

**INFLUENTIAL
IDEAS**

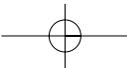
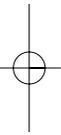
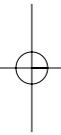
**Sustaining the heart of action
research(ers)**

An interview with Joanna Macy

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KEY WORDS

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For if there is to be a livable world for those who come after us, it will be because we have managed to make the transition from the Industrial Growth Society to a Life-sustaining society. When people look back at this historical moment, they will see, perhaps more clearly than we can now, how revolutionary it is. They may well call it the time of the Great Turning. (Macy & Brown, *Coming back to life*, 1998, p. 17)

In designing the new *Action Research* journal Peter Reason and I agreed to introduce influential thinkers using an interview format. Our goal is to connect journal readers with people whose work is not often cited in the action research community, but which we believe can benefit reflection and practice among action researchers.

My first interview is with Joanna Macy, an eco-philosopher and experiential educator. Macy leads experiential workshops all over the world, which are open to the general public. She writes prolifically both alone and sometimes in collaboration with others who share her experiential orientation to promoting increased social and environmental sustainability. Macy is adjunct professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies; she also teaches at universities close to her home, including UC Berkeley.

Macy's work may offer a fresh way to approach the systems orientation thought necessary (Starik & Rands, 1995) to tackle the messy and interconnected life challenges we would all agree are significant, be they environmental problems, poverty and justice issues and/or personal existential crises. As Peter Reason and I have articulated a lofty vision of action research as 'research worthy of human aspiration' (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. x), the work involved in addressing these ostensibly intractable issues seems compatible with an action research orientation. In encouraging a systems approach Macy stresses the need to move away from linear ideas of causality (X causes Y) and instead to think about multiple forces of causation that interweave over time. The focus of the interview is on challenging ourselves to go deeper into this difficult action research and of sustaining ourselves as we engage with the transformational efforts it implies.

Accessing foundational emotions

Particularly notable about Macy's work is her effort to allow participants to access the deepest emotions that anchor their thinking. Often these are fearful emotions ranging from fear of being too separate from the norm, confronting personal pain, causing distress to others, being unpatriotic, etc. In turn fear leaves people powerless to act with commitment. When fears are released, however, through recognition of participants' connection with the greater web of life, other sources of strength and capacity for action can grow. Macy says in our interview

that she has documented about 50 exercises designed for such transformation (Macy & Brown, 1998), and holds another 30 in her head when leading workshops.

An Example of one of Macy's workshop exercises

I describe just one of Macy's many exercises to give a flavor of her work. Called 'The council of all beings' Macy developed this with 'Deep ecologists' John Seed and Arne Naess. Its purpose is to allow people access a sense of themselves as part of the larger web of life.

Following a ritual opening, participants allow themselves to be chosen by another life-form (animal, vegetable, ecological feature such as a rainforest), for whom they will speak in council (a kind of ecological United Nations). They prepare themselves for this by reflecting on their life-form, often by making a mask to represent it, sometimes practicing moving and speaking as that life-form and finally gathering in a formal, structured council to speak of the grave threats faced by nearly all life-forms today. Preparation may include time outside and time alone. The facilitator encourages people to stay with the first impulse that arises. S/he then calls all to a council on what is befalling the Earth. One by one around the circle each being introduces itself, in ceremonial fashion, in a mini roll-call. Lengthier statements may then follow. The council gives space to the expression of concern that each individual brings, as well as reflection on the causes along with an invitation to humans to simply listen. People are then offered the opportunity to think together about how to stop the destruction of the Earth.

The exercise combines many of the features of all Macy's workshops, namely ritual, creative arts, dialogue, systems thinking and connection with the natural world. The emotion released in such an exercise is difficult to 'forget'. It therefore forms a strong basis for a more traditional intellectual treatment of the issues of ecology, which follow in the workshop. More description of Macy's is available at the website: www.joannamacy.net and in her book *Coming back to life*.

Core concepts in Macy's work: The Great Turning, the Spiral Framework, Buddhist teaching on mutual causality

Knowing that all living systems are in decline (Worldwatch Institute, 2003) and that a majority of the world's people live in deepening squalor, Macy suggests that we must turn away from our current socio-economic systems, for they are simply not viable over the long term. Instead, we must create alternatives that are more consistent with sustaining biological and social life. The reason for the

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development of Macy's extensive repertoire of experiential methods is that when working toward changes required of this Great Turning, it is important to have change agents understand that the interrelated issues of environmental justice, peace, personal development are not just issues 'out there. Rather, in approaching the issue of sustainability we must all begin to ask what is it that sustains our own lives, the lives of those we care about, both present and yet to come, both human and more than human. In stressing the external and internal human worlds, Joanna's work makes clear that one needs a 'both and' approach that interweaves our emotional connections while also calling for the more dispassionate discipline of thinking clearly about systemic interdependencies. Her experiential work holds open an opportunity for revitalizing ourselves in a revitalized society, which exists to serve, rather than exploit, natural and social systems.

Macy's work is most often organized using a spiraling framework which is intended to draw participants from an emotionally defensive or frozen stance to begin to engage productively with the almost inconceivably large and messy problems we live among. Following what has sometimes been referred to as despair work, or more generally, methods that allow people to move toward an emotional acceptance of what they feel (from despair to gratitude to empowerment), openness to new concepts such as interdependence and integration of thinking and doing can proceed. Analytic reduction is not ignored, for its value is difficult to contest, but rather is placed in a new relationship with ideas of systemic causality.

Macy publicly acknowledges the spiritual rootedness of her work and has interwoven Buddhist thinking and systems theory to catalyze processes of inquiry akin to action research (see especially Macy, 1991a). The concept and related practices associated with systemic interdependence (or mutually dependent co-arising) are pervasive. A recognition of systemic dependence means recognizing that self is deeply related to other, not just other human selves, but the natural world (water, air, other species) which impact our lives and whose lives and processes are deeply impacted by our actions. The more Western notion of systems thinking (Flood, 2001; Senge & Scharmer, 2001) is quite consistent with Buddhist thought. Throughout her work, the Buddhist practice of actively holding a stance of inquiry (what Suzuki, 1968, refers to as 'holding beginner's mind') over a stance of 'I already know that', is demonstrated as a way to encourage collaborative activity and creative insight.

An 'anonymous action researcher'?

Using the term that the philosopher Karl Rahner coined to describe those who do something without naming it in terms familiar to others, I would refer to Joanna's work as that of an 'anonymous action researcher', for Joanna is anonymous in

the sense that she would not have used the term ‘action research’ to describe her work prior to our interview. Yet the term ‘action researcher’ applies well to her ongoing engagement with projects from community development in Sri Lanka to nuclear disarmament in the USA, both of which deeply inform the frequent workshops she leads around the world. Her work illustrates what Peter Reason and I argue are some of the core dimensions of action research: working with rather than on people, engaging with issues of live concern, while linking the personal with those sometimes very large-scale issues. Furthermore, Macy demonstrates concern for enduring consequence, while drawing on the more than rational ways of knowing, always in pursuit of a practical way forward.

Context of our interview

Our conversation occurred on 17 February 2003 in the San Francisco Bay Area duplex that Joanna shares with her (if I may say so, altogether handsome) husband Fran. Married since 1953, they have lived all over the world. I was delighted that someone so feted by the ‘lofties’ of the world (something a reader of her many books can see in the prefaces and blurbs by some of the world’s best known spiritual leaders) was so quickly willing to be interviewed. Joanna was recuperating from an eye operation. We spoke just after a large peace demonstration in San Francisco, protesting the impending war in Iraq. From the start Joanna was strikingly ‘no-nonsense’ in her interaction (I think in retrospect that I had been expecting more warmth at first – I mention this as Joanna reflected on the moment of our meeting in a most honest way) and unequivocally generous with her time and thoughts. I shared all my questions before starting (see Appendix 1) to allow her to weave back and forth as made the most sense. We spent four hours in conversation.

Joanna’s words

What is the main contribution of your work, in other words, what are you most proud to offer to the world?

I’ll re-phrase your question to ‘What am I most grateful for?’ And I am so grateful that Buddhist teaching and systems thinking came into my life, and that their convergence helped me relate to the global crises of our time. Each gives tools for confronting and responding to the unspeakable destruction which humankind, with its advanced industrial technology, is inflicting on the natural world and all of life.

It was lonely, you know, at the beginning. Few people were approaching

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social and ecological issues in a psychologically oriented, experiential fashion. I often felt marginal, but that did not stop me, because I was grounded in Buddhism and systems theory. They dance together in such a rewarding and mutually supportive way.

There is a three-point convergence then in my work: systems thinking, Buddhist teachings and a desperate, vulnerable concern for the ecological and political context of our lives. I am unable to keep my distance and view this context from an objective or traditionally academic perspective. Or to put it positively, I deeply love my world. I'm very grateful to be alive. I feel wonder and awe at the beauty of life, its incredibly intricate variety and abundance. And now it stuns the mind that, after all these millennia of the human story, we are doing such irreversible damage.

When Buddhism came into my life, my immediate response was 'Ah, this can free us to be of service to our world'. I could not view the Buddha's central teaching of dependent co-arising as being of merely academic interest. I needed to see how it could make a difference in the way we live – which was the very reason the Buddha gave for teaching it.

How does this convergence of systems, Buddhism and love of life become practical for you and those you work with?

I think what I'll be remembered by, or deserve to be remembered by, is methods, that is, the experiential practices I have developed. All are based on a cellular conviction that knowing happens in the presence of others. I had no interest, no appetite, no temptation whatsoever, to deliver information. What matters to people is what they acquire through their own experience. I had the freedom, as well as courage and ingenuity, to fall into methods of working with people where people are helped to discover the huge wealth of their own experience.

People come alive through exploration, through speaking and listening to what they are hearing from themselves. To me, that is all that is needed. There is a faith or a conviction that each person is in touch with the universe, like a nerve cell in a neural net. Our greatest joy and efficacy lie in coming alive to our own connections and in re-framing our distress for the world in terms of this interconnectivity. This is profoundly reassuring and allows a discovery of our own authority.

Is there a thread that connects things and motivates your work, gives you energy?

The thread is the mutual dependence of self and world. The thread has been to delight in this interdependence, and that means courage to feel, and the courage to love, and the courage to dissent, the courage to be present, the courage to keep your eyes open and not avert the gaze.

I am currently, for example, baffled and fascinated by the continued use, on a very large scale, of depleted uranium in armaments. [Depleted uranium has

replaced tungsten on the tips of bullets and other armaments because it is more effective for piercing armor. It is radioactive. These types of armaments were used in the war on Iraq which started in March 2003.] We used this in the first Gulf war, and are planning to do it again, as we have in the Balkans. I am fascinated by the minds that would conceive and carry this out. Because it is murder that assaults the land and all beings on it. Radioactivity of a half-life of four and a half billion years. And even now, we knowingly continue to do this. So a thread is my fascination, my bafflement, well, my horror, that in this well-informed civilization, with huge means of analysis and communication at hand, we should be engaged in this massive self-destruction and self-deception.

How does knowing this shape your own work at present?

Well, the methods I developed can be adapted to any issue; they help people face their fears around an issue and turn to action. There have been workshops focusing on nuclear waste (see Macy, 1991b, 2000) with people living near nuclear power and weapons plants. This week I am going to be doing a workshop on knowing and preserving our constitutional rights. I have become alarmed by their abrogation by recent legislation. In this workshop, we have invited the police to join us, so we can look at these changes together, and ask each other, ‘How do you understand them?’ It is pointless to do it in an oppositional way. The approach is one of inviting participants to share their views. And more precisely to share on a deeper level, how they really see things, how they experience what is happening to their world. If it is left on the cognitive level alone, you get into rationalizations and posturing. And that is when you get adversarial. When we meet at the heart level of sharing our lived experience, there is less room for adversarial responses.

It is easy to blame people, but blaming is often an avoidance of feeling the sorrow. We numb ourselves to painful feelings. Much of our consumer behavior, and our addiction to violence on television and in the movies, is linked to that kind of numbing. It isolates us, and isolation breeds fear. When people are afraid they turn on each other. Just look at how the Third Reich in Germany led people to commit atrocities against each other. The deepest reason I do the work I do is to help people relate to fear with intelligence and compassion, so that they do not turn on each other when conditions become difficult, as they will, increasingly, with the collapse of the industrial growth society.

Tell me more about your workshops.

They function on different levels simultaneously. On one level, it is like being in a think tank, because, for delimited periods of time, we really exercise the brain – and I find that the brain works better with interactive work that involves the body and the emotions. On another level, it is also like being in a monastery with guided meditations that stretch the spirit and the imagination. Such mental

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journeys reveal our connectedness in the web of life through space and time. On yet another level, the workshop is a laboratory for discovering our innermost responses to the global crisis and our capacity to act on behalf of life. Here the imagination is a wonderful tool, increasing our sense of what is possible. So I like to use games and collective improvisations.

A pretty holistic engagement of the full participant?

Yes, and for that kind of engagement and discovery people need time. When I go over as a guest teacher to the University of California at Berkeley where most of the courses are still in 50-minute blocks, I go out of my mind. What can be expected of anybody in such a little block of time? Students rush in and sit down and rush out. There is no time to swim around in the material and play with it.

What practices might spill over, say, into your own everyday life?

I pray. Just really on the fly, in my mind, I evoke the mother of all buddhas. I'll say, 'All right, here I am, you better help me here!' Now I know she is not separate from me, she is an archetype, endless in wisdom, but it helps. For example, when you came in, I turned to her and said, 'I don't know who this woman is, but remind me she could end up being one of my best friends.' That reduced my fear of you.

Why fear?

Fear that you would not understand, that you could misinterpret me. And another thing that helps is to recognize – and this comes from my early nuclear disarmament days – that the persons I am encountering could be the ones I am with when I die. We are in this life together. We could die together. This realization cuts through the notions we may have about each other and the separations we create. It keeps me from over-identifying with an assumed role – scholar or expert or teacher – which is essentially boring. It also releases a lot of caring, and I function a lot better when I feel that.

What is different now and what remains the same in the way you work?

A number of things have changed, I am sure. I have become more relaxed and spontaneous, I think. My work has also become more politically oriented as the global crisis deepens. More emphasis is placed on the Great Turning to a life-sustaining society, and how we can take part in it. More attention is paid to preparing people psychologically for the drastic changes that will come with the end of the petroleum age. My development and use of what I call 'deep-time work' increases; it is extremely effective in building a long-term view of things and a felt sense of our continuity with previous and future generations. And Gaia herself has become a guide. I love Gaia theory (Lovelock, 1987), viewing the planet as a living system through the lens of systems theory. That was not happening when I first studied systems – which dates me – but now I find it offers a

solid intellectual basis for deep ecology and my understanding of sustainability. And some key things are the same in nearly every workshop I do.

Central to my work is enabling people to tell the truth about what they see and know and feel is happening to their world. That confrontation with their own, often censored, responses breaks through the denial and psychic numbing that assails so much of Western society. It opens the way to experience seeing our interconnectedness, our deep ecology and our power to act.

It has been equally important to me to free people from conventional, hierarchical notions of power and to offer them a new, collaborative concept of power, which they then embody in interactive exercises. I agree with systems theorists Gregory Bateson and Kenneth Boulding, that the greatest cognitive revolution of our era is in the understanding of power. And I want activists to get this, because commitment and courage are not enough by themselves. So long as we fall for the old top-down view of power, we are essentially crippled in our actions, easily disheartened and defeated. In appreciating and teaching about the kind of power manifested in living systems, which we experience when we fall in love, have a child, go camping...I have been hugely helped by the Buddha's teaching of dependent co-arising.

If I might ask you about something of a paradox that I see . . . I am struck by your talk about synaptic connections and 'coming alive in the presence of others'. In the action research world we put a huge premium on working with people; there is a concern for partnership and participation. And yet you work primarily alone. You are in charge. Is that a contradiction?

That is a good question. I have wondered about it myself. And then I think: although I have developed this kind of group work on my own, it has equally arisen through continual interactions with others. Its theoretical foundations rest on the work of many thinkers, scientists and spiritual teachers, to whom I owe a great debt and gratefully acknowledge in all I do. The experiential practices I use embody contributions from many sources and colleagues, and I cite them in my book, *Coming back to life*.

When I conduct a workshop or training, I often have others help me as co-teachers and co-facilitators. But I like to stay in charge, so that I can follow my intuitions of the moment and freely and quickly deviate from any pre-formulated plan. Even when I am the sole teacher, the experiential work is continually guided and shaped by feedback from the group. So, yes, I do work alone. It is easier! [*I know!*] What I offer are ways of working together. So I do not know whether there is some inherent paradox or contradiction there.

Well, the Buddha himself sat there all alone under the bodhi tree till he got it right.

I am sure I am more of a team player than that!

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We live, especially in the US, in a type of cult of optimism, and yet at least some of us feel we are part of a larger whole where all is not well; how do you work with your own pessimism and doubts about our collective future?

Well, I often wonder about that. I feel that we may be wired to do ourselves in. It is our big brains and our hands. But I recognize that we do not need to be optimistic in order to be fully alive and contribute with joy and efficacy. Hope is overrated! It is just a feeling, and feelings are transitory. It often relates to what happened to you yesterday or what you had for breakfast or if you had a good night's sleep. So it is good not to take our feelings too seriously.

And even if we manage to be hopeful, the losses are incalculable: what we are losing and have lost irretrievably in terms of species, eco-systems and cultures. So it is OK not to be hopeful. And it is OK to be hopeful! It is liberating not to have to take your emotional temperature all the time as to how great you're feeling about the future. It is not such a big deal. As systems epistemology makes wonderfully clear, the part cannot know the fate of the whole.

When I talk about the Great Turning, which is a very useful conceptualization for the return to sustainability, I acknowledge that we do not and cannot know whether it will succeed. But does certainty of the outcome elicit from us the most creativity and courage? It is often against the greatest odds that the greatest ingenuity and heroism and leaps of intelligence occur.

In this dark time I like to remember an ancient prophecy that I heard from my Tibetan friends in exile in northwest India. I call it the Shambhala Prophecy and share it in many workshops as well as in three of my recent books. It gives me perspective on the challenges we face in the Great Turning, and helps me better understand the work I do. Here it is, in the version I received from my friend and teacher Dugu Choegyl Rinpoche.

There comes a time when all life on Earth is in danger. Great barbarian powers have arisen. Although these powers spend their wealth in preparations to annihilate one another, they have much in common: weapons of unfathomable destructive power, and technologies that lay waste our world. In this time, when the future of sentient life hangs by the frailest of threads, the kingdom of Shambhala emerges.

You cannot go there, for it is not a place; it exists in the hearts and minds of the Shambhala warriors. Nor can you recognize a Shambhala warrior when you see her or him, for they wear no uniforms or insignia, and they carry no banners. They have no barricades on which to climb to threaten the enemy, or behind which they can hide to rest or regroup. They do not even have any home turf. Always they must move on the terrain of the barbarians themselves.

Now the time comes when great courage – moral and physical courage – is required of the Shambhala warriors, for they must go into the very heart of the barbarian power, into the pits and pockets and citadels where the weapons are kept, to dismantle them. To dismantle the weapons, in every sense of the word, they must enter the corridors of power where decisions are made.

The Shambhala warriors have the courage to do this because they know that these weapons are *manomaya*, 'mind-made'. Made by the human mind, they can be unmade by the human mind. The dangers threatening life on Earth are not visited upon us by any extraterrestrial power, satanic deities, or preordained evil fate. They arise from our own decisions, our own lifestyles, and our own relationships.

So in this time, the Shambhala warriors go into training. When Choegyal said this, I asked, 'How do they train?' They train, he said, in the use of two weapons. 'What weapons?' And he held up his hands in the way the Lamas hold the ritual objects in the lama dance. The weapons are compassion and insight. Both are necessary, he said.

You have to have compassion because it gives you the juice, the power, the passion to move. It means not to be afraid of the pain of the world so you can open to it, step forward, act. But that weapon by itself is not enough. It can burn you out, so you need the other – you need insight into the radical interdependence of all phenomena. With that wisdom you know that it is not a battle between 'good guys' and 'bad guys', because the line between good and evil runs through the landscape of every human heart. With insight into our profound interconnectedness – our deep ecology – you know that even the smallest action undertaken with pure intent has repercussions throughout the web of life. By itself, that insight may appear too cool, too conceptual, to sustain you and keep you moving, so you need the heat of compassion. Together these two can sustain us as we work together for the healing of our world.

Do you have any last reflections to share before we close our conversation?

I wonder sometimes whether this is the best use of my life. Are there better things I could do to serve my world in this time? I question everything. But I come around to this – that this work helps us tell the truth. Freeing us from denial, it unblocks the feedback loops and opens us to the intelligence latent in the larger system. As I experience again and again, in every single workshop, this work enlivens us and helps us love each other.

Thank you.

Reflection

I have called Joanna Macy an anonymous action researcher in the sense that her work illustrates some (though not all) of the core characteristics of action research. I want to be careful to note that Macy does not take people through cycles of action and reflection, which for action researchers is a fundamental means of linking thinking and action. Yet her work is nonetheless interesting for what it could add to the common set of action research practices. In particular, I believe that Macy's work has much to teach us about accessing those parts that

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block action researchers and their research partners from embracing and realizing the changes we desire. By addressing deeper emotions that color all our so-called rational efforts, we may find ourselves more capable of doing research that is not systematically distorted to bypass the irrational foundations.

Recognition of the anchoring quality of emotion is not absent in the action research tradition; to the extent that action research has origins in t-groups and Bion's work (1961), it too is rooted in emotions. Yet, to a large extent, this emphasis has been lost. John Heron is probably the one who has kept the link clearest, and in both his book (Heron, 1996) and his joint chapter with Peter Reason (Heron and Reason, 2001), there is reference to the importance of emotions as potentially occluding human intelligence. Nonetheless action research work often gets stuck in what Argyris et al. (1985) call 'undiscussibles', that is, those 'elephants in the room' that no one quite knows how to acknowledge but which block change efforts. Argyris's approach (see also Friedman, 2001), may be very successful in translating some of those emotions into rational (productive) conversation. More recently the action science approach has been noted for its avoidance of most emotions (Seo, 2003). Generally then, action researchers live in the threshold place between acknowledging the importance of deep-seated emotion and dealing with them in idiosyncratic ways. Typically action researchers' accounts continue to be written in the paradigm of disciplined rationalists.

Interesting empirical studies by a Harvard professor of education, Howard Gardner, underscore the link between action and emotion. The studies have involved work with his graduate students who do well on exams that test for concepts learned (Gardner, 1993). When observed actually applying those concepts in a new situation, a yawning gap between students' action and their theory was repeatedly noted. This is hardly a surprise to action researchers. Argyris and Schoen long ago noted the distance between espoused theory and theory in action (Argyris & Schoen, 1978). However, Gardner goes further to say that these 'old theories' are perhaps much older and much more difficult to unseat than we realize, as they are anchored in childhood cognitions and kept in place by powerful emotions. He explains this:

the problem is what I call 'scripts'; that is, we learn a certain way of thinking about things when we're very young. These are very [emotionally] powerful stories, and they're very long-lived. They influence the way we understand and explain things...so you might say that the challenge of education is, on the one hand, to preserve the imagination and the questioning and the theoretical stance of a 5-year-old, but on the other hand – gradually but decisively – to replace those ideas that are not well-founded with theories, ideas, conceptions, stories, which are more accurate. (Gardner, 1993)

The findings portend a disturbing revelation that most learning efforts, as typically practiced, all too rarely result in learners' capacity to take what is learned in

one setting and to apply it appropriately in a different setting. Very little learning seems to be actually happening! For those of us who are educators and action researchers, where learning and change are interwoven, these studies suggest that we need new ways of working to unseat the powerful emotional mechanism that lock in particular behaviors. Moreover, we need to describe those practices that do work in spite of their divergence from what is considered normal, rational, practice.

While action research efforts are not in the mainstream of educational practices – for they do, in spirit if not always in practice, attempt to transcend the dualism between knowing and doing – nonetheless, much can be improved with our methods. Macy's set of methods seem most valuable for allowing real learning to occur.

If it is left on the cognitive level alone, you get into rationalizations and posturing. And that's when you get adversarial. When we meet at the heart level of sharing our lived experience, there's less room for adversarial responses. (Macy interview)

Macy's work moves between modes of experiential, artistic, silent knowing, spending time in nature, intensive thinking, involving body and emotions, engaging in role play, party-like singing, dancing, meditations and invoking metaphors and prayer. All of these modes are organized around the Spiral Framework, which begins by allowing people to access what they actually feel about the issues they wish to confront and make change with. Holding people in a heart-oriented, non-blaming mode is important and consistent inquiry is a crucial part of that. Her work embraces the importance of action and reflection, of actions to prevent more bad things happening, to building new structures for the future. Underlying this is a shift in consciousness, which is in turn enabled by accessing emotion.

We see in this work elemental action research for it combines first-, second- and third-person research/practice. First-person work builds capacity for being aware of what one is noticing at any particular time. For example, Macy admits to her fear upon meeting when I arrive as a stranger and in doing so opens up a capacity for transforming that emotionally-toned cognition. Similarly in her workshops she senses what is going on, and presumably has done well enough that her workshops remain globally popular.

The second-person work is the heart of the transformative capacity of new learning, for it proceeds from a cellular conviction that people learn relationally, in and through the presence of one another. The goal is to find one's own authority and to share it, thereby amplifying learning for self and others. Because the methods she draws on are so holistic, the learning seems to get anchored more deeply than purely intellectual learning and can therefore be carried to a new setting and actually be applied.

The third-person work, that of sharing with others with whom she is not in personal contact, and catalyzing larger momentum around her ideas, is accom-

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plished through reflection, naming experience for people who do not have words for it and, crucially, in writing for a broader audience. Macy's willingness to be involved in large-scale issues, and the extent to which she has connected the first person with the third person may well be what Bjorn Gustavsen (see this issue) calls for if first-person work is to fuel movement to make larger-scale effects.

Appreciation of Macy's work for developing my action research repertoire

In the end what I take away from my interview with Joanna Macy are the following questions, or perhaps reminders in the form of questions.

How do I develop the skill set necessary to go into the emotional realms required for desired change to occur? As I think about the different populations I work with and have experienced as being less than willing to engage in emotional self reflection – MBA students, executives in multinational corporations – I experience the fear Macy suggests is pervasive in our lives. I wonder how I might invite a CFO to dance in our upcoming meeting designed to allow business people from many corporations to build sustainable development practices into everyday business. Indeed as I described the Council of All Beings earlier in the introduction to this interview, I wondered if I was risking the loss of readers from the action research community itself (and so early in the fragile life of a new journal), for whom serious work simply does not include masks and ritual (and, of course, I thought about praying to the mother of all buddhas).

Robert Quinn (1996) writes that real transformational moments happen when we give up trying to be in control. Yet one must build a personal repertoire to be able to trust this when the moment arrives. What have I done to build that repertoire? Are others referring explicitly enough to this level of work in their writing about action research so that those who are interested can learn from it? Can we encourage more of that through this journal?

Beyond all these doubts and fears, I also wonder if I can integrate more of a sense of gratitude into my stance, simultaneously avoiding a Pollyanna quality, while recognizing that appreciation or gratitude allows one to acknowledge and value the contribution one is making, however small. For example, as Peter and I discussed this interview, we talked about the 'deep-time' dimension of the Great Turning, effectively wondering what we will or can tell our children about how we contributed to speed up this important movement. We laughed to think we created a journal called *Action Research*. Yet beyond the self-deprecation lurks an appreciation of using the positions we have to make the contribution we can. The work is not heroic, but a contribution to an intricate whole, whose entirety we cannot even contemplate.

And finally my conversation with Joanna causes me to question whether I

really am consistent in my commitment to the significant issues. This is not really a question in the ordinary sense, but a lifelong inquiry, that will catalyze as much courage and curiosity as I am capable of.

Notes

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Appendix 1. Questions prepared in advance for interview with Joanna Macy

1. What is the main contribution of your work, in other words, what are you most proud to offer to those who want to know your work?
2. Is there a thread that connects the issues that you've been working with over the years, one that motivates your work, gives you energy?
3. What have been the main inspirations for you that you think could help others understand the important concept of 'dependent co-arising'?
4. To what degree has your spiritual nature given energy to your work?
5. How explicit is your own self-inquiry (or reflexivity) in your work? 6. How do you encourage others to engage with this?
7. What special role, if any, do women have to play in creating a world worthy of our aspirations?
8. You defined 'learning' as a reorganization rather than just addition of data. Please speak to the relationship between being humble on one side, (i.e., willing to reorganize), and then, on the other, being confident enough to assert what one believes?
9. As we live in this cult of optimism in the U.S., and yet know we are part of a larger far less optimistic whole, how do you work with your own doubts about our future?

I will check periodically if there are other questions that you would have me ask and I will make tangents to pick up more on particular things you say.