64. Like Goodchild, Cajete makes clear that an interconnected way of thinking, doing and being is endemic to an Indigenous worldview. He writes, **"**In the practice of Native Science, the more humans know about themselves—that is, their connections with everything around them—the greater the celebration of life, the greater the comfort of knowing, and the greater the joy of being. This relationship to space and time, and between living and nonliving things, is not just physical, but psychological and spiritual, in that it involves dreams, visions, knowing, and understanding beyond the simple objectified knowledge of something." See, Cajete and Little Bear, *Native Science*, 75-76.

65. Omer and Stein, Complexity Capabilities in Human Systems, author's notes, (fall 2018).

66. Omer, "The Spacious Center," 33.

67. Diessner et al., "Beauty and Hope," 306.

68. Ibid, 306.

69. Omer, "Imagination, Emergence, and the Role of Transformative Learning in Complexity Leadership," 312.

70. Omer et. al., "Wisdom Journey," 375-384.

71. Ibid.

72. Aftab Omer, Relational Development, author's notes, (fall 2018).

73. Omer, "The Spacious Center," 33.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Omer, "Imagination, Emergence, and the Role of Transformative Learning in Complexity Leadership.*"*

77. Ibid, 33.

78. Jones, *Artful Leadership,* 1.

79. Ibid, 3

80. Goodchild, "Relational Systems Thinking," 87.

82. The field of adult development contains vast resources that would help to explicate this statement. See, Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*, 77; Jennifer Garvey Berger, *Key Concepts for Understanding the Work of Robert Kegan* (Kenning Associates, 2006); Terri O'Fallon. "Stages: Growing up is Waking up—Interpenetrating Quadrants, States and Structures," *Pacific Integral* (2017); Cook-Greuter, "Ego Development"; Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey."

83. Buhner, *Ensouling Language,* 36.

84. Omer, "The Spacious Center," 32.

85. Sebastian also offered a headline for his experience based on Charles Eistenstein's book *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*. He wrote, "I haven't read the book, however, the title speaks to me of the relationship to imagining a beautiful world and leadership perhaps then is the process of bring[ing] that world into being..."

86. "Puhpowee," Kimmerer writes, is "the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight…The makers of this word understood a world of being, full of unseen energies that animate everything." Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, (Milkweed Editions, 2013), https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/10540745-puhpowee-she-explained-translates-as-the-force-which-causes-mushrooms (accessed January 8, 2022).

87. Omer, "The Spacious Center," 32.

88. "Veneer," Online Etymology Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=veneer/ (accessed July 9, 2021).

89. See, Learning One

90. See, Learning Three

91. I refer here again to the soul's passionate nature. As discussed in Chapter 1: Literature Review, the soul does not adhere to the conventional norms of society but remains wedded to the more mysterious sources of life. See, *The Ensouled Universe* on page 24.

92. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 49.

93. Houston defines social artistry as "the art of enhancing human capacities in the light of social complexity. It seeks to bring new ways of thinking, being and doing to social challenges in the world." See, Jean Houston, "Social Artistry," http://www.jeanhouston.org/Social-Artistry/social-artistry.html (accessed September 6, 2021).

94. A koan is a riddle used in the Zen tradition to push one beyond the logical mind toward enlightenment. "Koan" Google Search,

https://www.google.com/search?q=koan&oq=koan&aqs=chrome.0.69i59.710j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8/ (accessed January 8, 2022).

95. I borrow the term, *cultural trance*, from Aftab Omer. See, Omer, "Spacious Center."

96. Henri Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature* (SteinerBooks, 1996), Kindle Location 494.

97. Ibid, Kindle Location 494.

98. Weber, *Matter and Desire*, 22.

99. Omer, "The Spacious Center," 31.

100. Ibid, 32.

101. Ibid.

102. Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 384.

103. Omer, "The Spacious Center."

104. Ibid, 32.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid, 33.

107. Omer, *Imaginal Transformation Praxis: Key Definitions*.

108. Jean Houston, "What is Social Artistry," http://www.jeanhouston.org/Social-Artistry/social-artistry.html/ (accessed July 31, 2021).

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.

111. It is becoming widely known that hierarchical and top-down, control-based change efforts not only fail, but fail spectacularly in complex environments. Systems science, developmental theory, and emerging leadership theory all agree that to meet the fullness of these times, what is required is a complete paradigm shift—from causal efforts to a holistic perspective. A shift that pays as much attention to the unseen connections and invisible interiors (mindsets, beliefs, values, relationships) and a leader's unique presence as to visible exteriors (tactics, actions, and behaviors). See, Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey, "Complexity Leadership Theory"; Zimmerman, Lindberg, and Plsek, *Edgewhere.*; Forman and Ross, *Integral Leadership: The Next Half-Step*.

112. See, Lichtenstein et al., "Complexity Leadership Theory"; Zimmerman, Lindberg, and Plsek, *Edgewhere.*; Forman and Ross, *Integral Leadership: The Next Half-Step*.

113. Omer, "Climate Crisis and the Challenge of Collective Transformative Learning"; Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 378; Adler, "The Arts & Leadership"; Garvey Berger and Johnston, *Simple Habits for Complex Times*.

Chapter 5

1. "Here be dragons," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Here_be_dragons/ (accessed December 22, 2021).

2. Chima and Gutman, "What It Takes to Lead Through an Era of Exponential Change."

3. Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 378.

4. Ibid, 382.

5. Ibid. See also, Omer, "The Spacious Center," 33.

6. Laura Blakeman, "Leadership & Systems Change Integral Program Review," presentation at *Banff Centre Systems Leadership Design Retreat*, Banff, Alberta (October 18, 2018).

7. Deardorff, "The Other Within," 52.

8. Richard Bandler, *Richard Bandler's Guide to Trance-formation: How to Harness the Power of Hypnosis to Ignite Effortless and Lasting Change* (Health Communications, Inc., 2008), 21.

9. Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 382.

10. Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

11. Martin Shaw. *A Branch from the Lightening Tree. Ecstatic Myth and the Grace of Wildness.* (White Cloud Press, 2011), Kindle Location 353.

12. Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer. *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), xvi.

13. Ibid, xvii.

14. Omer et al., "Wisdom Journey," 378-379.

15. Omer, "The Spacious Center," 32.

16. Omer, *When Imagination Leads*, 321.

17. Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*; Brown, "Leading Complex Change with Post-Conventional Consciousness"; Garvey Berger, "Dancing on the Threshold of Meaning"; Chima and Gutman, "What it Takes to Lead Through an Era of Exponential Change"; Laszlo, "From Systems Thinking to Systems Being"; Omer, "Wisdom Journey."

18. Chima and Gutman, "What it Takes to Lead Through an Era of Exponential Change."

19. Ibid.

20. Bradley Owens, Michael Johnson, and Terence Mitchell, "Expressed Humility in Organizations: Implications for Performance, Teams, and Leadership." *Organization Science* 24, no. 5 (2013): 1517-1538.

21. Ibid.

22. "Humility," Online Etymology Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=humility (accessed January 8, 2022).

23. Jennifer Stellar et al., "Awe and Humility." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 114, no. 2 (2018): 258-269.

24. Ibid, 258.

25. Ibid, 260.

26. Hillman, *The Soul's Code*.

27. Omer, *Imaginal Transformation Praxis: Key Definitions*.

28. Ibid.

29. "Social Artistry," Jean Houston, http://www.jeanhouston.org/Social-Artistry/social-artistry.html (accessed December 20, 2021).

30. Laszlo, "From Systems Thinking to Systems Being," 101.

31. Chima and Gutman, "What it Takes to Lead Through an Era of Exponential Change."

32. Omer defines reflexivity as "the capacity to engage and be aware of those imaginal structures that shape and constitute our experience," Omer, *Imaginal Transformation Praxis: Key Definitions*.

33. Pierre Gurdjian, Thomas Halbeisen, and Kevin Lane, "Why Leadership-Development Programs Fail," *McKinsey Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (2014): 121-126.

34. Nick Petrie, "Future Trends in Leadership Development," *Center for Creative Leadership White Paper* 5, no. 5 (2011), 36.

35. Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*; Brown, "Leading Complex Change with Post-Conventional Consciousness"; Garvey Berger, "Dancing on the Threshold of Meaning"; Chima and Gutman, "What it Takes to Lead Through an Era of Exponential Change"; Laszlo, "From Systems Thinking to Systems Being"; Omer, "Wisdom Journey."

36. Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, 42.

37. See, Steve Salerno, *SHAM: How the Self-Help Movement Made America Helpless* (Crown, 2005).

38. Vanessa Andreotti, personal communication, December 12, 2021.

39. Bill Moyers and David Grubin, *Healing and the Mind* (Anchor Books, 1995), 238.

40. Al Gini, "Moral Leadership: An Overview," *Journal of Business Ethics* 16, no. 3 (1997), 323-330.

41. Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul.*

42. Max Weber first referred to beauty, truth, and goodness, or art, morals, and science respectively, as the "cultural value spheres". See, Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, Kindle Location 242.

43. Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, Kindle Location 2241.

44. Sardello, *Facing the World with Soul*, Kindle Location 2783.

45. Ibid.

46. Moore, *Care of the Soul*, 135.

47. Sardello, *Facing the World with Soul*, Kindle Location 2996.

48. Sardello, *Love and the World: A Guide to Conscious Soul Practice,* Kindle Location 103.

49. Adam Cohen, June Gruber, and Dacher Keltner, "Comparing Spiritual Transformations and Experiences of Profound Beauty," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 2, no. 3 (2010), 128.

50. Diessner et al., "Beauty and Hope," 306.

51. Ibid, Kindle Location 61.

52. Drawn from Omer's Imaginal Transformation Praxis, his understanding of the soul's nature as passionate, and the way that human capability increases through the transmutation of affect. See Chapter 1: Literature Review, the section titled *Imaginal Transformation Praxis,* 20.

53. Goodchild, "Relational Systems Thinking."

54. Plotkin writes that an *egocentric* approach is the part of the psyche that "knows how to get things done, to make things happen, but it doesn't know from its own experience what to offer its life to." Scharmer and Kaufer see the egocentric approach as one that is driven by the needs and desire of the "small self." It is, therefore, devoid of larger purpose, and an embodied ethic in wider relationship. An *ecocentric* approach, in contrast, is that which is in service of the soul first, contextualized and enlivened in relationship with all things. Scharmer and Kaufer write that this way is animated and informed by the "well-being of the whole." They go on to explain that the prefix eco goes back to the Greek oikos and concerns the "whole house." See, Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, *Leading From the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013), and Bill Plotkin, *Wild Mind: A Field Guide to the Human Psyche* (New World Library, 2013), 25.

55. Omer, "The Spacious Center," 33.

56.   James Baldwin, "James Baldwin on the Creative Process and the Artist's Responsibility," The Marginalian, https://www.themarginalian.org/2014/08/20/james-baldwin-the-creative-process/#:~:text=In%20the%20same%20way%20that,darker%20forces%20in%20our%20history (accessed January 9, 2022).

57.   Oliver Koenig, Megan Seneque, Eva Pomeroy, and Otto Scharme, "Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change: The Birth of a Journal." *Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change* 1, no. 1 (2021), 2.

58.   Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," 1.

59.   Willie Ermine, "The Ethical Space of Engagement." *Indigenous Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (2007), 195.

60.   Ibid, 202-203.

61.   Many integral thinkers believe the human species to be on the brink of a new way of thinking—a structure of consciousness that integrates the power of our rational minds, with older streams of knowing. Cultural philosopher Jean Gebser caught glimpses of this new consciousness in the work of some of the most notable poets, artists, and thinkers of 20th century Europe with whom he found friendship and shared interest. In their work, he saw the instinctual come into expressive form, as if the poet Rilke, for instance, was writing from the perspective of an older, nutrient-rich part of the self while simultaneously shaping the work with the diurnal power of the mind. They exhibited a radical simultaneity of sensing, feeling, imagining, and thinking. Gebser believed the obsidian waters of our collective evolutionary intelligence are just under the surface of the crust of the mind, lying in wait as seeds of potential. See, Jean Gebser, *The Ever-Present Origin* (Ohio University Press, 2020).

62.   Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Planetary Renewal* (Parallax Press, 2021), 93.

63.   Ross Ashby, "Requisite Variety and Its Implications For the Control of Complex Systems." *Cybernetica* 1, no.2 (1958): 83-99.

64.   Jay Friedenberg and Bruce Liby. "Perceived Beauty of Random Texture Patterns: A Preference for Complexity," *Acta Psychologica* 168 (2016): 41-49; Richard Gabriel and Jenny Quillien, "A Search for Beauty/A Struggle with Complexity: Christopher Alexander," *Urban Science* 3, no. 2 (2019): 64; Samy Lakhal, Alexandre Darmon, Jean-Philippe Bouchaud, and Michael Benzaquen, "Beauty and Structural Complexity," *Physical Review Research* 2, no. 2 (2020): 022058

65.   Wendell Berry, "The Real Work" in *Standing by Words* (Counterpoint, 2011).

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