

Living in Deeptime: Cataclysm and Collective Emergence

Stephan Martin, Deeptime Network

My friend Marianne reached out to me recently to discuss a situation in her personal and professional life that she was struggling with, and I found it to be a powerful place to apply the Deeptime Principles that we explore in the Deeptime Network. For those who aren't familiar, these are principles that connect the larger context of the universe to our personal lives and communities and help us see our lives and our everyday situations from a bigger picture. You can find more details on these principles here:

<https://dtnetwork.org/deep-time-perspective/>

I've been applying these principles in my own life for some time now as a framework for personal guidance and action, and it occurred to me that they could be helpful for Marianne in her current circumstances as well. I asked if she would like to try looking at her situation through a Deeptime perspective and she agreed, so I coached her on applying these principles in turn to this situation.

As we discussed applying these principles to her situation, we found them to be very helpful in evoking a sense of perspective, support, and inspiration that both gave Marianne more ease about the situation while provide concrete next steps for her to follow in helping move it forward.

One of the gifts of taking a Deeptime perspective is that it helps us to step back and "see the big picture" of any particular situation. In this Deeptime framework, everyone and every situation is part of the larger context of an evolving universe. Seeing ourselves and our situation as part of the larger movement and evolution of the universe naturally encourages more breathing room, trust, and acceptance in what is happening, which in turn allows the situation to evolve more freely and organically than it might have if we had adopted a smaller perspective or agenda.

The universe naturally goes through breakdowns and difficult circumstances, whether it's the struggle of a star to remain together at the end of its life or the collision of two galaxies as they form something new. Seeing breakdowns,

obstacles, and struggles as part of the cosmic evolutionary process can really help when things get tough and messy on the ground here on Earth. Remembering this, I asked Marianne to share more about what was going on for her at this time.

Marianne's Situation

So here is the situation in a nutshell. Marianne and her business partner co-manage a meditation studio which offers classes, retreats, and community-building experiences in the Monterey Bay area and beyond. Both Marianne and her partner teach and offer classes that have brought people in community with each other and with the natural world for many years. Marianne's business partner recently decided she wanted to leave the business to pursue her own interests. Since their professional lives and roles were interwoven with the studio, its administrative structure, and the studio community, this sudden departure of her partner not only disrupted the operation of the studio but sent shockwaves through the community of participants who had found a home for themselves there. The financial viability and continued operation of the studio was now at stake in addition to the emotional impact this change was having on the studio members and Marianne personally.

In a Deeptime framework, I would say that the power of Cataclysm is at work here. Cataclysm is the cosmological dynamic by which the universe breaks down structures so that something new can arise in their place. Death, destruction, and loss are all examples of this power at work in our daily lives and communities, and while this can be very painful and isolating to experience on our own, it can be helpful for us to see that this is a cosmic dynamic that is universal and happening everywhere. Stars explode and disappear, leaves and plants compost back into the Earth, people die and vanish from our lives. It is through breakdown and loss that the universe expresses its creativity in creating something new from the ashes of the old. While this doesn't diminish the great pain and struggle that people experience in going through this process, it does help to see it's how the universe works on all scales.

It was this experience of cataclysm, disruption, and loss that Marianne and her studio were experiencing. Aware of this, I suggested we reflect on this situation through a Deeptime lens, to see if it might provide additional insight, support, and

guidance for her and how this situation wants to evolve. She said “yes, let’s do it,” so I started in asking questions.

What’s the Context of this situation?

Context in a Deeptime framework is the larger sense of the whole situation, recognizing that every person, being, or situation is whole and complete in itself, and yet a part of some larger whole within the universe. Like Russian nesting dolls embedded one within the other, our lives are contained in increasingly larger and smaller wholes all the way up and all the way down from the smallest scales to the largest in the Universe.

This also means that every situation, no matter what is happening, is also a complete whole. Even if the situation feels broken, disrupted, or fundamentally incomplete, it is still a complete and whole Context in which the universe is expressing itself. In a Deeptime framework, we can trust the wholeness of this larger Context and the completeness of every situation just as it is. In so doing we can access new perspectives and inspirations from within the situation, simply by shifting our focus to a larger framework.

Marianne’s Context

Marianne’s context is the meditation studio and its member community, along with the human and natural ecosystem of Monterey Bay in which they are embedded. Context also includes the situational aspect of her business partner leaving the studio and the disruption of and potential dissolution of the studio and its community.

We outlined the Context of the situation together and then I encouraged her to take a step back from the situation to see it from a slightly larger perspective, while asking “What is trying to happen here?”

Taking a step back in this case does two things. First, it helps the person who is struggling to disidentify from the situation to see it more objectively and in a different light. Often our emotional responses (attachments and aversions) and our cognitive structures (beliefs and assumptions) can be like blinders that narrow our vision to focus on the parts of a situation we’re most emotionally invested in, rather than seeing and feeling the whole of it. Practical ways to step back and experience the larger context can include taking a deep breath, going for a walk,

calling a friend, shifting focus to a different task, taking a vacation...anything that provides more breathing room so that you can be *in relationship with* the situation instead of *being overwhelmed by* the situation.

At this point, Marianne was looking visibly relaxed. Taking a breath and stepping back had given her a much-needed respite from the worry she had been experiencing. As she expanded her emotional frame and the field of possibilities she exclaimed, "Whew! I feel so much lighter and more open now. I hadn't realized how contracted I was and how tightly I've been holding on to the situation."

The second reason to step back and give the situation more space is that it connects the situation to the creative potential of the universe. It turns out that modern physics has discovered that space is not empty but full of creative potential, in the form of quantum fields and other local and nonlocal influences. The "creative field of possibilities" that is the nature of space is always waiting for the right conditions to evoke these possibilities into existence. It was from this seemingly "empty" space scientists hypothesize the Big Bang emerged. It is from this "empty" space that quantum fields actualize into the particles and arrangements of matter that we experience every moment as the world around us. Space is also the main component of our universe, overwhelmingly more so than energy or matter. If space is not simply empty but full of creative potential, then providing more space to a situation connects it with a much larger realm of possibilities. Connecting with the creative potential that gave birth to the universe surely can provide additional insight and inspiration for any situation!

As we talked more about giving the situation space and connecting it with the creative potential of the universe, her relaxation shifted into excitement – she was now seeing new possibilities in the situation instead of feeling trapped by worry and concern. Gradually it seemed that the situation was transitioning from an emergency into an emergence of new possibilities.

Since reflecting on the Deetime principle of Context had been helpful, I began to wonder what else might we learn from this situation if we brought in more cosmic perspectives and kept asking open-ended questions?

What's the Matrix of this situation?

If space is not empty but filled with quantum fields that are influencing other fields throughout the universe, then space is no longer a separating phenomenon, but a unifying field which interweaves all the different elements of the universe together. This is an example of Matrix, the field of relationships which interweave our lives with those of everyone and everything else around us. Matrix is the expression of our embeddedness in the universe and in the life systems of the natural and human world. Modern biology and ecology have shown that our actions and lifestyle choices have profound effects on our ecosystem and that we are inseparable from the entire community of organisms, species, and living systems with which we are interwoven, on which we depend, and by which we are influenced.

A large-scale overview of the dynamics of cosmology and evolutionary biology suggest that the universe is actively seeking to deepen relationships between its parts at the same time weaving new relationships between each part and the whole. Stars, gas, and dust cluster together to form galaxies. Species cluster together in ecological niches to form food networks. People cluster together to form new cultures. The modern world has woven the entire globe together through the internet and global communication. This process of increasing complexification and deepening relationality as a universal dynamic inspired Thomas Berry to express the phrase, "The universe a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects." Communion in this sense is an ongoing activity of connection and relationship happening within and all around us each moment.

On a personal level our matrix includes the relationships we have with our friends, family, and culture and with the natural world which surrounds and sustains us. Identifying our personal matrix and the matrix of our specific situation acknowledges that we are not isolated individuals but are embedded in a network of relational influences and supports that are present in every situation. We influence and are influenced by our choices and actions, so acknowledging the communities and relationships that make up our lives opens us up to new sources of inspiration, influence, and assistance we might otherwise overlook.

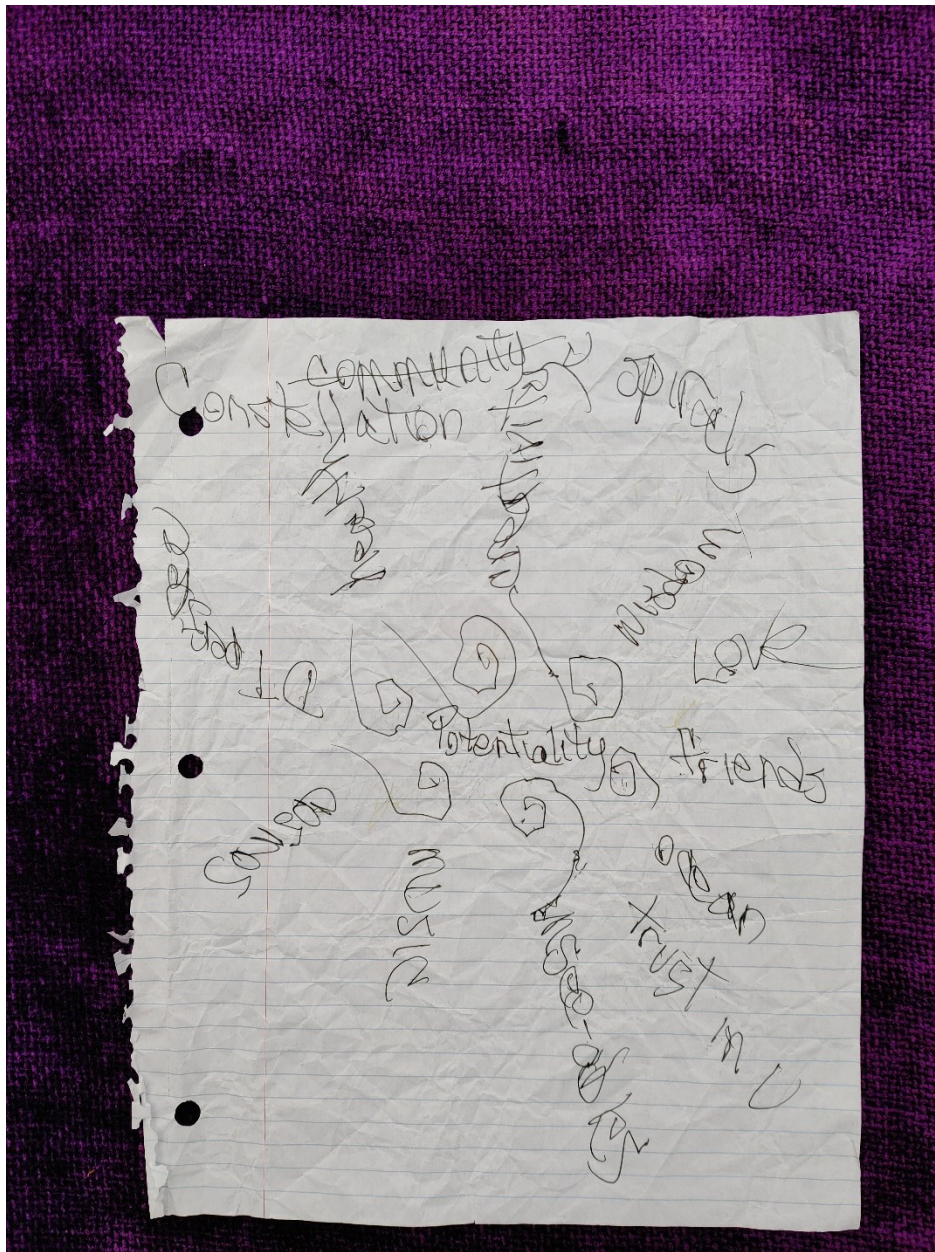
If the universe is a “communion of subjects,” then perhaps it is seeking greater communion and interrelationship as one of its active dynamics in every life situation. Identifying the set of relationships that make up a specific situation can help us to see where the situation is naturally trying to deepen relationality as an expression of its evolution. Once we discover where relationality wants to deepen, then our way forward with any relationship, problem, or situation is to *move in the direction of deepening relationality* as a way of aligning with the natural dynamics of the situation and the universe as a whole. When we take a step back to give a situation more space and breathing room (i.e. provide Context), we continue to *stay in relationship with* the situation so that we can begin to see and feel how its relationality wants to evolve when it’s given more breathing room and creative potential.

Marianne’s Matrix

As we talked together, Marianne described the matrix of her situation as the members of the studio, the relationships of the members to the studio and each other, and the studio’s relationship with the larger human community and the unique ecosystem of Monterey Bay. I shared with her that I saw her situation as a matrix of relationships, so that the overall view might look like a giant spider web, with the studio in the center, and all the members and living beings as nodes and weaves in the web extending further outwards.

I encouraged her to draw on a piece of paper how she sees and feels the matrix of the studio and its members. To my surprise, she didn’t draw the nested web that I was visualizing but instead drew a cluster of spirals grouped together in a circle. This showed me that we all have our own ways of visualizing and feeling our relationality, and to let each person express this matrix in a way that feels natural and resonant for them.

Her drawing looked something like this:



What I noticed right away was that she had chosen a collection of open shapes to represent each element of the situation. The spiral shape to me represents a two-way exchange with the environment, what's often referred to as an open system in physics and complexity theory. In these open systems energy and information can flow freely back and forth from the system to the larger environment so that the system and environment change and evolve together. All living systems are open systems since they need to exchange nourishment, information, energy and waste products with their environments. Had she drawn a different shape, such a closed circle, square or triangle, that might have expressed a different dynamic,

but her open shape struck me as inherently relational, with each element relating in an open way with each other element and the larger whole. It seemed to me that she had a great deal of openness with regards to her situation and saw her community in two-way relationship with her in this process.

As we reflected together on the drawing she had just made, Marianne became more and more excited, practically jumping out of her seat with enthusiasm. “Relationship is my jam,” she said, “I just love it.” Marianne is also a practicing psychotherapist, so relationships are not only her bread-and-butter but her jam too! Expressing and feeling the relationality of the situation as a whole that included herself and a much larger network, Marianne no longer felt alone but that she and the studio and all its members were all in this together. “I felt as if a great weight has been lifted from me,” she said, “I am no longer all alone in this situation, but I’m on a journey of discovery with all of us together. This brings me great joy.” It seemed that the way forward for the situation was not going to happen through isolated or top-down decision-making by herself but through active relating and sharing with the studio and its members.

What’s the Subjectivity?

Marianne’s feelings about the whole situation, the feelings and perspectives of the studio members, the collective feeling of the studio itself are important here. Reflecting on Thomas Berry’s quote earlier, if the universe is a “communion of subjects,” then the subjectivity and perspective of each individual and aspect of the situation are important elements to consider. Subjectivity in a Deeptime perspective means that every person, place, or being in the universe has a unique experience of the whole. All the elements of experience are included in this – the thoughts, feelings, sensations and perspective of each part are included and necessary for a complete view of the situation. Each one of us has a unique viewpoint in every situation, so to see the whole of any situation it is necessary to include everyone’s perspective and experience.

While it might seem unusual to think of a meditation studio as having a perspective, but this idea is quite common in fields such as organizational development where the “spirit” of the organization and the “temperature” of a group are commonly explored in that field of work. Additionally, indigenous peoples and the shamanic traditions around the world commonly relate to the

spirit or sense of aliveness of each aspect of their communities that includes the rocks, trees, animals, and even buildings, organizations, and other structures. These human and non-human perspectives are considered in any deliberation of these traditional communities and these cultures naturally and instinctively engage these diverse viewpoints. Many cultures around the world hold this inherent Deeptime Subjectivity as an integral expression of their worldview. Modern Western culture is now starting to appreciate and incorporate these ways of being and perceiving.

Marianne's Subjectivity

In contemplating the Deeptime perspective of the Subjectivity of her situation, Marianne immediately felt that she needed to meet with the members of the meditation studio community as a group to discuss and explore the changes taking place. She also felt the desire to include the Monterey Bay ecosystem in their considerations: would the current way forward with the meditation studio benefit or diminish of the community of life in which the studio is embedded? This question would also be a part of the larger deliberations within the member community.

As she shared her feelings, desires, and intuitions about the situation, I noticed that there was already movement towards Deeptime Action and next steps coming from her insights. It seemed that embracing the Deeptime Context, Matrix, and Subjectivity of the situation was itself a kind of action which effortlessly gave rise to new insights and movement forward from within the situation. This affirmed for me my original view that every situation, no matter what the conditions, is a complete subset of a creative universe and, as such, contains within itself all the resources, support, and guidance needed for its development and movement forward.

The self-organizing dynamics of the universe are present in every point within itself, so if we can learn to listen to each circumstance deeply, we can find sources of cosmic wisdom and insight we can align with to accompany the situation to its next evolutionary stage. This means being open to how things want to evolve, taking a step back to give them space to unfold, and to stay in relationship with them through the process. When this happens, we have the possibility of

partnering our capacities with those of the situation in service of becoming evolutionary and co-creative participants with the larger Whole.

Action

At this point, Marianne felt empowered, excited and confident in the next steps she wanted to take with the direction of the studio. She still did not know the ultimate fate of the studio and her work there. At the same time, she felt deeply connected to the process and committed to staying with the situation while deeply listening to what was freshly emerging in each step and trusting whatever came next. She now felt she was a full collaborator with the situation, with a new feeling of support and trust in whatever the universe revealed to her. This sense of support and trust brought a new kind of openness, and a willingness to let the situation unfold into new possibilities. "I just love being on a journey of discovery together," she reflected, referring to the feeling of collaboration and shared destiny that she sensed with the community.

In the perspective of Deeptime Action, our actions and participation are aligned with the movement of something larger than the situation or ourselves. We might call it a connection to a greater sense of wholeness or a feeling that we are contributing to something more than ourselves through our actions. When we are aligned with Deeptime Action, we feel we are helping the universe move forward in a new way, opening to more of its creative potential, and responding to a higher sense of purpose. This feeling of contributing to something greater naturally deepens our own fulfillment and that of others in the process. It's a win-win-win for ourselves-others-universe. I felt confident we were moving in the right direction as I was sensing greater movement and ease in our conversation and what was unfolding in our exploration so effortlessly.

This conversation had taken only twenty minutes, and yet an enormous amount of movement and growth had taken place. To me this shows the power of a Deeptime perspective to bring us into a field of space, time, and action beyond our usual everyday sense of these terms. Deeptime in these situations seems to be a deeper experience of time, a different mode of being than the linear time measured by clocks and calendars. Deeptime is a time not measured by clocks, but a time of creative emergence, a time that gives birth to hummingbirds and

galaxies, to hydrogen atoms and the dreams of animals. Deeptime is a time that has its own innate wisdom and path of unfoldment.

This capacity of Deeptime to bring together the cosmic and the personal came together for me a few days after my conversation with Marianne when I came across this image of spiral shaped cyclones near Jupiter's north pole:

https://cdn.sci.news/images/enlarge4/image_5795_1e-Jupiter-North-Pole.jpg

When I showed this image to Marianne, she immediately said "That's it! That's the pattern of spiral shapes that I saw as the matrix of my community of the meditation studio."

The resonance between Marianne's psyche and patterns in the larger cosmos suggest there is a deep cosmic patterning being expressed in a Deeptime perspective. Synchronicities, spontaneous insights, and helpful connections are all signs of our connectedness with something larger in our daily lives. These occurrences and patterns seem to be ways the deeper Universe is making itself known to us, saying "I'm here with you! You're on the right track...keep going!"

Considering a Deeptime perspective in our lives is a way of aligning our personal journeys with the journey of the Universe. In this Deeptime perspective, we can begin to see that our individual challenges, triumphs, and growing edges are all part of the 13.8-billion-year unfoldment that is the Universe. It is this larger Whole which has given birth to the world around us that is present in every life situation, always seeking to collaborate with us to find new pathways forward together.

Marianne and I reflected on all this quietly together, still stunned by what had transpired in Deeptime during our conversation and afterwards. "This is the life I want to live," she said, "as a partner in the life of the universe." "Me too," I replied, as we sat there together rapt in awe and wonder at this mysterious and deeply nourishing journey of unfoldment we call Universe.

Stephan Martin is an astronomer, educator, and Director of the Deeptime Leadership and Wellbeing program at the Deeptime Network (dtnetwork.org), which empowers individuals and communities to embrace and align their lives with an evolving and interconnected universe. He can be reached at steve@dtnetwork.org

Marianne Rowe is a psychotherapist, meditation teacher, and founding member of the Monterey Bay Meditation Studio (www.montereybaymeditation.com), which offers classes and teachings to help people cultivate conscious response and relationship in a changing world. She can be reached at marianne@montereybaymeditation.com