

AMA Convergence – An Experience Report by Moana Pfleiderer

The title of the invitation for this year's "Convergence" of the AMA project was "Societal Transformation as Spiritual Practice." AMA stands for "A Mindset for the Anthropocene" and has existed as a collaborative research project and experience space for over 10 years. As part of its activities, the AMA project has offered a community of practice for its network of



friends, colleagues, and fellow travellers. This group met regularly online over several months to provide a space for learning and exchange on the role of inner transformation in the context of sustainability. After a large conference in 2019, the four-day Convergence in Potsdam was the first in-person gathering since then. This made the reunion all the more joyous on Tuesday, September 10, 2024, when guests from all continents arrived in the ballroom of the RIFS villa in Potsdam.

Laughter and chatter filled the air during the first lunch. The room buzzed with excitement as people who had only known each other through a screen now met in person. My heart beat faster with eager anticipation.

Tom welcomed everyone with the thought that we would be "creating a playing field together" over the coming days. During the check-in in the large circle, the atmosphere was relaxed and a sense of warmth began to settle in. One participant expressed the atmosphere beautifully, saying, "It's so special, I feel like I can be myself here. I see so many faces laughing, which is not often the case, especially not at conferences," capturing the circle's energy. Another shared a reflective sentiment that set the tone for the days: "When I sit here, I feel like in a concert – and now the music can begin. I arrive here from thinking, to sensing, to being."

The first day was entirely dedicated to getting to know each other. The weather was wonderful, with autumnal sunlight shining through the leaves of the large oak tree in the RIFS garden. People stood in small groups outdoors, chatting. It was time to exchange names and learn about different connections to AMA.

We participants were invited to share our own stories, to talk about the inner and outer transformations we were experiencing. Many



women spoke up. Experiences were shared, and resonances emerged. There were first “Aha” moments, where experiences and stories began to intertwine. The “Open Playground” was launched, a space for unstructured time. A Chinese participant and long-time AMA ally led a Chinese tea ceremony, there was dancing in the basement, the Flow Game was offered by a Flow Game Host from Brasil, and people enjoyed Tom’s marble run or table football. Everywhere, conversations deepened the initial introductions.

The day ended with a reflection round. One participant’s conclusion summed up the first day: “We are not here with an agenda; we are here with a purpose. Holding space and experiencing what’s possible in it. There are subtle seeds that can flourish when there is no agenda.”

The second day began with a grounding moment in the large circle, hearts open. After a reflection practice led by Valerie, a recurring element throughout the event, participants went into various workshops. The theme of the day was “Stories of Tension and Integration.” It’s hard to put into words all that happened, but the experiences of the morning were diverse. In the villa’s large hall, improvisational theatre was used to playfully explore the art of constructive building. In a smaller room, participants mapped their cultural birth and life journey. In another room, people drank heart-opening and connecting cacao in the form of a ceremony. In the garden, a constellation reflected the relationship with the more-than-human world. In the basement, a Bohm dialogue led participants into a sense of collective consciousness. A colourful mosaic of experiences that could not have been more different.



When the group came together in the large circle afterward, there was a contemplative silence before tension arose, as it came time to link the different experiences. Some returned fulfilled and relaxed. Others were frustrated and irritated. A feeling of disturbance and tension between the various workshop experiences dominated the room’s atmosphere. The dissonances palpably reflected the complexity of the world we live in. What does it take to make collective experience meaningful? What do we need to make it meaningful? One thought offered was that perhaps it’s about naming and integrating complexities and differences rather than separating and excluding them. The practice of holding inner space for the simultaneity of all that is.

The afternoon was inspiring and powerful. Keynotes by Ioan Fazey, Violeta Bulc, and Mark Lawrence opened a deep and rich space for a conversation about the tension between personal meaning-making and worldly engagement for sustainable change. Many things found a place here: the courage to listen to one's own intuition, the friction with existing structures and boundaries, and the sheer joy of life's diversity – stories of tension and integration. The day ended, and a lively hum remained as groups gradually left the room. The theme of the second day stirred many things up and brought uncomfortable topics to the table. Many questions remained open, and they would work through the night.



Thursday greeted us with a bright, clear autumn morning. Many things had settled overnight, and the mood was calm. The theme of the day was finding and strengthening one's own resources and each other's. The morning was dedicated to an Open Space. With music and playful ease, topics were gathered.

Then suddenly, ALARM. Forty-five phones simultaneously sounded the German government's emergency alarm. A deafening noise. Power structures became visible. Shock. Tears. The theme of war was suddenly in the room. The emergency alarm caused an abrupt energy shift, and the Open Space became an emergent space, with two new sessions forming in response to the new situation.

Everything went differently than planned. The topics of war and death stirred many things that needed space. In the Open Space, various conversations and experiences emerged that wanted to be deepened. Yet disappointment also arose. Some people felt left alone with the issue that particularly troubled them and found no resonance.

Then the weather suddenly turned autumnally beautiful instead of rainy, and after lunch, there was time for a collective walk to Heiligensee. Upon reaching the shore, two people jumped into the water, others climbed a tree, some lay on the ground, and others leaned against a trunk. The intention was to let go of what no longer served. Together, each in their own way, in nature.



Back at the villa, Valerie led a journaling session with the question of what had been a resource over the past days. Experiences were shared in the large circle, including the two unplanned sessions that had emerged from the shock of the morning. One group explored the topic of death and dying. In the large circle, gratitude echoed, and a sense of sacredness emerged. The other group held space and “sat” with everything that was present in the room. No avoidance, because in light of the world’s situation, there can be no turning away. Unfinished processes found closure within the small group.

Other impressions and resources included: A poem that had been written during the days was recited, and the scent of magic filled the room. A birthday song was sung while the birthday “child” said goodbye with a sunflower. Laughter and tears. Stories of co-creation and resonance were shared. One member of the circle experienced a miracle and told us about it, deeply touching everyone. The essence: “In every human being, if addressed with sincerity, there is the seed of love.” An experience report that gives hope. Breaks and healing are part of the collective experience. The experiences became more peaceful and gained meaning. For some, puzzle pieces came together, and the big picture became visible. Others remained in the middle of the story, the transformation process, with the meaning still hidden. What united everyone was the gratitude for the AMA community of practice.



The day of resourcing ended with an improv show. The actor gave body and voice to the collected and condensed impressions of the days. The essence was deep, questioning, unknown, a mystery. People were here to learn to listen to what lies beyond words and

concepts – AMA or AMMA, the Great Mother? Powerful and gentle. We are called to be gentle and courageous.

Farewell was the energy of the fourth and final day together in Potsdam. The check-in was playful and creative, and familiarity and connection filled the room. Much had moved in the four days. There was an opportunity to ask for help, and small wisdom councils gathered around those in need. A fishbowl was the final large format to hear voices about what had been experienced and was still alive. Embodied knowledge and the ontological question of knowledge generation were highly valued. It was meaningful and powerful to invite this dimension of knowledge into a research institute, while also holding space for not-knowing.

The days were full of ambiguities. They were personal and intellectual, painful and joyful. There were games and playfulness. It was shared: “I have never been so raw in a place,” and “I can bring all my identities in an authentic way.” Different cultures, generations, and gendered socialization patterns were present in one room. The experience of expansiveness, and also how uncomfortable it can be to be human, was shared. Within this lies the possibility of seeing the beauty of life amidst all the challenges and friction – saying yes to the whole experience. The reflection of one friend: “Without the struggle, it might not become a resource and feel transformative.” Many tears. Deep gratitude for being able to be present with everything. The feeling of being seen, heard, and supported by all the people who made up the space. The question was asked: “Is it naive or visionary to believe in a world without borders?” The immediate response: “Isn’t it powerful? Wouldn’t it be naive to think that business as usual has a future?” Another participant described the AMA gathering as “a journey of the heart. It can expand so much; it can hold so much.”

My personal experience is the embodiment of the non-binary, symbolic of all that was on the table during the four shared days: pain, suffering, laughter, dance, joy, grief, triggers, trauma, magic, and holiness. The world, the time together, each one of us is full of ambiguities. We came together as researchers, connected by a shared vision, to explore what societal transformation as a spiritual practice means. Despite all the ambivalences, we stayed and embraced one another. Something happened, and that's why the eyes shine so vibrantly during the farewell.

