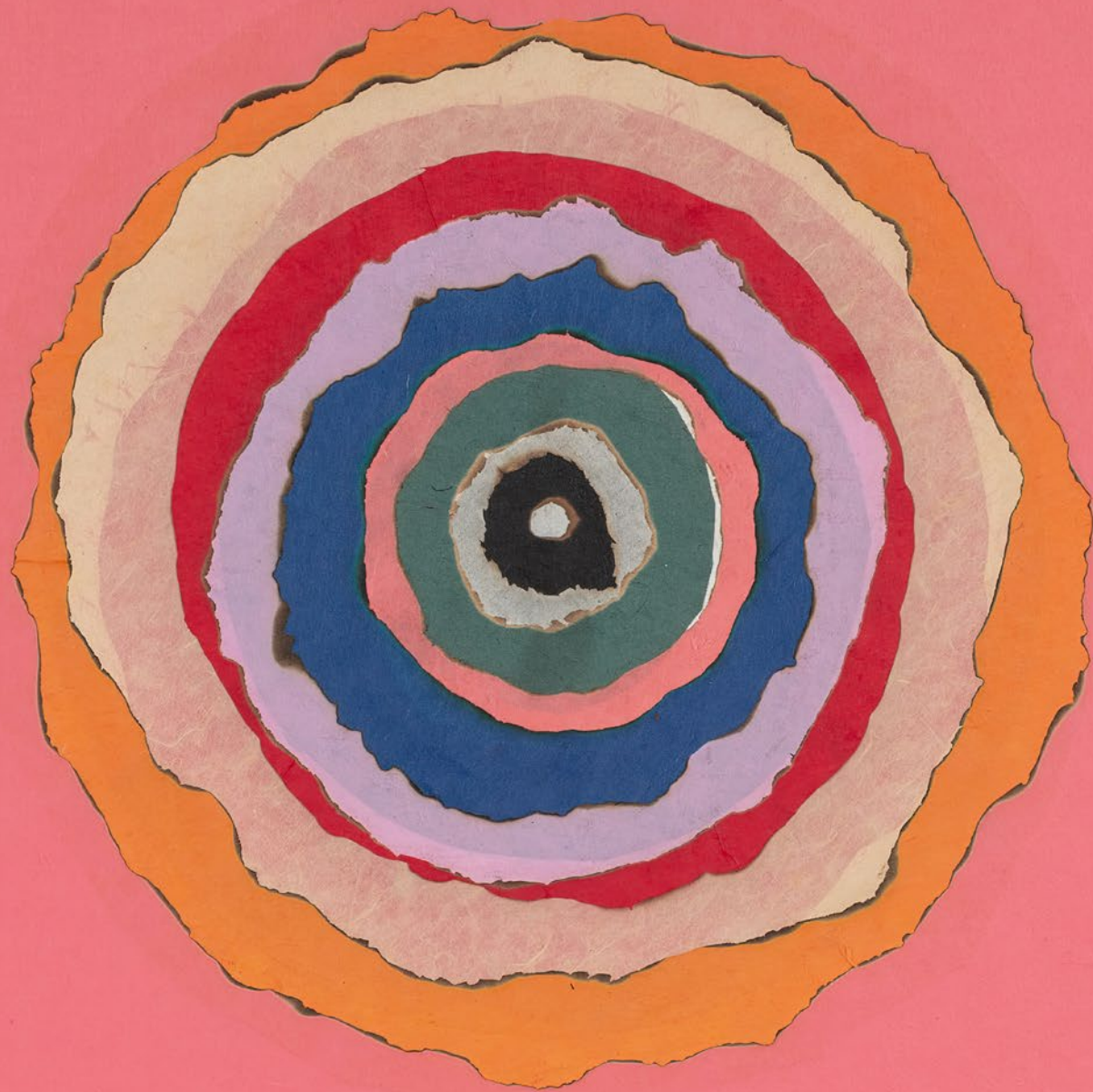


The Gift of Interbeing

THE WHOLENESS IN
THE SPACE BETWEEN



Minjung Kim, Vuoto nel pieno, 2025

Minjung Kim, Red mountain, 2025

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The word interbeing refers to the wholeness of life in which we are always woven together. When this wholeness awakens between us, we find new ways of being, knowing, and creating.

Interbeing is in the air. The term can be heard more and more frequently. Most famously, the late, much beloved Buddhist monk and teacher, Thich Naht Hanh, brought it into awareness. He even founded a new Buddhist lineage called the Order of Interbeing. As he said, »We do not exist independently. We inter-are. Everything relies on everything else in the cosmos in order to manifest—whether a star, a cloud, a flower, a tree, or you and me.« And as he explained further, »The verb ›to be‹ can be misleading, because we cannot be by ourselves, alone. ›To be‹ is always to ›inter-be‹. If we combine the prefix ›inter‹ with the verb ›to be‹, we have a new verb, ›inter-be‹. To inter-be and the action of interbeing reflects reality more accurately. We inter-are with one another and with all life.«

Thich Naht Hanh brings an immediate and fresh perspective to classic Buddhist teachings with Interbeing. First, there is the classic teaching »no independent arising« (or »dependent arising«), which means that nothing exists or can exist in separation. Hanh uses the example of a piece of paper, how even that piece of paper contains within it the entire universe, because without everything—the tree that needed the sun, the life of the logger who cut the tree who was birthed by his mother, who was birthed by hers, etc. etc. There are webs of relatedness through time and space in all directions. Noting our continuity back in time, Hanh also draws on the teaching of impermanence—that all that arises, passes away. Our existence depends on the past, on our ancestors, whose lineage we inevitably join. We arise and pass away.

A new story

Charles Eisenstein, the author and activist, has taken Hanh's Interbeing as a new narrative for the future. The »Story of Interbeing,« he explains in *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible*, is

the path beyond the »Story of Separation« that is bringing us to conflict and collapse. »The Story of Interbeing,« he writes, »says that everything we do, even our smallest choices, affects and reflects the world. It says that we can no longer act from a place of separation, as if we were discrete and separate beings living in a world of other. It says that we are interdependent with all life, and that our well-being is contingent on the well-being of all beings. It says that we are here to contribute our gifts to the evolution of the whole. It says that we are

powerful contemplation on the nature of reality. Such a contemplation simultaneously expands our sphere of being beyond all limits and reveals us to be the tiniest spark in an infinite whole. For an individual, this contemplation can be powerful, particularly when coupled with deep meditation practice that opens the empty ground of all being. Yet contemplation is not enough to transform culture—which is how we are human together. What is needed is a new embodiment of the truth of our interconnection and participation in something far

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powerful agents of change, and that we can create the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible.«

This new narrative is not simply a story, though. Eisenstein is pointing to the imaginal nature of all of our social realities. They are a collective imagining through which we participate in shaping what we experience as real. It is a participatory, shared knowing. Changing the »story« means living in a new perception of who we are, what is possible, and what has meaning and relevance. We embody the worlds we inhabit. Saying this does not mean that anything we can imagine can become real. There are patterns to the emergence of each new way of being here that constrain what the next possibility can be.

A new reality

For both Thich Nhat Hanh and Charles Eisenstein, the truth of interbeing opens a

larger than ourselves.

Thich Naht Hanh points to the reality that we always »inter-are« whether we perceive this directly or not. This inter-being is true at all levels—from the quantum to the mystical. Despite this, for most of us, this is a beautiful idea that we contemplate from a position of separation. But how can that truth become a living reality? This is the invitation of Interbeing. The sense of Interbeing shared here enables us to experience this profound truth as an embodied opening to shared presence. (And that is just the beginning.)

Interbeing is Given

Just like the truth of nonseparation, the Interbeing introduced here is not merely an idea or concept. The two of us writing here did not invent it. It is not owned by anyone. It cannot be trademarked. When human beings who have a capacity for in-

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ner awareness meet under certain conditions, the field of Interbeing opens up. This is why many »We Space« and dialogue practices speak of similar experiences of intimacy, sacredness, co-creativity and so forth. Most often the implication is missed that these experiences point to an intelligence and coherence inclusive of and beyond the participants involved in the dialogue encounter.

Interbeing, like life itself, is given. Life is nothing that any one of us made happen. The tree with leaves that dance gold and green in the sunlight were not made by human hand. The pleasant warmth of the sun on your face just is. These are given to us. We are made to seek beauty; to see and smell and taste it in the life world we are in the midst of. Life as such is a gift, even in the midst of suffering and confusion. The many trillions of cells that come together as our bodies, lit up with the impulse to make meaning and find wholeness is one of the most extraordinary happenings in the cosmos. When we open ourselves through curiosity and humility, the living presence of the space that we share—Interbeing—reveals itself within, between, and beyond us. Interbeing enables us to touch the deeper truth of non-separateness as embodied experience. We tend to interpret this subtle presence of the in-between as a love and care that is

no less than the fabric of Life. The awareness of Interbeing steepens us in belonging. We come home to a deeper dimension of self and relatedness that feels so familiar and yet is a surprise. Interbeing is a gift, and it is for giving.

In giving Interbeing, we honor the gift. Just like the gift of life, it is up to us to make something of it. As individuals, the love and curiosity and meaning and creativity that we bring to life is our responsibility. Interbeing depends on human beings to co-create with it so that its capacities can develop. It is, after all, a being—a living intelligence that we human beings can be available to and be consciously part of. This is paradoxical: simultaneously Interbeing is a deeper, more expansive aspect of self and it has a unique presence that we can perceive. Interbeing as given invites us into a co-conscious co-creativity with each other through its synergistic force. This takes practice—to sense the field, to discriminate, and to be available.

Discovering the Field of Interbeing

Let's start with sensing the field. Our habit is to look within. But Interbeing is between (and through and beyond). Interbeing is for giving, so rather than pulling one's awareness to one's self, it invites us to be

open and curious about what is present between us. There are moments when most of us feel the presence of the space between. Entering a cathedral lit by emerald, ruby, and sapphire stained glass and fragrant with incense, a quiet falls. The interior reaches dizzying heights, like being inside a mountain and, like the mountains, a silence pervades. Or opening a door to a room and the couple inside suddenly falls silent—a slight tension spans the distance between you. An argument? A secret? You? Or the hush that falls as the curtain rises and the intensity of an entire audience's attention in the gap before the first note is played sends a thrill up the spine. Or the inner slowing down that happens during walks through the forest, giving rise to a sense, somehow, of being home. Or the infinite peace that abides at the death bed of a dearly loved one who is taking her last breaths.

One might say, indeed, that Interbeing is in the air. It is in the space between. Space is not empty. Between human beings, space holds intelligence, information, knowledge. Most of the time, this slips past our awareness, unnoticed. When we begin to pay attention to that space in a group dialogue setting, an awareness of a collective presence can open in one's perception. Interbeing is the living presence of the space between. Even more precisely, interbeing is the space between becoming self-aware through us.

This may seem like a koan. It is tricky to write about this, because in reading a book one is necessarily engaged in a solo activity—or at most, a relationship between the author, through words on a page, and reader. Dialogue, as a group practice, necessitates the immediacy of relatedness. One is in the presence of others, and through the realization of the subtle dimension of presence that others bring, one is aware—often before thought—that one is not only in others' presence but that, taken as a whole, one is amidst a collective presence. The next time you are in a group conversation, take a minute to become aware of your own presence, then the presences of each of the others, and finally the presence of the group as a whole. Having an embodied sense of this—as opposed to an idea—is essential to bringing Interbeing into conscious awareness.

The Metaphor of Light

Perhaps another example might help. Right now, you are somewhere—at your desk, sitting on a chair or sofa, at home or in a café or on a bus or...wherever. Is there light

where you are? You have been in the presence of the light probably without being aware of it. As soon as you read these words and look around you, your awareness of the light changes. Something widens, opens. Nothing has changed—the light didn't do anything. But your awareness now holds the light, which makes it somehow more sensible, more present. Where are the people nearest to you? Are they in the same space of light? Someone across the room shares the light with you—even if they are sitting next to a lamp, the light from the lamp doesn't have a hard edge dividing you from it. If you are outside during the day, notice how the light where you are is not different from the light anywhere you can look. Notice that your relationship to the light is not an idea or concept. You are experiencing light, not theorizing about it.

Interbeing is like the light: so present, so close that we rarely are aware of it. Unlike the light, becoming aware of the subtle aliveness of the space between us requires a whole body sensing to discover that which we are already in—which is Life. Life with a capital »L.« means nonseparation from the whole unfolding process that is you, me, this neighborhood, this bioregion, this Earth, this galaxy, this Cosmos. Also, unlike the light, Interbeing carries with it intelligence that collectively we can intuit. Together in the awareness of Interbeing, we can hold more, understand more, and intuit next steps that we cannot do on our own.

Interbeing refers, as Eisenstein and Hanh tell us, to the nonseparation of life as a whole—human and more than human, sentient and not. Life is whole. Nothing exists in separation. For the purposes of this book, though, Interbeing is the conscious awareness of and response to this living wholeness. As one develops the inner perception of Interbeing, it becomes far more. In a group, when a significant part of the members brings awareness to the space between, a certain intelligence, emergent from the field, becomes available to us. This intelligence seeks to integrate the knowledge and perspectives of the participating individuals. And it is delicate: how do we ensure that we are not deluding ourselves? How do we distinguish between our individual motives and agendas from the subtle force of Interbeing? Such a collective awareness is so new and our knowing of it is very tentative, developed through trial and error, directed by a sensitivity to what is experientially new, and motivated by a love for its unfolding potential.

From Me to We to Interbeing

Interbeing may be given, but tuning our awareness to be able to sense it takes discrimination and practice. Typically, individuals do not take seriously the glimpses of intelligent co-consciousness that arise in group settings. Those moments when the field opens and becomes aware of itself through the participants becomes just another peak experience for the experience-hungry »me.« It helps to get clear about the different ways that we relate. Many »We Space« practices and projects do not distinguish between the different forms of relatedness that they encompass. Frankly, everything exists in some kind of »we.« As

many say, everything is related (or entangled). Indigenous Americans say »All my relations.« The »I« that »I am« is part of an infinite number of »We's.« That being said, there are important differences between these different »We's.«

Let us start with the relational space that is centered on »Me.« In the past several thousand years in which the West has cultivated individuality, our inner reality of thought and feeling and reaction can become so dominant that it divides us from realizing our participation with the interconnected web of life and relatedness. In our hyperindividualized cul-

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ture, where our very survival depends on competing against others for enough money to live on, it is not at all uncommon for persons to relate more to themselves and what they project onto others than to be in authentic, curious, and empathetic relationship with another human being. One could call this narcissism, but it is unfair to suggest the fault is with the individual when the entire cultural apparatus of Western culture aims to produce individuals who see themselves as separate and disconnected from body, deep relatedness, and the natural cycles of nature. When in this Me-colored world, one is often not aware how much our own hopes and fears tint what we see and direct how we respond. The world of Me tends to be two-dimensional, lacking a deeper resonance with other beings. There is an emphasis on sameness: I understand you because I assume that we feel or perceive the same way. The sense of isolation and alienation that many people experience in the modern world has to do with this constantly self-reinforcing bubble of separateness. Needless to say, the relationships that come from isolated beings trying to meet are often distorted mirrors and self-deluding projections. Because this is so common, so rewarded, this stunted relatedness typically seems quite normal.

The relationships found in most We Spaces step out of the Me into mutual and empathic relationship with others. In the last decades, there has developed a deeper capacity to share inner worlds. Many We Space practices emphasize the sharing of one's inner experience such that the person sharing feels seen and heard in a way that is touching and meaningful. There is a breaking of the bubble of individual isolation, which is a profound relief. Group conversation is almost dyadic because each group member relates to other group members one-to-one. In other words, one relates to the members as individuals in an I-you (and you and you, etc.) perspective. These We Space practices attend to the experience of one person at a time, and so, one's focus falls on one individual after

another. One's own experience becomes a source of resonance to understand the experience of another human being but does not seek sameness. Here the uniqueness of the individual is held dearly. This is an *interpersonal* space in which one seeks to truly understand another's feelings and to sense into their presence.

A primordial Connectedness

The relatedness of Interbeing holds both the Me and the We Space, plus something more. Note that Interbeing is about a primary relatedness that arises from the prior unity that is before any multiplicity, rather than emphasizing relationships with the individuals present. Interbeing does not mean to bring together parts—group members—into a whole. Rather, Interbeing begins with a shift in perspective from part, or individual, to the whole. This shift changes our perspective and sense of the group from »all of us« to »the whole of us.« Thus, the perspective of Interbeing starts from wholeness—simultaneously the group-as-a-whole and the space that is within, between, and beyond any group that one is in. One senses into the whole field of the group and into the space that holds the group and all that is in it. Interbeing calls for a more complex perception, in which one is aware of one's own experience—thoughts, feelings, reactions—as well as being aware of the unique individuals who are present and the arising of both of these in the space within and between that holds both self and others. This delicate, subtle, living presence within and between is forefronted, and the usual dominance of our inner world recedes. That shared presence is a manifestation of the primordial ground, which Buddhists call Emptiness, that is itself ungraspable and unknowable. Interbeing is not something or an idea that is separate from one's self, not an object in the mind. Through

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an embodied sensing into the space between, Interbeing emerges and, carefully, can come into language out of a field of unity that holds the dynamism of diverse human experience.

The difference between Me or We Spaces and Interbeing runs deep. The living presence and intelligence of interbeing unsettles core assumptions about being a separate individual with agency to act upon the world. Interbeing does not obliterate individuality; it places our individual uniqueness in a new context. And as the awareness of Interbeing grows, the potential for becoming a vehicle for this synergistic intelligence also grows. Agency no longer is simply the purview of the individual, but more of a murmur—a collective emergence out of Interbeing. This transcends and includes the capacities of individuation to empower a co-conscious sensing and sense-making. This is a new step in human and cultural development. We call *transindividuation*. ■



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VIDEOS ZUM THEMA

Dialoge zum *Emergent Dialogue*:

Individuation and Transindividuation

www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQpMesmK0IY



Synergetische Intelligenz

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