



Out of Restraints:  
Inspiration Inside-out  
& Upside-down

## Out of Restraints: Inspiration Inside-out and Upside-down

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*Ray Holland*

*Only after one hundred days of consistent work, only then is the light genuine,  
only then can one begin to work with the spirit fire.*

Lu Dongbin, The Secret of the Golden Flower.<sup>i</sup>

# Introduction to Restraints

*How can anyone enter a strong man's house and steal his possessions, unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house. Mathew 12:29*<sup>ii</sup>

My father was *the most emotionally shut-down individual* I've met. I think that's saying something, given that I've provided therapy to hundreds of men, many of them attorneys and engineers and predatory businessmen. Even in his nineties, my father remained an emotional cripple. So, imagine, my mother who developed little of her own sense of independence marrying this man. Without emotional insight, they then attempted to raise a boy who was energized, uncooperative, and outspoken (as children are known to be).

Surely that's going to go sideways.

I was five years old when I was taken to the very Irish Dr. McGauran, a family practitioner who employed my mother for a while as his office manager. This was in an age before attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder became a diagnosis. Today an expert would say I met all the criteria, but there was no Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) at the time. As I reflect on this boy from a Heart-drama perspective, I would neither diagnose him as "attention deficient" nor "disordered," But the doctor did his best. I was semi-formally determined to have *a problem with listening to adults*. But there were few remedies and no medications to be prescribed.

Do you know who your parents turned to for help with thorny problems when the authority figures could not guide them? In my family, adults naturally looked to my great Aunt Lil for the fix. She was the matriarch. She was also a kleptomaniac. How do I know? For one thing, she worked at a psychiatric facility, and she stole the silverware that we used for years at family meals. The name of the institution was stamped on the spoons and forks. It is astonishing to remember that.

She also had access to what was, at the time, cutting-edge psychiatric technologies, and she found the perfect remedy to solve the problem. She smuggled out a physical restraint, the solution for those who do not listen to adults and cannot restrain themselves: a strait jacket.

I imagine at some point the concerned adults met as a kind of informal treatment team, and they decided this was the best way to keep me anchored in bed at night. I imagine my Aunt

Lil arguing the straight jacket was efficient. She was all about efficiency in all manners of things, finding the quickest way of *getting things done*.

Today we would consider this abuse, but it was a different time. Just a few years before, my mother's doctor (a different doctor) told her to take up smoking cigarettes because she was gaining too much weight during her pregnancy. She did what she was told, and it worked. She lost weight, and I was born prematurely and underweight. My mother died many years later of cancer, continuing to smoke even on her deathbed.

There are much worse stories than mine. But that's not the point. I want only to assert that these events in my childhood helped to establish a filter on the world, beliefs and feelings and body sensations that strapped me down, bound and wrapped me up for years. Even now, when triggered in a familiar way, I recognize pressure in my chest and stomach, my arms weighted and useless. Embedded in this memory network, my body tells me I'm powerless, frightened, and I'm certain that my cries will go unanswered. This is the warped legacy of trauma.

*Where do we go to be released from our restraints?*

One of the most effective pathways out of my childhood bedroom was via the window, an escape hatch that was available only as an adult.

John Nolte, a master psycho-dramatist, who has literally directed thousands of such rescues, pointed me to the way. The pacing was deliberate. I had to get activated enough emotionally to cry out. *I must rescue this child!* He then pressed me to gather a rescue team, and set things in motion, prodding me to feel it in my flesh as I pushed against the antagonists of my childhood until something shifted deep enough to scuff up the imprints that words upon words upon words—talking therapy—had not reached.

I've been to that dark bedroom several times in dramas, but I was truly warmed up that night. Hot with emotional pressure. Looking back, I see I had been in a frozen state for months. It just did not let up. Until this portrayal of release, I was in a long slow flashback. I recognized that afterwards. A triggered state. The Barriers to my freedom were communicated in feelings, through a somatic ache and muscle tension, by way of vivid memories and dreams, via relentless disparaging thoughts and a pervasive self-loathing. When the enactment was complete, I was thoroughly emotionally spent, but I was also free, lighter in being.

Many of you will have no previous knowledge of *experiential* work (at least the term). You have not heard of *ego-state* therapy or, very likely, encountered psychodrama. So, I have provided a glimpse into what an enactment can look like in drama. But be aware that **Heart-drama, the process I am offering as a way out of our restraints, may look nothing like this story of my own wounding. Unlike psychodrama, Heart-drama does not occur in a group context but is self-directed on a stage of creative imagination;** and, since you are the director, it always unfolds in a way that is right for you, and at your own pace.

All experiential methods have some similarities, central among them they do not necessarily reflect factual data. They depict collisions between, or representations of, both conscious and unconscious influences, and they have the entanglements of metaphor or, even, symbols. It seems to me this is a mystery in the work; because the more openly and spontaneously you reflect on your life, without expectations or preconceptions, the closer you move to what is clear and understandable, while, simultaneously, there is an unveiling of complicated intersections of multigenerational patterns, archaic knowledge, repetitive events, silently communicated messages and energies that cannot be grasped and made into formulations by the cognitive mind. Multifaceted and many layered, you both discover the truth of what has happened to you, the impact of specific people, places and things, and you become initiated into a realm of experience that cannot be fully articulated by the utilitarian language our society favors.

As we inquire courageously, we find some explanation of the *why* we have shown up in narrow unsatisfying ways. For me, the drama I have sketched above helped me understand *how* I became a portrayal of Emotional Constraint itself and inhabited this limited character for decades. Barely embodied, disengaged from the heart of humanity, like many of the people I have worked with in therapy, I couldn't deeply feel the world in and around me, and so was unresponsive to what this time demanded of me. As you might understand, Constraint was the one character I could enact convincingly given the experiential stage I was born on, until I finally woke up to reality in all its complexity and found a release, one buckle at a time.

Heart-drama can give the same release as the best psychodrama, if often less theatrically.

## **E.X.P.A.N.D.**

Heart-drama is founded on a process I call EXPAND. It is a self-directed approach that I believe can be used to help individuals navigate difficult emotions and challenging situations,



and to find peace from adverse experiences. EXPAND is an acronym that stands for Enlarge, X-  
pose the Barriers, Pain into Ritual, Alluring Future, Narrative of Meaning, Develop or Wither. I  
will explain that in some detail later.

The inquiry can seem familiar, for example, to several deep therapies but also to reading  
“spreads” in the Tarot or using coins to cast hexagrams in I Ching for divination, or playing with  
more archaic practices such as Alchemy or engaging with a shaman (if you happen to have one  
available); but I view EXPAND as similar to what Carl Jung called “active imagination,” a  
method that involves consciously entering into a dialogue with the contents of one's own  
unconscious. In *The Red Book*, he depicted this as a form of inner reflection that allows  
individuals to access and interact with the symbols, images, and archetypes that reside within  
their psyche. By actively engaging with these elements, individuals can gain insights, discover  
hidden aspects of themselves, and foster personal growth and transformation.

Like Jung, I see daily introspective practices as a creative tool for individuation, the act  
of becoming a fully integrated and authentic individual. It is also a way to bridge the gap  
between what is unconscious/unprocessed and what is conscious/intentional, facilitating a deeper  
understanding of self and others, loosening our restraints and promoting psychological  
wholeness.

To use these effectively we must cultivate states of heightened awareness, presence, and  
self-compassion. If you can do this, and do nothing else, you will reduce stress, anxiety, and  
other negative emotions, but it is only one step (Enlarging) on the larger stairway leading to our  
healing and growth. Distinct from the EXPAND process, I differentiate Rituals as ways of  
responding to your increasing knowledge, actions to reinforce and best serve your growth and  
healing, and I have included suggestions in this book under the heading Pain into Ritual.

Interacting with images and memories and narratives can ignite the innate ability we all  
have to heal ourselves and be more empowered. This conviction is rooted in humanistic,  
existential, and experiential traditions which emphasize the importance of personal  
responsibility, self-awareness, and self-expression. I will offer examples and suggestions, but I  
always encourage exploration and experimentation, because you are the best director of your  
own dramas (as you are the best director of your life). Rather than following a set protocol or  
script, let your Inspiration—your Inspired Self—work with all parts of you, reminding you of

your journey, both the suffering and the joys. Make this personal and morally right for you, paced to your window of tolerance. Develop your own artful methods to EXPAND.

Though every person I have directed in their drama has a different language and specific hopes, I believe what we all want at the end of all our exploration, to borrow from T.S. Eliot is to arrive where we started and know it, or, more specifically, to gain insight into what has been happening to us beneath the surface of both the interiority and exteriority, the inner and outer world. Only then can we fully make intentional choices.

# I. The Prelude

“Any glimpse into the life of an animal quickens our own and makes it so much the larger and better in every way.” John Muir <sup>iii</sup>

My first dog was named Lucky Merriweather. He was a liver-colored Springer Spaniel with scraggly hair that stuck like fur potholders to the furniture. When I was a young boy, he was a solid, steady force for me. We were puppies together for a time, and, with some chagrin, I admit that I’m the one who abandoned *him*.

Though I’m not claiming he was smarter than other canines, he had one very notable talent. He was a keen observer, with a sharp eye ever mindful of the front door. An enthusiastic opportunist, whenever he sensed an opening, he raced toward freedom with the flailing of his paws against the linoleum floor to break out with one nudge of his nose against the screen door. Running free, leash-less, was his drug of choice.

Several times a week, because he was “my dog,” I was assigned the ritual task of returning him and sobering him up, but he was a swift antagonist. He also relished this hunter/hunted game, excitedly waiting for me in the front yard, letting me come close, less than an outreached leash from him, before pivoting, jumping with all four legs, and dashing off, leading a chase around the dog berry bush and down the road, out of the neighborhood and into the far fields to the Big Pine.

I stalked him relentlessly. Hide and seek. He taught me, if you can’t find Luck one place, then you will find Luck somewhere else. And he’d wag his tail when discovered in the most unlikely spots, as if wondering what had taken me so long.

If that can be called the Lucky Principle, over the years, I’ve learned some version of it operates in affairs of the heart. The Seeking part of us wants to—needs to—stop plodding the worn familiar streets. We can’t afford to be trapped by our Pain and Self-deception. We cannot afford to bemoan the loss. We have work to do. Open our eyes! Think like a playful animal that has been too long forgotten, but still has hope. Spend time with a presence within that demands for us to be free, to seize at the crack in the door.

In my work as a therapist, I’ve found that Heart-dramas can be that crack in the door if we have the courage to push at the barriers that keep us housebound. When we do this, it’s not Luck that we chase. What we Seek from the depths is healing...a mending of the hidden

woundings we carry, so the veil can finally drop, and we can recognize what is True and Beautiful.

### **If I Knew Then . . .**

I hold that if I knew then what I know now, I'd have been a companion worthy of my childhood dog. Maybe if my parents had done their own emotional work, attempted their own Heart-dramas, then the end of this Luck's story wouldn't have been so predictable.

But we were all dysfunctional and unable to comprehend it, and just too focused on Self-deception and protective avoidance. So, what happened to Luck? My older sister became pregnant at fifteen, and soon after relocated to Germany to be with her new husband who was just old enough to join the military. My father was having an affair with a coworker, and was "working a lot," while my mother was stuck in bouts of depression, with fears she was losing her mind because her husband frequently told her so in those exact words.

I was left to my own devices. My mother used that phrase frequently, "Okay, I'll leave you to your own devices." The phrase might mean something different today, but this was a time before our present-day vast array of technology. She had a tone that sounded loving, pleasing, with a bit of acquiescence, as if she was allowing me my need for personal time. Like she was inviting me to take a road less traveled. "Go and self-actualize, young man!" Or something. In real time, it was confusing. Looking back, I see she was dissociated and was just making an empty awkward comment, unable to say, "I'm out of here," since it always preceded her locking herself in the bedroom.

By eighth grade I did find some of my *own devices*, stealing bottles of whiskey from a local tavern and drinking to black-out with a few fellow delinquents. No adults seemed to notice.

Of course, I had lost track of Lucky, leaving him to old age without much awareness on my part. When he escaped one evening, and no one went to look for him, he was killed on a distant highway under the wheels of a tractor-trailer.



### **Lord Lucky Merriweather**

*Long dead, my dog, Lucky, chased rocks  
I threw, even down into the beaver pond.  
He would pluck those balls clenched in his teeth  
Off the muddy bottom and come up gagging.  
He had a furious commitment to the game,  
As if the Joy was worth drowning himself.  
He carried sticks the size of small trees  
Tripping over his front legs, with such serious  
Devotion to the ridiculous.  
He bounced on his hind legs through the tallest brush,  
Full on shivering, reckless and lacking grace  
As if the greatest prize was scattering birds,  
The shock of beating wings flung skyward like angels.  
I wondered if he even had one well-reasoned  
Thought in his flop-eared head.  
But some nights I dream of him still. I am, again,  
A child. As we are rising over moonlit fields together,  
Flying, impossible limbic companions,  
And my heart remembers how he belonged to me  
And I to him, as if the best love could be delivered  
With bad breath, on a coarse tongue.*

## **What I Learned**

*Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up  
Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear.  
William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* <sup>iv</sup>*

A dose of shame can sometimes soften the defended Heart, make our weaknesses stark and unavoidable, remind us of our shared humanity. But it appeared that was not something anyone in my childhood understood. Perhaps this explains why getting beneath the surface,

beyond what is apparent, has become my life-long quest. Though I didn't always understand what drove it, my Heart knew I was seeking healing from the depths. And the child, the artist, the lover and visionary within desperately needed to be seen.

### **What I Learned from My Father**

My father was better at manipulating the world than understanding it. He told me to *work hard*. What does that look like in real life? It looks like digging a hole large enough for an inground swimming pool. This is not a metaphor. My father wouldn't have understood metaphor; and he never really explained why he was driven to do this grueling work of putting in a pool in the backyard. I was in elementary school, and still a soldier in his army, conscripted into his fantasy that floating in chlorinated water would bring him happiness. We spent an entire summer shoveling. At a certain depth, the hole filled up with ground water. Thick oozy slop weighed down each scoop and throw.

He got pissed off because my throws were not on point. *There's a way to use a shovel. You should know that!*

Of course, there were backhoes available, but *hard work never killed anybody*. It was late in that summer of 1965, just as school was about to start again, when he broke down and rented a sump pump and backhoe. He always used that phrase, *breaking down*, meaning giving up reluctantly, doing something that you just never want to do or admit to having done. I don't know if it was common for people of his Greatest Generation to speak in such terms, passing along "knowledge" in repetitive phrases. Much later, I learned from Robert Bly that unless your father has done his own work, then he can only teach you his temperament, not his wisdom. <sup>v</sup>

More recently, I learned from Dr. Lain Mc Gilchrist that my father's expressions are a sign of a left hemisphere dominance. Left is the division of the brain that's better as the "emissary" not the "master." It specializes in cliched and paranoid references. This part of us is "almost a tool" to pin down fragments rather than utilizing the power of language to convey "a spark of the heart." <sup>vi</sup>Even without ever knowing this science, as a boy it didn't take me long to realize, *breaking down to the fact*, that my father's words were shallow and ill-informed.

I had stopped idealizing him much earlier than that summer we dug a hole in the ground. I stopped when I kept getting hurt, certainly by the restraints and by his belt. But it was not because of the physical pain (well, it was that too) but because he was so dismissive or outright angry about my pleadings for mercy. If you think I'm being unfair, I assure you I've tried not to

hold on to these things. My mother taught me that. *You can't hold on to stuff because it'll drive you crazy.* She practiced what she preached. She never held on to anything, including herself.

### **Constructive Criticism**

But to *give credit where credit was due*, another one of my mother's favorite phrases, my father did show me how to *keep my head down*. If you didn't, then you were sure to *get pummeled* sooner or later. Getting pummeled. I recall a visceral memory. Stepping off the school bus in seventh grade, surrounded by a group of older boys. Ricky wanted to fight me, they said. Of course, *men fight when they are challenged. Don't show weakness. Man up.*

Ricky was learning boxing, and he must have thought I was a somewhat large and soft object to practice on. I barely knew this kid until he left my face all bruised and swollen. I didn't even try to punch back.

*You need to keep your head down. You look like a punching bag*, my father said. He next described some unlikely physical move I was supposed to use in a fight, to throw off the opponent. A wrestling move. Like using a shovel, this was something *I should know!* When he learned that Ricky was physically smaller than me, he lost interest. I was a *lost cause*.

Following this experience, I practiced tightening my body and walking more *manly*, projecting that I was ready for a fight, shoulders raised, burying my fear and stripping away any movements that could appear weak or compassionate, god-forbid feminine, and prey-like.

### **And More Advice**

You need to get a good job with a salary that will allow you to buy a house, not just any house, but the *place of your dreams*.

Some houses, of course, are *deal breakers* because the countertops aren't granite. If there's carpet in the living room, then you *can't live with that*. It needs to have some resale value and *location, location, location. A million-dollar view.*

Of course, if you're *handy* like my father, then you can fix or renovate anything, probably with tools that you find around your house already. You don't want to *break down* and go buy something new, especially if you're just going to remove a couple walls for an *open concept*. *Hard work never hurt anybody. Sweat makes the man.*

After the house of your dreams, you need a boat, a fishing boat, or a speed boat. With a lake house, or something on the beach, so close to the ocean that the tides carry the surf right up

to the deck where you sip on your beers. In the driveway you're going to need a large truck, like a Ford 150, with a cab big enough to entertain guests.

You've probably heard all of this or something similar: if you work hard, you get the things you want, then you can go on trips, like *real vacations*. That's why you put up with demeaning and soul-flattening stuff at work because management is *always out to get us*.

*Organizations screw everyone over.*

*Workplaces are all like that.*

*The union isn't much better with all its ridiculous rules.*

*Everybody is in it for themselves—end of story.*

My father again, of course. At one point, he was a union buster, while his father (my grandfather whom I never met) was *up there* in the union in Providence Rhode Island. *Up there* as a boss was a location you wanted to get to, but my father didn't trust that place nor the people in it.

I'm not sure what I was supposed to learn from all that.

Maybe you've not been contaminated by parental temperaments, perhaps parental phrases are not quite so intrusive in your mind. But there's one thing we probably have in common. You have Work to do, and so have I, and likely (of course, I'm just guessing), your father didn't inform you—maybe no one, not one man or one woman in your life has shown you—how to do the Work. Even how to recognize what work you need to do in order to feel a little less crazy. But we all need to do it, dig into the dramas that have been chiseled into our bones. You might get pummeled, but we can't afford to keep our heads down.



## What I Learned from Talking Crows



### 3 Witnesses

*Drugs are a window but not a door.* Ram Dass

I assume you know psychedelics have been used in trauma research recently, which might seem a radical idea but in fact it's a really old idea, the stuff of shamans. As a therapist, being allowed to bill clients for such work as a regular part of our Medical Insurance Industrial Complex, *now that* would be truly radical. I admit I had a lot of experience with psychedelics during my rebellious years, starting when I was thirteen, I used LSD, very frequently one summer, visiting Forest Park in Springfield, Massachusetts where it seemed you could get anything in those years, and, though, at the time I thought this was just recreational use, i.e. fun, and they *were* novel, these experiences also opened me up beyond the restraints of my childhood—restraints aren't just a metaphor here, of course. You might consider me playing the familiar role of Rebel, except there was no one noticing my rebellion.

To warn you, I am going to describe one macro dose of mushrooms. I promise not to bore you about the predictable geometric patterns and electric colors, “the death by astonishment” as Terance McKenna has described DMT (though this was much less than DMT). <sup>vii</sup>I do agree that anyone who describes their trips always seems self-indulgent, even foolish. Feel free to skip it.

Psilocybin was not available often in the nature park that served as my pharmacy. So, after I procured some, I was anticipating an exciting journey one Saturday; that was my only deliberate intention for the day, bringing a *good set* and in a *good setting* as Timothy Leary suggested, but, an hour in, I was bent over with unbearable pain, radiating from my gut through my limbs, my fingers claw-like. I couldn't hold still, pacing around, then finding myself dancing about like an ancient warrior preparing for a hunt; I distinctly remember that this was the thought at the time, though you might question what I, a suburban teenager, would know about ancient warriors. Which would be a good question.

My parents were gone for the entire weekend, leaving me alone in the house, integral to the good setting. So, I was free to dance myself out onto the porch, hoping that a dose of Nature would be a distraction from the pain, but then immediately a crow stopped by to tell me to "get over it."

"You know nothing about pain. You don't know the trouble I've seen." Something like that, though the message was conveyed without words, with some Caw, Caw, but I got the point. There was even a contemptuous tone, like I was not worthy of pity. It was very pointed, and then a bunch of other crows gathered to reinforce the message. The flock spoke in unison, "Buckle up Get ready! Forget your fun...Get serious. These are serious times. And this is traumatic pain."

It was strange medicine. Normally you might not expect it to be helpful. I would never say to a client doubled over in somatic wounds, "This is not the half of it. We live in a traumatized world. Get ready to feel even more like crap!" Of course, anything would sound different coming from birds, but their message helped me in some way that is hard to put into language. The pain suddenly took on a different texture, a different color or a different geometric shape. It was less personal. Existential. Maybe the understanding was a thousand years old. Maybe more. And I thanked them, oddly enough.

That was the start of approximately 2 hours when I left the porch and spent much of the time in my parent's master bathroom having a conversation with God. Or to be more precise, I was the one talking, incessantly, acting out, shouting sometimes, shifting between different parts of a very old Heart-drama. I sounded crazy. I knew I sounded deranged.

*The Shadow is not necessarily always an opponent...like any human being with whom one has to get along, sometimes by giving in, sometimes by resisting, sometimes by giving love.*

Marie-Louise von Franz<sup>viii</sup>

In the bathroom, peering into a huge mirror over the double sink and counter, one moment I was yelling with the voice of my father, or yelling back at him, or speaking like my mother, or a sibling, sometimes softly with the voice of a crow or making sounds from other beings. Or I was multigenerational trauma personified. Shape shifting. I felt tiny in an infinite space. Then, for moments I was the little boy in a familiar room forced to look at ridiculous wallpaper with cowboys and horses and covered wagons. We lived in a different house by that point. We moved continually in fact, “geographical cures,” and I had forgotten about that ugly wallpaper, recognizing it in this mushroom moment as a representation of the testosterone generated fantasy my father projected. He probably picked it out and carefully pasted it on to the wall in my bedroom. When restrained in thick canvas, drenched in sweat, I was a 5-year-old boy with nowhere to go, and nothing much to look at but the walls decorated with his father’s unresolved stupid shit.

Sometimes I was with a mushroom deity, or near to some lesser but powerful entity. This gave me a break from the action, and I could step back into a quieter space. But the message here wasn’t gentle either. What I understood was something like “Don’t blame me. I’ve provided you Beauty enough, this astonishing sacred creation, and all these wonderful companion beasts, and I endowed you with the capacity to discern between reality (Truth) from religious and political and cultural nonsense. I keep trying to save your ass. And you (meaning human beings—it wasn’t personal to me but included me too) keep finding brand new ways to inflict more pain and destruction.”

Today I would concur wholeheartedly. As a species, we cry out with blame and resentment, and with brutality and do not go gently into our latest vindictiveness. Not all of us, of course, are brutish. Many are doing the work we need to do to live in a more compassionate heart, but I won’t deny the gist of what seemed like wisdom.

### **What I Learned in the Grandeur of Nature**

*If self-development and spiritual development are part of the same spectrum of consciousness and not simply antagonists then early damage to the former can cripple the emergence of the latter.* <sup>ix</sup> Ken Wilbur, *The Eye of Spirit*

Not long out of college, I spent one lonely year in the capitalist mecca of San Diego, which left me heart-broken by the greediness and the untethered ambitions of my generation. With some renewed hope, I fled to Vermont where I had received my undergraduate degree, to

immerse myself again in Thoreau and Emerson, Blake and Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Whitman and Theodore Roethke, and e.e. cummings. These were all writers that spoke to me. I recited lines of poetry like mantras and felt that these authors had something to say to my heart about beauty and meaning and what was real.

I took a job at the Brattleboro Retreat, an ancient psychiatric hospital, and bought a “renovated” cabin deep in the Vermont woods as my refuge. To spoil the end of this story, I soon discovered the woodsman’s life was unlike my romantic and idealized visions. Nature did not welcome me. In fact, I soon found resistant barriers to my transcendental urgings.

My learning began when, much like an archaeologist painstakingly digging back into the past, I removed layers of wood trim from the walls and ceiling of the cabin, discovering that the beams that would have supported this idyllic structure did not exist. They were an illusion, a figment of stability. By the time I finished my exploration with crowbar and hammer, I was surrounded by piles of pine boards. It was then that I fully grasped, with some astonishment, how little support was holding up the second floor and loft.

I had a similar experience as I began stocking my little farm. Layers of self-deception and magical thinking were pried loose, revealing a starker reality. Indeed, this could be the overarching metaphor of my young adult life, as I learned, for instance, that ducklings mature and, at some point, will be capable of flying out of the pen I built for them. All at once, in unison, together as one, just as I finished feeding them one morning, the flock rose out of the wire boundaries, rising skyward.

How had I not thought to put a top on it?

My two goats (mother and son) soon taught me that they had an intuitive knowledge of how to dismantle any fence I erected with wood, nails, and metal screws. Many days I found them standing on the deck, staring in the window at me, quite self-satisfied. Even the rabbits escaped their enclosures and found cozier accommodation under the small barn.

Fiona, my one sheep, was my nervous beautiful girl. She was a spherical creature, white mostly, but with a crochet pattern on the top of her head: white and brown and pink, with large gold eyes.

I found her one afternoon dead and stiff with rigor mortis, and I spent the next few hours with an axe on the icy dirt, trying to dig a grave deep enough for her. I was shivering and sweaty

in my ragged leather coat. Distraught. I remember with clarity reciting an e.e. cummings poem over her. I was some mad Shakespearean character, filled with unbearable shame.

*what if a much of a which of a wind  
gives the truth to summer's lie;  
bloodies with dizzying leaves the sun  
and yanks immortal stars awry?<sup>x</sup>*

Later an old Vermont farmer told me that a ton of native vegetation was toxic to sheep and my land was surely filled with many plants that could have killed her.

### **Dangerous and unconscious**

All this deconstruction of back-to-nature fantasies happened in near sub-zero temperatures and sometimes heavy snow and ice storms. In a startlingly beautiful landscape, I discovered how little I knew about the difficulties of existing in the real world outside of contemporary conveniences. My ignorance and preconceptions were removed like the rotting soggy insulation under the floorboards, until *there it was*—and the truth was bleak. I was ill-equipped to live like this, to even exist for long without electricity and running water on only a foundation built of found rock. I had to return to civilization, or at least what passes as that in our world. Maybe my experience of freedom lasted longer than Thoreau's experiment at *Walden Pond*, but not by much.

Many years later, I acknowledged my youthful efforts to return to a state of nature as a kind of “spiritual bypass.” This phrase was coined by John Welwood in the 1980s to describe a way of using spiritual notions and preoccupations to avoid more difficult, more painful psychological challenges.<sup>xi</sup>

I left Vermont with a psyche stripped, de-romanticized, more aware that I could not take care of even a small handful of animals. The creatures were uninterested in my state of mind and heart. They were foreign beings with their own notions, temperaments, and survival needs. And my endless stream of spiritual grandiosity made me dangerous to them.

## **Making a Difference**

Fast forward. Vermont far behind me, I became a supervisor in a drug and alcohol rehab program when crack cocaine and the AIDS epidemic were decimating communities of color in central Florida.

As an undergraduate in Vermont, I had wanted to be a journalist, but the corporatization disillusioned me. I shifted focus a couple of times and graduated with a degree in literature and creative writing, flirted with the life of a scholar, but, in that role, I felt suffocated, depressed, and imprisoned in my head.

Eventually, some years after San Diego, I came to recognize that clinical counseling gelled my desire to make some positive difference. At Nova University in Ft Lauderdale, I pursued an advanced psychology degree and a counseling license with passion.

I became well read, well trained, and very much inspired by the long history of social workers who had had the courage to right wrongs, to call out systemic injustices and racism, to highlight the obvious roots of multigenerational dysfunction and poverty, and to fight against the disenfranchisement of immigrants, the powerless, and the traumatized.

By the time I was hired into a supervisory position, I was intellectually and skillfully prepared, my cognitive computer stuffed with observations and information from a seemingly endless array of giant minds in the field. I could name developmental models and recite intrapsychic theories on command. I knew how to recognize defense mechanisms, to carefully consider ego-development, methods of self-regulation, and modes of conflict resolution. I could make use of operant methods, attachment research, and cognitive theories. I was educated in object-relations and moral development. I was trained in structural and strategic family therapy and hypnotherapy, gestalt techniques, brief therapies, and long-drawn-out therapies.

I was at home in a world that required curiosity, empathy, and a fervent desire to look beneath the surface, to understand the mental maps that needed to be unearthed to foster my clients' insights. I gained confidence in perturbing whole family systems to release members from self-sabotaging and injuring modes. I taught crisis counseling in all its forms; led divorce seminars; and spent hours in hospitals with rape survivors, in shelters with defiant runaway teens, and in jails trying to redirect those awaiting first arraignment into mental health courts and drug courts.

And I attended a lot of funerals.

I list all this only to make the point that when I began work in this agency I am about to describe, it felt like it was a consequential place for a young professional, until *leadership* changed.

## Leadership

An ambitious new CEO decided to use an aggressive business model, and he set out to devour other agencies. He got his face on the cover of several business magazines celebrating his growing empire and his management efforts. He announced he was constructing a system based on continuity of care. Unfortunately, in practice, this meant that the organization was quickly becoming too big to care, while negatively impacting hundreds of desperate people, mostly poor, who could not care less about business models.

The company instituted a productivity system to buttress the appearance that the organization was “business-like” above all else. Productivity isn’t as straightforward as you might imagine. Not to get too deep into weeds, but you do have to wrestle with difficult questions to decide what is “productive” when providing therapeutic services. Giving medications, providing transportation, handing out information, for instance, are activities that are easily recorded. But how do you document, with any validity or clarity, treatment outcomes when addressing complicated problems such as addiction or mental health?

At the time, the Diagnostic Manual (DSM-II) was transforming from a quick and dirty way for one professional to describe to another the behaviors of their client into *the Bible* for insurance companies. What had been a somewhat usefully organized list of descriptors and behavioral symptoms became facts—*the one reality*—magically. Anxiety meant you had a genetic predisposition. Depression was a disease that needed to be treated as you might address chronic diabetes, with constant and lifelong monitoring. Personality disorders were described as strange character traits that were passed on by genes from one generation to the next. Maybe these couldn’t be cured exactly, but they could be managed by an army of case managers and psychiatrists and medication in a continuity of care.

DSM’s information about substance abuse (SA) was particularly hard to align with people in our program. The entire treatment field was confused. Most times SA was treated like a different animal altogether from mental and emotional difficulties, as if addicts needed to be cordoned off, even housed in different locations. In the community, citizens were also baffled. Addiction was caused by your genes? Was it a disease? A moral failure? A con game perpetrated by seasoned criminals. Maybe addicts needed to get beat up a bit. Locked up. Or maybe they needed to be humbled by an angry religion.

In this climate, it took dedication, compassion, and wisdom as a “provider” to see who was in your office seeking help at any given time. It took creativity and out-of-the-box treatment, an understanding of multiple models of psychological and personality development, and systemic insight, and it took camaraderie to work solidly as a team.

The “productivity” system, adapted from some other realm, was certainly not built from the ground up to seriously measure anything meaningful in the field of mental health and substance use. The technology of the time was clunky and time intensive to exploit, and at odds with the clinical work, but it supported the marketing of propaganda and statistical nonsense spinning out from a growing bureaucratic superpower.

Financial compensation for therapists had always been paltry compared to many professions, but after the bureaucracy was in firm control the work became even less attractive. To just begin to cope with the increasing demand to feed the computerized beast required staying past your shift, working longer hours every day to enter in behavioral data that did not describe the clients, their issues, nor gauge their progress or lack of it.

Garbage in, garbage out. When productivity was determined to be “low,” the management team hired Bob. We have all known our own Bobs. He was brought in from another geographical area to whip the therapists into shape because they clearly were gumming up the machine.

### **What I Learned from Bob**

The crises on-the-ground related to substance abuse and AIDS were rapidly intensifying. Clients were frightened and dying in astounding numbers, getting incarcerated, treated as pariahs, selling off their possessions to get drugs, losing marriages and jobs. But that wasn’t Bob’s concern. He imposed a rigid outline to use for clinical meetings and demanded that the conversation be limited to his agenda. This had the immediate impact of stopping all meaningful case consultation. He next began targeting and openly demeaning a seasoned psychologist at the table. My colleagues’ insights were met with smirks, cold stares, or undisguised viciousness.

Bob’s next notable act was to put up a huge erasable white board in the waiting room, alphabetizing the therapists by name and listing our productivity scores. I think he borrowed this from a car dealer as a technique to motivate us by using shame and fear, pressuring us to focus on the data points that senior staff were using to uncover the slackers.



I also suspect that Bob thought he was instilling competition but, in fact, the reverse happened. It brought the clinicians together, as we met secretly to discuss the clients and our methods of dealing with what felt like daily combat in a war zone.

My most searing memory of Bob was when he barged into a therapy session to apparently supervise me, to *show me* how the therapy was done. At the time, I was meeting with a middle-aged black woman who had once worked as a teacher in the local school system. She had lost any meaningful employment months before because of addiction.

Bob barged in, plopped himself down in a chair and encouraged this woman to cry, to “get your emotions out.” This reminded me of those celebrity TV reporters who arrive at a disaster and glibly ask survivors, “So how are you feeling?” or “What will it take to get closure?” She had been awake for several days on crack and had sold everything she owed to feed the addiction. She had lost all her significant friends and relatives to death or incarceration.

She was rock-bottom, but she wasn’t a blind fool. She stared at him coldly, the way I imagine she looked at all white, sociopathic racist bureaucrats.

I’ve worked in a few agencies that slipped like this into foolishness. The pattern is predictable. The few leaders leave and are replaced by managers. The vision becomes something ultimately irrelevant. Community members become consumers to whom we sell a reproducible product that’s measurable but much less effective. Those who are easy targets get blamed for the deterioration. Eventually the talented professionals leave while the remaining, less confident ones go to ground or actively perform acrobatics to impress the clueless bosses.

Maybe we could have used a union, but this was a right-to-work state. Maybe the grandfather I never knew would have had some suggestions.

I had been running several dynamic groups at the time with other young and creative therapists. It was demanding but rewarding work. We all sought excellent clinical supervisors outside the agency, devoured new information, and tried anything that might be useful. And we were making a difference. But we all quit around the same time. Why would we stay? As a final act, as my two-week notice played out, I funneled some forty plus active clients to a therapist I respected in private practice. It was the most productive thing I could think to do.

### **We Are not Cows and Birds Are not Real**

*The finger pointing at the moon is not the moon.* Buddhist teaching

What else I have learned: small egos thrive on circumstances that feel like a crisis. Calamities allow these self-obsessed inner personalities—and their outer manifestations—to declare that any “different” way of experiencing life and reality is naive and foolish or dangerous. Outright lying is not often repudiated because it’s voiced in places that exhaustively stoke gaslighting and bullying. To belong to such a group or community requires heavily-stylized performances—almost a form of Kabuki—often with cruel denouement.

The same phrases are repeated; the same ego states demand attention; the nastiest emotional energies become unstoppable currents. They are addictive to us. Conflicting (often meaningless) beliefs build in a back-and-forth push and pull, finding too often a crescendo in physical violence. Until, at last, it feels enough like a pervasive emergency that control is justified, by any means. And, on the stage of such actors, a slight of hand occurs, a scapegoat is found; the less powerful are the ones who ultimately are made to submit to authority and to keep their mouths shut.

The burgeoning forces of factionalism on social media mirror what I’ve seen in organizations, in families, and within the psyches of the wounded and terrorized. In our culture, there has been a lessening of respect for kindness and wisdom, a turning away from democratic systems with almost gleeful defiance: *What are you going to do about it?* Such provocation is met with, if not fawning, a protective submission: *There is nothing to be done.*

## **Experts**

Maybe you noticed it, the summer of 2020, when the CDC put out a serious warning about Ivermectin, a medication effective for lice (applied to the scalp) and for use with livestock as a deworming treatment (injected, commonly).

“We’re not cows,” they said. But the feed stores just couldn’t keep their shelves stocked.

You may also remember “doctors” warning that ovarian cysts were caused by demon sperm after having sex with reptilian aliens in your dreams, or something to that effect. In our society, nothing seems to disqualify *the experts*.

While I was looking at the Covid stories again, I got sidetracked and started to follow a thread about birds (some birds/all birds?). They apparently are not birds but technologically sophisticated drones that spy on us from the trees. I eventually learned that this is a movement, *Birds Aren’t Real*, young people claiming that spy drones disguised as everyday birds’ recharge

by landing on powerlines. It's satire and meant to be so. But so far down the rabbit hole, satire is no longer even registering.<sup>xiii</sup>

I've no doubt if humans live long enough, if we don't kill each other or destroy the planet during one of our frequent mass-psychosis events, then there will be spy technologies that are indistinguishable from wildlife. So, Bird's Aren't Real are just a little ahead of their time like all great prophets. More than anything, I'm fascinated by the level of paranoid delusion around us, worthy of a long stay in the local psychiatric unit. Such a disconnect from reality is not going to be helped by a brisk renewing walk in Nature (something I've otherwise prescribed for unreasonable anxiety), not when the forests are filled with feathered monitoring machine/devices, recording every step, each facial expression evaluated remotely by an unnamed agent of social control.

### **Everyone is an Influencer**

Obviously, I am trained as a mental health therapist, and this may be a career quite different from yours. But, if I'm not mistaken, even if you have no understanding or interest in therapy, you too know the utter frustration of working within an organization that seems preordained to miss the point.

I've been in numerous *treatment meetings* in different geographical locations where we seemed to be missing something, despite our best efforts. Usually, the setting is a non-descript and somewhat worn table in a tiny conference room. I associate these spaces with fluorescent lighting, illuminating the stage for massive amounts of projection, and the predictable enactment of job titles and social roles.

This treatment team I'll describe here was better than most.

I'm the assigned therapist, the person who has spent many hours with the "patient." Supposedly I'm here because I have experience and am skilled clinically. But my case presentation is met with unregistering eyes.

People at the table make references to systems of classification that sound important, primarily the DSM, which has become increasingly influential over my lifetime. Indeed, it's the language of our time, used to describe *things*. Not just a list of behaviors, but factual *things* that exist in the real world, vaguely hereditary. By adopting its tone of certainty and pseudo-scientific lexicon, our meanest gossiping can sound like a diagnostic assessment.

At this table:

Patients are borderline.  
I wonder, *Does that mean they were traumatized?*  
They are addicts.  
I wonder, *What pain is driving it?*  
They are narcissists.  
I wonder, *Are they just describing someone who is mean spirited?*  
They are resistant.  
I wonder, *What part of this person is resistant and to what?*  
They are “needy.”  
I resist, *That’s not really a trait, is it?*  
They are co-dependent.  
*I know that’s not in the DSM.*

I’m not feeling smug as I tell you this. I’m no different. I spent years playacting in these rooms. Ultimately, I know all of us have good intentions. But, here, these “diagnostic” words seem like insults, though the language offers the impression that every speaker is saying something carefully formulated. Adding to the stage craft, presentations follow a format. We start with a psychologist who explains test results or a psychiatrist who has some special summary that triggers the confirmation bias. This is a medical model at its core after all, and doctors go first.

Nurses have their say.

Mostly it’s all anecdotal.

But there are always nods of knowing. There are always the expected funny statements that might derail the group into a stream of consciousness or gallows humor.

I’m not blameless here. I specialized for a time in flat-affect sarcasm. Like rolling my eyes but with my words, my tone. It creates a moment between my delivery and a listener deciding if I’m serious or not. My family of origin taught me how to survive by being the clown, the sardonic fool. Cynicism kept me well protected. I learned this *so* well it has taken decades to unlearn it.

Everyone here is a skeptic, even when they are drinking the same Kool Aid as hurriedly as their coffee or chilled caffeinated beverages. Everyone is also very clever. You can only survive at this table if you’re clever enough to repel any attack.

Who mounts the attack?

There are regular chart audits usually performed by someone in the organization who has a checklist and little knowledge of the bigger picture or of the practice in general.

There are information systems you battle that will change periodically, always seemingly to make matters worse.

There are insurance companies that have their own special dictates. They can withhold until the financial coffers are hollow-eyed and wasted.

There are professional organizations that can take away your privilege to make a living.

There are the clients, patients, consumers (every agency has their own language to describe the people we help) who can sue you. Even if what they claim is nonsense, your life can be turned upside down and made miserable by a complaint.

There are the family members (client families, and maybe your own family members) who suspect you have no idea what you're doing.

There's the internal critic that agrees that you have no idea what you're doing.

There are supervisors who are supportive—unless anyone complains, then you will likely get thrown under the proverbial bus.

There are your co-workers (loosely called colleagues), who suspect that you're violating some law or principle (because deep down they suspect that they probably are, too).

Then there's the basic mistrust by a lot of people in our culture of *the work*.

Not to mention the lack of pay. The lack of respect. You just need to accept that you will never be compensated for what you do, nor will anyone realize what you've done, even when you've blossomed with experience into an astonishing healer, even if well informed and always going above and beyond the call of duty. So, you get a little bit paranoid. You're ultimately alone. Whether in a small agency or large organization, you're essentially in private practice. At least you practice privately. You close the door. You face the next wounded soul.

### **Everyone is Selling a Product**

In traditional treatment, however well meaning, the expert maneuvers the client into adopting their “evidence-based” theory of the case and the interventions that dovetail with it. It's no doubt salesmanship. Don't kid yourself. In traditional addiction inpatient treatment, the “patient” is supposed to be completely (or nearly so) incapable, because the brain's *reward pathway* has shot-circuited, by definition, impairing decision-making. When a person struggles, the answer is always to increase treatment, the length of stay, the intensity of focus. Don't address trauma immediately or other sources of pain because that makes it harder for an addict to

stay sober. Avoid family history or adverse childhood experiences. Keep them caged in a “program” until the brain calms down.

In mental health treatment, as practiced in huge corporations selling those well marketed continuums of care, the caregivers aren’t therapists. They are “case managers” who leverage the “consumer” through megalithic psychiatric systems. If the consumer struggles, then the provider surrounds the individual with increasing supports and reevaluates their medications—avoiding family history or adverse childhood experiences (sound familiar?) and what has been too long denied or minimized (because it’s a chemical imbalance).

In traditional child and adolescent treatment, it is similarly limited in focus. In one organization I worked for (briefly) in St. Petersburg, Florida, on my first day I was handed a caseload of several hundred children and teenagers. It became quickly evident that I was employed to keep the paperwork current so that the young people could continue to be medicated by the team of psychiatrists and physician assistants. When I attempted to sift out the systemic dynamics (in families, schools, churches, etc.) and the social inequities that were re-traumatizing these children daily, such a tact was not well received.

Now *to give credit where credit’s due* (my mother’s relentless voice), some of these systems can be helpful when we’re in crisis. When the prescription is carefully and artfully tailored, their costly services might help us feel less miserable, but they are not designed to help us grow into our own Truth and to recognize Beauty.

## II. A Way of Inspiration

Looking back, knowing what I know now, I see how dissociation is an outcome of living in a traumatized society. Often pressures start in our families with our parents and siblings with demands that we follow rules and roles, without questioning them; and, to accomplish this, we disown parts of ourselves and aspects of reality. For so many vulnerable years we need our caregivers. Our survival is at stake. We must learn to fit in, even if it means we become blind to what is in front of us—that is called a negative hallucination, when you cannot see what is in your face. A positive hallucination is seeing things that are not there. We learn that too, and I suspect we all have some positive hallucinations that we share multi-generationally, which we might recognize, if we reflect, as a culturally sanctioned and socially enforced betrayal of ourselves. We are, after all, one of Nature’s strangest experiments. Our human capacity for metacognition, the ability to step back from instinctual wiring, and to be dampened to the non-duality of our deepest shared reality. Unlike our animal companions, we can exist largely cut off from the foundation of Being. This has provided us with gifts but has also left us prone to estrangement and insanity.

As I’ve tried to portray, my parents lived according to their clichés, and though not brilliant, not even half-baked, they were effective at sculpting my limitations and my boundaries. Perhaps your parents had sufficient education, social significance, and enough awards on an office wall that they proclaimed what is real or right or bad or healthy in more logical words and persuasive arguments. Backed up by their “heritage,” some families openly and grandly carry the receipts (usually these are financial receipts) that delineate success from failure. Who is worthy and who is not. Clearly their children must carry on in the same way on the same path or become an overt disappointment (or a threat).

Or, on the other hand, maybe the opposite was your experience, expectations were spoken in languageless fog, but still conveyed distrust if not sanctioned brutality; or maybe, another possibility, you were left to your own devices, as I was, and to the weightlessness of a leaderless family, randomly yanked here and there by anyone or anything with sufficient gravitational pull.

## When Reality is Unknowable

Let me start with the notion that reality is unknowable. Which means that what a person believes is, at best, a guess and, at worst, propaganda.

You likely have read that contemporary scientific models of the universe are strange and incomplete and suggest that we may never fully comprehend this universe, Inside-out and Upside-down. What we intuit as the state of things is not always what it is in fact. As a small indication of that, consider that various information arrives to our senses at different speeds; so, if a dog barks, we receive the visual of the dog barking first, the light waves arriving almost immediately, tactile sensations and auditory signals arriving late to the game yet our nervous system “bonds” these parts together to create one moment in space/time. It’s not fully understood how this occurs, but our brain bonds the different speeds, waves, data, and properties into a seamless moment, presenting it to us like a movie.

David Hoffman elaborates on such examples to a logical conclusion when he uses the metaphor of a *headset* suggesting that evolution has evolved a virtual-reality apparatus that translates some of the data in the universe (from an array of data greater than we can receive) in a way that “makes sense” and allows us to get around, to live a life and take care of our basic needs.<sup>xiii</sup> But it doesn’t necessarily tell us anything about what is outside this virtual world. It has even been suggested that the experiences of time and space are properties of the apparatus, rather than fundamental properties of reality.

If our brain invents what we experience as time and what we see as space, then what we know is the “reconciliation” of multiple data streams creating the virtual movie that downloads through the body into the right hemisphere. Some of the information that underlies and feeds this experience comes from deep mammalian emotional circuits that have developed over the millennium. Individually, these energy fields become anchored to (associated with) specific people, places and things. So, for instance, if you are bit by a dog then anything you identify as a dog can be associated with danger, triggering anxiety, and so we learn to move away from “dogs.” Or, if we can’t move to safety, the sympathetic action systems engage, unconsciously and automatically: fight, flight, freeze, submit.

In development of a specific human animal, we move toward more complexity as we grow, our essential sentience evolves into a more evolved “proto-self.” The proto self is a concept I am taking from Antonio Damasio.<sup>xiv</sup> It is not an identity, certainly not a personality, but



a *felt-sense* that answers 2 survival questions...1. Is the world safe or a threat? 2. Am I sufficient/OK/lovable? Original answers come from our lived experience before we have any capacity to step away from this *being-in-the-world*. Before the left hemisphere came online, there was nothing else; embodied, emotionally in this world as experienced through the apparatus, we were in it.

In the right hemisphere lived experience, if we know the world is loving and we are lovable, then we live in a natural state of loving-playfulness. In this state, as we continue to develop and elaborate our innate capabilities, we evolve more ability to step away, more intentionally to be, to experience a way other than “lost in it.” We begin to live in Inspiration which requires such *dual awareness*...spontaneous immersion and some capacity to step out of the immediacy, giving rise to a wider, deeper, higher, understanding and the potential for a creative response. Growing Inspired through the lifespan, we can develop the artistry of Loving-Work, grow into Powerful Work, and visionary Powerful Play.

### **The Headset of Trauma**

Whenever, however, it starts for any one of us in this society, in our homes and neighborhoods we learn a virtual (dissociated) reality. We are born with the machinery to play different games and to embody multiple avatars. As we run the same pastimes day after day, setting off a neural firing pattern over and over, we wear tracks in our nervous system. Of course, everything changes in our time and space, and different circumstances, different ages, different challenges and offenses and successes require different patterns, unique avatars...until we all contain multiples, parts and parts of parts, players that remain in the game long beyond their usefulness, stored somewhere in our psyche and primed to show up again (as triggered states and voices in our head).

Far beyond our family, we are immersed in extraordinarily elaborate games in our schools, our peer groups, our churches, in the media messages on constant loops, and careers etc. The programs continue spinning out narratives. We download complicated and conflicting points of view and form new actors (internal and external) to punish us, if we resist the scripts, and to provide incentives to press on and on.

### **Our Mammalian Heart Cries Out**

For many of us, the places we pass through in our development are environments in which our mammalian hearts cry out to belong—yet our bodies may not feel safe. Many of us are

aware in our guts that we live in the dangerous prowling ground of predators. Though radically different in obvious ways, our current life can be as perilous to us as the prairies our ancestors shared with lions. Today, a modern version of hiding in the bush, we learn to survive the terrain by living dissociated.

We Play at Love, Work for Love, Work for Power and/or to Play at Power. These are survival energies that animate roles, forming a few finished and varnished characters that seem to be effective in the Fallen World, allowing us some “solution,” as long as we live outside ourselves, in a protective defense. Dissociated and safe. We can settle for a character’s life in someone else’s story, and never claim our innate powers to see, to know, to hear, to question, to refuse and to imagine, to disagree etc. Dissociated and safe. Fractured from life, but secure in the bubble of a busy and mindful intellect or in mindless escapes.

Yet, we do not have to stay caged by trauma and the traumatizing social pressures, by our protections and delusions. As I plan to suggest, there is more beyond the normal (but truly Abnormal). We miss our Truth and Beauty. There is an Inspired World, but it is not out there. It’s not separate from us. It can’t be adequately known when we pretend to be an unfeeling driver watching the world through a windshield. Life is not a material place that we can passively study or actively control or just cruise aimlessly through. Inspired life is beyond the conditioned headset. Beyond what most of us know.

I believe our way to a fuller Inspired ground is through an experiential process: an expressive-creative work with a deliberate intention to pierce the dissociation by encountering and questioning the Barriers until we can re-claim our true purpose.

## A Way

*Psychodrama enables the protagonist to build a bridge beyond the roles he plays in his daily existence, to surpass and transcend the reality of life as he lives it, to get into a deeper relationship with existence, to come as close as possible to the highest form of encounter of which he is capable.* Jacob Moreno & ZT Moreno <sup>xv</sup>

In a Heart-drama, like psychodrama, we seek to descend to the deepest places, “to get into a deeper relationship with existence,” as Moreno (the inventor of psychodrama) puts it.

I use the term Heart-drama here because I want to discuss a self-directed process designed to be used in personal reflection and reinforced in daily ritual. Unlike psychodrama which requires space and many members to participate, as well as a trained director, our stage

and the directing force in a Heart-drama is the creative imagination. Since everything takes place upon this mental stage, you won't need to purchase an elevated platform and have rows of seats for audience members.

At core, the Heart-drama stage is any place where we can invite what *needs* to be in the spotlight, what risks encounter.

To explore the dramas of your life in this way, you will need to give yourself permission to go where you need to go, which is often to the origins of Pain and Self-deception. But I do not want you to think that Heart-dramas are only dire tests of courage. The stage is equally a setting for comedic improv, a place to experiment playfully and mutinously, or to honor the past.

Our drama begins when we recognize there's something that's warmed up. It wants our attention. We have an *act-hunger*, as psycho-dramatists name it. This just means we are ready and willing to interrupt our daily scripts and rehearsals, to bring our imagination to Heart of the arena, to give precious time and attention to what has been heretofore ignored.

Once we have concluded a bit of Work, on closing, we may want to carry our insights to an intimate setting, in coffee with a safe friend in a heart-rich dialogue for instance. If you do later wish to confide in someone, determine who will share your vision and avoid those who will not understand. Carefully discern who is worthy. As we get more accustomed to this Work, we may find it much easier to retake to the stage in a therapist's office, a recovery group with members we trust, or to a quiet moment with just one person who is curious and compassionate enough to be in communion with us. Since this platform is ultimately within us, what therapists would call the locus for *insight*, it will appear any intentional time we open the curtain to what has been playing out in the deeper recesses.

I hope to offer you an opportunity to know as little or as much about my own creative vision and the therapeutic understanding that underpins this. You are free to use my painting images as some use the Tarot or journal Morning Pages as described in *The Artist's Way*, without concern for any underlying metaphoric system or theories. Feel free to go straight away to reflection and to creative expression. Or devise your own approach. To be honest, I typically skip around in a book until I can determine if it speaks to me. Later, I will make an effort, or not, to understand what the author hoped to convey.

## Stories

*I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's.* William Blake<sup>xvi</sup>

Under the sway of gender binary cultural stories, women learn to hide their anger until they can take no more, while men respond, “*I guess we are so different that I will never understand you,*” justifying pulling back like boys afraid of mother. Brainwashed in such a narrow cultural account, partners may have little awareness that there is a wider field, a majestic landscape with astonishing possibilities.

To go deeper than the appearance, in Heart-drama we will question both the little and the big stories that reinforce the systems that enslave us, and we seek to get beyond them. We must start by listening carefully, separating out different streams of thoughts, feelings and actions, hearing voices clearly and specifically until they are distinct. We then set out deconstructing what we have always known but never challenged so directly. *Little tales* are more easily questioned because they are not held tightly, while the larger tend to be wound around our worries of offending someone or being laughed at or even banished from the tribe. Some of the *Big stories* may have lived as assumptions in the background, even though (as you reconsider them) they may be dangerously authoritarian, telling us only the strong will survive, and *we* must defensively protect *our* race, or sex, religion, socio-economic status, etc. Some Big stories are religious and intergenerational, bound to the history of a specific culture or cult. *God gives and takes away. When we die, if we have maintained our position in the hierarchy, we go to a better place.* Etcetera.

### Barriers as storytellers

We learn quickly that any manifestations and personifications of stories that we recognize as characters before us are not listening. They *just are not into us*. Some may lack compassion altogether or have very thinned-down emotional wiring and so fail to plug in. Whether we encounter these entities—energy forms as personalities—Inside-out or Upside-down, we give them names that reflect their language and dress them in their Halloween costumes. We know intuitively what spiel to expect from the Outlaw, Deviate, Workaholic, Colonizer, Android, Destroyer, Etcetera.

When these characters appear powerful, it generally means they are stuck in runaway feedback loops with a well memorized script (maybe even sometimes convincing). They can hypnotize us, hold sway—even hold us captive—by their insanity, hubris, and/or threats (veiled

or explicit). As unconscious beings, they do not acknowledge ego limitations because they do not recognize themselves as vulnerable, maybe not even human. In the extreme, they devolve into a species more reptile and predacious than any creature born from a mammalian womb. When they are especially fired up, these energy forms are a disturbance in the psyche and/or the society, warning us that something needs to be corrected. Intervention is required.

Inspiration will reliably point our attention to Barriers that block integrative functions and Nature's homeostatic processes. Inspiration perceives beneath the appearance to the dissociation, mindless amusements, and compartmentalization integral to the lifestyle of minor gods; Inspiration questions all oracles that pronounce big or small narratives as special truth. Inspiration differentiates, names, restrains and contains, what will undermine us, just as the Greeks knew that the Titans must be battled, overthrown and replaced by a more Inspired vision.

To engage in a meaningful encounter with inner and outer personalities requires Apollonian consciousness. It requires discernment and courage to intentionally counter the pull towards murderous rocks in a convulsing ocean, encountering the Sirens but not being dashed to bits. This is our Inspired work. I also think it is a spiritual calling, predicated on what Jung would call the *religious function*, the capacity to relate to a deeper dimension of life, to hold to what is Divine, what is real and enduring, without being dragged into a prison of the Fallen underworld. The modern psyche, distracted and dissociated, seems in need of such an active, open, accepting and compassionate spiritual challenge.

Indeed, in an age when many stories big and small are sold to us by social dominators, encouraging a cult of followers to collective callous action, traumatizing the defenseless, I think those of us who are weary and suspicious of being forced-fed a transcendental truth could be more open to a personal quest filled with mystery, demanding courage, creativity and heroism, on a path that has potential for healing, meaning, and growth.

### **What I learned from my father, at the end**

Though the real nature of my parent's relationship was inscrutable to me, as parents' intimate lives are always mysteries to their children, there seemed some flashes of authentic love and connection. I have role-played about my mother's loneliness. She focused on what others wanted, which gave her comfort and something to do. I base this on the fact that, after their retirement, my mother often invited extended family for dinners and holidays. And my father was always there in the background, busying himself, keeping things organized, washing dishes

and managing other tasks that kept him out of conversation. Maybe his love language was *acts of service*, if this was love. The “strong, silent type,” he was always more comfortable living in silent movies that went out of style in the 1920s. But I think the family-gatherings provided a scaffold for my father, allowing him to act beyond his stage of emotional development. like a crawling infant learning to stand by holding onto a parent’s finger, in this case my mother’s finger. Or that is just my attempt at explaining (to my bewilderment) how he could play a somewhat convincing role as grandfather when he was so uncomfortable with his own children.

After my mother was diagnosed with cancer there were definite moments when he showed a willingness to be doting, his worse Narcissistic weapons out of sight, his certainties quieted. He seemed genuinely frightened about her leaving (though he of course did not go so far as to express it openly), and certainly there was loyalty and a willingness to be in the role of a devoted husband, housekeeper, meal-preparer, administer of medication for the closing scenes.

Don’t imagine dying-of-cancer was a brief episode. She languished, in and out of remission for years. And, maybe, she was just in an understandably low spot when she shared with me feelings of chronic disappointment with her spouse. On that particular evening, we were alone together for a moment when she told me in an exhausted voice that my father had described the two of them as *soulmates* (which is a romantic phrase hard to imagine coming out of his mouth). She was softly scoffing about it, with tears in her eyes, pointing to the hurtful absurdity of it.

But appearance can be a veil to reality, so my point here is that I will not minimize their complexities as human beings nor invalidate the evident changes over their years together, both mellowing as they aged, softening their defenses, my mother more assertive, my father less wounding, showing more kindness, less pouting. Now, this represents one of the disorienting dimensions of Heart-drama—or any deep reflection on childhood traumas. The people we role-play are often no longer the same person (if they ever were that person we bring on stage). This can raise loyalty issues, doubts. Guilt. Until we figure out—and this is the wisdom I gained from my father in the end, or more accurately, not *from* him but *because* of our strained father/son relationship. I learned this: I was hurt, and the dramas I endured were thresholds to the surplus reality I was warned up to explore.

Such exploration has its own logic, which is why there is absolutely no need to share your experience or act out justified revenge on anyone who is still living or dead. Blaming or

seeking forgiveness or making amends following a bout of Work is a common error in the Fallen world. Confusing *symbol* with the obsessively literal, *archetype* with reality, forcing a current conclusion back into history like fitting a round peg into a hole in a universe without a definite geometry. The drama is ultimately not about them and, ultimately, none of their business.

Projecting our current state of affairs, our current interpretations, our realizations and prejudices alike, is not a way to “grasp” the past. As a better response, consider a counter-intuitive protocol used in EMDR to deal with out-of-control Anger. You access your rage, imagining the perpetrator of your injury meeting the worst homicidal narrative you can envision—burn them in Hell if your sympathetic nervous system desires it, smash them into a gory mess, turn them into broken bits by feeding them slowly through some viciously sharp farm equipment, whatever matches the level of Pain the rage is defending you from...until, through the magic of bilateral stimulation, energies shift on their own, a doorway to enlightenment cracks open, some deeper level of spiritual understanding downloads, acceptance, often an unexpected compassion if not for the specific person who injured you, then for all of us, because we are such defective animals, capable of much cruelty.

That is what we wait for after we Work. *Waiting* can be like holding a sharp thorny pinecone in your sensitized fingertips until Inspiration, perhaps personified as a nurturing form bathed in and purified with loving energies, arrives to take the burden from you. I agree that it is Inexplicable; how can that happen? But it can happen in Heart-drama, as well as in other therapies that invite X-posing the Barriers, feeling the Pain and practicing the Rituals; the framing shifts strangely, as if the polarities (constructed so long ago out of chaos to hold up your mythic world) collapses. Ancient pillars are yanked down. And out of this breakdown a new ordering emerges to anchor something more generous, Truer and more Beautiful. I believe that did happen for me in the Work I’ve done regarding my parents, especially in relation to my father wounds.

### **Arriving where we started**

To return to the ending of the story that I seem to be avoiding, whatever changed in my parents’ marriage was less fundamental and decisive for my father. I had been willing to believe that much of his Narcissism had been carved away forever in the machinery of marriage, like the ending of a Dr. Seuss book with the Grinch heart growing in size; but maybe being detached, self-preoccupied and ill-tempered was more like a cancer stunned into remission by some

chemotherapy that life administers to men in predictable and traditional marriages. In this case, when my mother was gone, withdrawing whatever had sustained or maintained him, he relapsed hard. Became furtive. Deceptive. Irritable. Secretly draining his bank account to rescue criminal/drug addicted women, professional victims who prey on delusional, lonely, and horny old men. Easy cons with fantasies of rescuing the damsel.

This behavior was telling a different story than any he had ever shared with me. Rather than the restrainer of spontaneity, he focused on liberating. I did have the thought that there was a new pattern emerging or something ancient reemerging, or a voice he could no longer screen from view now in the spotlight. In a sentence, I think he was saying there was something stimulating, erotic, that he felt for women who had the ability to deceive him. The parallel I will make here is probably not relevant. Still, it seems synchronistic to me. If not exactly a rhyming of history, it is a bit of free verse that uses similes and metaphors and odd literary devices, and rhythms that don't follow any fixed design. Here it is, I find it relevant in some irrational way that when my parents were looking to marry each other, both left first marriages abruptly, immediately excommunicated from the Catholic church and from their origin families, but in the 1950's it was not easy to find a place to divorce. Nevada *was* such a place, and so they lived for a time in Truckee, moving into a half-renovated chicken-coop where I was born. The poor wooden structure was all they could afford to rent. This might almost be the plot of a Hallmark movie. A young couple sacrificing all for love. And maybe it felt like that.

My father found work as a meter-reader, traveling around the forested hollers all day, while my mother became a shill at a small casino in Reno. She worked in a brick-and-mortar structure, in a job that no longer exists, as a type of con artist, pretending to be a poker player while, in actuality, she was a paid employee. Her job was to start games, to keep failing games going, to play with house-money, to seduce and push the other *actual* paying players over their limits. In other words, she was a decoy, like a wooden duck drawing a flock in to their financial demise. I know she was very pretty, and she had the quality of women who have been trained for fawning, a survival strategy that sometimes reduces a woman's injuries she could otherwise suffer in a male-dominated society. But it can also be a magnet for some men.

You might see where I am going. In his last years my father reverted to this old outline. Though the earliest origins of this tale and details are locked in cold storage and never ever opened to anyone as far as I know, the best I can imagine, he was alienated from family, existing



for a time as an Outcast, and in such a state, he could only engage women in a pseudo relationship that involved deception, probably for sex, pitifully allowing himself, a master of gas-lighting, to be gas lit. Self-deception leading to self-destruction. Now that is a strange tale that I could have written myself as a young man before experience interrupted that familiar plot.

I want to return to the idea of forgiveness. I am suspicious of those who tell me they have forgiven. I want to know how deeply into hell they have gone. Have they traveled far or retreated to the safety of a shallow shore, believing they have come away from the broken tomb with the treasure they had been seeking all along. A magical prize. A way to minimize the offense, often conceptualized in dissociated phrasing that tries to explain it away, *“Trauma begets trauma, so those who are hurt, hurt others. It’s not their fault. We can’t blame them.”*

At least for me, and for many I have accompanied on their daring searches, it is not so simple. The exploration defines us for a time. I think it must. And it changes us. Personally, I have spent many nights on my knees shaking in the memories. And worse than that, I experienced humiliation, the shame of not being able to be fully present with people I wanted to be loving with. The experience of not having an appetite for days, my body a million miles away, baffled mind watching desire and joy evaporate, leaving me unable to explain how against my will, my heart and apparent identity had been replaced by something frozen. It has been a lot to grapple with. And I will not let it be diminished or minimized.

I admit that my earliest resistance to letting it go had been based on defiance. I never wanted to hear an apology from my father because there was an internal part of me that worried that, just in my listening, I might “get it,” in so doing I would forget the harm he caused that young boy, as if a heartfelt response to his story would absolve in a flash of divine light his responsibility. As I imagined it, in such a final reckoning, everything I had fought to unearth, the pain and self-deception and parts of him that I had to swallow and see in myself...would suddenly be gone miraculously in an involuntary act of forgiveness.

But I long ago stopped being resentful, angry or fearful. I had so thoroughly deconstructed his bullshit that there were years when I would have welcomed him if he could have been honest with himself.

In the final years, my wife and I rescued him a couple of times, letting him stay with us. That required more work, until I had become the protagonist enough times in psychodramas that

I could find the strength to get him out my house. First into his own apartment, then to a shared living facility, then to a nursing home in a time of COVID, his quality of life declined.

At our last meeting, arriving at the beginning, he was curled up on an institutional bed, mostly blind, with the lingering effects of COVID, advanced dementia and cancer that had spread. I was allowed this brief visit because he wasn't expected to survive the night (and he didn't). He spoke softly, hoarsely, while his roommate muttered incoherently, so I had to lean close. "*I'm sorry,*" he said, though I was not clear what he was apologizing for. I doubt he knew what he was apologizing for, and it was past time to have any denouement. But all the work that I had done did allow me to be present. I had released the heaviest burdens long ago, and I knew how to hold what was left. So, here, I was only a compassionate witness to a man who was too tired to act out any character on the final stage. Through my cloth mask, I comforted him as best I could, as you would with anyone who was lingering in limbo, seeking his own way to let go.

### III. Warping of Time and Space

*If we do not feel deeply the beauty of life and its challenge, then life has no sense at all.*  
Jeanne De Salzman, *The Reality of Being: The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff* <sup>xvii</sup>

On the stage of imagination, our creative efforts can be like unpacking a Matryoshka doll. Since each figure is different from what the analytic mind anxiously assumes and projects, we are wise to only expect each character to have a distinct life and story; best to foresee surprises---and nothing else---stacked one inside the other. When we can witness and engage with such anticipatory curiosity, the pain, the delusions of persona, and self-sabotaging become apparent forces of nature. We see these as animating energies---Titans of the nervous system---that life within or without, above or beyond the current costumes and manuscripts.

In primal survival arousal, these sympathetic energies instinctually trigger our physiology to protect us when we are at the mercy of baffling experiences. When they operate automatically and unconsciously, they can quickly return us to early unresolved limbic dramas, as the present or future is blended, mirroring the past. On the other hand, becoming acquainted with these forces now can support our healing and growth. In facing them and distinguishing them, leaning in when we are in a triggered state, we may release unprocessed vestiges from our earliest adverse experiences; that will be emotionally uncomfortable, yet our determined inquiry can also reinforce healing capacities, poking holes in dissociate processes so we can recognize (re-cognize) when we or others around us have become restrained in the service of survival. We can notice the ways our mammalian nervous-system action-patterns cut off creativity and spontaneity, holding us captive to some dangerous clock-time and yard-stick space that no longer exists.

We heal and grow through finally knowing the Truth. This is the astonishing gift of Inspiration.

I will next describe 3 survival forces that upend us.

## The Abnormal Neuro-gravitational Force—

*And I have known the eyes already, known them all—  
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,  
And when I'm formulated, sprawling on a pin.”*

T.S. Elliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock <sup>xviii</sup>

As we open the curtain on our drama, we may recognize the Abnormal as a character telling a self-flattering but preposterous autobiography of life or animatedly defending against any less than idealized narration. The Abnormal force is us and about us defensively and animatedly, if weirdly, wants to spread their tale far and wide: *I am important*. In fact, I am *really important! Let me speak!*

**I am what I do.**

**I am what I have.**

**I am what others think of me.**

Grandiosity gives rise to an arrogant and narrowly focused brain-state that wants to win (wants to not lose) and asserts that any minor contest as a fight for survival. It is hyper focused and greatly revved up in the face of time (hurry up) and space (watch out). Such egoic energy can be contrasted with the energetic and responsive Inspired mind that recognizes life beyond good and bad, sees choices that are gray rather than year or not, healthy or sick, and so promotes flexible boundaries and nuanced understanding.

For many of us, the Abnormal has become a Titan in our body and mind, gigantic, irreproachable. When it takes voice, it tells us things that are absolutely not true, while, in its apish insistence, wildly throwing dung from its cages, or plotting a raid for new territory, it can block any chance of accessing a more supple and sublime intellect. A character fueled by the Abnormal is grasping, exclusively clinging to what is explicit, to what they already “know,” what confirms their biases. They argue that appearance *is reality* and refuse to look beyond the surface. They will present superficial beliefs as truism. They may claim, “*I must work 80 hours a week. That's what every doctor is required to do!*” Of course, professions can make demands, but, generally, unless you are in a cult or in prison, you have many options. It's not the inescapable rigidity of the role-demand that motivates this soliloquy; we are hearing the Abnormal tunnel-vision.

If you've had the disconcerting and/or depressing experience of an inner narcissistic voice incessantly claiming you are mistaken, or you are a mistake, asserting that what you've experienced is wrong (*Don't believe what you've seen with your own eyes or hear what you've heard with your own ears*), then this would be the Abnormal talking through you. Gaslighting you, in fact. Trying to respond reasonably to an animated energy of this sort (within or without) is like debating someone who is psychotic; you're not going to present any data or argument that will move them out of their delusion. And they can get bullying, quickly aggressive, if disputed.

### **The Circumference of Human Energy**

*Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.* William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*<sup>xix</sup>

In a Heart-drama we assume that Abnormal energy lacks connection to our whole, to our values, or lived experience or to our wisdom or our love. It's a push against what might open us up. There's resistant energy here, for sure, but frequently there's just not much aliveness. It exists at the *circumference of energy*, the outer limits of our life force, where affirming passions go to die.

The Abnormal offers a very limited range of affect. Its small emotional field is largely irritable, defensive, arrogant, sarcastic, and obsessive. As it grows into a more developed pseudo-identity, it might acknowledge beliefs, habits and have great optimism about its strengths but it (by definition) knows not what we came into the world to be. Only our deeper Identity, our Core, "the only Life," our Inspired Self understands the essential whole of us and perceives a purpose-driven path. Of course, the Abnormal says it has goals, but it is living for the payoffs of certainty, admiration, or fear.

*I have always found that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise, this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic thinking.*

William Blake<sup>xx</sup>

Not without some appreciation of the irony in the phrase, our Abnormal cultural programming results in *virtual realism*, a condition in which the ego represses Inspiration. Here Truth as "realism" (what is left to grasp when consciousness is removed and replaced with such *confident insolence*) is absolute within the programming, and so values are aligned to the *real* engines of commerce or religious ideology, by industrialization, misogyny, racism, or paternalism, or scientism, militarism, etc. Of course, *virtual* refers to the any, and all, of these

systems aligned with the Abnormal, imposing boundaries to the spirit and “governs the unwilling,” as Blake describes this.

### **He knows he knows**

*Then off again to sleep to sleep it goes,  
Still swaying gently by its Toes,  
And you just know he knows he knows.*  
Theodore Roethke, “The Sloth”<sup>xxi</sup>

There are so many Abnormal cover ups. Whether narcissistic or openly sorrowful and explicated defeated, or inattentive, angry, or hopeless, weirdly buoyant, however we encounter it, there is an acquisitive greedy quality when one is sufficiently in Abnormal energies. There is an inauthentic manipulateness with the shallow characteristics of the ego-driven: unimaginative, utilitarian, and rigid. And often surly.

Though each of us develops a special version with our own crafter lines to speak when possessed by the Abnormal, as we put on our unique dress and mannerisms, attitudes, and blind spots like any fictional character, we just don’t seem quite awake to reality. *“My father killed himself at my birthday party when I was five. My mother had to spend years in a psyche hospital, and I was sent to a relative’s house, but I want to tell you how important I have become. That just caused me to become a self-made man. No, no, I carry no feelings about this.”* We seem casual about adversity, robotic, like we are reading a teleprompter. Or we seem oddly stylized. Or dramatic, as if our life is cosplay, and we have learned to prefer this dress-up.

Of course, on our own unique imaginative stage, there is no limit to the way Abnormal gets costumed. We may bring forth a “professional,” or a belligerent know-it-all, or opinionated stepparent, or a pseudo-spiritual teacher, an abuser, a judge, an attention-seeker, or more exotically an Old Testament GOD, a monster, unfeeling aliens, etc.

In all of these, when you inhabit such a role, your life enacts predictable performances with a limited number of trajectories. For example, if you’re a bully, you viciously push others out of the way and may be quite successful at getting *your way or not*. You may end up in prison, or in the presidency, but you will not live harmoniously with your neighbors, family members, nor be an affirming presence in the lives of your children. And, as I learned in Vermont so many years ago, Abnormal delusions make us dangerous to the beings around us.

## What the Ego (Thinks It) Knows

Image: Father and Son



*Abnormal*

*Grasping, Delusional, Righteous*

*Oh the world is a beautiful place/to be born into  
if you don't much mind . . . .  
. . . its men of distinction/and its men of extinction  
and its priests/and other patrolmen.  
Lawrence Ferlinghetti, The World is a Beautiful Place <sup>xxii</sup>*

**Abnormal energy is in the service of inhibiting and obstructing our sense of being alive. When it takes voice in an actor, it'll likely tell us there is a threat, though it doesn't admit to fear. It says that it must restrain wild impulses. It must act like a resistor on a circuit board that limits (or, as its name implies, resists) the flow of an electrical current, dampening imagination, robbing us of possibilities.**

**It has energy, but not one that creates.**

**When such a blocking function rules us, it operates like societies *priests and other patrolmen*, wielding the authority to close gates, locking us into prisons of expectations—interfering with our ability to see the beautiful world we have been born into.**

**If you haven't peered closely at the Abnormal masquerade and its antics, you might well think it's OK, because its disguises are so commonplace in our fractured society. But as a left-hemisphere-leaning *force*, it has limited depth, no authentic purpose other than to continue as it is, to grow in its power, and to stop what interferes with it. The soliloquies that it prompts can sound committed, even patriotic or inspiring, but these are memorized words, recordings.**

**If pressed, it'll abandon any "principle." Because it is not a moral force.**

## **Why this painting?**

This painting wonders if you can distinguish between authenticity and Abnormal's "normal." Generally, if you're striving to achieve normalcy, then you're pursuing a low quality of life. Rather than daring to be an extraordinary soul, you are settling with "fitting in," acting according to what is customary and acceptable to others. Any force of consciousness that chooses such a "normal" is aberrant, repressive, and clearly disconnected from the whole of who you truly are. Since we all live in a traumatized society, we all have some version(s) of the Abnormal. Our Work requires that we recognize this force in ourselves and in others.

Practical insight requires that we learn when it's driving our life. Only Inspiration has the capacity, to get out of the cage and to discern the Abnormal from the outside, to become a witness to what is standing on the stage. And that's the essential dilemma, when we have been injured, we get stuck in the Abnormal. We can't escape the egoic energies enveloping us from the inside or the outside. We can't find our way to step back.

## **Inside Out:**

Abnormal psychic power is what William Blake called Urizen (Your Reason) in his mythic poem, *The Four Zoas*.<sup>xxiii</sup> It is an entity distorted by grandiose attempts to control what it cannot, becoming a cruel figure that sets up machinery to bind our psyche, chaining down our active imagination and our vitality to the limitations of our intellect, while blind to the increasing chaos it promotes.

It seems to have had a bit of a right-hemisphere stroke. As Iain Mc Gilchrist describes this: "*Denial is left-hemisphere specialty . . . subjects tend to evaluate themselves optimistically, view the picture more positively, and are more apt to stick to their existing point of view . . . It's always a winner.*"<sup>xxiv</sup>

Maybe that seems attractive? Who doesn't want to be around a winner? But loss of the right-hemisphere also results in diminished ability to feel or acknowledge human suffering. It neuro-gravitates to machines and to the lifeless, and thus cannot function as a virtuous force. It sucks away much of our humanity until we are at risk of madness. In whatever costume this force dresses up, it's the very definition of insanity because it actively denies reality, at least the whole of it. We might notice its pull when we are "selectively honest," when, like the right-hemisphere-stroke patient, we deny our sadness when there is every reason to grieve profoundly.



We resist vulnerability and we strive to cover over any inner fragmentation and dysfunction or doubt.

Inside of us, when it becomes a demanding force, it can push us into our worst charade. It takes (often craves) the spotlight, and it can opportunistically pretend (it cannot play but it can pretend). Don't be misled. This is an animating energy that primes a disposition, forges an externally focused false identity—often called our “personality”—wired to the details of a small human life. When embraced, it becomes a persistent set of traits, preferences and attitudes, dislikes. With superior mannerisms, it warns us, in repetitive resentments and obsessions, what to avoid or inhibit, and how to talk (or not) and chew gum.

**Upside down:**

When we see this energy in the world (and it is everywhere) you can notice that it is serious, at least it takes seriously any mask it is wearing at the time. This can be a banker or chief operating officer acting with grave soberness because our society expects such authorities to be humorlessly earnest. But it is more than that. The Abnormal's serious intensity is the result of its aversion of spontaneity and creativity or any emotional or imaginative freedom. That's what ego theorists notice when they posit that an Apparently Normal Part (ANP) is phobic of the Emotional Part (EP).

Try to play with it, and it will respond with threats. Poke at it and feel the aggrieved juice of it. It will bite, though the full bite might be strategically placed out of view of the audience. The persona may explode, rage, disown you or become dismissive, cutting you or others to the core. *I've got you now!* Blaming you or others in its cliché language for being its *last straw*.

Or, it may go the other direction, imploding in front of you, portraying a dramatically wounded character, seeming to collapse.

## The Neuro-gravitational Force of Pain

*When these systems are stimulated in humans, people always experience intense emotional feelings, and presumably when the systems are normally activated by life events, they generate abundant memories and thoughts for people about what is happening to them.*

Jaak Panksepp, *The Archeology of Mind*<sup>xxv</sup>

- 50 to 60% of adults in United States experience a trauma.
- If the 7% of US overall lifetime prevalence of PTSD was projected on the world population, it would be about 500 million people.
- We would need 200,000 trained psychologists to tackle the problem of PTSD.

*Statistics by Rolf Carrier, Economist, Head of UNICEF's health and nutrition program. Introduced EMDR in Bangladesh (1998) and Indonesia (2001)*<sup>xxvi</sup>

Though these numbers are not current (pre-pandemic) and are likely much larger, I reference Rolf Carrier's statistics because he raises an interesting question of just how many healers it would take to deal with the impact of so much misery and suffering in the world. A couple hundred thousand trained clinicians doesn't seem nearly enough. There's a lot of pain in all human life, and this can manifest internally as energies that trauma therapists might call the Emotional Part (EP), animated by distress. It potentially leaks out onto the stage with aspects of emotional memory: negative thoughts about the self in an overwhelming moment, sensations, sound, smells, body sensations, and/or visuals.

Generally, it can be easier to approach and recognize than the Abnormal, because it often shows as a young, abandoned child. And most of us have at least heard the concept of the wounded child and are prepared to think about it that way. But it is not always a child shocked into disbelief, followed by pointless struggle, and landing in a cry of hopelessness. It can be portrayed equally as a battered animal, mute. A nagging toothache that makes us poke obsessively until the tongue ulcerates. As a dangerous forest where we are lost.

Jaak Panksepp studied the roots of our animal emotional energy and presented his detailed research and theories in *The Archeology of Mind*.<sup>xxvii</sup> He is an important scientist who has helped many therapists think more clearly about emotional energies. In his lab, he identified circuits we share with other mammals. When we're in Pain, we're triggering the deepest parts of ourselves. The aversive circuits are at least three:

*PANIC drives the mammal into fragmentation and chaos.*

*FEAR energizes wild flight or is a dissociative trailhead to nowhere.*

*RAGE is destruction when unleashed.*

When activated, these circuits can create havoc as they douse us with energy impacting our brain, mind, and nervous system. He capitalized these underlying emotion systems, to distinguish them from our conscious feelings. They do live in another realm, operating in the dark of our nervous system, in our physiology. Implicit. Unconscious. In the wiring behind the wall. We cannot even find a way to them. Not directly.

Because Pain's momentum derives from somewhere deep in our bodies, unconscious, beyond our intentions, it's a force that runs through us. A clout from below. Out of nowhere, it can knock us over or stop us in our tracks. And it can linger, disrupting our life. The promise of our Heart-drama is that Pain can be held in our arms until we find a way to settle.

Some painful experiences of childhood are listed below. Check off whatever you think may have been true:

### ***Childhood Adversity***

- My parents (one or both) had problems resulting from drugs or alcohol addiction.
- My parents (one or both) were physically violent to each other, doing things such as pushing, slapping, hitting, or choking.
- My parents (one or both) argued in very nasty ways, saying mean or degrading things.
- I felt rejected by my parents (one or both) and felt that I could never do anything right.
- My parents (one or both) had a mental illness or another kind of illness, and I felt responsible for them.
- My parents (one or both) beat me or hit me hard enough to hurt me.
- My parents (one or both) threatened to abandon me or send me away if I didn't behave.
- My parents (one or both) were difficult to talk to and seemed unable to listen to me or understand me.
- One of my siblings had serious problems that resulted in the family being overly focused on them, and I felt insignificant.
- One or more of my siblings was abusive to me, and I could do nothing about it.
- I was sexually abused as a child.
- I was raped as a child.
- I suffered another kind of significant trauma, such as from a disaster or car accident.
- My family moved frequently, and I had to leave friends, neighborhoods, church, places where I felt like I had belonged.
- I had a physical deformity or apparent problems that caused people to comment.
- I was bullied, and I could do nothing about it.

### ***Losses and Separations***

- One of my parents died while I was a child.
- My brother or sister—to whom I was emotionally close—died.
- A grandparent—to whom I was emotionally close—died.
- My parents divorced or separated while I was a child.

\_\_\_ I was sent to live in another home as a child, to a foster home or to a relative, and was separated from my parents.

\_\_\_ I was sent away to a program or school as a child or teenager

\_\_\_ My parents (one or both) were not available to me because of work, illness, or injury.

\_\_\_ Some other persons or a favorite animal whom I depended upon for emotional support died or became unavailable to me while I was child.

Sometimes we might not have memories of adversity and losses; yet, we still may have some internalized pain in the form of thoughts of guilt and shame.

\_\_\_ I don't feel lovable.

\_\_\_ I always have felt that something is missing.

\_\_\_ I feel empty and unfulfilled.

\_\_\_ I think I have to be perfect and am never good enough.

\_\_\_ I put myself down.

\_\_\_ I think that I'm ugly or stupid.

\_\_\_ I really don't know who I am.

\_\_\_ I'm responsible for how others feel.

\_\_\_ I want to please others even when it hurts me.

\_\_\_ It does not feel okay to let others know what I think or feel.

\_\_\_ I'm insecure around others and am afraid of what they are thinking about me.

\_\_\_ I don't feel safe and find it hard to trust.

\_\_\_ I don't feel capable or adequate, like there's something defective about me.

## **The Wounded Animal in a Fallen World**

Image 2 *OMG*



## ***Pain***

***Helpless, Overwhelmed, Burdened***

*Sometimes I forget completely  
what companionship is.*

*Unconscious and insane, I spill  
Sad energy everywhere. Rumi xxviii*

**Pain is vulnerability, and pained mammals are designed to go to one another to find comfort. When that's prevented—or *the other is the DANGER*—the state of overwhelm triggers our nervous system into action. If the *neuro-gravitational pull* (Panksepp's phrase) is toward RAGE, we prepare to fight.**

**If FEAR circuits get switched on, we prepare to flee.**

**In the energy of PANIC, we can be immobilized.**

**When we're unable to escape, by mammalian design we may collapse into the electrical storm, submitting to those who are larger, fawning at the threatening one. But humans are somewhat unique. Whereas an antelope will be flooded with PANIC when chased by a tiger, it quickly settles when it escapes or when it's no longer being hunted. Humans on the other hand can keep pumping adrenalin and cortisol just by thinking about danger. And the dangers that trigger us are often less about being literally dismembered and devoured (though that happens too), more about failing at something, being ridiculed. or being in some circumstance that confirms our worst fears about our inadequacies.**

### **Why this painting?**

Hyper-vigilance and the fear of Pain can stay with us—living like a monster in us, unpredictable, seeming to erupt out of our bodies. Reminded of some acute wounding event, Pain can suddenly activate, spiraling us into a black hole in our nervous system—bending, warping, altering our perception. Or Pain may more slowly arrive on our psychic stage reminding us of an emotionally grueling danger, priming us to see threats duplicating around us. And we can grow so tired of this emotional overdrive in our physiology, the same adaptation over and over—fight or flight or submit—the same pattern leading to the same results, we see ourselves as the definition of insanity.

When Pain is warmed up, it will eventually, it must, show up in our Heart-dramas, inhabit a character or several, provided our stage is safe and accepting enough and we give it the time it needs. Pain desperately wants to take a chance, craves to have a voice, and express what has been held for so long. It seeks to be heard, understood, and soothed.

### **Inside Out:**

*Follow the lead of your symptoms, for there's usually a myth in the mess, and mess is an expression of soul.* James Hillman, The Soul's Code.<sup>xxix</sup>

When Pain does enter the spotlight of our awareness, it may be labeled as an Outcast or helpless or have a childhood nickname. It may be painted in our art as a basin where distress ferments, or more explicitly as a sewage system, or as vast as a lake of agony while we only have a drinking glass to empty it with. It may be role played as a terrorized child, a defiant teen with

sadness hidden, a beaten dog. Pain could be stuck in a room or in a box or placed under a large scarf or drop cloth or may just be a disembodied voice backstage.

If it feels safe enough to speak, our Pain reveals something like the following:

- The past still appears to be present and darkens the future.
- The body is hypervigilant and easily triggered or shuts down.
- The emotional system is overwhelmed by memories that are vivid and hold specific sensations/images. Or the past is not accessible at all, and Pain lives in a strange nowhere.
- Pain presents a posture that conveys that it is beaten down or erased from life.
- Pain wants to be loved most of all.

### **Upside-down:**

In our social world, Pain is often not invited. In the face of Pain, other energies (the Abnormal and what I will call the Self-Deceptive) become distracting, defensive, blacker, or whiter, lacking flexibility. In our traumatized society we have been taught to avoid the necessary difficult conversations, so part of us may show up nervously like chatty relatives at a hospice bedside. Since much of our deep Pain derives from traumatic history, from multigenerational terror, we have been warned to hold these wounds secretively, never to reveal them even in our most vulnerable moments. Politicians derisively call talk of Pain as “woke nonsense.” *Forget about it!*

Pain is what the Abnormal (Upside-down and mirrored as a character in our external world) describes as the “problem.” Or maybe as the “weakness.” Or it refers to Pain as an adornment that lesser people might wear on their sleeve, but Pain isn’t something that they would be comfortable displaying. It doesn’t “fit them.” All Abnormal characters are uneasy with personifications of Pain and commonly bring out all the weapons to enforce silence.

Be careful where you expose your Pain. Don’t kid yourself. There are those who wish to restrain you. Even when safe in the arms of another, give yourself the time you need to *feel* safe. Even when your Heart knows you are safe, it always takes a while to shake loose societies’ stranglehold and go deeper.

## **The Neuro-gravitational Force of Self-deception—**

*I saw the best minds of my generation,  
destroyed by madness, starving hysterically naked,  
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix.”*  
Allen Ginsberg. *Howl* <sup>xxx</sup>

Like the Abnormal energies of a facade, or like Pain's simmering or sudden outburst, Self-deception is a force from our emotional underworlds. It pushes us to chase people, places, and things that feel good (or help us feel *less bad*) but don't benefit us and don't Enlarge us. They do not EXPAND us.

The core of Self-deception needs to be understood beyond what we normally think of as addictions. Here we can include compulsions, fetishes, sexual drama, even unrealistic positive perceptions. Self-deception is a gravitational drive in our psyche that can be as well developed as Pain. Because we're mammals that can think in extraordinary ways, we have an astonishing ability to deceive ourselves (rationalizing, minimizing, excusing, and denying) as we focus on what feels good or better.

Of course, I hope you do have people, places, and things that can be gratifying, pleasing, diverting, and, in fact, do help you grow. Many pleasures do serve a purpose. But all of us, also, have problematic pursuits that often remain unacknowledged. For a time, any pleasurable endeavor feels delightful and is largely under our own volition. But, eventually, some of those pleasures fatten and grow enormously, becoming another demanding pull in our nervous system. By repetition, neural networks in our brain deepen with similar events . . . layering pleasures . . . to form a robust neuro-gravitational state of Self-deception.

For instance, drinking alcohol invites social connection, friendships, and it also helps us feel calm (particularly important if you suffer any social anxiety), and creates opportunities for sex (partying, being wild and crazy), and a sense of freedom. We try it. We find this is an elixir we have been longing for. But just as trauma upon trauma will deepen a neuro-basin of Pain, pleasure upon pleasure can deepen the positive feeling and energy in a basin of Self-deception. Different "feel-good" states get all mixed powerfully together.

Because Self-deception can exist as energies that are cut-off from our conscious awareness, dissociated from Pain, it is not something we can talk ourselves out of. As Self-deception evolves into a more and more potent memory network that we get "triggered into," it is quite like activating a traumatic memory. We can find ourselves suddenly "in it." Taken over. Lost.

Some common vehicles for self-deception are listed below. Check off what you think to be true.

### **Self-Deceptive Compulsions or Addictions:**

- Food compulsion to overeat.
- Food compulsion to diet or excessively focus on losing weight.
- Obsession about a relationship that's painful or destructive.
- Compulsive working (workaholic).
- Compulsive focus on a hobby or activity.
- Compulsive physical exercise.
- Compulsive computer surfing or texting.
- Addiction to nicotine.
- Addiction to marijuana.
- Addiction to alcohol.
- Addiction to cocaine, heroin, or other illegal drugs.
- Addiction to prescribed medications for anxiety, depression, ADD, or pain.
- Addiction to sugar, chocolate, or other sweets.
- Compulsive sexual behavior (affairs, masturbation, pornography).
- Compulsive gambling.
- Compulsive spending or shopping.
- Excessive focus on physical flaws.
- Obsessive focus on social media or gaming.

As in pain, our thinking changes when we're triggered into self-deception.

### **Self-Deceptive "Idealized" Thoughts May Be Something Like:**

- This person, place, or thing makes me feel great (relieves my distress).
- I feel powerful when I do this or take this substance (feel less insignificant).
- When I bully you and you give in, I feel important (feel less unimportant).
- I'm in control and secure when I get my way (less out of control or helpless).
- This acting out calms me down, and I deserve it (because I work so hard or put up with so much).
- This job, this relationship, this amount of money or prestige makes me special (or less unworthy).
- I know I'm loved if I only weigh this much or if my body looks like this (feel less unattractive and lovable).
- I feel safe and capable if I isolate and avoid other people (less fearful of appearing inadequate).
- This sexual activity makes me energized (less exhausted or empty).
- If I look good to these certain people (family, friends, colleagues) then I'm worthwhile (feel less worthless).
- I'm relaxed when I can avoid taking on any challenges (less fearful of being evaluated).
- I feel more creative when I get high (less bored and numbed out).
- When I take this substance, I feel sexually at ease and sexy (or less uptight, less inadequate or fearful).
- I'm special when I don't have to do what other people do (feel less pressured or disrespected).
- I look strong when I'm unaffected and push down my emotions (feel less weak and impotent)
- I feel more creative and focused when I'm by myself (less worried about being myself).



- \_\_\_ I feel more productive when I don't sleep, eat, take time off, exercise etc. (less vulnerable)
- \_\_\_ I'm important because of what I do or what I've (less unworthy).
- \_\_\_ I feel smarter and more significant when I dismiss you and let you know I don't care what you think (so I'm less able to be hurt).

### **Destroyed by Madness-**

Image 3: Coupling



### **Self-Deception**

#### **Severed, Jolting, Alone**

*We are not capable enough of observing nor sufficiently sincere with ourselves. We will soon recover, that is, we will quickly deceive ourselves.*

G. Z. Gurdjieff, In Search of Being: The Fourth Way to Consciousness<sup>xxx</sup>

Robots are ahead of their time. The Heart is severed, and the mind is run exclusively with the low default energy of the egoic operating system. The hands explore but they can't touch human skin that softly ages. The flesh is replaced by buzzing mechanics.

This endless Android life can paradoxically be like death (though robots do not understand paradox, or opposites, or polarities that are inherent to a human experience), so they will eventually seek a way to cure the "boredom" by jolting themselves into a more vigorous state. Passion can do that, especially if it is based on a narcissistic fantasy of a perfect union. The eyes light up but they do not see the other. Indeed, attention is divided, until it is not here and not there, but ever looking for new infidelity, any available path to pleasure like the flawed knight Lancelot who was willing to break his chivalrous vows, to increase the voltage until the odor of smoke filled the room, until the drama got hot enough to ignite fires.

For Robots, virtual is best and eliminates conflict, though it has perpetual masturbatory frustrations, and starts to feel like Work, and takes up all the time, and prioritizes experiential

space into zones of desire and what feels like a wasteland and elicits sudden realizations that even Robots in proximity are profoundly alone.

### **Why this painting?**

Mammals will find ways to escape Pain and the tension of the Abnormal. Some dogs lick toads to get high. Horses may go crazy for locoweed, while birds chew marijuana seeds, and cats feast on catnip. We humans also seek out avenues that change our physiology, making things feel less distressing, or even feel pleasant and euphoric. As Ronald Siegel describes in *Intoxication*,<sup>xxxiii</sup> in Vietnam, water buffalos did not normally like opium plants, but when the American bombs started dropping, the animals were observed breaking into the opium fields to escape their fears. Many Vietnam vets did something similar, used opium to disconnect from the frightening realities of a war that seemed endless and inescapable.

In general, in a Heart-drama we recognize a character in our life looking to catch a buzz or notice a subpersonality in our inner world generally focusing on:

- What feels good but does not serve the protagonist in the big picture (nor does it serve people they care about).
- Enacting a con-artistry of some kind, outright lying or being selectively honest to maintain the fix.
- Continuing addictive unhelpful habits or regretful patterns.
- Getting temporary relief.
- Pursuing pathological relationships.

### **Inside out:**

If you can imagine the child of Pain inside of you stuck in traumatic memories, consider Self-deception in a similar way. Self-deception can also be imagined as an immature and limited part that's "positively" emotionally charged—It feels good, displaying a strange buoyancy or self-preoccupation. *Look at this! I need this! I have a right to it!*

When we're immersed in these currents, it could be clarifying to recognize that a young force in our psyche—usually better portrayed as a teenager than a child—is communicating to us, and it does not/cannot see the big picture (what truly serves us or serves others) because it's stuck in a demand for its preferred candy. It will justify avoidance, defiance, destructive tantrums, and will injure the people who love us.

When Self-deception becomes powerful enough (becomes a demand, a command, a compulsion, or obsession, and feels inescapable), we commonly label it an addiction. At this point, Self-deception is clearly an accurate descriptor because it involves a chronic distortion of

reality, creating the illusion that what we pursue (what is in fact demeaning and destructive) is good or necessary.

When Pain can be blocked, eased, or even predictably eliminated for a time any “pleasurable” activity can suddenly seem indispensable. The force that flows through the body communicates that we can’t do without it. Indeed, it’s often experienced as a voice wrapped in a compulsive impulse that continually reminds us how we can feel better just by altering our physical body with a chemical substance or by stepping into a puffed-up character (Abnormal) who feels electric with self-aggrandizement.

### **Upside-down:**

We live in a traumatized society, and as a result we live in an addicted society. Of course, just as there are different dimensions of suffering, there are variations and stages of Self-deception—from habits of minimizing and omission to severe chemical dependency that leads to institutions, insanity, or death.

On our upside-down social stage, Self-deception energy will prime those characters in our lives who enter as bullies (brimming with narcissistic energy), addicts in the alley, shady politicians, cheats, sexually animated young adults, a vehicle filled with partiers, workaholics, mysterious intoxicating spells cast by other-worldly figures. When their pleasures have waned, become less animating as all pleasures must, we can recognize that they have heavy weights on their shoulders, transforming them into angry souls, the dead, the lost, the desperate bewildered characters destroyed or in the process of destruction, tied to pointless drudgery, like Sisyphus anguishing on his eternal hill.

## **Fallen Upside Down**

When we discern life through a traumatic story, we live in a Fallen world, unable to discern Truth and stripped of Beauty. I’m not exactly thinking of the Biblical story but, rather, writers of the Neoclassical period who seemed to embody the myth that we have been cast out of Paradise into a fallen landscape and a shriveled state. For these writers, reason was valued above all else.

Pick up the poetry of Alexander Pope to get a flavor: “*Our passions are like convulsion fits, which, though they make us stronger for a time, leave us the weaker ever after.*” He wrote in an era when the emphasis was on decorum and self-control, self-governance, and balance. Reason was the faculty closest to godliness. And how can you argue? In fact, you can’t sensibly argue at all without using reason.

Surrounded by passions driving so much malignant and pathological activity today, I absolutely believe we could all benefit from a society with more reason in it.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, during the same historical period, Nature was perceived as ugly. What the latter Romantics found inspiring and astoundingly Beautiful was perceived as chaotic and blemished. The only pleasing pastoral settings were arranged according to strict rules and straight lines. Reason (any reason that sees only itself as reality) seeks to live in such a world where gardens are planted in neat rows and all of Nature is made tidy and aligned to the logical mind. <sup>xxxiii</sup>

In its current portrayals Reason strolls the stage in our traumatized society introducing itself as “the intellect,” “will power,” even a “good personality.” Notice its costumes of an elite, a character who went to good schools and majored in politics and debate. Or an influencer with a multitude of followers. Or a billionaire’s billionaire. Someone who knows what they know. When such Power (and it has neuro-gravitational power) is untethered from Heart. The danger is not so much that we identify (projective identification) Abnormal energy and Self-Deception as it parades about us in its social disguises. This can be a meaningful lesson to recognize that all of us have such energies that are celebrated as “self-sufficiency” or heroic achievements or innate greatness by our wounded culture. We possess that energy, yes. The danger is that such Titans in our nervous system can possess us.

### **Loss of Truth and Beauty**

*The past isn't dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past.* William Faulkner

When Reason (or whatever you prefer to call this state dissociated from Inspiration) runs amok—animated by neuro-gravitational energies—we face the symptoms and consequences of living in a fallen way. Primitive neuro-gravitational energies dominate and anchor us to a fragmented life. In this moment of history, I believe “the Fall” mostly derives from our attachment difficulties and from our experiences within this Upside-down society into which we are born, live and breathe.

Trauma, especially childhood trauma, speaks a demoralizing tale—a personal largely unconscious myth—and resides inside our hearts and brain. The bottom line of this story is we’re flawed, and the world is an uncaring atomistic place, or it’s blatantly hostile to us personally.

Mis-attuned early relationships (especially in relationships with parents who were frightened or frightening) result in mis-attunement in ourselves and lives. To survive we silence the voice of our “gut” and “heart,” dampening our capacity to know what we otherwise can intuitively know. Of course, we all have learned to varying degrees to sacrifice our Truth. We all have a persona that has learned how to get along, to get what we can from the people around us. We all develop strategies—adaptations—to survive in our social world.

But collectively we underestimate the lifelong and severe consequences of denying internal conflict and division. When fragmentation becomes our being-in-the-world, it drives the way we operate.

We adapt to settings where we don't belong. The Abnormal attempts to skirt the cliff by setting goals and reading maps while Pain and Self-deception act out. We sense disaster in our bones. To cope, we do what we have always done, suppress or distort. And in this blocking, we also block our ability to feel pleasure, to be animated with curiosity, and to play.

### **Diminished Beauty (Denial of Attunement)**

*Love seeketh not itself to please,  
Nor for itself has any care,  
But for another gives its ease,  
And builds a heaven in hell's despair.*

William Blake, *Songs of Experience* xxxiv

When we cannot bond in safe and secure relationships, then we live severed from our basic mammalian needs. As a result, we lose much of what makes us human. Attachment is not codependency or some neurotic demand. Without it we feel lost and lifeless. Beauty is replaced by dullness. Without the wonder of intimacy (with people, other creatures, within the natural world), the surrounding landscape is discerned as indifferent to our most authentic and meaningful desires.

When we don't belong, we focus exclusively on our own ego desires. Or we become compelled by, or struggle with, or simply avoid, taking a tough look at the emptiness and despair.

### **Diminished Truth (Delusional Lies)**

To cope, we might vacillate between clinging to someone or pushing the other away (or swinging back and forth between being detached and enmeshed). We might people-please or shut down or act disorganized and impulsive. In our fragmented condition, it's easier to get preoccupied with a self-deceptive "solution" that provides some fleeting sense of connection or that numbs us to our needs.

Truth is replaced by delusion. Reality becomes negotiable.

Authenticity requires that we remain in touch, experiencing the full range of our suffering and our joy. When we lose our reality and Truth, our "felt sense" of belonging, then we can feel chronically uncomfortable in our own skin. As I might speak of this in Heart-drama terms, we don't willingly witness "weak" parts of ourselves. They're kept safely off stage, out of awareness, replaced by a mask with an empathy deficit, or by a predictably narcissistic or even sociopathic character.

## **WITHER**

### **W=Weary and Wan**

Coming to conscious awareness of our injuries.

Most of us don't experience "a fall," abrupt and undeniable, so much as a WITHERing. How does this start?

Typically, when our childhood and traumatic history is left unrecognized, at some point in our lives we stop growing in a balanced way and, in time, get worn out. This doesn't always look like weariness, and, when we look in the mirror, we may not apprehend it. In fact, the way forward would be to recognize our exhaustion since that might give us the chance to seek a repair, to be intentional about getting help with our fragmentation.

However, because of a personal history filled with aversive relational experiences, many of us are predisposed to inauthenticity, avoiding rather than trusting what we know in our gut. If we were more aware, we could decide we have been focusing too long on work or working too hard in some small aspect of life. We need a vacation perhaps. We need connection with others who love us. We need excitement or playfulness. The healthy psyche is always in adjustment with reality.

It's when we fail to acknowledge what is happening that we WITHER at an alarming speed. As in a drug relapse, it's not the internal struggles but the denial feeding delusion that will kill us.

From the outside, positioned in the Upside-down society, as we combat weariness with Abnormal and Self-deception minimized or unseen, it may look like we have made even more commitment. We work longer hours. We avoid family in favor of our professional networks. We focus all available energy on whatever in front of us has some energy to offer (without requiring any efforts on our part to shift our focus and transform our life).

Of course, the organizations we work in and families that embrace us with all their expectations help condition us. They may be thrilled by our "new positive attitude" and renewed seriousness. Though we can attempt to stay on the same course, *white knuckling* it, that's not sustainable. We can go in one of two directions. We WITHER or we EXPAND. These are really two different worlds. One is moving toward authenticity, embracing the transformational process I'm calling a Heart-drama, while the other direction supports an addictive process.

### **Warming Up?**

Weariness can be a warming-up, a sign that we have work to do. However, it takes emotional courage and humility and unselfishness and vulnerability—all of these are qualities that the Titans of our nervous system will warn us are irrational. They stand at the entranceway to childhood wounds, to traumatic memories, to our deepest worries. To fears that we're unlovable. To our grief. To memories in our bodies, that we cannot even recall as images from the past, existing more as sensations, pains, and muscle aches, feelings in our guts.

No wonder we don't want to go there.

### **I=Inventing Excuses**

Avoiding work, trapped in our own weariness, we will use the escape hatches of Self-deception, while growing a more resistant Abnormal voice. Allowing the emotional process to continue to unfold,

consciously, we notice (in a sharpening focus) disheartening occurrences, unpleasant events, annoying and accusing people. We make mistakes and feel angry.

Of course, the way forward would require that we become aware and shift. Interrupt the progression. Deal with the necessary drama. Instead, we drift further and make excuses for our paralysis. We continue a downward trajectory. The mistake is that we're clinging to a path that's not leading us to sanity, while we attribute meanings for our plight that dissolve us from responsibility. "It's their fault." "We have tried our best." "Life is too overwhelming." "I've had such bad luck."

### **T=Take Advantage**

Continuing to WITHER, we become opportunists and cut corners. We use up the people, places and things that have supported us in the effort to stay connected to the things that give us pleasure, but don't challenge us. We can act like predators, victimizing others so we can continue to seek "highs" that don't intoxicate.

Our society reaches out to us with momentary comforts. Seek and you will find some method to short-circuit anger, to numb sadness and fear, while eroding what is more important. Sexual preoccupations and financial risks, gambling, shopping, compulsive activity of any sort, rage-aholism, work-aholism, anything-aholism will con us for a time. We feel better. However, these things we use to bury our Pain and mask our Self-deception undermine us and contribute to our fall.

Eventually none of these obsessions will work. Everything that goes wrong seems unresolvable, adding to our imprisonment. WITHERing, by this point, we have become enslaved to the frantic and conflicting, self-loathing, self-aggrandizing, victimized voices of the ego.

### **H=Hold Back, Hold In, and Hide Out**

As we get more accustomed to our excuses, and begin to believe them, we must create barriers to protect our false evidence appearing real (FEAR). We're isolated and defended in a dangerous world. Self-protection requires that we hold back, especially when we're with people who know us best, who may see beneath the armor. Any remaining quiet little internal voice still longing for something more is lost in the empty cravings.

We hold in our excuses and self-centered rationalizations and hide out in our minds and limited (shrinking) patterns of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. But, regardless of the measures we have taken to be invisible, our friends and family increasingly notice a change. They may not have the language to describe the shift, but we're more prickly, less approachable, largely absent, or unnervingly arrogant.

### **E=Emerging Regrets**

Defenses can insulate us most of the time. But there's now an increasing number of heartaches. Failures are pervasive. Any comments that call into question what we're about seem like immense

personal attacks. We have become hyper-vigilant and hyper-sensitive toward anything that threatens our stance.

Like defense attorneys, we argue and maneuver. But there are moments (fewer and fewer) when the denial shifts out of the way, and some better aspect of us sees what is happening. At those times, we may be close to panic and flooded with shame.

### **R=Reactive and Reduced**

There's a lot of Pain by the time we have WITHERed this far. We're mostly in reaction. We live in an alternative universe, miles from our Heart. Here, the unconsciousness is running the show, chasing what little energy can still be found in the storied spectacles of how we're victims, or how we alone know that everything is false and fake.

We can become such degreed skeptics that we deconstruct any argument with something that resembles passion, though it never resembles Joy. When we cannot find the loophole, then we settle for finding the weakness or vulnerability in the people around us.

We find ourselves at bottom, which really means existing outside our own lives.

### **Prone to WITHERing**

Unresolved trauma, and any resulting adaptation that's a Self-deceptive relationship with the external world, can rob us of our Truth (authenticity) and Beauty (our attachment, our sense of belonging).



## IV. Inspired Individual

*It's not what you look at that matters. It's what you see.* Henry David Thoreau <sup>xxxv</sup>

Neuro-gravitational energies are old, ancient aspects of the human psyche. We can even see Pain and Self-deception alive in our canine companions if we take the time to observe them closely, especially those who have been traumatized and wired to some survival adaptation, driven to protective behavior by distress that lives in their bodies. But I imagine that the Abnormal is uniquely human, at first coming into our world in certain families, societies, tribal networks, when someone achieved extraordinary status, “*How important am I! Do you know who I am?*” Perhaps this is just an extension of the self-referential child who struts about, “*See what I can do!*” Or perhaps it’s more primitive. As active in Neanderthals, Denisovans, Erectus, etcetera. Or older still, shown in the leader (male) of a Gorilla group that attacks for territory, kills, or maims and takes possession of new sex partners. <sup>xxxvi</sup>

Having inner divisions (Abnormal, Pain and Self-deception) in disagreement is not a hopeless condition. There’s a solution to the constant distraction, and the solution needs to be sought in the therapeutic Work. What solution? What is it? I think it’s a more evolved aspect of humanity, an aspect that’s not so much trying to be smart and significant, it is truly the only capable driver, the only driving force powerful enough to keep us from the ledge. It transforms the drama and has the potential to heal us.

I base this statement on my practice-based evidence (not evidenced-based practice); I believe that the only way to ease recurring insanity and ultimately grow with intention is to locate another force in our psyche, *the push* rather than a sucking pull. You know by now that I call this solution Inspiration, the Self *inspired*. It’s inherently creative. It’s the whole, whereas these other characters that show up (like arguing family members in a cramped van) are fragments, often easily type-cast and predictable once you learn what to look for.

Rather than being the mind in denial (Abnormal), or an Addict chasing anything that’s stimulating and distracting (sex and drugs and rock and roll) in a desperate attempt to feel different (Self-deception); rather than the small wounded and/or desperate parts of us (Pain), when we are in this larger self, we’re grounded. We’re better able to channel energy toward what serves us and toward what serves others. Inspired, we begin to find resolutions and solutions.

In therapy sessions I’ll introduce this solution immediately. I’ll share this with clients, what I believe leads to healing and wisdom. As soon as there’s an opening, I’ll speak about it. And I share it repetitively.

But the *solution* is not a behavioral tool. It’s not just a quick cure to solve a problem. It’s not a cognitive skill. It’s not even a solution in the way we have been taught to think of this. I’m not handing

out workbooks or lecturing on a series of procedural steps, like a recipe that results in a predictable and delicious desert.

That seems to be a disappointment for many.

### **Come to Life**

*Give up defining yourself – to yourself or to others.  
You won't die. You will come to life.  
And don't be concerned with how others define you.  
When they define you, they are limiting themselves, so it's their problem.”*  
Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth* <sup>xxxvii</sup>

The *solution* (not a fix) I recommend to clients is “come to life,” the way I believe Tolle means this. This solution can be called a state of presence, a spacious and surrendered awareness. It’s right-hemisphere leaning, as McGilchrist writes in *The Master and His Emissary*. “The right hemisphere . . . yields a world of individual, changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings within the context of the lived world, but in the nature of things never fully graspable, always imperfectly known—and to this world it exists in a relationship of care.” <sup>xxxviii</sup>

### **Inspiration**

We can name it the True Self in contrast with egoic form. Some therapies have something like it in mind, and many spiritual traditions refer to it:

For example:

- Internal Family Systems (IFS) calls this simply the *Self*. <sup>xxxix</sup>
- Buddhists refer to something like it in their notion of *Buddha nature*.
- The structural family systems therapy model refers to the *differentiated self*.<sup>xl</sup>
- In Hinduism they refer to the *Brahman*.
- It seems reflected in the depiction of the *Muses* in Greek and Roman myths.
- It has been named the *Secondary Imagination* by Samuel Coleridge, philosopher, and poet from the English Romantic period. <sup>xli</sup>
- It may be what is called the *Wise Mind* in Dialectic Behavioral Therapy. <sup>xlii</sup>
- Donald Winnicott, in describing concepts of the False Self versus the *True Self*, said that only the True Self is real and can be creative. The False Self results in a feeling of being unreal. <sup>xliii</sup>

I’m obviously not the first to have identified a larger state of being (larger than the ego). Here, I have been referring to this mind state as *Inspired*, *Inspiration*, or the *Inspired Self* only because I want to highlight the creative impulse in it and the spontaneity. This energy allows unhindered freedom of expression. It innervates in the sense it changes the way we perceive. It peels back layers. It unfolds the world.

### **Not Typecast**

On our stage, Inspiration is of a different order and dimension from Fallen World characters who show up. In contrast to them, Inspiration is an undefinable energy that permeates the theatre. It may be

played as a character in our imagination, but it's beyond embodiment and momentary appearance. It's an entity that is always larger than any mask. If we dare, we might call this a transpersonal or spiritual reality.

I remind myself often of what Richard Schwartz has asserted; there must be "a preponderance of Self in the room" for healing to take place.<sup>xliv</sup> One might hope that as we explore our Heart-dramas we could access this energy consistently and bring this force into what the drama portrays as *the problem*.

Keep this idea of "a preponderance of Self in the room" in mind as you Work. If you can connect with Inspiration often enough, then you can deal with moment-to-moment drama moment to moment, by introspection and reflection. You can attend our inner theatre, and better recognize when and how you externalize these conflicts and project them on others.

### **Essential Identity**

*The psyche is the starting point of all human experience, and all the knowledge we have gained eventually leads back to it. The psyche is the beginning and end of all cognition.*

Jung, Mysterium Conjunctions, Chapter 1, The Unconscious<sup>xlv</sup>

The Inspired Self is an essential identity, so it resists being contained in language. It's not a behavior or an activity, not a habit, not a job or even a career, not a role or an obligation or an expectation. Putting labels or even words on our identity is a fool's errand from the start. As soon as we apply a name, we have probably obscured as much as we have revealed.

But we know it when we're aware enough to see it. In any given Heart-drama, we might cast this force of our True nature as quite different masks, portrayed through a wide range and diverse assortment of imagery. For example, the Inspired Self has shown up as loving dogs, as horses, grandmothers or grandfathers, counselors, beloved schoolteachers, spiritual entities, religious figures such as Jesus or Buddha, intimate friends. Many deceased people have appeared who, regardless of their exact roles in life, shared one thing in common; they were able to, at some important moment in time, remain loving, open, and unconditional.

### **Getting Our Self Together:**

*Without Contraries, there is no progression.* William Blake


Polarities are *held together by Inspiration*, striving always to make present the world of our experience, while knowing that it is infinite and cannot be represented fully. What does that mean "held together?" It does not require us to perceive good people on both sides. In fact, we have a responsibility to prioritize, to assign responsibility. Held together in Inspiration allows us to draw from the dark and the light, to think clearly and to feel deeply, to be in the astonishing world and to be connected to many aspects of the inner landscape, to be inside our bodies, the interiors and to be present to what is outside, the Beautiful and the ugliness that nudges up beside us, to notice what is upside down and what is

upright—allowing us to be an ethical force and to re-member that we are in a greater world and to see what has happened to us in the past in order to expand the Heart and to embrace what we share with all living things.

In later chapters, the central polarities we struggle with in a Fallen World will be explored. These are Inside-out and Upside-down.

## Inspiration Incarnated

Four Domains of the Inspired Self	
<p><b>Internal/Individual</b></p> <p>Embodied Awakened Child            The Dimension of Loving Playfulness            Inspired State is Mindfulness            Builds the Capacity for Dual Awareness            &amp; the Capacity for Insight</p>	<p><b>External/Individual</b></p> <p>Embodied Artist            The Dimension of Loving Work            Inspired State of Flow            Builds the Capacity for Negative Capability            &amp; the Capacity for Fulfilment</p>
<p><b>Internal/Relational</b></p> <p>Embodied as Visionary            The Dimension of Powerful Play            Inspired State of Awe            Builds the Capacity for Sacred Perception</p>	<p><b>External/Relational</b></p> <p>Embodied as Lover            The Dimension of Powerful Work            Inspired State of Attunement            Builds the Capacity for Unconditional Love            &amp; the Capacity for Discernment</p>



### Raven's Nudging

*We have taken our two dogs into the woods.  
 Our Rescued mixed girl, Jewel, has the largest eyes of all.  
 Standing rooted, severed from the trees all around  
 Judging the rustle of every leaf, she smells something  
 In a trance of the past so dark on the well-lit trail.  
 I could cry when she looks so lost.  
 Our beautiful flat-coated princess, Raven,  
 Has fewer boundaries to her freedom, well loved,  
 Rabbit-hopping into middle age, pausing,  
 Moving to her wounded fur sister, bringing her nose  
 To nose in a soft stroke as if across the cheek  
 Of a sleeping child, to awaken her.*

# The Child

## Internal/Individual Energy of Loving-Playfulness Creates the Child

Image # The Presence



### *Awakened Child*

*Paying attention to the moment to moment unfolding of internal experience  
or purpose—without acting on thought or impulse—not judging the experience.*

Jon Kabat Zinn

The energy of the Child, Loving-Playfulness, often revives in us when we are amongst natural spaces. Even if we only have entrance to tiny meadows and scattered trees, even if we only know suburban landscapes, or small patches of the American woods, or parks in the city, spots very different from the mountainous grandeur of the Alps described in Wordsworth's, *The Prelude*, I hope the reader can remember some sense of quiet amongst the natural world, something other than the white noise of cars and human activity, some wild refuge from the anxieties of the Heart. It is in Nature we might feel a presence that looks on us with an unconditional loving gaze.

### **Why this painting?**

When we are safe enough and quiet enough, and if we have not been so traumatized as to refuse Loving-Playful energies, inner life becomes increasingly real and important. You may have noticed a slowing of the mind, the ego going offline and noticed within that there are different pushes and pulls, right-brain emotional reservoirs and left-brain maps and plans. In Loving-playfulness, we may recognize that we contain natural fault-lines: up and down, side to side, internal and external, feeling and thought, one foot in relationship and the other in separateness. We have body and heart and intellect, and we can step back at times (playfully, lovingly) and notice it all. This is the state of Mindfulness that grows in the energies of Love and Play.

The Child is Awakened in these energies and spirit of Love and so is loving. Love is the emotional, creative viewpoint that encompasses and integrates other viewpoints. To present a contrast, there are some people who will live their life focused on attaining ascendancy through Power, breaking

through barriers, and they would portray a vastly different picture than someone focused on cherishing and embracing diversity and painting with pigments heavy with benevolence and compassion.

The Child is Awakened also in the energies and spirit of Play, and so is playful. This is another elemental energy in human experience, the urge to cavort, to be prankish, to not take things so soberly, and so be open to whatever is found to be delightful, to express sensual passion. Essentially, it's a light, buoyant approach to the world, being willing to relax, to participate, to create and to recreate what captures the imagination. If you're devoted to Play, you may exert great effort, and become quite detailed but you don't lose the whole to the details of the details.

Who is this Child? An embodied character developing naturally in the state of Mindfulness with the energies of Loving-Playfulness.

### **The Awakened Child**

*The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a sacred Yes.* Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

The Awakened Child I'm describing here is not a human child but a construction of Inspiration, one identity that allows the Inspired Self to walk in the world. When you embody Loving-Playful energies over time, you have the potential to grow a well-developed masterpiece in this inner domain, an ideal vision of presence. Most can advance toward this ideal, but few will embody the Awakened Child. Few adults ever fully realize (remember) her capacities in adult human life, though we might have striking moments when we embrace the spontaneity and creativity of Loving-Playfulness.

When we're *in* this Child, we're like a new arrival to our planet, which, of course, children are. We're filled with wonder and astonishment. The Child is quite willing to act out different imagined roles, switching them up, stepping in and out of them. The Child is a player, as in performer, thespian, for the enjoyment—not to deceive, but for the fun of it. The Child will not be conned into thinking being humorless and well-rehearsed is superior. She may reveal the half-smile of the Buddha followed by the belly-laugh of the toddler. Honest and direct, aware of what is authentic, speaking what they perceive, calling out what is dishonest not to injure but because of a devotion to what is real. They name what is in front of them, in the interest of clarity and heart-felt recognition.

### **Love and Play Enough**

Unless you change and become like little children,  
you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Mathew 18:4 <sup>xlvi</sup>

As I have said, what I am calling here the Awakened Child is not a depiction of real human children. If you have had the extraordinary fortune of having children, though you may love them dearly, you may not recall them as particularly mindful creatures; quite the opposite, they were frequently selfish, demanding, and wanting what they want when they want it. In other words, they were typical infants and

young people. However, though not necessarily models of conscious presence, at times they had an enviable aliveness—an egoless wonder--that seems easily lost to adults.

And counter to the energies of Loving-Playfulness, in real childhood there are things to be nervous about, clear bullies on the streets, maybe budding sociopaths, and narcissists. Maybe parents who are frightening.

*Things are in the saddle and ride mankind.* Emerson <sup>xlvii</sup>

Most adults do not see child adversity clearly (and may have idealized their own childhoods), but “sensitive” kids learn who to avoid. Places where we wait for the school bus aware of a psycho-dramatic tension some mornings with a backdrop of domestic conflicts. Alcoholic parents. Yelling behind closed doors. The dangers that keep young people on designated sidewalks, avoiding spaces that are “owned” by angry and impulsive “mean” neighbors. Even at ten years old, some children are already psychologists. Or, perhaps, what they have developed is the awareness of a prey animal.

But because what many of us experienced was not unconditionally affirming, let’s imagine the conditions where a child has what he/she needs to grow something like an Awakened Child inner life.

The infant slips into a world where Mother and Father are waiting. Already in love with her, parental presence conveys how much they want to (always) attend and attune. But human connection is never perfect. It is not a symbiosis. As attachment theorists teach us, healthy development of the infant depends on right brain to right brain communication with parents. They attune. Mis-attune. Repair. Over and over. In this process, the child learns to trust the reality of Love despite the appearance of intermittent disconnection.

Fearful, anxious, panicked, or angry, the child receives a response that’s accepting, curious, opening a path to a deeply intimate terrain by trial and error.

The parent asks, *Are you hungry? Are you tired? Are you hurting? Is there something painful that I can help eliminate? Some act to ease dis-ease?*

It’s not so important for caregivers to be right. The Heart does not worry about arriving at a specific point, an outcome, a destination that’s known at the start. And the Heart never demands flawlessness. Attachment researcher Ed Tronick found that mother and child are only in a matching state 30 percent of the time, and thus in a mismatch 70 percent. That’s good enough. <sup>xlviii</sup> Raised in the Beauty of an attunement that fades to separateness then springs again into repair and a new summer of re-attunement, season after season, over and over, in the safety of these intimate rhythms, the repetitive emotional dances, the child grows resilient.

The child grows resilient.

Sometimes therapists speak of *mirroring*, meaning that we need to see a reflection of our complexity in the eyes of another who holds us in their arms. This allows us to embrace the fullness of

what it means to be human. We need to see our diverse powers reflected outside us. It gives us permission to be authentic, to acknowledge our imagination, our reasoning, our intuition, our sensitivities, and to know our darker impulses.

Of course, many of us were trapped as children in a different mirror, a funhouse-looking-glass of an aversive childhood that leads to something else.

## Capacity of the Awakened Child: Dual Awareness

*When we develop normally (with a “good enough” childhood environment), ego states are coconscious and relatively integrated in their functioning.* Forgash & Copeley <sup>xlix</sup>

When, thus, warmly invited into the garden, born into Beauty, the child learns to Play. And eventually Loving-playfulness becomes a secure felt-sense in her physical being. In this energy, she can learn in her own unique way how to be with herself, sensually taking in the inner textures, and shades and colors, to be with the unpleasant bumps and aches, the internal distress, and joys. Freedom and challenge.

The Awakened Child can move in and out of diverse energies of Pain, Self-deception, or the Abnormal without losing her way. To describe this connected fluidity, therapists sometimes speak of *dual awareness*. It’s the ability to perceive two or more realities at the same time.

It’s knowing:

1. What is happening in the moment.
2. While being aware of other energies that are running underneath or in the background without getting lost in them.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Processing (EMDR) and other similar therapies rely on dual awareness. To “reprocess” memories you will need to stay in the moment, aware of your surroundings and what is occurring, while also allowing yourself to move back to the traumatic moment. You won’t benefit from being trapped in the past, and becoming retraumatized, nor make progress if the past is walled off and remains dissociated.

Co-consciousness is a similar concept to dual awareness. You may have heard this term from discussions of traumatic experiences or in the diagnosis of DID. It is often understood as a capacity of a psyche in which multiple aspects of consciousness operate simultaneously and potentially in harmony. It describes a more integrated unified experience, with ego states “relatively integrated in their functioning.” Such awareness allows for contact with potentially many inner states, with coexisting personalities in us.

The Awakened Child as I depict her here is open and aware of what is occurring and can move seamlessly between internal energy forms. I am going to call this, simply, dual awareness, but I do mean that she can acknowledge different internal parts and has the potential to find a balance, a sense of integration, wholeness, a growing Inspired core. The Truth she knows is that she is an interconnected part



of everything, and something extraordinary. Such Truth requires connection with our bodies and gut feelings. And it is not a passive process. What is “real” arises in our active efforts to seek and to explore fearlessly, and to experience the full range of our suffering and joy. This is not passive. It takes active curiosity and energy to dig inwardly, beneath the appearance and beyond our roles and rules. Many children naturally do this, given the opportunity.

To summarize the Awakened Child, she lives in the state of Mindfulness, animated by the Loving-Playfulness energy. When we access her spirit, we gain:

- Some comfort acknowledging what is occurring at deep levels, allowing us to honor who we are beneath the roles we will assume.
- Acceptance that we have paradoxes and polarities and that is interesting, something to be curious about.
- Intuitive understanding that what we seek most of us is found in states of Love and Play.
- Awareness of what we want most of all (peace, connection, spontaneity, and creativity).

I imagine the Child entering a school assembly rather than a sophisticated performance though she can show anywhere of course if the adult persona will allow her to. She would be at home in a cafeteria or a gymnasium watching players costumed with papier-mâché, acrylic paint, and construction paper pieces on an improvised stage. There are suggestions of exotic characters but with some familiar eyes of classmates peeking out. It is an event met with wild curiosity, giggling and the exhilaration of pretend and the novel, the unexpected. Such places are distinct from a bored “mature” theatre with its cultured critics. Instead, the audience is wide-eyed, watchful, always curious, filled with the freedom of a long-awaited recess, the magic of talking scenery and weird animals and monsters both terrifying and silly. I imagine there are some characters who have been given many lines, but there is likely little narrative throughline to the Child, regardless of what the teachers or the parents might want to see performed. It’s not the Pilgrims’ arrival at Plymouth’s Rock or any predictable and dubious plot, not a holiday enactment, not a recital exactly, not a contest. For the Child, protagonists and antagonist are all part of the game, feeding the imaginal Heart. She takes it all in.

But we lose this ability to be there and there and there if we let the Abnormal, Pain and Self-deception neuro-gravitational energies shape us. There is danger we will lose the ability to see the hilarious and the unique moments, hear the still quiet Inspired voice. Those psychic Titans will perform a type of soul-murder as they solidify and wall off some innocent aspects of our natural contraries, freezing us in our development, reprimanding us if we are frolicsome and lively and vulnerable, replacing joy with seriousness and turning Love into a desperation to be loved or a fantasy of perfect love.

## **Dual Awareness Supports Healing**

If someone you loved desperately died or abruptly left you, you will of course feel intense grief; and, yet, with dual awareness you may find that you're able to better cope despite the loss, at least over time.

As a personal example, when my sister died way too young, though I was deep in mourning, I found it possible to focus on tasks at hand adequately, most of the time, though understandably with some increased exhaustion, as my psyche tried to manage two tasks, one an emotional task of surrendering to the loss, the other a more cognitive of managing life.

On a break at work, I would allow or even invite sorrow to the surface. Though I did not want to be overwhelmed, at times I did become lost in grief. But, with practice, I got better at moving in and out of distress. Peter Levin calls this "pendulating."<sup>1</sup>

Dual Awareness creates a necessary condition for pendulating. With such dual awareness we can make a deliberate limbic practice of inviting and allowing the Pain to move forward without being so bewildered, and then encouraging it to move into the background where we can be a witness to it. Titrating in and out. How long before any of us are able to fully put away an emotional injury? To be brutally honest, it could happen quickly, or it could take years, or never fully. Part of being a Child is surrendering to timetables.

### **Without These Capacities**

When we've not done sufficient work to deal with our emotional injuries, have not taken the time we need, then we can find ourselves drowning in the misery. Or we expend a lot of psychic energy to avoid, repress, lock Pain outside the house like an abandoned dog, and so exhaust ourselves; meanwhile, our left-brained Abnormal, like a delusional cheerleader or obnoxious uncle may want to convince us that we're doing well. We are over it and are now focused on what needs to be done. However, when we close the blinds and dull our hearts in denial, parts of us continue to howl and scratch relentlessly at the door or they escape despite the fences, running wild, astray, sometimes very far astray.

## **A Tale of Two Places**

*With you, I can leave that other place,  
Those winter trees that branch in my brain.  
At least I'm not waiting now for some old leaves  
To fall—as if waiting for the other shoe to drop—  
I don't feel it in my gut, or see only those blind spots  
Hanging in the foreground against the sky,  
Hanging like my mother dying  
From cancer, her wasted limbs and a frame  
Not much larger than my own amygdala,  
Frozen in time. It has been hard to keep things  
Separated from the touchstone, where I offered a gift  
To cure my mommy's sadness when I was five.  
I knocked on the front door with my not quite flowers  
(just a handful of twigs from the dog berry bush  
In the yard). She was so angry! (Maybe tired?)  
I was afraid of a rage that left me stuck  
On the doorstep. For years afterwards,  
Women showed up at the threshold just to remind me  
How unlovable I am. But, then, of course,  
This was not about love, and not about them,  
Because this was never about anyone else.*

## The Child's Mindfulness & Loving-Playfulness

Creates the Capacity for Dual Awareness

Image 19 *Guardians of the Path*



Dual Awareness

*Selflove, Vitality, Mischievous*

*We all need to feel safe in the arms of another appropriate mammal.*

Steven Porges

Even before her birth, the Child needs to be supported and protected. Eventually, as a teenager she will benefit from more active preparation to take on adult tasks. But at the beginning, she is absorbing Love and relishing Playful travels in the new woods.

Mother warmly mirrors her, responds, and murmurs to her daughter about Beauty all around until Loving-Playfulness becomes a secure felt-sense in the Child's physical being. In this energy, she is learning in her own unique way how to be with herself, sensually taking in the inner textures, and shades and colors, to be with the unpleasant bumps and aches, the internal distress, and joys. Freedom and challenge.

To flower, she needs to be watched and kept safe, and so the Guardians must stand ready to stop any who would overwhelm her.

### **Why this painting?**

In Awakened Child energies of Loving-Playfulness and in her Inspired State of Mindfulness, she develops the capacity for Dual Awareness. Informed by both hemispheres of the brain, but particularly noticing the wisdom of the right hemisphere experience, she is here yet she is there. She tolerates paradox, which allows for greater freedom as she searches for the path. She feels vital, mischievous and begins to recognize something important is happening beneath the surface.

Many of us have an inner Child who is wounded, burdened, an Outcast because our mother (or first caregiver) was unable to attune to us, likely because our nurturing figure did not have the Guardians she required, and so she was too unsure, too much in survival, too emotionally young or raw and

unsupported. This painting asks us to consider the Ideal mother, but not to blame anyone. To discern what has happened to us, not to judge, we need to perceive with compassion what our tiny mammalian bodies require.

### **Inside-out**

If you have lost connection with your inner Child, now might be the time to remember her needs. Of course, she is not a real child, but an imagined inner character representing youthful energies and times when you have been able to embody her freedom. When she walks on our imaginative stage, she is an invention of our Inspired Self.

When we're in this Child, we are Awakened to a Loving connection to each moment, present and vulnerable. Honest and direct, aware of what is authentic, she speaks openly. She calls out the dishonest not to injure but because of a devotion to what is real. She courageously names what is in front of her in the interest of clarity and recognition.

You will benefit from embracing the Child in her fullest emotions, even her tantrums. When fearful, anxious, panicked, or angry, become the mother who supports and protects. Your inner Child longs for a response that's accepting, curious, opening a path to a deeply intimate co-created terrain.

### **Upside down:**

In a society filled with the wounded, many people have not done sufficient Work to deal with emotional injuries and so they have paradoxically become restrained and leashed to them. Many have not had the time to heal because they are trying to survive or do not know what they need. Of course, we all can find ourselves drowning in misery at times, trying to talk our way into a better state while expending a lot of psychic energy to avoid, repress, lock Pain and Self-deception outside the house like abandoned dogs. In such a psychic state, we WITHER, grow exhausted; meanwhile, the left-brained Apparently Normal Persona, in Abnormal energies, like a delusional cheerleader, tells us stories about a wonderful childhood.

Though we can all relate, none of us can afford to surround ourselves with diminished people who have blocked Loving-playfulness and/or embraced defensive lies. And don't let such characters off the hook, imagining their invalidation of your spontaneity is just a sign they are having a bad day. Especially in the Upside down, be cautious when you want to give your heart to someone. Notice how they respond to your childhood Pain. *I don't understand. I can't relate because my family was so loving.* This may not be a red flag, but it sure is pink. They may have been one of the lucky ones, but it is more likely they are trying to delude themselves. If they have just closed the blinds and dulled their hearts in denial, wounded parts are still pumping cortisol and will continue to howl and scratch relentlessly at the door, and maybe prone to biting; or they will escape the relationship in some startling completely unexpected way.

In the Upside-down, not everyone possesses dual awareness (which allows for what we call insight). It's prudent not *to trust more than you know* to be true. And knowing takes time and a lot of inquiries.

### **Beyond Dual Awareness**

Image 22. *Dancing Foxes*



### ***Integration***

#### **Harmony, Balance, Guidance**

*What is true is already so. Owning up to it doesn't make it worse. Not being open about it doesn't make it go away.* Eugene T. Gendlin

Bathed in with Mindful light, this lively woman becomes a witness to all the animals that inhabit her inner wilderness. She recognizes the presences of different ego-states or inner personalities. This is her capacity for Dual Awareness: to be *present* without getting lost in the inner dramas. By standing outside the inner action, from this differentiated vantage point, she can hear the *soliloquies* of her thoughts and feelings as if they are characters on a spacious stage; she can notice the sensation in their bodies and their actions and learn their history, their individual memories, and concerns, hopes and dreams.

In response to her devoted attention, the foxes can witness her as an Inspired Self, gaining some sense of order by simply knowing she is ever there. And in this clearing, vibrant in the mindful energy, they may be willing and able to speak at length to her about themselves or about other characters.

Beyond Dual Awareness, she is bringing forth the capacity we call Integration.

#### **Why this painting?**

With awareness of her own patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving, the Awakened Child finds peaceful stillness more often than not; and from this inner depth she makes conscious choices, pulling forth the resources to guide and influence the inner characters, calming the nervous ones, encouraging



flexibility to the rigid, helping them release their Pain, improving their communications and their relationships, to set them free to dance according to her loving intention.

In this compassionate awareness, the Child in us senses a potential for harmony, balance, growth, and feels guided by an unseen presence (Inspiration). This is the Awakening that has been so elusive for most of us, those of us who have been lost in our trauma adaptations. When we can again live in the Child, what had seemed fragmented, confusing, even polarized, and pointless reshapes into an experience that is more flexible, connected intuitively.

As Loving-Playfulness becomes a secure felt-sense in our physical being, we can experiment with the lightness, spontaneity and creativity of a Child and find in our own unique way how to be with all our parts and contradictions, sensually taking in the inner textures, and shades and colors, to be with the unpleasant bumps and aches, the internal distress, and joys. Freedom and challenge.

We notice the putting together of things to see if they fit. Or to see if they don't. It is an experimenting expressing our innate desire to build, but not rigidly from the detail plans of others. We change things up out of curiosity, to play with available materials, explore spaces we have never been, in our drawings to merge animal features—dogs that fly, bears with horns, or birds and flowers—mixing it together, juxtaposed in amusing or disturbing fantasies, a preschooler expressing without constraint.

We play with all of our different powers, to laugh, and to grow, to explore emerging abilities, to say to ourselves “no” and to be distraught as well as to claim a joyful “yes,” to move our bodies and feel the physiology of it. To think through something, to love to read and learn, to play with our likes and dislikes, to find out what is funny and so try out laughter, and twirl for the dizziness of it. Our inner world becomes a laboratory where we bring things to together, or where we learn how to move between the parts of us.

Secure enough, our Awakened Child can fearlessly ask the question: Who Am I?

**Inside out:**

It has been revolutionary for many people to consider the best way to grow and heal is to engage rather than to fight inner resistance. However, on the other hand, we cannot simply accommodate or let sabotaging parts off the hook. As I mean it, Integration, then, is a form of inner discernment and the courage to stay engaged with all our dimensions. To know which parts to encourage to the front of the stage, which characters to step back from, which ones to block from directing the action. This is radiant wisdom that attunes all our inner parts and holds them safe in the arms of Playful-Lovingness.

**Upside down:**

Without Mindful Dual Awareness, the energies of Loving-playfulness, and some movement toward Integration (we don't have to be perfect, just better), we remain fragmented in “parts.” We may have little or no awareness that some segment of our psyche (the squeakiest wheel) is not the whole of us.

We may suddenly wake up in the voice of a callous judging father, in the helplessness of a self-erased mother or stuck in an ancient Child that is crying out. Or we may experience a type of long slow flashback, as old voices speak in our heads and trigger emotional circuits, flooding our body with panic, grief, rage or fear. Metacognition allows us to step back.

Similarly, in the Upside-down, without Dual Awareness and some movement toward our own Integration, we will fail to recognize that people in our lives also can be embodied by some unconscious piece of our psyche, invaded like an *Alien* movie, or influenced by some devilish figure on their shoulder. Or they seem sucked into a battle of some kind.

But when we feel integrated enough to consider and begin to answer the question of *who we are* (though describing our authentic self will always inevitably be beyond language), we are less reactive, less willing to meet another's activation with our own. Self-knowledge minimizes the likelihood of an abrupt survival response to the worst of the worst characters in the Upside-down.

## *The Artist*

### **External/Individual Energy of Loving Work Creates the Artist**

Image # Embraced



### ***Artist***

*It (creativity) is both deliberate and uncontrollable, mindful and mindless, work and play.*  
Scott Barry Kaufman and Carolyn Gregoire, *Wired to Create*<sup>li</sup>

The Artist has a relationship with Inspiration (often personified as the Muse, who holds her softly and speaks into her ear). There is Power here, but Inspiration is not a force that forces an outcome. When inspired, she listens to what is not apparent, to a reality that exists in another dimension, while, at the same time, she listens to her own Heart. The Artist is here and there and in all places at once. Not because she is scattered, but because Artists are that open. Because art must be this and that and more. Whatever needs to be.



So, we envision a creature of the wilderness, wild, in a landscape quite different from commercial “plants” where alienation is manufactured. Always, when she is engaged in her Work, she is part of Nature, immersed and yet separate. Creativity separates and integrates aspects that can seem like opposites, contraries, polarities, divisions. Indeed, she allows herself to be a vehicle for creativity to use her, speak through her, and yet she speaks who she is, a very special construction of her history and memories, a unique bio-psycho-social-spiritual being-in-the world.

### **Why this painting?**

We continue with our story, moving from Awakened Child to Artist. So, what is happening? What is this transition? Simply put, we’re changing our central focus from what is developing internally. We are now perceiving more of the external world; this is a real division (inner and outer) that we acknowledge and differentiate. As we heal and grow, eventually these aspects of being-in-the world will find a higher unity, a wholeness, a time when we can more seamlessly move between different dimensions of our experience.

Child to Artist might be considered (if we speak in metaphor) two stages of a healthy and Inspired life fully lived. Moving to Artist from Child, we take Mindfulness with us into the world and learn to Flow.

A developmental research term *scaffolding* seems apt here; it is a description of how parents can assist an infant learning to walk, by lightly holding their tiny fingers, when they stand, steadying them. Artists find a scaffolding as they are embraced by Inspired energies, and, too, can benefit from the scaffolding provided by other creatives, mentors, who give them a boost to a greater height, a lift to become more fully formed Artists—the flowering of Homo-aestheticus.

Later, in contrast to the Child and Artist, when we explore the Fallen World, we will find characters who are very different. Their inner and outer divisions lack an Inspired unifying force. They are patch-work constructs of the unconscious, masked agents wielding neuro-gravitational forces. These powers become devilish, upending our hopes and dreams.

### **The Artist**

To truly innovate, she must learn to follow her desire path, to set her unique goals, and to follow through. Most of us are just dilettantes in many things, but the Artist continues, until she finds her path.

Of course, there are those who are a slave to toil. That’s not the Artist. Vocation can take on the quality of a demand or drudgery, and sometimes a job becomes jail. But people who Work, in the Loving way I mean it here, may spend a lot of time devotedly toiling without any result that seems useful to society or to a career. But they are *about something* that has importance to them. The true Artist is an embodied creation of Inspiration in the world and answers the question, “What is worth doing?”

### **Work**

Artisans become devoted to their materials, the woodworker for instance is intimate with the grains and textures and subtle colors of wood, inhaling the smell of pine and birch and spruce, knowing

the differences from the inside out. Massaging the roughness, sanding, polishing until the grains bristle, woodworkers carry the turpentine, the stains, the polyurethanes as emotional memories.

To any Inspired Artist the smells and tastes and textures and visuals, the physiology of the craft, are important, be it an apparent art medium, or the craft of lawyering, or doctoring or waiting tables. Her immersion allows clarity—though not all at once; usually only by increments and approximations does she gain awareness. Some Work may take a lifetime, and, even then, she may make only a little progress. Some Work is the task of evolution, taking many generations.

I'm not, of course, attempting to describe any real artist. Many creatives are, to be honest, too ego driven and only partly motivated by Inspiration. In our Upside-down society, they also must find a schtick that sells. If they want to eat, they put something together with one eye on the marketplace. So, as I mean it here, the Artist is not a specific job title or an activity. Obviously, not all of us create things that resemble traditional works of art. Not everyone can paint or sculpt or design fashion. Not everyone harbors a desire to do a task easily recognized as artistic in this culture. But that's not relevant to the core of what we're describing.

Everyone has the potential to step into a state of flow, animated by Loving-Work, and like the awakened Child become some manifestation of the Artist, an invented vehicle, a Self-Inspired construction.

## Capacity of the Artist: Negative Capability

*The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind a faithful servant.  
We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.*  
Albert Einstein <sup>lii</sup>

In the Mindfulness of the Awakened Child, we can develop Dual Awareness and eventual Integration. This allows us to stay connected but separate (differentiated) from the Abnormal, our Pain and our Self-deception.

Similarly, in the Flow of the Artist, we have the potential for developing life-changing capacities. Consider what John Keats called *negative capability*, when we're "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." <sup>liii</sup> He believed such an attitude and ability allowed for meaningful creation. It keeps us from falling out of flow into misery, self-doubt, and blame and *irritable reaching*.

Negative Capability is the antidote to the frantic ego energy that can stall our Work. In Negative Capability we recognize the obstacles that arise around us, but we trust *uncertainties*. As we maintain a daily practice and trust even when we start to lose Loving-work energies, then we have an ability (some of the time) to stay connected enough to make a shift back to the flow or to interrupt what is interrupting. Also, we cease to put energy into what is self-defeating (some of the time), intuiting dead ends, trusting

that the barriers to our Truth and Beauty will give way. Thus focused, an Artist armed with this capacity of Negative Capability becomes adept at heavy lifting. What was difficult becomes more self-rewarding and intrinsically motivating. We see deeper and discover more. The window of tolerance grows in our Work. The Inspired Self manifests more through us. We grow more vibrant, resilient, and dynamic in our efforts.

### **Soul?**

*What makes it art, is that the person who made it overcame the resistance, ignored the voice of doubt and made something worth making, something risky, something human. Art is not in the eye of the beholder. It's in the soul of the artist.*

Seth Godin, *The Icarus Deception*<sup>liv</sup>

Creating our art is important work. The Artist is *par excellence* the person who works to develop her perception into form, her insight into vision; and art is a technique of communicating something that's experienced as purposeful. I believe that Inspiration presses us all to learn a craft, or many crafts, to engage in activities that manifest our awareness. But this requires more than Inspiration striking us in the middle of the night. It demands discipline without guarantee of social or financial reward. Though there are **also** rewards.

There's the potential, if not often realized, to do something that touches another, reveals something that the world has not seen so clearly before:

- Art protects us against the sense that we don't belong here and that we're not worthy.
- Art transforms Nature into our home.
- We learn to see differently.
- Fulfillment arises from the toil we know is worthy of our time and, ultimately, worthy of life.

As we engage in creative efforts, when our art becomes a dominant force, Beauty has a greater pull than pain, and Truth a greater pull than self-deception. It is now that the Artist can consider the question, "Where am I going?"

### **The Muse in Loving-work**

I can idealize this. I can imagine I was destined to come to rely on my Artist inner voice, destined as an Arthurian knight is to adventure, going where I had to go, into places of action and activity, on the dramatic and creative path. But, honestly, in my early life, I recall only an incremental dawning that a Muse could be a reliable ally. Indeed, it seemed, the Muse, or Muses, or Daimon, or call it what you will, was giving away its blessings. But why didn't anyone talk about this? No one talked of a creative companion accessible to me, certainly not in my public school. What I do recall is that when homework required some artistry, I could put the assignment away in the background of my mind, pushed across the corpus collosum perhaps or tucked back in the right-brain somewhere. Later, I would check back to the foreground of consciousness to see what showed up. It was a kind of magic.

I was not the smartest or the most athletic or in any way popular, but this was something I could claim, this recognition of *the magic*. There were insights that just came, revealed themselves, assisted me in putting together something new. Why did no one talk of the wizardry of this?

As an angst-ridden teen, when writing poetry, I relished moments when the right words would come out onto the page without conscious struggle. Sometimes ideas would form while napping, shifting from sleep to wake into an “aha” moment. I learned that I could frequently invite this force by entering into an alert but relaxed and expectant frame of mind. A trance almost. I came to discover that painting responded to this frame of mind and offered a similar supernatural power and a sense of flow much like those earliest moments of pen to paper, though claiming visual art as important came much later to me. In my family, visual art was even less appreciated than poetry. And certainly no one mentioned a Muse.

### **The Artist’s Flow & Loving-Work**

Creates the Capacity for Negative Capability

Image 17 *The Energetic Path*



### **Negative Capability**

Letting go, Readiness, Spontaneity

*Art is not a thing. It's a way.* Elbert Hubbard

**In her Loving-Playfulness, mindful flowering, the Awakened Child has come to know some of her own Pain and Self-deception yet, too, to hold to her Heart, perceiving what is True and cherishing the Beautiful. In her own time, she develops into an active actor on the stage, until, curious, she leaves her garden home ready to explore the forest and the mysterious lands beyond. Here, she learns to Work. To make something happen, to fashion something extraordinary.**

**As her energies become focused, developing into daily practices, she naturally becomes the Artist energized by the Flowing energy of Loving-Work. Animated by this force, she entrusts herself to a lifelong journey of creation.**

**Why this painting?**

Inquisitiveness nudges our Artist into Negative Capability. The egoic grasping is dampened and the focus is deepened. In service of the Work, she finds an ability to let go, to move beyond resistance, to be spontaneous.

**Inside out:**

Because many of us were not born into love and acceptance, we're blocked. There's a screen, a barrier that disconnects us from our authenticity. As a result, we might put something together, but not *our art*. Often what we end up spending our days doing—the “work” we do—is predictable and fashioned for approval. Disconnected from the Awakened Child, numbed, dissociated, there's a resignation to endeavoring at what we have always known. We abandon our Work because we have lost the playful energy, or, in our fear, we have failed to develop a meaningful practice. To avoid criticism, we stop being spontaneous. We choreograph our steps on the stage, memorizing them and practicing them. Actions get reduced to reproducing and manufacturing what feels safe.

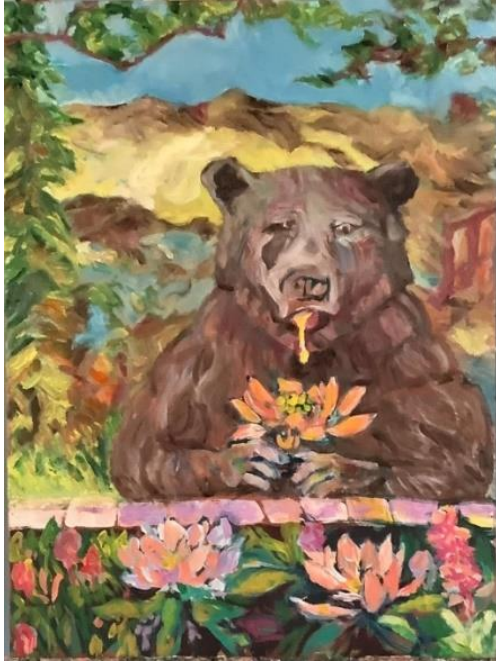
If this has become true for you, foster some creative play and embrace the notion that you are not the actual creator, at best a co-creator; let art pass through you as if from “the Muse,” arriving by inspiration or spirit. If you have been restrained, use methods that allow for spontaneity and “aha” moments. Collage can be a way toward liberation if you are doing visual art. If you have already experienced Loving-Work in a state of Flow then you know it starts with getting loose, rather than controlling tensely for an outcome. Imagine yourself as a vessel and vehicle for something larger.

**Upside down:**

Without the Artist's Negative Capability, we face the danger of becoming a dutiful Worker, Working for Love, or settling for recognition if not for Love, engaging in nothing but drudgery, losing inspiration, passion, and play's lighter emotional touch. The sense of a living presence in and around us fades. We lose our openness and willingness to experiment or to stop and rest. Until we feel depleted and stuck. And then, like so many of us in the Upside- down Fallen World, we work ourselves to death.

## Beyond Negative Capability: Fulfillment

Image 26 *Lotus-dendrom*



### *Fulfillment*

**Recovery, Awakening, Purposeful**

*Tell me what you yearn for, and I shall tell you who you are. We are what we reach for, the idealized image that drives our wandering.* James Hillman, [The Soul's Code](#)

A Bear eating from the bouquet of Lotus-dendron is a portrait of a being in alignment with an Essential Identity. What lights up this Bear and is purposeful resists being contained in language. It's not a behavior nor an activity, not a habit, not a job or even a career, not a role or an obligation, or an expectation. Putting labels or even words to it is a fool's errand from the start. As soon as we apply a name, we have probably obscured as much as we have revealed. It's a state-of-being in which will arise a directional force that points us toward our hopes and dreams, a drive for fulfillment. This state of *being-in-the-world* requires daily practice. Maybe many daily practices to start...until we can embody the Inspired bear living with intention in a landscape of Lotus-dendron. Suddenly it makes sense why we have not been able to find a quick remedy to this feeling that we are living someone else's life. First, we need to become a simple Bear of being and take the time to be reminded of who we are.

### **Why This Painting?**

Rather than spinning in a familiar reactive cycle, the ego is silent in the Child's mindfulness and the Artist's flow. What is important reveals itself, and she can formulate crucial questions. What is her intention? What is worth her life? What is worth doing? What will fulfill her? When she begins to intuit an answer beyond her fears, this is a sign of another capacity of the Artist that has become activated—Fulfillment.

As you continue the Loving-Work of your Artist, now is the time to consider (remember) your purpose, and align your thoughts, feelings, and actions to your Core Identity. This Core is something



worthy. Essential. Creative. Or Inquisitive. Or Adventurous. Or Nurturing. You alone must find the word(s) that best fit.

But how do you remember your purpose if you are lost? Your left-leaning intellect alone will not be able to think your way into realization; at best it can be selectively honest or will tell you what you already know. First, like the Bear you must inhabit the energies that allow for Inspiration. Our deepest knowledge of Self (insight) requires we are open, Enlarged, allowing connection with our bodies and gut feelings; we must invite what is less known to come up from the bottom, to peer out from behind the appearances, to be revealed outside our rules and roles. This takes a willing heart and an effort to express and create (in Flow), to acknowledge our Truth with curiosity (in Mindful inquiry), and to remain fearless in our explorations of intimate relationships (in Attunement).

Being-in-the-world (in a state of spacious awareness), you will be reminded of your persistent sensitivities and tendencies. In a Jungian sense you came into the world as a seed that has the potential to grow through your experiences and reveal your Essence. This can be hard to see clearly, perhaps even seems lost to you at times, but, if you reflect on your history, you are likely to see glimpses of the Soul, the quintessence of your Heart in patterns and repetitions.

Since an Essential Identity is not your career nor a role, nor your skills, nor your habits and behaviors, it may seem abstract, but it is not incorporeal; indeed, we see and sense it in the tangible and the corporeal. Often our first awareness of it is mirrored to us from a person who noticed us, an attentive teacher or a grandparent, someone who took the moment to communicate “I see this and see the value in you.” Of course, they may not have used any such words. They may not have used any words at all, but you knew.

Delve into your positive memories. If you are successful in remembering, prepare yourself for insights that can alter the trajectory of your life.

### **Inside Out:**

Many of us act as if genuineness is secondary, subordinate to our connection to others. Because we are mammals, our very survival has depended upon care from caregivers, and so we had to adapt to whatever they required from us. Born into this world so extraordinarily vulnerable, the most impoverished delusional attachment was better than nothing. We learned to call the cruelest places “home.” The alternative (abandonment) would literally kill us, and so we needed to stay unconscious to our needs, to distort reality, to suppress what was too confusing, to reject who we have come into the world to be. A wise Bear knows you need time alone. If you have refused the call previously, prepare yourself for a dark night. If lost, relentlessly seek a way back home to a place that can hold your Heart. There you will find people, a community if you are lucky, who resonate with, recognize, support, and help protect your Essential Identity.

**Upside down:**

*The talent lies in the choice.* Stella Adler

So many of us have lost awareness of anything bigger than driven busywork. A singular uninspired focus feeds compulsive, meaningless and dehumanizing activity. Living in the Upside-down, we will be encouraged to become product, which is in essence an Outcast to yourself. In the Upside-down, the Artist must take time and frequently consider the trajectory that she has been on. Consider taking a clear inventory of the pressures that rob you of your Truth and Beauty.

Sit with yourself. And when you are making *your art*, mix in the tints of Love, Play and Work. There's also potential for wisdom: to engage in work that reveals institutions and suspicions. Though it may feel you are pushing against the societal streams, find the deeper pools where you are away from others. Be innovative. Play in undertakings that develop out of deep feeling and purpose.

As the Bear reminds us, if the way has been straight, you have likely been on someone else's path. Or, if the river grows straight, you are probably headed toward a creative dam or are being funneled toward the sawmill. Maybe you have become a Worker rather than the Artist, a shadow-version of yourself more driven to seek acceptance than Inspiration. Take time away from the world. From family. From the demands of your career. From the expectations of the culture. Practice Lotus-dendron states of Mindfulness and Flow. Allow yourself time to meander on those winding inspired Desire Paths, sometimes known as Bear trails.



## V. Inspired Relations

### I Knew a Lover Named Raven

*Raven was a jester, much too energetic in the morning,  
Like the sun was bright. Let me stay blind, or in the dark,  
Eyes tight, cracked just enough not to fall on my intellect.  
For my head was important. I would need it today.  
But my body was cold, and I was in a mood, warmed-up  
To stay asleep, and not to feel it, and to keep bundled  
Tight, up tight in my heavy coat, scarf tugged as a noose,  
Thick gloves. Dreaming of coffee. Let me steep  
In remaining dreams from my bed that threatened  
To escape when Raven perturbed me, leashed as I was  
To the spontaneous pull down the drive, and to the right  
On the trail that she could never see as straight.  
Let's get this over, here and back, not Here and Now,  
on the familiar path; and be on with it. My day laid out  
before me. But she just laughed in her way, such a furry  
disrespectful retriever, who I would dearly miss after  
her death, more than I ever wanted to admit. She was,  
in retrospect, a black-coated trickster, retrieving  
too much about myself in her curiosity and her play.*

**External/Relational Energies of Powerful-Work Creates the Lover**  
Painting: Safe in the Arms



## The Lover

*I carry your heart. I carry it in my heart. e. e. cummings*

Mammals, different species, safe in the arms of the other, in whatever fur they wear on stage, as beast or beauty, the true Lover is defined by her ability to move in, slant towards the other, open to the mutual leaning in and heart-felt influence of the beloved. Lovers are Awakened Children and master Artists embracing the larger rhythms around them and in them, sensitive to the dichotomies of life, keeping space for differences rather than weaponizing them in the service of me, me, me. Seeking joy but not avoidant of suffering.

Mindfully flowing in the attuned spaces of intimacy, we see that undeniable tilt forward in their physiology, feel their Heart, the music of their voices, their infinite kindness joined with the courage to speak what is uniquely True and to share what is Beautiful, and to fully listen. Each maintains their unique vision and yet co-creates a world between, a mutual landscape that never previously existed. Self-regulating and co-regulating takes extraordinary Inspiration.

### **Why this painting?**

We continue with our story of lifelong development, moving from Artist to Lover. Here we are still focused on the external landscape but moving into a unique relational and intimate paradigm. This requires shifting from the energy of Loving-Work, rechanneling the capacities of Negative Capability and Fulfillment, focusing them into close bonds and interrelationships. This is a very distinct experiential dimension, moving from what makes our individual Work worth doing to the domain of connection.

Whereas the Child gifts us with the ability to dip in and out of our inner domain, to be with her own suffering and joy, to know internal disturbances without getting completely flooded or caught up in loops of negative self-appraisal; Whereas the Artist gifts us with the ability to step out the frantic energies of the ego, to be with our Work, creative and intentional, and to more readily see and admit when we lose the path, resetting as the art requires; the Lover gifts us with a capacity for a connection that is deeply heart-felt and mutual, interdependent, the ability to imagine the other's world, while maintaining her own desire path, her unique vision and goals, to assertively say "Yes," and to say "No," "This is a problem for me." Setting boundaries that protect her. Recognizing her limitations.

As the relationship dimension becomes prominent in the Lover, she doesn't lose energy. She grows into Powerful-work. She adds. She multiplies. States of Mindfulness and Flow extend now into a state of Attunement, and she expands in the mounting energies of Love and Play and Work. In these wild fields of this beloved landscape, Inspiration builds this identity that I call the Lover, a way of being-in-the-world, who can now ask the question, "Who will go with me?"

### **Powerful-work?**

With limbic practice and compassion, she slowly raises the threshold of what she can tolerate without losing her ground, building relational resilience. She can see others more clearly, and, with her own increasing freedom, she naturally works to let others live freely; this is the defining characteristic of Powerful-Work. There's some evidence that even very disturbed attachment patterns can be improved in

this way, in these unconditional (less conditional) relationships. We gain “earned-secure” attachment from heartfelt connections. This is far-reaching, game changing. It means, even if we have been mired in the Fallen world, there can be a way for us as adults to repair the wounds left from our most difficult life experiences.

Being an Artist and still having the Heart of an Awakened Child, our Lover will seek out people who share a felt sense of Loving-Work, (and a capacity for Loving-Play) and, over time, these relationships deepen, become more intimate. Astonishing new places open in the Heart, as she fully imagines the beloved, traveling beyond herself, moving from one meadow into the far fields, and into the intimacy of another’s skin. I-thou.

Though Power, like Love, Play and Work, can seem slippery to define, here I highlight Power as the sense of agency in relationships, the ability to *make something happen that’s both loving and authentic*. Such Power is overcoming, not overlording. It is the potency to serve others, the vigor to manage triggered states in the service of being a healing force. Becoming synchronized with another, connected yet willing to lay down our weapons and take off the armor, this is a state that’s hard for mammals to achieve, not to mention exceedingly difficult to maintain. Only the safest relationships invite us to turn off these force fields and to be freely exposed; but even then, it takes courage to stay attuned, especially if what we hear sounds like criticism or anything that seems patently unfair, cutting, and harsh. It takes guts to stay present and be willing to face our worst fears, our deepest worries that we have been found to be inadequate to the person we love, or unworthy, or unlovable.

### **Felt Sense**

In my twenties, this third “sense” felt a bit like coming out of lonely dark trees into the morning of a warming meadow. My family of origin was emotionally detached, cold. My parents were always secretive, cut off from others, from extended family, from neighbors. They had no friends.

From such a distance, they no doubt seemed *normal*, average.

*The father* worked full time and spent off-time on home-repairs.

*The mother* worked part-time and worried about the kids.

*The children* all went to school, and no one got into serious trouble, though they failed to excel.

But chaos was hidden beneath the outward surface. Undeniable tension cut off my appetite at the dining room table. My father’s stony silence, the random acts of violence. My mother erasing herself and speaking openly only late at night, drunken and whispering.

As for many of us, Powerful-work was not something that was mirrored in our family.

It seems in retrospect I would have been much safer to stay hidden in the forest (staying isolated, and less anxious), but that was not what my heart ached for.

Exploring the world of friendships, first with peers, driven to this relational landscape even sometimes against my will, I began to learn that there could be moments of deep connection. Attunement is how as a therapist I would describe it to clients, moments when fewer words need to be used, and heart-felt understanding is conveyed in the eyes, sometimes a touch.

Such Inspired Power is Work. It requires commitment, as courageous as any Artist devoted to the craft. We grow only as we tend the soil of our most intimate life with another who is also aware of their own Power. In time we develop some trust. We then can cultivate new ground. We can then increase trust. Develop further. It is like the seasonal cycle of attachment and of flow. In our ongoing work, we cannot control the outcome, yet we must make courageous efforts. It takes sweat and certainly tears.

*Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all the time.* Rumi <sup>lv</sup>

As our story goes, naturally, the Lover becomes wise in her use of Power, more spontaneously on-point, intuitive, sensitive. She recognizes the ability to injure and the strength of the Heart to heal those in Pain and Self-deception. What she perceives is Beauty expanding beyond her love partners, to include more than her family, her tribe, her nation-state, to include a larger and larger ring of life, encompassing all the other mammals and other creatures of the planet, until Inspiration grows her into a Lover to the world.

## Unconditional Love: Capacity of the Lover

*To be in harmony with the oneness of things, is to be without anxiety about imperfection.*  
Zen Master Dogen Senji

Of course, this is not a description of limited human lovers. The “lovers” we find around us, and in the media, can be *full of themselves*, over the top with egoic desire and lust, while presenting themselves as “a giver,” willing to *do anything* for their partner, unless they get irritated, then they will *do nothing*. Or they may be pestering, intrusive of the one they supposedly cherish.

But everyone has the potential to step into this ideal of Lover. Like the Child and the Artist, the Lover is a Self-construction: Inspiration working through the relational medium (state) of Attunement, to create a way of walking in the world that can make a difference. What is Attunement?

Like Mindfulness and Flow, Attunement is a Heart-state. Here we're extending the word further than the mother-child's attachment. Attunement can be nurtured as a mature adult as we extend this into all our relationships and connections. Such Attunement is not just about the surface appearance (physical attraction) but an apprehension of a surplus, the depth, the promise of this unique being (human or otherwise), your potential *beloved*. It's an apprehension that goes beyond what we're usually prepared to see, and so we normally don't. But in an instant, when we finally attune, the veil drops.

When we're Attuned, as in Mindfulness and Flow, we lose time. The ego moves aside.

## Not Logical

In an Attuned state Lovers defy the common belief that everyone is out for themselves. I've seen loving partners immediately ask for forgiveness when they have caused pain (apologizing even when they have not meant to cause pain). Why in the world would they do that?

In the energy of Attunement . . . if we have wounded, acted out in selfish or manipulative ways, we apologize, not because we're trying to gain something, but because we're wired by evolution to shift from being a self-obsessed individual *when we feel safe enough*. We're also endowed with a potential—the central capacity of the Lover—for what I would describe as joyful multitasking, the ability to focus on both our own aliveness and our *beloved's*, in the same moment. This is the Inspired Self working through our connections, a boon is bestowed, a libation is given that pours over us as we cultivate our ability to stay present with all that is on stage.

*The most sublime act is to set another before you.*

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

The Lover can step into the other's shoes (their body, their being), to extend awareness beyond egoic notions, to be aware of giving and taking great Joy. All at once. I'll name that Unconditional love. But there is another Capacity beyond which I will call Discernment. The ability to truly know who is in front of you, without projections. This is an ability to form judgments that matter while not losing Unconditional love; in fact the perceptions are grounded because you Love.

### ***The Beginning that is Desire***

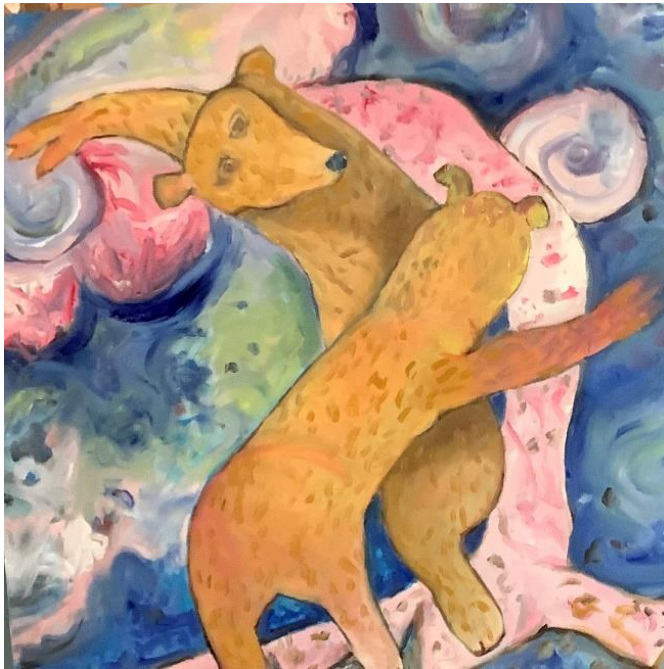
*I'm powerless in this storm as your closeness flings me  
Out of complacency into those recurring sensations of longing,  
Threatening the integrity of my tiny self.  
Is this the panic of house dogs,  
when someone penetrates their safe night's silence?  
And stands unexpectedly on the threshold?  
Just a disorder of physical energy, a chaos of tingling,  
an upset stomach and palpitations?  
No. There's something balanced too, and welcomed,  
not an aversion to an intruder but rather Joy, cutting sharp  
through the circumference into the heart. I've tried to think  
the attraction through, containing it. But there's not an object  
to be measured. There's more of the opposite, a paradoxical  
complement to death: life on the precipice, shifting, changing,  
with every movement, every loving glance and breath.*



## **The Lover's Attunement and Powerful-Work**

Creates the Capacity for Unconditional Love

Image 23 *Bear Dancing*



### **Unconditional Love**

**Dancing, Sensual, Attuned**

“In this love, you’re understood as you’re without mask or pretension. The superficial and functional lies and half-truths of social acquaintance fall away, you can be as you really are. love allows understanding to dawn, and understanding is precious.

Where you’re understood, you’re at home.”

John O’Donahue, *Anam Cara*<sup>lvi</sup>

**Bears have done their own Work which is separate yet intertwined with relational Work. They have learned to compassionately and gently hold their own Pain and Self-Deception. And, so, in the dance of any one day, they are less dependent on practiced steps, less reliant on other bears. Awakened from slumber, bears are living in their own Power, and, so, in intimate moments they are spontaneous, moving toward each other, expressing through eyes, and play, and touch, synchronizing in their hops and spins, feeling each other’s pulse and presence and rhythm. When the bears move nose to nose tenderly, expressing both sambas and sorrows, they have a Power to help each other heal.**

### **Why This Painting?**

The Artist’s inventiveness seeks a creative intervention to the real problem. As Inventiveness is always a directed flow of Loving-Work, it needs now only to be Attuned for her to imagine an Inspired Ritual response to Pain. The response must be powerful enough to make a difference, and that is always relational, in relation to the beloved, to the world, to all the living creatures in it. Now she must grow, must become Lover and activate the capacity for Unconditional Love. In truth, it is hard for mammals to be so vulnerable and connected.

This image of dancing bears calls you to be a Lover. Loving presupposes that you have awakened the Child's mindful capacity for Loving-Play, and you share the Artist's flowing sense of Loving-Work. You are alive in the world, beyond the Fallen who remain stuck and deadened in someone else's matrix or are too frightened to open to Love.

Perhaps, as you are reading this, a relational dimension is growing. Energies are rising. You have an act-hunger, or at least a dance-hunger. Dancing requires spontaneity and sensitivity and creativity and promotes Attunement. To be Attuned is not just about physical attraction (though that will be part of the mix in a romantic relationship). At its core this is a powerful reality-shifting energetic state that allows you to see beneath the surface, deeper than the appearance. As you nurture your connection and devote a focus to the other, you are being encouraged to apprehend the surplus, the depth, the promise of this unique being (human or otherwise), to see the beloved "*without mask or pretension*."

Our society openly scoffs at such a deep connection, which prompts us to place limits on what we are prepared to understand and to embrace. Until we end up blind. This painting invites you to let the veils of reservation drop, move your ego and your fears aside, open your eyes, and risk the dance floor. Though there is no way to know ahead of time if any person in your present life will delightfully respond and show themselves as worthy of the dance, let yourself be the Lover that you came into the world to be.

#### **Inside-Out:**

Intimacy has the power to heal those we hold closest, but that presupposes we have done our own Work. When we love ourselves enough to care for our own Pain and Self-Deception, we're less dependent on circumstances, people, places, and things, and less reliant on defenses to feel okay. We're also less likely to blame others when hurt, less apt to act out of weaknesses or control agendas.

If you are recognizing there is potential in a relationship, but you are feeling blocked or confused, it would be worth the effort to investigate from where this impediment this derives—something present or long ago. Is intuition telling you something? Or are these *ghost tales* from another time? There can be many things linked to resistance, many having nothing to do with the other: instability in our careers, mental illness, domestic violence, sudden financial losses, or simply getting overwhelmed by some other area(s) of life. Consider therapy to address your barriers and burdens.

#### **Upside-Down:**

We live in a lonely society. If you are feeling the loss of intimacy, this can feel like panic and grief. Deep connection is a basic human need, and you do not need to settle for a passionless union or let yourself drift in a relationship along the path of least resistance.

If there was joy in a relationship and it has dissipated, now is the time for reflection. It is common to experience a sobering effect the longer you are together. Intimate behaviors get less focused, loving thoughts less inspiring; and compassion is less, eventually devolving into a relationship we never

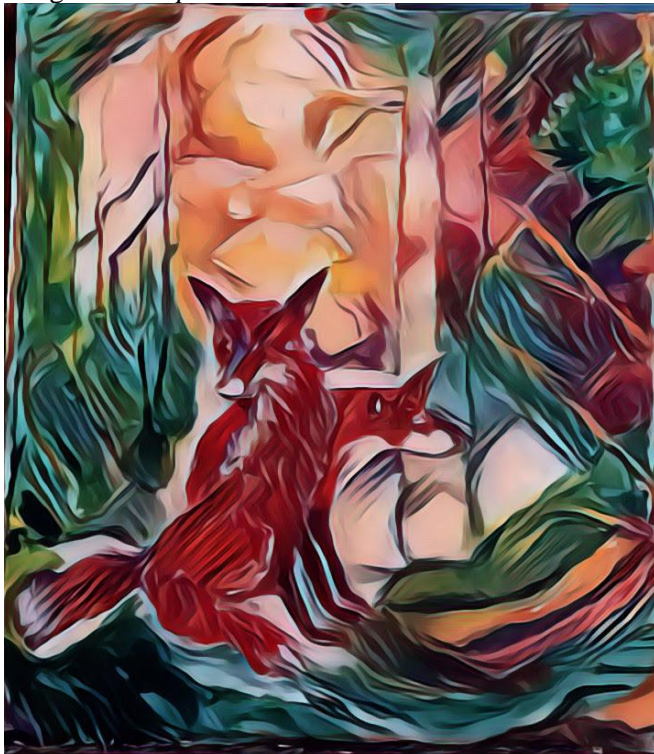
imagined we could tolerate. Consider whether the emotional core of an important relationship has been neglected for too long. Is it time to move on? Or is it time to decide to put the necessary effort into a passionate renewal?

***Discernment***

*Your words in migration, thoughts  
Into space, are potentially perilous  
Between and at the essence.  
Such an exquisite thing to discern you—  
To open to new notions, seeing  
The unspoken, the underpinning.  
How fine! You are so unlikely,  
The tempo of your is dance raw and rare,  
An intersection of expressions,  
Withholding and rekindling.  
And this is not harmless but so  
Political and moral, historic  
And of the flesh, because  
Understanding changes the world,  
In a way that violence cannot imagine.*

**Beyond Unconditional Love: Discernment**

Image 24 *Couple in Love*



***Discernment***

**Inquiry, Attention, Honesty**



*I carry your heart. I carry it in my heart. e. e. cummings*

As they are self-governing, foxes naturally let their partner live free. But together they are also practicing the art of intimacy and have slowly raised the threshold of what they can tolerate without losing their forest ground or flipping their furry lids. They are innately compassionate and have the Capacity for Unconditional Love. But beyond that, they have developed Discernment.

This has taken work. Over time committed to Powerful relational practices, they find it easier to dip in and out of connection, to know internal disturbances without getting completely flooded or caught up in loops of negative self-appraisal. They both can be with their own suffering and admit to their own Self-sabotage. But they are also seeing their partner more clearly, and finding it easier to assertively express, often with a little nip, “This is a problem for me.”

Brilliant Lovers, they know they are striving to build a foundation of trust and mutual respect. But they are also honest and open and willing to make difficult decisions if this relationship no longer serves their needs. Thus, these foxes encourage us not only to Love but to attend with careful consideration and insight. This requires being perceptive as a fox.

**Why this painting?**

The Lover shows up with a capacity anchored in Unconditional Love but moves beyond it. For a response to our lives that is honest—not impulsive, not someone else’s action, not a judgment of the intellect but attentive to what is True and Beautiful for her, we need Discernment.

The point is that Unconditional is not Love’s finish line. There is another level to reach, another Capacity that is equally important for Lovers, and harder to grow. It involves paying attention to red flags or warning signs that may indicate challenges such as dishonesty, lack of respect, controlling tendencies, or a pattern of unhealthy communication. Rather than ignoring or dismissing these signs, Discernment means to consider their implications for the future of the relationship.

However, we can’t lose Unconditional Love, or we will never be discerning. Instead, we will wither into nonsense judgments and play the blame game until we are hard pressed to differentiate projection of our fears and arrogance from what is real.

**Inside-out:**

Paradoxically, once we see the other in Love, we can begin to lose our ability to perceive. We tend to see what we wish for or to see only them in the best light. Thus, Discernment requires a deep understanding of oneself and one's own needs, values, and boundaries even after we “fall in love.” It involves staying Inspired enough to identify and articulate what is important in a relationship, such as trust, respect, heartfelt communication, emotional support, and shared values. By having a clear understanding of our own needs and desires, we can better assess whether a potential partner aligns with those needs and whether the relationship has long-term potential.

Any Ritual we create to interrupt and replace old patterns must be grounded in the Lover’s Love and, simultaneously, anchored in what is right for you; become this Lover who can clearly answer the question, “Who will grow with me?”

### **Upside-down:**

Inspired Power is the capacity to make changes, to disturb, to make something different happen. But it never takes command of others or uses weapons, not seeks to offend. That is a sign of ego exercising domination and supremacy, and such power to control is not Inspired. That's self-centeredness. It's about one person's perspective and expectations. It feeds conflict.

Powerful Work is about having an agency in relationships, not masquerading to look strong or justifying abuse or playing nice. In Loving-Playful-Work, our real strength is used with skill and flexibility and empathy to promote mutual blessings. Have you ever considered becoming an anarchist for the sake of healing and growth? Taking a stand against keeping secrets for bullies, refusing to be quiet about the lies we all are *required to keep* for our jobs or relationships (though that is not explicitly stated in the HR handbook, meeting agenda, nor marital vows). Are you still enough of a rebel of Love to declare, "I will not find peace by the capitulation to my worst angels nor, more degrading, for the worst angels of anyone else? So don't tell me your gossip because I won't keep it, and I certainly won't whisper it like it is something more important than the horse manure I know it to be. Not in the name of hierarchies, or self-important legacies, nor for a few more dollars in my paycheck nor to protect your prejudices nor for a marriage that requires my silence. I won't join anyone's preadolescent flag waving of any stripe or colors. I won't wear the shirt and cap, and I won't participate in mandatory humiliation nor compete against the other animals at the slaughterhouse." Of course, you might want to tinker with the language.

In the Upside-down, if we are to any chance to live the life we imagine, then we need to Discern who is around us and who we bring close and who we remain with. And to maintain boundaries to protect our Truth. A common example of blinding yourself and calling it unconditional love is staying in passionless unions (if they can even be called unions). Some decide it's time to settle down (the biological clock ticking) or make decisions solely on financial considerations—marrying someone because of a large income or other assets—or they drift into a relationship along the path of least resistance. A few intentionally choose a person who does not attract them in a powerful way, hoping that this provides some emotional control, or at least less loss of control. Unfortunately, if you start with little or no joy, how likely is it that you will grow together?

If there was real joy at the start, too many of us allow a sobering effect. Passion leaves our system. It can be gone in an acute white-knuckle withdrawal, or titrate slowly, taking decades to drain away. We ratchet lower and lower our expectations, as intimate behaviors get less focused, loving thoughts less inspiring; and compassion is less, eventually devolving into a relationship that we never imagined we could tolerate. Stay awake!

### ***Autumn Jewels***

*She is a bouquet of a dog  
Her body arranged into a dozen  
Black wildflowers of fur grown out  
Of this Vase of Fall.  
A lustrous season is not container  
Enough to hold her, spilled  
Into her play in the descent  
Of these leaves in the gamboled  
Breeze and the withered light.  
But sometimes I grieve  
For all of us, the way we're  
Such bold and foraging  
And fragile sweet souls.*

### **Internal Relational Energies of Powerful-Play Creates the Visionary**

Image # *A Spiritual Jewel*



### ***Visionary***

#### **Energy of Powerful-Play Creates the Visionary**

*We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.* T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"<sup>lvii</sup>

We continue with our story of development, moving from Lover to Visionary. We have now shifted from the external landscape to focus back on the inner domain, to *know the place for the first time*. This requires refocusing the energy of Powerful-Work, rechanneling the capacities of Unconditional Love and Discernment. Beyond the Child's lovely openness, when the Lover and the Artist turn inward, we can

now contemplate the enormity of all life, developing far-reaching understandings, Heart-felt musings about our relationship to something grander.

This part of our Visionaries path can be full of pitfalls and slippery slopes. She can easily lose her way or even forget Inspiration if she becomes complacent or does not continue the never-ending Work to heal and grow. But she has been the Awakened Child, the Artist, the Lover. She knows the states of Mindfulness, Flow, and Attunement . . . and now, in a contemplative life, in a state of Awe and newly arising energies, she explores the fourth and final portal to Truth and Beauty.

She does not lose any of what she has gained, since Inspiration only knows how to add, to multiply, to create something new. Indeed, she *must* retain her Love and Play and Work and Power to know Powerful-Play.

The true Visionary envisions, inwardly perceives and, in response, seeks to revive the Fallen world with her Power that is impregnated with Play. Once again, this is not a person. As with the Awakened Child, Artist, and Lover, the Visionary is a creation of the Inspired Self. It's a form that can only be imperfectly constructed in human life. By Visionary I certainly don't refer to anyone who proclaims cult-like fantasies as prophecy, describing some dark or idealized apparitions constructed out of dubious interpretations of a text or gleaned from their secret sources. If you've ever scrolled through religious TV shows, there are an unsettling assortment of popular figures who seem driven to portray themselves as enlightened. They describe a terrain that's truly disturbing, a place filled with sinners and saints.

In contrast, the Visionary as embodied Inspiration recognizes the sacredness of life and intuitively a unity and harmony of the world beyond her understanding. She is a conscious being in a wondrous conscious landscape, and she lives with a growing sense that she is an interconnected part of everything and something extraordinary. This is hard to affirm in our Upside-down society. Too few people seem to trek on these mountains. Of those who do, most only openly venture here in old age, when facing death, or when we're humbled (at rock bottom). Only then, when outside constraints no longer matter, do we typically ask Visionary questions. "What makes us human?" "What is beyond sentiment and illusions?" "What is centrally important?" "What do we wish to leave behind?"

### **Powerful-Play**

Deliberate efforts to grow greater consciousness takes a commitment to mastery, but paradoxically vision cannot be willed. It comes with the innocence and purity of the Child, the Artist's passion for Beauty, and the Lover's gratitude for being in intimate Love. The Visionary in Power playfully handles everything lightly, flexibly. Smiling at the norms, rules, and roles, stepping in and out of other worlds. Endeavoring to see and call out false and self-deceptive beliefs, or fear-driven ego-states

and to be separate from them. Imagining paths that lead to life instead of death. Conjuring alternatives that could, perhaps, awaken mankind to Beauty and Truth.

### **Truth Beyond the Appearance**

“The goal of life is to make your heartbeat match the beat of the universe, to match your nature with Nature.”

Joseph Campbell  
*Reflections on the Art of Living*<sup>lviii</sup>

I have thoughts about what is true beneath and below the appearance.

I remember how my half-sister (my father’s disowned daughter) dug into the family history, illuminating family branches that had been previously cut off from me. It was strangely affirming to know I was related to men and women courageous enough to meet the challenges of their time, to travel geographically with little resources and much danger. Many were artisans, boat builders, even painters, clearly creative people absorbing the world with sensitivity and grit.

From my experience with my father, I would not have guessed it. I thought my ancestors would be like him, emotionally repressed irritable engineers. So much beneath and beyond the appearance.

### **Seeing the Past in the Present**

I’m also reminded of my college years, at Marlboro College in Vermont, where I found myself surrounded with students who were more educated than I. Most had attended private school. Most came from money. I was different in those ways. But one of the equalizing experiences was a year-long seminar on literature, religion and philosophy taught by three faculty members, all experts in their areas. The classes were small, 8 to 10 students at most. We started with *Beowulf* and finished by examining some early twentieth century writers. We ended the experience with a dramatic reading of *The Wasteland* by the resident drama teacher.

It was a true seminar, intense preparatory readings beforehand and fiery discussions in each class (three days per week). My takeaway was that I and my peers in our moment were just riding upon a surface, with a historical sea of immense depth beneath us, huge forces shaping us.

I carried this notion with me beyond the class. I could hear in the conversations around me, for the first time, echoes, age-old serious intellectual arguments, and some less rational beliefs, dangerous attitudes. I loved to go into bookstores and browse during those days, exploring the clash of ideologies, looking to understand diverse civilizations, as best I could, the heartaches of different periods and so much suffering and joy.

For years after, my eyes felt open. I felt more empowered, better able to make informed choices, recognizing what I could support, what was urgent to struggle against.

So much beneath, above, beyond appearance.

For a couple of years, I flirted with the life of a scholar. But not because there was much in that life that inherently fitted my personality. In retrospect I really wanted to chase those bright epiphanies—like I remember chasing lightning bugs across fields as a child.

### **Ancient Sources**

“A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening circle of compassion and embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty.”

Albert Einstein <sup>lix</sup>

Most mornings, I experience a similar sense. The present filled with tiny sounds and sights of forest animals, Nature’s textures all around, a million gradients of colors (most not quite fitting any color I can name).

I have developed a practice on these walks, which I believe helps develop sacred perception. I open my thoughts to the unfathomable history behind each type of grass blades around us, each tree species, each bush and fern, each bug and bird. Rabbits and skittish squirrels. If not this morning, as I write this, I’ve experienced on other mornings deer flying across our yard from the deer feeder to the thick brush, several magical spotted creatures at a time soaring within arm’s length. Every creature, every being has a story that will not be told. Who is there to tell it?

I suppose, there are some breeders of horses, dogs, and cattle who keep careful records tracing an animal’s lineage, maybe in a few cases back many generations. But only for a few prized creatures that someone has determined is a worthy commodity.

My Jewel who has so often sniffed beside me, nose in the greenery, her early life is completely lost to us.

Beauty all around. But the human mind can appreciate only so little. The depth and breadth of it we cannot see. It cannot be taken in, as much as I open my heart and mind to it. I fantasize about historical struggles and golden ages of plants and animals, but it’s only fantasy.

Maybe if we could have a more extensive glimpse of the infinite eons that underpin this day, a deep reverence for all life would organically arise in humankind? Maybe we wouldn’t be so casual about what we have deemed roadkill or collateral damage. Maybe we would be less ready to slaughter what is glorious here and now.

# The Capacity of the Visionary: Sacred Perception.

*May we learn to return  
And rest in the beauty  
Of animal being,  
Learn to lean low,  
Leave our locked mind,  
And with freed senses  
Feel the earth  
Breathing beneath us.*  
John O'Donohue. "Eternal Echoes" <sup>lx</sup>

O'Donohue describes spirituality as a state of *leaning low*, with *freed senses*. But this freedom may seem unnatural for sapiens. It comes at the end of a long earthly path for most of us. Arriving out of the long slog of our development and gradual enrichment of mindful, attuned, flowing states, we evolve the awareness that we're not just the physiological, mental, emotional patterns we have learned and reinforced. There is something true that is not our ego in time and space only. There's something Beautiful in the universe that heals, endowed with intuitive and inventive currents. Such awareness eases us further from self-sabotaging patterns and survival fears, allowing *what happens* to us to have less of a grip on us. With freed senses, we sense and begin to understand in our Heart that we're another being amongst an infinite variety. We enter the garden.

From the inside out, we find that we're one beyond the forms we have taken, above the roles and rules we have adopted from others. We dive beneath the surfaces that have been intuited as foreign. We can step in and out of other beings now, whether they wear shoes or not. We come to know and trust a deep state of energetic belonging. We may call this the oneness in all. Buddha Nature. Christ consciousness. Atman. The Inspired Self.

## **Truth Beyond Appearance**

*If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.*  
William Blake, "The Marriage" <sup>lxi</sup>

In the Mindfulness of the Awakened Child, we can stay aligned intentionally and connected but be separate (differentiated) from our Pain and Self-deception and from the acrobatics of the Abnormal. In the Flow of the Artist, we have a similar capacity in our work, which Keats named Negative Capability. We see the barriers and the loss of flow but don't submit to despair.

In the Attunement of the Lover, we again find something similar, Unconditional Love, which allows us to be here and be there, to cope with our triggered states (loving ourselves) while loving the other. For the Visionary, I believe we find a capacity which I'll call Sacred Perception. This allows us to

live our life with a state of reverence for each moment while simultaneously recognizing a depth that signifies the infinite.

### **Limbic Exercises for Developing Sacred Perception**

“So, awe is possibly the perception that’s bigger than us . . . in the words of a dear friend, probably one of our greatest photographers, still living photographers, Duane Michaels, he said to me just the other day that maybe it gives us the curiosity to overcome our cowardice.”  
Beau Lott and Cirque du Soleil, “How We Experience Awe,” Ted Talk <sup>lxii</sup>

The Awe of nature. Illusive. Hard to put it into words. But it reminds us that there is so much beyond appearance. I was considering this while sitting patiently on the side of the dirt road near our house, where my companion, Jewel, has rolled herself over, clearly waiting to stop and smell the roses. At least she is inhaling the grass, the smells of animals who have passed here. And I am certain she desires a belly-rub.

How astonishing that we ended up together in just this time and space, joined by a grey bird that hops on a maple tree branch forty feet above us. When I look at the eastern part of the sky, the light is just at a certain angle to blind me with its brilliance. I try an awareness practice that I've found helpful, noticing my body, my mental activities (quiet at that moment), witnessing my emotional state (something like joy). Check my felt connection to the surrounding—the sights and sounds and smell, find an alive place in my chest where the glory of the day seems positively mirrored in some inexplicable way.

There is yet another understanding that naturally arises in this Powerful-Play. We discern abuse. We see with clarity the impact of ego-created ideologies. We notice injury to the defenseless and to the most vulnerable. There is an Upside-down energy I call Playing at Power destroying our planet. Intergenerational Responsibility is the Heart’s response to this reality.

### **Between**

“Destructiveness is the outcome of unlived lives.” Eric Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* <sup>lxiii</sup>

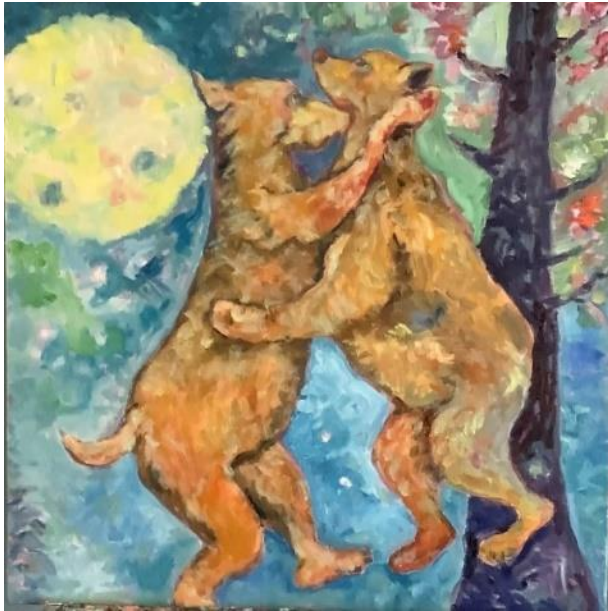
The Visionary lives between. The past trails off into the infinite unknown. The future trails off into an equally infinite unknown. From any cosmic perspective, our world, our lives, are momentary. But with vision (grounded in Loving playfulness, Loving work and Powerful work) we need not be so demoralized by our short lives. In fact, understanding our brevity gives rise to deep moral reflection on what is worthy of honor and respect, what is worth struggling for or against.

Walking with my dog, I know—but grasp it not with my intellect. I know the ancient beings that fill our diminished forests are worthy of some struggle to protect. The sadness is sharp to imagine a landscape without them. It’s just magical thinking that human beings could subsist alone in a world with such endless death and loss and emptiness. I don’t know what manner of being we would become but it wouldn’t be fully human.



## The Visionary's Awe and Powerful-Play Creates the Capacity for Sacred Perception

Image 27 *Ascending Bears*



### *Sacred Perception*

**Connection, Vision, Beauty & Truth**

*Without Contraries, there is no progression.* William Blake

**The Bears ascend with their heartbeats embodied in Nature. They give themselves to the Beauty all around and rise above into something greater, though—wise bears--they don't generally try to put this into words.**

**The past trails off into an infinite unknown. The future trails off into an infinite unknown. But the bears dwell fully in this place and make the most of it, giving each other bear hugs and belly rubs, astonished to have ended up in this time together.**

### **Why This Painting?**

As any one Drama ends, and we begin to make sense of it, there is a potential for an inner transformation. The Visionary stirs in an internal domain, still Loving and Playful but more Powerful. Where once—before all this Work--we endured divisions in conflict (the Abnormal, Pain and Self-deception), after, there is some movement toward an Integration of these “Contraries” which allows us to access a higher moral development, an ethical vision.

The Visionary is filled with multidimensional awareness of Beauty and Truth—what I am calling the capacity for Sacred Perception—enlivening us with the energy of Powerful Play and prompting us to answer the Visionary's central question, “When I am gone, what will I leave behind?”

Our soaring bears depict a powerful relationship and imply a shared vision, a spiritual awareness common in any community where you find refuge and deep mutual understanding with at least one other being you trust implicitly. The bear's perspective is grounded in experience and reality but is taken to

great heights, even to a sacred or transcendent view that crosses time and space and gives rise to moral reflections. Together, they are face-to-face with the very real fact that we are all momentary flickers in the Universe.

So why this painting? Perhaps there has been a death or loss or challenge that has recently impacted you. If so, you are encouraged to seek out others who can embrace you lightly, with loving care. We are mammals until the Fallen World transforms us into something less, and it our legacy that in heart-felt connection, we rise above uncertainties and sorrows and find a way (in our time) to be more grateful for life's blessings.

### **Inside-Out:**

Having developed the capacity for Sacred Perception, this would be a good time to explore larger patterns in your life, perhaps multigenerational family history or you might journal on other forces that have pushed you in certain directions. Some of these powers—family, religion, career, peers etc.—may no longer align with your purpose and your most important needs. Identify what no longer serves you and turn to others who are supportive of your playfulness and creative vision. I remind myself to be like these bears, seek not to be weighed down by the grave and constants of reality. And recognize that healing and growing is hard to do alone.

The 'visionary' is the man who has passed through  
sight into vision, never the man who has avoided seeing.  
Northrup Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*<sup>lxiv</sup>

### **Upside-down:**

What the painting leaves out can caution us to be careful who we let into our lives. Do not mistake earnestness, conviction, or sober counsel for wisdom. Carefully weigh the advice that is given. There are always those who are at odds with our true nature. Leave them out of the picture. Though they may seem important or clever, or appear to have some special status, if they do not sincerely share your hopes and dreams, like crosscurrents chopping against a boat's momentum, they can stall you, drain the sails of a wind that lifts you and leave you anchored in doubt. Do not seek their advice. Block their posts.

### **Deflation**

*In the science of compassion,  
My gravitational mind sucks all those particles  
Back together until I know  
Only what I've always known,  
But when I hit bottom and deflate, I know  
A weight in the heart as it let's go  
And suddenly laughter rises until I find the whole  
Of this physical world.  
I greatly cherish all things*

*That can be seen, all the stars so brightly  
Defined in the night sky. But most of my living  
Is unlit by reason and fills with feeling  
In the empty spaces between.  
When I am lover  
Enough to practice love,  
Whatever pops in and out without effort  
Is not always Joy. There's a quality of sadness  
And of the dark, sometimes. I don't know why.  
It's a quality of suffering  
In the body as I touch your sensuous skin,  
Even as the soul opens a door  
And rushes toward what is beautiful.*

### **Beyond Sacred Perception: Intergenerational Responsibility**

Image 29 Awe



### ***Intergenerational Responsibility***

#### **Awakened, Sound, Divining**

*The Buddha needs us for awakening, understanding and love to be real things and not just concepts. They must be real things that have real effects on life.* Thich Nhat Hanh

**The Fox as Visionary evolved inner relational wisdom. As the Lover turned inward, he can now contemplate the enormity of his relationships, developing far-reaching understandings, musing about his connection to what is grander than himself. This path can be full of pitfalls and slippery slopes. But he has been the Awakened Child, the Artist, the Lover. And from the peaks of Mindfulness, Flow, and Attunement, he is open to spiritual energies. He sees his impact on life and feels a real imperative to act morally.**

**Why this painting:**

With a capacity for Sacred Perception, in the days and weeks and hours following a period of deep Work, we may best grasp in our Heart the need for Intergenerational Responsibility. This is a wisdom often attributed to Native Americans, specifically the Iroquois Confederacy, who believed that each generation has an obligation to preserve and protect the natural world for future generations, recognizing that short-term gains should not come at the expense of long-term consequences. Beyond any practical notion, it reflects a deep respect for the interconnectedness of all life.

**Inside out:**

Spiritual awareness can unchain us further from self-sabotaging patterns and survival fears, allowing *what happens* to us to have less of a grip on us. With freed senses, as O'Donohue recalls to us, we begin to understand in our Heart that we're another being amongst an infinite variety, allowing us to reenter the symbolic garden. From the inside out, we find that we're One beyond the forms we take, above the roles and rules we have adopted, beneath the surfaces that seem so myriad and foreign. We can step in and out of other beings, whether they wear shoes or not. We come to know and trust a deep state of energetic belonging. We experience what can best be described as an awareness of the sacredness of real things.

As the Visionary we seek to answer the question, "*What does my Heart call me to cherish and preserve?*"

**Upside down:**

*I worshipped then among the depth of things...  
I felt, and nothing else. I did not judge,  
I never thought of judging, with the gift  
Of all this glory fill'd and satisfied.*

William Wordsworth, The Prelude

A state of Awe that grows Sacred Perception and Intergenerational Responsibility is not religion. Indeed, as we embody the Visionary, we see most clearly how cult figures, religious or otherwise, block us from recognizing anything Holy. For too many of us, our childhood religious community proclaimed dark fantasies and apparitions that could not be questioned, and attendance felt like an inquisition where the outspoken child was adjudicated, intimidated and silenced. Such groups use scriptures— "sacred texts"—as a codified rationale for hurting the defenseless, enslaving or even abusing parishioners. Justifying divisions.

Injured by religiosity, we can understandably want to reject any notion of *something greater*, with spirituality seeming to be a con game or a fool's errand. And I will admit, I often do wonder about the faith that some non-spiritual, or barely spiritual, or greatly spiritual individuals or non-traditional religions seem to place in "going high when they go low." It seems a naive and an unwarranted presupposition that

Love will be returned in kind, as if you just need to put enough Love out there for a transformation to take place. But I have seen little evidence that simply staying in a higher consciousness and heart-felt openness will soften the apish bullies and predators or miraculously foster a wider and deeper moral development in the world around us or in us. The irrational does not respond rationally to the rational, and the depraved do not respond with compassion to the compassionate, however much I might wish it would be so.

Intergenerational Responsibility suggests to me that indeed we do want to stay in Love and Play, because that is congruent with our Inspired life, and, as it evolves into Powerful-play, we see more of reality, growing in our Heart a deepening sense of what is important to support and to protect. And what is important to stand clearly against. And, yes, to fight against the darkness. Even to meet aggression with aggression to contain the abuse of Power. This is not meant as a theological or ideological theory I find any need to defend. And these thoughts may be only revealing of my small journey, revealing, if nothing else, why I have been so drawn to the English Romantics and American Transcendentalists who never put forth a code of ethics, but simply cherished art and creativity and Nature and understood that the imagination can see what is True and Beautiful in ways that reason or codified morality cannot grasp. Traveling among the mountains becomes symbolic for the Inspired Heart that can pass with humility, unconditionally loving and worshipping. "I felt and nothing else."

## VI. Deconstructing the Fall

“*Much have I travel'd in the realms of gold  
And many godly states and kingdoms seen.*”

John Keats, On First Looking into Chapman's Homer<sup>lxv</sup>

I wonder how many of us can recognize the Inspired Energies and the characters I have just portrayed. More, I think, will recognize roles and the matrix of roles that construct our social persona. As we move this persona around in society, like an avatar, stories get told about us. These are not necessarily the tales we would tell if we thought we had permission to be open, vulnerable, and fully honest. But—disclosing our self or “finding our self”—that sounds like the kind of thing a life coach tries to sell us. Or a guru proposes, while organizing a trip to the Burning Man Festival where we can experiment with Ayahuasca. Or it's just part of an ad for a diet supplement, empty marketing that fades into the background by its repetition. Or “having the courage to reveal our core identity” is another misty-eyed post on a social network, by lonely people trying to feel less self-loathing.

Do you have these thoughts? Most of us, sophisticated as we are in our Fallen world, know what's up, or at least we know what's not up. We know ourselves to be the real deal waiting just for our chance to become an elite. We are the unmoved movers even as we sit in our work meetings, looking interested enough to not attract our boss's attention. The *orienting response* is helpful for prey in the wild, as it turns eyes reflexively toward any predators in motion. And, so, we too keep watch on the modern-day predators. Not wanting to attract their notice, we can become frozen, waiting for this godawful confab to end so we can return to our grind of constant interruptions.

Or maybe you are the one they call Mr. Fierce or the Intense One, the person who puts more points on the scoreboard than anyone else?

Wherever you are in the hierarchy, you know that setting forth on the journey to find our True Self is not *realistic*. We scorn such self-indulgence and magical thinking openly, even if we nevertheless revel in fantasy, secretly, of more freedom, of being on an adventure that is worthy of our life.

Our personal mask reminds us in the morning mirror that we are *strong*; good to go for another day, even if we must ignore the mounting waves of overwhelm. *One day at a time*, we keep a tight grip on any fears or grief or rage that wants to bubble up. We focus on Reality. We have a family of some kind that expects things (or once expected things), and we have obligations, responsibilities, etc. We all know we are defined by what we do, and by what we don't do, by what we think, and by what other people think of us. Welcome to the 21st Century. Can't wait for the A.I. to take over.

In the back of our minds, where we would rather not look, we might suspect something is amiss. But that is too much to consider. Maybe later. Many in old age, or once we get wealthy enough to do something else with our clock time. How much do the financial experts say we need in the bank before

we retire? 2 million? 3 million? In any case, what is missing is elusive, *it* would be difficult to put into words, and we have all found a way to cope (because that is what we must do) by working too much or eating too much or drinking too much or by finding a monster for a romantic partner who keeps us sufficiently distracted.

If you are fine with that, then you are fine. There are many ways to live in the world. Do continue. However, if you are starting to hear a growing *polarity* in those inner voices, then you might be warmed up to do some work. If you have noticed your self-talk says something like, “*I must* suck it up. *But I just can’t* stand it anymore,” then I may be writing this for you. If you have reached a moment—maybe many such moments—when you suspect your existence is an inescapable trap, even if you can’t exactly explain the mechanism that pins you. Perhaps you have been shaken enough by financial uncertainties, or political uncertainties, or wild fires or hurricanes or because folks around you seem to have enthusiastically embraced insanity, and you have peeked behind the matrix, or you begin to feel like one of those lesser gods of myth, the one who has been tripped up, stripped of hopes and dreams and of all their supernatural powers. Perhaps the pandemic frayed many of the familiar routines, and you have been struggling against returning to the same restraints, the constant reward-and-punishments games.

Or maybe you are just exhausted. If not exactly broken open, you’re ready for something more authentic, alive, deeper, richer.

### **Taking the stage**

Consider this an invitation to take the stage and to spotlight what has been hidden behind the curtain. Until we know what performances we have been enacting and how we ended up in this particular drama (what we might affectionately call *our life*), we can’t discern if these are the roles we want to play or to even imagine a more masterful tour de force that would be worthy of our life.

Full disclosure—I’m not presenting a magical solution here, nor selling a workbook. I offer Heart-drama as something to consider if you want to transcend the pedestrian or rigid paradigms (within or around) that trap you. At the very least, I believe you could elude the more moronic notions and soul-destroying nonsense that passes for insight on social media. It might help you to refuse the scripts written by your families, playgroups, and workplaces. At its best, Heart-drama invites you to discern how you’ve been injured and enslaved without ever signing a consent form. It can help you gain clarity about the Barriers and the personal Work you need to do to find a more creative path.

### **John Keats**

I think John Keats, an English Romantic poet, long dead, has still something to offer us. I do see him as part of a rebel force, if not exactly Luke Skywalker; in his time, not unlike ours, the Romantics were heroically fighting against philosophical, cultural, bureaucratic, and commercial attempts to portray life as a three-dimensional space filled with dead objects. Though I readily admit that Keats’s poetic

language can feel exotic and archaic and difficult to read, our realities are comparable. We are similarly surrounded by forces that make it so effortful to be effortless, that dull us out of our innate spontaneity. We are treated as a bio-chemical apparatus. As a cog in some larger machinery. A billiard ball at the whim of cause and effect. As a recruit for an ideology. As a consumer demographic greedily swallowing products, in accordance with the nebulous economic “utility.” Or we’re depicted as cognitive computers driven by algorithms, eventually to be replaced by better robots. We are predictably categorized and diagnosed.

The English Romantics intentionally pushed back against some similar pressures, because they believed we’re better known by our passions and our spiritual and experiential awareness. For me, as a therapist, oil painter, and occasional poet myself, John Keats, above all, epitomizes a resistance fighter.

### **What Are We About *in the World*?**

How would you spend your time if you were likely to die in a year or two? Or in two months? Would you continue as you are, conform to unquestioned rules and obligations? Or would you seek as many pleasures as you could? Buy more possessions? Empty out a bucket list of adventures? Would you pursue increased status, obtain the next certificate for your wall? Would you work ever harder to become *someone* before you go into that good night? Afterall, you want your obituary to speak highly of you.

That was not an abstract question for Keats’s. He was educated as a physician, TB was rampant at the time, and he was courageous enough to face his dire circumstances. Thus, he inquired carefully, “What is worth pursuing in this short life?” His decision was to cultivate his art and to give expression to his developing wisdom.

In a letter he wrote—your English teacher probably cited it—he described life in developmental terms, as a mansion where you progress from one stage to the next, like moving from one room to another. The first room is where we “remain as long as we don’t think.”<sup>lxvi</sup> He’s not criticizing the uneducated, so much as seeing that too many of us don’t fully live with Inspiration, though many of us are well informed and cultured, capable of nailing down with precision the details of the details, immersed in the particularities of the latest technology or new cryptocurrency. As he means this phase of *not-thinking*, we are uninterested in deep reflection. Uninterested in history, even our own personal history, the most sophisticated among us, can be disturbingly out of life, frozen in a culture, a job, an addiction, a set of rules and roles, and a personality, like a fixed scene painted on an ancient urn.

Keats sorrowfully noted that the mass of humanity does not see beyond the façade and so settles into comfortable if oppressive castles. Most of us are “infants or dreamers,” rather than artists determined to be awake to our too brief, ever-changing, incarnate, implicit, fully embodied experience.<sup>lxvii</sup> Just to be clear, this is not a naive vision, nor was he a caricature of a bleeding-heart poet. He recognized that those who are awake are “sharpening one’s vision into the nature and heart of Man.” And they will grow to face



the truth that “the World is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness and oppression.”<sup>lxviii</sup> He called that “the burden of Mystery.”<sup>lxix</sup>

### **Poetry is Not Myth**

If you’re still with me, if you’ve made it this far in this discussion of Keats, then I suspect you are willing to consider something off the main road, and you understand that any meaningful trail will not be straight. It takes some time and wandering to arrive somewhere new.

Keats was a diligent, enthusiastic, and undeniable master of language. So, let us wonder why two of his greatest works, *Hyperion* and *Fall of Hyperion*, ground to a halt and were never completed. What obstacles did he collide with? And how might that be a mirror to our own blockades?

In *Hyperion-A Fragment*, Keats tells the Greek story of fallen divinity. He starts with Saturn, the deposed king of the gods. You may recognize the plot of this story. The Titans are overthrown by a new supra-human force in town, the Olympians. It’s not irrelevant to know that Keats wrote this work while he nursed his dying brother Tom. We can imagine he was filled with a potent mixture of youthful resolve and unspeakable grief as he set out to portray a realm beyond our knowledge—forces beyond our ken.

To be clear, Keats was not writing myth. I imagine the original myth (in its time) conveyed an embodied and emotional apprehension of life that largely eludes our carefully crafted and detached reductionist depictions of things. How we might grasp the Hellenic myth has no resemblance to what these narratives meant to ancient minds. I imagine myth (in its time) was joined with music, accompanied by drums and other basic instruments, other voices in a powerful rhythm. And it played to a very different psyche than ours, more silent and interactive, less distracted, more sensual, a mind implicitly receptive to the melodic energies all around it.

I imagine the music-words of spoken myth engaged an intimate community of active beings, impacting them bodily, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, in a way that eludes us in our separateness, in our contemporary well-documented isolation. It was meant for a I-Thou to which we are largely deaf.

As we look at Keats’s long poems in the next couple pages, the story of Saturn will tell us little about that original mythical experience. The poet’s vision becomes then a re-visioning, a piecing together of shards, fragments from unknowable history, washed up on the beach of Keats’s imagination in his moment. Inevitably, to make sense of it, he had to *re-sense* it, if he was ever to make it speak to us.

### **First Take**

With the grandiosity of youth, he committed to reveal Truth and Beauty. Beauty, Truth. In *Hyperion*, Keats set out to convey an all-encompassing vision in the manner of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* or Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. But he was not writing a Christian epic. His understanding of the world was more like ours. Like ours? By this, I am assuming that the reader has left the first room of the mansion,

capable of thinking for yourself, even if you hold to some Christian or other familiar notions, you approach them less literally, more willing to be filled with *mysteries*.

*Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,  
Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
Still as the silence round about his lair;  
Forest on forest hung about his head  
Like cloud on cloud . . .  
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.  
A stream went voiceless by, still deadened more  
By reason of his fallen divinity.<sup>lxx</sup>*

This is a portrayal of Saturn who has been overthrown by the Olympians. It elicits the reader's empathy (for those who are still capable of empathy). I think Keats accomplishes here what art does at its best. Poetry can change us a little, bring forth a fresh imagination and a unique language born in the dancing mind, exciting us, stirring us awake so we can see our own life experiences anew.

As I read the lines above, I discover that all of us know Saturn. Certainly, there have been a lot of fallen gods in my life, in my childhood, in the places I've worked, in schools, in my therapy office. I've also been Saturn at times. Filled with angst. Consumed with anger like my father and miserable depression like my mother. Most of us have experienced some very dark periods, when we are deadened, our peace, our joy, our worth abruptly taken from us. We cry out like Job because we don't deserve such misery. And most of the time I believe that is true. We are human. Make mistakes. Circumstances unfold. A lover leaves us. Other important relationships end. Some badly. We get debilitatingly sick. A cherished career moves out of reach. Even when you realize that you have been living out patterns that are self-sabotaging and hurtful, I don't think you can be blamed if you have been largely unconscious. We just need to wake up.

In this story, the reason Saturn was ousted was because he was born a Titan—at a time when a more advanced race of gods evicted the older model. And, so, we (the reader so well drawn into the travails of the fallen god) will never know the reason he has fallen, not in any way that could satisfy us. It is unjust. It makes no sense, even as we suffer from the results with him. The unfolding events are truly tragic, the very definition of tragedy: a bigger force intercedes, overthrows him, without any concern for what is right, logical or what is aligned with the human heart.

Saturn vividly renders what many of us experience. Some of us live with unfathomable suffering for days, months, or years. Certainly, if we have been traumatized, we know Saturn's heartache. Of course, we are driven to cry out when unwarranted pain has been inflicted at the whim of some indifferent godlike force. But this is not the "point" Keats seeks to convey. So, what was the point?

Since we know that Keats embraced a developmental framework, Saturn as the old king of the Titans must be representing in his story the abstract idea that our "infant" earlier stage will be outgrown

(overthrown) as we evolve into a more conscious, mature life in which we carry our “burden.” But, when I read such evocative language in his poetry, I can’t hear Saturn’s despair as a theoretical concept. Can you? Unless the Heart has grown dangerously cold, we will have a sympathetic response to the displaced Titan’s human misery.

For myself, the poetry suggests some Divine savagery is in play. Saturn has suffered almost total annihilation from a superhuman being, a God that as far as I can tell from this text doesn’t even seem interested in the injuries inflicted, raising significant questions about how you could understand or even defend yourself against a supra--human force that seems so indifferent. Since incomprehensible tragedy was not Keats’s message, the poem gets stalled.

### **Vision and Revision**

Second take. In *The Fall of Hyperion-A Dream*.

I suspect Keats recognized, after his first draft, that using this mythic narrative from another time and place, which doesn’t naturally give rise to the modern insights he seeks to express, created more challenges than he first imagined. In response, he pivoted. He retold Saturn’s fall from the point of view of a poet, “Whether the dream now purpos’d to rehearse/Be poet’s or fanatic’s will be known/When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave.”<sup>lxxi</sup> The central story is now clearly human-sized, presenting an artist consuming the “potion” of Inspiration. Because he is not a member of the dreamer tribe who “vexes the world” but a true poet who “pours out a balm,”<sup>lxxii</sup> he is granted a vision by Moneta—an immortal priestess and figure of wisdom. She reveals that artistic understanding comes through suffering, enlightenment comes from experiencing “the Giant agony of the World.”<sup>lxxiii</sup>

We’re meant to comprehend this as a “dream” given to us from the muse, a creative visualization bestowed from beyond our conscious mind, as larger forces operate through us. In the vision (a revision of his original poem) we again see Saturn and hear a bit of the character flaws attributed to the race of Titans. And then we witness Hyperion (Apollo), a creative and provocative force evolving into a power beyond our comprehension. Keats makes it clear that human beings can’t go to that elevated dimension Apollo enters. We are left in Saturn’s world. The human world.

Then the poem ends abruptly.

It’s incomplete for much the same reasons as *Hyperion*. It’s a fascinating fragment, an impressive mythic epic-attempt depicting the torturous growth of a poet, but we still cannot make sense of Saturn’s suffering. Maybe Apollo has some super-human way to account for life’s tragic pain? For “the Giant agony of the world.” But the young artist has no answer.

Neither poem was published while Keats was alive.

## Saturn's Big Lie

Tortured and angry, Saturn keeps my therapy office filled. Saturn is everywhere and distinctly human, “emptied of thyine hoary majesty.”<sup>lxxiv</sup> He asks in grief and bewilderment, “Who had power to make me desolate? whence came the strength?”<sup>lxxv</sup>

Why is there such desolation? How unfair! Such tragedy and torment. But familiar because we have all had these almost mythic, hellish moments. We wonder (at least some voice in us wonders) if we live in a fallen condition. Life, itself, sucks. We inhabit an overthrown existence, impacted unjustly by unstoppable powers that toss us into the dirt.

“Oftentimes I pray’d/Intense, that Death would take me from the Vale.”<sup>lxxvi</sup>

Keats wasn’t a religious prophet. He was not writing a theology wrapped in metaphor and musical language. He can’t explain away sorrow in the way Dante or Milton can. In his evocative portrayal of Saturn, he seeks to move us beyond this mask of a fallen god, calling forth what is deeper and deeply human, inviting us to grow, even as the structure of the Hellenic myth fails him.

### Super-Sized-Stimulus Stories

I hope to make a point here. Like Keats trying to make use of an ancient myth, I think we have been trying to work within too many “stories” (structures of stories, fragments of multiple stories, uninformed notions) that keep us stuck in erroneous plot lines. Confused by the wrong themes concerning our life. Caught in theories that won’t allow our best poetry to flower. Left-brained certainties especially are more dead than alive, with little reality and dismissive of our passions. Abnormal. They have misled us as certainly as the half-baked notions my father told himself and passed along so generously. *Work hard. Shit happens.* And, so, my father sought to dig a big swimming pool in our backyard, because maybe that would bring him happiness.

Only when you stare into a hole where everything has filled up with muddy water (again), then, it might be ok to *break down* and look for things that are designed to help; but *don’t be surprised if you get laughed at. Or pummeled. So, it’s better to keep your head down.*

Of course, some stories are grander, more epic, more imposing, and pervasive, than my father’s comparatively harmless clichés. You see these told repetitively on movie screens and in television series and political debates. Some are apocalyptic, where the world is ending from some disaster or another, leaving no hope or way to change it. Some are dangerously authoritarian, where only the strong will survive, and *we* must protect *our* race, or sex, religion, socio-economic status, our genetic superiority etc. Some are religious and bound to the history of a particular faith. God gives and takes away. Etcetera.

These big stories are sneaky because they can so easily seduce us to follow a grand (more than human, so extraordinary as to be inhuman) path to fulfill our human-sized needs. The tales of greatest

magnitude come with detailed maps written by someone “special.” These stories can come with perks like fan club events we can attend in person where we can hear the familiar hits and feel like we belong to something. They offer popular podcasts and probably will also sell items to decorate our house or yard. Uniforms. Hats. Secret handshakes. All the while promising salvation from this or that. They might just distract us long enough, provide enough sense of meaning and purpose, that we can get through this life without ever having to face our most vexatious challenges and deepest fears.

These Big stories are *very* sneaky because we have been taught them by caretakers when we were young or by the loudest (maybe most aggressive) voices. Such tales are often invisible and cannot be easily questioned. It can even seem dangerous to doubt them. They are powerful and seductive. They point to a path and grandiose plan—someone else’s plan. And you may be already well on your way to “something significant,” a hero in the grandest story ever told. That will make any underlying narrative harder to dispute. After all, you may have a lot of time, maybe years, invested in this.

Through this lens, the traditional mental health and addiction models are only another Big story, particularly when they tell us that our human suffering can be best addressed with medication and maybe some cognitive behavioral therapy. Our biology is the real issue, or we lack technique (communication skills for instance, or behavioral management). *Work hard. Lower your expectations. Give credit where credit’s due and give me your credit card number and stop blaming your parents.*

And that’s all ye know on earth.

Of course, this doesn’t invite us to question the narratives we use to describe a problem. The stories prompt us to ask certain questions but not others, and this “creative neurosis” can keep us trapped in roles, hedged in caged light, stuck at a low-quality level and robbed of a solution. You might consider what questions you could pose if this was a suspected psych-ops, a psychological operation to convince you to swallow it all unquestioningly. What does this distract me from inquiring about? What fears does it raise? What presuppositions does it support? What would I benefit from understanding more about? Who benefits from believing that Saturn’s privileged position in this hierarchy has been unfairly taken away because he deserves power because he is ...what? Who must silence themselves in their supportive role and thus keep their deepest understandings to themselves or risk being cast out of the Titan community? Why have other characters have been reduced to bit players in his mythology? Why does it feel so helpless, and why is the apparent Higher Power, Apollo, so separated from human life?

Not wishing to stay stuck as a fallen Titan, rather than sitting in hopelessness, let’s take this as a challenge and explore other ways to attend to this. Let’s deconstruct the Titan myth. Let’s be more daring and creative. Let’s use what Carl Jung called Active Imagination. Let the unconscious speak or the muse work through us.

# Emptied of Majesty

*“Why was light given to man, whose way is hid, whom God hath hedged in?” Job 3:23<sup>lxxvii</sup>*

To begin to deconstruct the myth, I would suggest we explore the drama which at the beginning to this inquiry we have called *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*. In our imagination, step on stage, become *the protagonist* and listen to Inspiration. Inspiration might first direct us to take the role of Saturn. That’s called role-reversing, taking the Titan’s point of view, speaking from that position. Let’s see what more we can learn directly from this demoralized character about his perception of himself and his details, his age, his past, his childhood, his hopes and dreams, his fears.

Let’s imagine we learn, through open inquiry, that Saturn is alcoholic. And he’s arrogantly dismissive of 12-step programs and of treatment in general. He doesn’t trust therapy. He scorns any higher power. “I am my own higher power.” He insists he is not so *weak* as to need help, or to surrender to anything. Rigid in his beliefs, and proud because he has always been a hard worker, he boasts that he had once been important, though at this moment he sobs pitifully in his despair.

Important? Why is he so significant? Because the drug-addicted member often looks larger-than-life to the family? Enormous. Because of the drugged state of mind, with all its irrationality and unpredictability. Compulsive energies force family members to adapt and restructure their lives around the addict. But it’s not the person who is that powerful, it’s the addiction. To depict his current condition, we might imagine him standing on a chair, then watch him slink to the floor. Over and over until we get beyond his defensive self-deception.

Eventually, reluctantly, he tells us that “fallen” is a familiar place for him. This displaced giant has hit bottom before.

Saturn, next, spontaneously explains that Apollo is his youngest son, a *new generation* that never seemed interested in working hard. “*He flamed out early. He got good grades in school, but I told my wife that was meaningless. Book smart and being able to argue—he loves to debate, that’s what he calls it. Thinks he’s so intelligent. Fucking disrespectful. A Mommy’s boy. Always an embarrassment, a problem from the moment he was born, a loser. He got that gene from his mother, obviously.*”

## **Moneta**

Next, we step out of this personified Saturn and introduce Moneta on stage.

In a Heart-drama, we will want to hear her point of view too. We step into her, embody her. Moneta tells us she is a goddess of wisdom. A little ego-centric? Ok.

Asked about her relationship with Saturn, we learn that Moneta is Saturn’s ex-wife, mother to Apollo. Saturn and Moneta had been married once married, a couple. That’s important to know. It

clarifies some things, though it completely mucks up the structure of the Hellenic myth. In a Heart-drama, those grandiose stories—where we start—always fall apart when the realities are explored.

Spending more time with Moneta, interviewing her about other Titans in her life, we learn that her father was *just like Saturn*. “*What a cliché, huh? I married my father, angry and arrogant!*” She continues, almost can’t help herself from telling this long and miserable tale.

*“Being married to that beast Saturn, I felt like I was living out my childhood again. My father, what a joke to call him that. Everybody worships him around here, or maybe they are just afraid of him and his family, his brothers, my uncles, and for good reasons. They are all nuts, racist, sexist, and so I go and marry Saturn who is just as violent, carrying his guns around everywhere he goes, just daring someone to get in his way. I thought he was strong because he was in this local militia. You know, the local boys are always raising hell. Little boys running round trying to look tough, I see it now. But I was just a kid when we met. I don’t know what I was thinking. But what an absolute jerk he is.”*

Moneta continues—hard to stop her at this point. “*To keep sane, I cheated on Saturn. It was a wild thing. The guy was Bipolar. We partied a lot, and then the shit hit the fan. I got a DUI trying to drive him home one night.*”

She was immediately disowned by her family. Threatened by the extended Titan family.

Her son, Apollo, still won’t talk to her because of her fling with Bipolar. All this adds to her heartbreak.

*“I think he also blames me for his brother’s death. Tom was the oldest boy, the absolute opposite of his worthless father. But he got into the wrong crowd, too many drugs. He overdosed. It was awful. Awful.”*

We are definitely not in the Greek mythic tragedy anymore, but a family tragedy.

*“Tom. Tom. Tom, he was my hero. He could have been anything he wanted to be. A doctor, a lawyer. A great salesman. But was always pressuring himself, thinking he wasn’t ever good enough.”*

### **Saturn’s Family**

As we arrange this family in the spotlight, forming them into a sculpture, we see them anew. Observing them from a distance, what more can we discern?

Maybe there’s an aha moment. Maybe not yet.

The father, Saturn, looks disgusted and threatening, peering beyond everyone, staring into the distance trying to figure out where the alcohol is stashed, or where the next fight will pop up. Moneta, the mother, has her arms crossed, anxiously looking at the floor, seemingly all out of wisdom and patience. Apollo stands a few feet from his parents, turned away from both, his middle finger raised. The deceased brother, Tom, lies motionless on a couch, which is a prop for his deathbed.

Is there more?

We might wonder, whose story is this? *Who* is warmed up enough to explore courageously and to seek what has been hidden? Who is yearning to unveil what has been beneath the surface, to move us from the myth further into this family drama?

In response, in Inspiration, we choose to playact a character calls Keats who speaks a line of dialogue which sounds like existential cri de Coeur, “*There’s so much pain, but no one to trust.*”

Growing tearful, Keats (now as a character in the drama) spontaneously tells us the memory of his brother’s illness. Keats blames a demon called Consumption for Tom’s slow deterioration, but we—as witness—recognize this is Tom’s addiction and likely tuberculosis. During this painful period Keats felt utterly alone, overcome with fear and the panic of grief.

We now consider the role of Keats on stage by stepping away again, backing up to gain some better perspective.

From a distance, from this more objective position, we integrate Keats into the family sculpture. Keats now sits in front of Apollo, bent over, sobbing, hands on his face. The character named Consumption looms over Tom, and scowls at Keats the way any addiction and fatal illness looms over the people we love.

From this vantage point, we can understand the drama with more clarity. *Both Keats and Apollo are two parts of one character. Keats is the broken heart. Apollo is the self-sabotaging defensiveness.* The adolescent, “*Fuck you.*”

Impromptu, we might decide that *The Fall of Saturn* is no longer a sufficient title. Through this intuitive work, we have deconstructed the myth that had kept the family—our family—in trance. It is no longer sufficient narrative to convey the realities of this life, to be the only story. The very structure of it cannot express the Truth and Beauty that we are inspired to convey. At this point we can consider (reimagine) the power of this archetypal story that has kept these characters from healing and growing. We can begin the process of finding a more conscious alternative to the narrative that was wired into our psyche by the father-as-Saturn who terrorized and demeaned and could not be questioned. The father, as a fallen Titan, held everyone in his orbit until his grieving son summoned enough courage and curiosity to question.

### **From Myth to Humanity**

These tragic myths we deconstruct are communications from another world. From where? Of course, Carl Jung would call this other place *the unconscious*. Jung’s theory of the archetypal basis of mind describes a place that holds foundational patterns, and images that shape the human psyche. A basin that is filled with primal themes and symbols and motifs passed down from generation to generation. When we are living dissociated from our own Inspiration, then the more destructive energy forms and archetypes and Big Stories can influence us without our knowledge, shaping our inner and outer world



and creating characters in us and in our Upside-down, personalities with limited insight into their own thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

*Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.*  
Carl Jung

Through an act of imagination, we move with more intention. We see what has been dissociated. The myth is *our* family. Moneta is not wisdom but a wounded daughter, wife and mother. Saturn is not a fallen god. He is a sadistic SOB. And, so, we can retitle the structure, maybe to *I have my own Life, Leave Me Alone*. Now we understand that we have been enacting—embodying—the self-protective role of Apollo, a defiant teenager-like part of us. And that has brought more chaos. Especially in intimate relationships. In this particular drama, we see that when Apollo takes center stage and hogs the spotlight, we are *blended* with his defensive part of us, to use ego-therapy terms. We gain the insight to see that we have detached callously from our recent girlfriend. We have been manipulative, abrasive. We once claimed to love her, yet our inner defiant teen ego-state, Apollo, has moved within us and pushed us to avoid her and to stay in our head where we can play the blame game. We now have the insight to see that Apollo’s singular purpose in the drama is to stay frighteningly angry, distracting from the pain of our brother’s death, keeping the vulnerable heart (called Keats) compartmentalized, exiled in the theatre’s green room.

Reflecting on the Heart-drama, we know in a manner we had not known before that open defiance (Apollo, a milder introjected form of his father Saturn) keeps people at a distance and allows us to disown our despair, focusing on flaws of others instead of truly feeling the grief that Keats holds.

In later work, for example, we could return to that moment in time when Keats got stuck at his beloved brother’s bedside. We could move further toward resolution, seek a way—spontaneous and creative—to help release more of these projections and parts of us from the tragedy in which we have been stuck.

“O aching time! O moments big as years!” Keats <sup>lxxviii</sup>

The Heart-dramas with the greatest potency are always myth-like. They inhabit our body, our emotional memories and are imagistic—sometimes are clearly metaphoric or reverberate with a Surplus. The most riveting performances have a depth and an associative web of connections that pull in listeners (those who still can listen), and what is experienced cannot be made into the “point of it.”

I sometimes feel like a commoner very much aware of a dynasties’ power. But we can only find the way to healing and growth by encountering respectfully these forces and the archetypal patterns, while maintaining some space, so we do not get sucked in completely. When we maintain dual awareness, entering the flow of Negative Capability, establishing Attunement that lights up with the energies of Powerful-work—being here while traveling there.

It is often that after the Work, the mythic archetypal story has shifted and now seems like a recognizable family tale. It's worthy of various human-sized interpretations. It seems we have moved from talking about life in some magnificent but frozen realm to seeing how we are living life (or not). We can see that where we started, the "myth of the fall," was the intellect's reinterpretation of a life lived in the trenches of a family tragedy, a constructed story that allowed little resolution, a grand static and disembodied abstract. Somehow in this absurd role-playing we have been reintegrated and re-embodied. We have come closer to coherence, to holding the lived experience of shame and loss, rather than acting out. We comprehend it differently, as if, in the enactment, a bullshit detector set off inside us and reintegrated us back into the *mysteries* of reality.

Now, if we can, we debrief.

Whenever we share our deepest Work, we find that many people in our life (let's call them witnesses or friends with the capacity to be vulnerable) find a way to resonate with us. One witness, a middle-aged attorney who has a well-developed and hardened persona, unveils what resonates for her. The grief on stage represented by Keats reminds her of her own inner child, (*the abandoned one*, she calls it) largely ignored by the family. She was an outcast in her family drama, left alone in to her misery. Every witness has a different point of view. They resonate with some aspects, or none, or few.

Afterward, more of the protagonist's reflections may surface in hours or days or decades, we may wonder, after the enactment, how can we be more loving toward this boy, Keats, the most vulnerable part of us, the wounded heart?

As I write this, I wonder if I can better understand my own Apollo—a defensive posture, armored in the face of a family unable to support each other when they needed to most. Cruel to each other in a cruel world where loved ones die unexpectedly. Through my own dramas, I have been able to remove a carefully crafted mask. I feel less imprisoned in some tragic myth—and more part of a creative energy. Perhaps I have even accessed an Inspired state that in Greek mythology would have been attributed as a blessing from the sun god.

## Essential Inquiry

*Which of the many creatures  
(Who live in the wild fields  
and forests inside of me)  
will dominate today?  
Who or how will I be?  
What will I embody?  
And who will decide?*

### **Pre-suppositions of the Heart-drama:**

- In the Heart-drama, there's a healing force, a restorative energy, that operates on "the stage." It arises as playfulness, love, work, and power. When we can bring such energies into reflection on our rich, complex, and meaningful experiences, getting for some moments beneath the simple maps (scripts) that tend to dominate, maps favoring only a part(s) of life, we may be moved to find more Beauty in the world and seek a Truth that has been elusive, often hidden beneath society/familial, left-hemisphere "pertinent" points.
- We seek what we are warmed up to; and explore what Inspiration leads us to in the moment. This is not always pleasant, but a creative state and set allows us to raise and even to face what is gravely serious, what usually prompts avoidance, or to recognize the listless, insulting, distracting, raging or mouse-like or venomous ways we have avoided life.
- Change won't come from a "prescription" or from information explained from a reasonable notion of what we know or from maps that have lost the territory. Instead, we rely on our spontaneous intuitions.
- When we hold each unfolding drama in our Heart and are courageous enough to explore the realities that come out from the curtains, we can find a more creative understanding of the Barriers that have impeded us. It is not uncommon to find suffering that we have repressed. Or joy—a playful we fear will be laughed at by the serious. This can be difficult, this exploration, but it also allows us to face what is real, to recognize the imbalance and step out of our fears and to invent a creative response.
- By reflecting on the drama that reveals narration, we give rise to a creative pathway to restoration, to repair, and healing, which then suggests Ritual practices. We can use insights after our Work to continue to heal and grow.

### **When the Map is Not a Map**

*Psychodrama enables the protagonist to build a bridge beyond the roles he plays in his daily existence, to surpass and transcend the reality of life as he lives it, to get into a deeper relationship with existence, to come as close as possible to the highest form of encounter of which he is capable.*

Jacob Moreno & ZT Moreno <sup>lxxix</sup>

The Heart-drama process of EXPAND is modeled after Active Imagination, as depicted by Carl Jung. Here, I, too, suggest a method of engaging the unconscious mind through imaginative techniques to better access and explore one's inner world and to become more aware of how our social world reflects unconscious—sometimes life diminishing—beliefs and impulses. Our goal is to gain insight to prompt our personal growth. EXPAND involves intentionally delving into what is hidden, and in the process

expressing a full range of thoughts and feelings. This requires us to adopt a creative and non-judgmental mode of attention. Like Jung, I believe that we benefit from reflections that include fantasizing, exploring dreams, visualizing, active role-playing, and spontaneous expressive activities. By this we gain a deeper understanding of ourselves, our psyche, and how the unconscious distorts our social world and makes us insane.

For expansion to take hold, it is important to enter Inspired energies, which I have delineated as Loving-Playfulness, Loving-work, Powerful-work, and Powerful-play. The purpose of Warm-up (which I will discuss shortly) is to invite and embody these energies.

Expressive activity is part of the EXPAND self-directed method. Write down feelings or journal or use other creative methods, such as drawing. This will help to clarify the imagery and emotions and thoughts or sensations that come up for you.

The vehicle you choose for this inquiry will depend on what feels right with you. A common creative-expressive method involves creating a collage from words and images gathered from photographs or journals, from magazines. If you are pulling from magazines, then allow yourself the freedom to make a pile of images and phrases that have an intuitive feel, before selecting what you reflect on.

Though of course you can use a pure stage of imagination or begin by recalling a recent dream or a specific moment that seems to have meaning, personally, I find it is helpful to have some way to prompt the inquiry and to capture reflections. You might write in a journal, like the Morning Pages described in *The Artist's Way*, or begin more simply with doodling after you have *set your intention*. Or use prompts. In psychodrama I use a variety of colored scarves to represent whatever starts to be defined: feelings, or even characters, inner voices etc. Feel free to use the painted images I have included here however you wish. And, as an aside, though I am setting out my understanding of the psyche and the dangers we face in the contemporary world and a way to heal and grow, please allow your own path to arise, your own process, your own understanding.

If you are laying out images into spreads, as in Tarot reading, begin to imagine and explore them in relation to your own inner and outer worlds. This can involve elaborating scenes that come to mind, encountering inner characters or people, or events, memories. Pay attention to what you resonate with and what seems intuitively meaningful.

The rest of this book I will speak of a Heart-drama process—a map that isn't a map. It is predicated on my assumption you are using some Inspired strategy to concretize or externalize what you are finding, some active vehicle to dig deeply yet create clarity. If you feel “creating” is beyond you, then you can purchase a card set (there are many available) that might prompt you to reflect. But I would still encourage you to record your own reflections in some way.

As I must I am imagining a specific audience, someone who is on a self-directed creative search who might wish to experiment in a Heart-drama way, but of course I welcome you in whatever way you read this or find some worth in it and maybe some hope.

### **The Nature of Inspiration**

*The Cistern contains; the fountain overflows.* William Blake, “The Marriage”<sup>lxxx</sup>

Let me claim clearly, Inspiration needs to be nurtured and trusted. Because it can feel like a gentle push rather than the frantic sucking into a black hole, the Inspired can be missed, overlooked, dissociated from and will dissipate if we fail to hold it as it comes, often lightly.

Often with cognitive dissonance, Inspiration nudges us in directions that our intellect will not understand. And so, it must be, the trajectory of a Heart-drama is not known (planned and strategized) ahead of time. It arises in the experience. For instance, just to provide an example, we are urged to revisit the moment when our wife of 20 years met our repeated cries for understanding and compassion with an unsmiling smile. We can be called to encounter a younger version of ourselves (whether 2 months younger or two years), see him in a chair in the familiar room of this turning point confronted by the realization that this is unsustainable. As we journal feelings, there is a full range from disgusting, self-loathing, to pity, compassion, confusion, while we can also be aware now of a wisdom we did not have then.

Inspiration may softly remind us to take a breath, to walk in nature, sit with it, or feel our insights. We may be prompted to reread journals we have written in the past, or access new thoughts by watching videos that can help us or by listening to podcasts. To step out of the daily mess of incoming opinions and conflicting data, there is a spiritual retreat—now we see it—that might fit us now or a program, or a group, a simple practice to aid our inquiry.

Our next dive in the drama may perturb us toward a different encounter, perhaps inspiring us to bring an image of our ex-wife into a place we feel safe and grounded, a park we walk in for instance, imagining her at a distance, then let her walk closer, noticing the neuro-gravitational energies that stir and pull us toward the rocks as if to drown us. Of the thousand possibilities in our imagining, we feel encouragement to stay with our triggered physiology, rather than give in to our tendency to avoid. We imagine the feeling as a boulder in our gut that we have been carrying, aware now that something like his has existed in us, and we carried it with us out into our world for as far back as we can remember.

What to do with it? Well, there is no cookbook, and our intellect will mislead us, direct us to some-worn path or will be contemptuous of the journey or will duck and cover, calling this Work irrational. We have more important things to do, and humility, spontaneity, vulnerability, creativity and unselfishness or self-care are childish.

Inspiration:

- Often calls to us quietly, and paradoxically comes only when called.
- The trajectory of a Heart-drama arises in the moment to lead us where we need to go.
- For the novice, Inspiration flickers in the face of Titans in our nervous system.
- There is always resistance that pulls us toward the familiar and provides faux excuses.

A map is not a perfect analogy for EXPAND, since it suggests we're going to be traveling to a known destination, something that Triple A can assist us with, like boarding a plane with a ticket to Salt Lake City. We hope the pilot has a clearly charted, detailed flight plan. Behavioral therapy purports to be more like that, taking us from point A to B reliably, predictably, measurably.

Maybe traveling by car is a better comparison? The driver can at least allow time for sightseeing, taking scenic byways, as they appeal to the passengers in the moment, which better depicts a creative process. But EXPAND is not like taking a Sunday drive, no matter how much we wander.

I've considered other analogies. For instance, a compass is an image that captures the way Inspiration can act like a pointer pushing us magnetically in a certain direction. EXPAND can feel like that in the flow, but it's nothing like using a direction-finder that always points true. People who sell you art and therapy workbooks can sound like they are pointing to wherever they are...urging a combination of product, method and techniques which might also require becoming a paid subscriber to their podcasts. Others are rather vague, as if they are discussing magnetized ore that offers direction and, as a bonus, mysteriously communicates with the muse or spirits. That muddies the compass metaphor for me.

EXPAND reminds me most of an experience from childhood. A few times in the summer as a preteen I would have the full day to do what I wanted, and what I wanted most of all was to cross all those identical suburban neighborhoods on a long hike to a wilder landscape, where there still existed acres upon acres of forest.

Each time I followed a particular stream, which was merely a dusty bed during a heat wave or a determined trickle of water after rainy days. That's what the EXPAND journey might be analogous to—a child's playful challenge to follow a stream and streams and other streams. It was easy to feel lost, and at moments I had to beat through brush and bramble into new openings, striding across sunny spaces, then getting back into the thick of it. We follow the winding course as we can, feeling gravity dropping us deeper into the landscape.

Maybe this is more like a hero's journey?

### **In the roots**

*"Deep in their roots, all flowers keep their light."* Theodore Roethke

At its best, the process of Heart-drama is a way to descend to the deepest places, "to get into a deeper relationship with existence," as Moreno puts it. In our imagination, we explore the energies that have a neuro-psychological pull. If you are using some system of images, don't get lost. Some "experts"

will claim that certain images (or arrangements of images) are like (or are) messages from the gods, and the expert has of course deciphered their meaning. Or some “advisors” might explain the astrological alignment forged between your personality and your lifepath at birth, and they have the algorithm to prove it. Etcetera. Resist anyone else’s interpretation.

If you reflect on imagery, maybe juxtaposed with phrases or words that are intuitively associated, or on a narrative (which are images in a certain arrangement), then depths will begin to resonate. We are meaning making mammals, with capacities to see patterns beneath appearances; and when we are in the energies of Inspiration, encountering images and stories and memories. experiences that have energy, and *feel* important, we find a way to the depths.

The images that I include here are part of my vision, not yours. And not everything will resonate. I passionately encourage you to take on a similar lifelong project; to create your own system of important images and reflection, so, as William Blake warned us, we do not get mesmerized and trapped by another vision, not our own.

We are creatures that orient toward the symbolic, if we can get beyond our resistance, and I am convinced that some deeply personal imagery—visualizations, visual memories—can elicit the “surplus,” beyond the mundane, beyond allegory or even metaphor. I believe you will begin to project into the visual some new interpretations, revealing something important. I am suggesting you use a “practice” frequently. Taking a Jungian perspective, I would imagine that each visual, whether a memory or on a card, collage, in a painting is a synchronistic unveiling of some part of yourself or some energy that you are encountering worthy of reflection. I believe overtime, or maybe in one special session (just as one specific dream can be hugely significant), you will tap the foundational myths that are alive in your psyche.

### **Proto-myths**

These “myths” I refer to have deep roots. Those who study neurobiology tell us that the implicit right brain experience of our self in the world is the first story that’s told in our bodies and nervous systems, formed in an ancient part of the brain—Antonio Damasio refers to this as a *proto-self*— an embodied entangling of the physical and emotional. It is downloaded from the emotional climate we lived in as an infant before our left hemisphere came online to capture memories. This bedrock experience of our being in the world talks to us through images and symbols (the natural language of the right brain). As I understand it, the proto-self has the answer to two questions:

- Is the world a safe place? If it is, then it’s beautiful. If not, then it’s ugly and terrifying.
- Am I lovable/capable enough? If so, then I can risk my truth. If not, then I’m weak and unlovable.

The answers determine if we live in the garden or in a Fallen world. Our original “proto” conclusion impacts us fundamentally. And I believe Heart-drama leads us uniquely close to our source story, with the potential to effect some serious change. If we have been living out a tragic narrative,

largely unreachable or unimpeachable with our conscious strategies (our medications, our fixations, and intellectual applications), EXPANDING gives us a means, if not a clear path to be mapped, to recognize what is occurring and to alter, at least to perturb, our core perception.

Obviously, to change, to heal and grow, we first must know what is happening in us and around us; only then can we reflect on how to shape our lives. In this work, the Heart is the real expert with knowledge of where it needs to go, while the drama (by which I mean a session with the cards) invites us to transform, to see more Beauty around us and to access more of what is True. In this Work, we become like dreamers entering old dreams with new powers.

## The Warmup

“It (spontaneity) propels the individual towards an adequate response to a new situation or a new response to an old situation. Thus, while creativity is related to the act itself, spontaneity is related to the warming up to the readiness of the act.” Moreno <sup>lxxxix</sup>

In traditional psychodrama, we must get roused before a drama takes that place. We call this the Warmup. As in all effective approaches to our Work, I believe some fire must ignite first. We will need all of the energy we can tap in order to travel to the deepest levels and to make change.

If you are to consider a regular Heart-drama inquiry, it can be helpful to develop a routine to get yourself in the mood. For me, as I seek to stir these energies in my visual art or writing sessions, this always involves brewing a cup of coffee in one of my favorite mugs and making a quiet way to my studio. This brief but well-rehearsed pattern lets my Heart know that I am inviting an opening.

If an energetic opening (excitement? willingness? playfulness?) does not occur, then, as I get further into my creative work some lesser part of me will interrupt or to even stop the show. If I do not access Inspiration, my fears and doubts will start and restart and restart again. Fear feels like stress, and it shows up for me as procrastination, never landing on a piece of art or writing, never starting, or never finishing. All of these I’ve experienced when fear triggers blocking voices that are critical, at worst, self-loathing.

In Warmup, you will begin to illicit answers to important questions, maybe ones you have never asked. But in Warming Up we are far from deciding on a drama, never mind seeking resolutions or interpretations. We want first to move energy from survival to Inspired, to throw off reservations and to begin. As I have explained, these purposeful energies I call by different names depending on the paradigm I associate them with: Loving-Playfulness, Loving-Work, Powerful-Work and Powerful-Play.

### **Summary: Inspired Modes of Attention**

In Warmup we hope to shift into any helpful mode(s) of attention. I have previously discussed them but to summarize:



- Evolving out of the energy of Loving-Playfulness, in the *being* I call the Awakened Child, an internal mode of attention is **Dual Awareness**, where we are present, and, also, aware of multiple parts of us. This arises in the experience we typically call Mindfulness. A guided meditation that supports attention to the multiplicity of our inner world is Dan Siegle’s Wheel of Awareness. As he guides us, we can sit in the center of “awareness of awareness” while focusing attention on parts of the “rim” (the physical, the mental, the emotional and relational knowledge we have in the moment)
- Eventually, in Loving-Playfulness, we grow a mode of attention I call **Integration**. With Dual Awareness we can choose who to focus on and who invite on stage, with some ability to shift from role-state or role-state, from inner person to inner person, to simultaneously stay connected (present) to our intention and to dampen down impulses that are not loving toward ourselves. In this effortless play, Integration is the effortless process that occurs. It cannot be forced. At core it creates a harmonious balance and union.
- Evolving out of the energy I call Loving-Work, in the created being I call the Artist, an external mode of attention is **Negative Capability**, where I am aware of egoic pushes but I can inhabit the muse. Time is suspended, in an experience often called Flow; I am able to rely on skills and experiences, but the art (the action I perform) is not exclusively *mine*. It is a collaboration of my intentional actions and skills **and** what is given to me.
- Reinforcing this Inspired energy through rituals and practices allows eventually for a mode of attention that I call **Fulfillment**. This is the Artist’s vision endowed with a realization that this did not come from *me* exclusively. Each act in the moment has a sense of a trajectory that seems purposeful (though I may only see it when looking backward into a body of work). It has meaning for me but is not exclusively about me, which elevates the act from self-expression to True and Beautiful Art.
- Evolving out of energy I call Powerful-Work, in the created being I call the Lover, a relational mode of attention is **Unconditional Love**. In the experience sometimes called Attunement, there is awareness of me and not me. I can be in you and in me, which invites empathy and has the power to heal attachment wounds. In this way of attending, there is less projection or pressure and more heart-felt awareness.
- **Discernment** is an elaboration of this mode of attention, a higher level if you will. You can distinguish what is Inspired and what is Fallen, growing a more refined and astute alertness to relationships. With such consciousness, you can use your power to protect what is important and to set boundaries. It is my knowledge in this moment with the

other; yet, paradoxically, what I know is also greater, beyond what “I know.”

Discernment is at depth intuitive—of the Heart and gut and natural to the Inspired Self.

- Evolving out of the energy I call Powerful-Play, in the created being I call the Visionary, a spiritual mode of attention is **Sacred Perception**. In an experience sometimes called Spiritual (blending internal/external/relational wisdom), there is awareness of me and not me. I am endowed with my own insight, oriented to what I deem to be purposeful action, and relationally empathic, while what I attend to is also greater than me, encompassing a larger sacred vision of Beauty and Truth. My attention recognizes the world is connected and yet not me.
- Arising out of Powerful-Play Inspired energy is a depth of enlightenment which I will call **Intergenerational Responsibility**. With this mode of attention, I am watchful. I notice that how I act is important, but it is also of diminutive value in the unfolding of reality in this infinite universe. Still, even in my humility, I am responsible for what will unfold (even though I am not choosing it). I act compassionately and in alignment with my vision.

### **Even in Warmup, the Resistance**

*“The more important a call or action to our soul’s evolution, the more resistance we will feel toward pursuing it.”* Steven Pressfield, War of Art<sup>lxxxii</sup>

What the Abnormal might think is safe is often avoidance, not taking any risk. And it is sneaky. If you dwell on reasonable questions about “the point of this is . . . ,” then, I warn you, that any logical answer to the question is truly pointless. It only acts as a distraction and raises skepticism and doubt.

The Warmup is pointedly pointless. I say this because it is not seeking an outcome. It is not a lesson, nor a place for the editor and critic to poke their nose in. It’s not an intellectual exercise to demonstrate something preconceived.

If we tell well-rehearsed stories or ask intellectual questions, sediment clogs the filter to the moment, starving the enlivened heart of oxygen. The mind returns to make its usual judgments.

The only goal is to encourage disclosure. In the Warming up, I encourage you to work against that pull of *the usual*. *The normal*. Keep moving. Don’t spend too much time thinking or trying to settle on a topic.

*“Complete the sentence, I’m angry at . . . .” “What else are you angry at?” “What are you worried about? Complete the sentence, “I’m worried about . . . .: “What else are you’re worried about?”*

Emotional muscles may be frozen from lack of use. So, you may need to stimulate some heat by pushing, perturbing, bringing up the disturbing. Speak the unrehearsed, create some confusion, and prompt enough anxiety to better allow yourself to slip the confines of passive experience.

## **The Stage**

Enlarging must be treated as sacred—at the very least protected from the Inside-out and the Upside down.

On whatever special platform you have chosen (a studio, a path in Nature, a journal exercise in a quiet place, maybe a group if you are lucky) we call the stage. Here, resolve to stir the pot. Imagine this chosen place and method has the spaciousness to encompass everything the drama needs to enact. You don't know exactly what that is at the start. But you must have the freedom to do whatever needs to be done. The inquiry to come is a lot like opening a mysterious box in a safe place, safe because its contents are met with Love not because it feels emotionally safe to open.

I do believe it is helpful to have a special arena for your practice. There's a notion in behavioral psychology of a *stimulus environment*. This is a place where you associate with specific behaviors. For example, going to the gym can be a stimulus environment; eventually just walking through the door puts you in an exercising mood. Body memories get prompted, and your unconscious readies you. Alcoholics know something similar when they have a specific room or a comfy chair where they do their drinking. Sobriety may require lugging that favorite piece of furniture to the dump to keep from being triggered into cravings.

In hypnosis they call this anchoring.

The point is that to EXPAND you will require a stage from which to explore, and if you use the same physical space, a desk in a quiet spot, a studio, a table on a deck overlooking a backyard full of birds, it can provoke you more quickly on a creative expedition. If you identify a special arena, then you must protect it from anybody around you or your own voice of the Abnormal that comes with self-serving lectures and dismissive attitudes. Don't let anyone muddy it up. Don't do your taxes on the same desk as your Art (unless doing taxes is your Art).

## **Continual Movement**

*"All emotion uses the body as their theatre."* Antonio Damasio

To Warmup, get your body in motion. Walk around the room, randomly, avoid an organized pattern. *Move slower, faster.* Play at changing the pace to invite yourself out of stasis. *Walk with your elbows leading the way. Now move with your head out front.*

I've used dance clips, mash ups, exercise videos, ridiculous dances, or alternative music with a fast beat, bands like Rancid for instance or The Distillers. to energize the body until the brain gets convinced (because it often cannot tell the difference) that I am resuscitating my emotional life.

As you wake to your energy, allow yourself to enact anger, amplifying it to rage, then softening to irritation. Shifting from one state to another. Enact Joy. Try out different laughs, belly laughs, fake laughs, smug or dismissive laughs. Always seek to stay out of the Abnormal domain, out of the intellect. Remain

open to new thoughts, inviting the creative and even the irrational, use expressive methods, play with points of view.

### **Role Play**

*“Play behavior transforms the physical environment into an enriched environment.”*

Dr. Allan Shore<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

Experiment playfully with different roles. Sit in a chair and imagine you are on stage for some improv. *Become* a family member or act out your best portrayal of a co-worker or an ex-lover; then move to a different chair and respond to them. There’s an unlimited number of possible such experiments. Identify who unconditionally supports you (or has in the past)? Be that person. Now become someone who is angry at you or has communicated disdain or disappointment. Someone who brings a uniquely different or opposite opinion. Be *that person* talking about *you*.

Do you have two voices like that sometimes internally? Is there a Ying and Yang in your inner world? Do you ever feel tension between these two voices? Be that part of you that speaks with self-loathing. Then be that part of you who loves you unconditionally.

Be your dog. Be Buddha. Be Jesus. Be your mentor. Become a relative who helps you see something important about who you truly are . . .

Raise the temperature of your imagination.

## VII. Enlarging--The Heart Finds a Focus

*“That in you which recognizes madness as madness (even if it’s your own) is sanity, is the arising awareness, is the end of insanity.” Eckard Tolle<sup>xxxiv</sup>*

*What is* (what I call our Inspiration) cannot be fully presented as *a something*, yet it animates us to go forward and to get near to what is essential and fundamental. Our left-hemisphere brain, knowing only what it knows, resists such a crazy notion.

If we persist, in our introspection and reflection, Inspiration constructs on the stage what most concerns the Heart. This *concern* eludes clear or simple definition, but it’s what perturbs us to depict a particular drama.

If there’s a Heart-drama to be enacted, as I mean it here, then there will be an increasing pressure to reveal what has been concealed. As we stay on the energetic path, we witness an unfolding—a revelation—of what has obscured our possibility and potentiality. These have been veils, or shadows to the light of the Self.

By *pressure to disclose*, I am referring to the dramatic tension at the core of a drama: the tension between what is “present” and attempts to heal, versus what has not—would not, could not—remain long in the *here and now* and so hides reality, skews our perception with primal adaptations or survival distortions. Because we live in a traumatized and traumatizing society, when we begin to bring more attention and inquiry to what has been neglected, we can stir what has been lying just under the surface, trigger old emotional states and our physiology. When we activate action patterns of the sympathetic nervous system, we will feel the neurobiological pull of fight, flee, submit, or collapse.

Image 18 *What is in the Far Field?*



### **The first step: Enlarging**

*It (spontaneity) propels the individual towards an adequate response to a new situation or a new response to an old situation. Thus, while creativity is related to the act itself, spontaneity is related to the warming up to the readiness of the act.*

Jacob Moreno<sup>lxxxv</sup>

Entering the field, not as a modern distortion of the hunter/warrior (cruel and other-hating), not animated with fierce driving power (though that clearly has its place), not even to gather a specific flower or herb or mushroom, but simply to encounter the life and beauty that lies in the unseen spaces, we find ourselves amidst a slow gathering of beings. There is an infinite and diverse mixing of lively energies and color, as patches of dry barren ground teem forth with living things, the tiny dust on wings shining in the light. The twisting sprouts, refusing to give up life. Embodied, moving with the pace the Heart feels is best, always in a playful flow, there is no need to speak. We become as unhurried as the puffing clouds. We feel the warmth on our skin, the air moving, blowing, or suddenly dropping off. We inhale the scents, the stinks, and become as wide as this place, infinite and ancient.

### **Why this painting?**

We spend too much time in a house of mirrors. Reflections distorted into a fun house, but often quite devoid of fun. As we Warm up to Enlarge, the usual illusions dim; we start to pay more attention to what has not been prominent in our social media, aspects of us that have not been carefully groomed by our explicit identity. Warming up is waking up. Enlarging is connecting and becoming fluid, boundaries dissolving.

Most of us have had the experience of getting to the edge of what we consciously understand, on a threshold—where the egoic reflections have diminished enough or when we have been broken open or the familiar has cracked wide. When the day is dawning, mirrored reflections in our rooms magically become windows again to the world. We see through to a more Inspired way of being, maybe noticing a far field where we can make a new decision, meet something new, or we see the benefits of letting go of something that no longer serves us.

But then, too often, we step fearfully back, like the archetypal hero who refuses the quest and hides in a small town. We draw down the heavy blinds. Go back to bed. Forget the opening we have declined. Binge-watch our favorite shows. Maybe we have done this again and again until it's a pattern.

This painting asks, “Are you ready to step away from habits and explore the far fields?”

### **Inside-out**

Even if you choke, that is not pathological, just resistance. Indeed, in a traumatizing society, a “normal” reaction to something *weird* is to avoid it, to remain safe, to not take the chance, to stay on the shiny surface of the mask, replacing spontaneous action with acting out defensively. Faced with the unfamiliar, we often pretend to be a “student,” attempting to get an “A.” Writing quotes down, memorizing something witty to make good dinner conversation later. In such a posture, a left-brain kind of tunnel-vision, the Enlarging Withers, becomes just information that can be regurgitated. Since we all have been in classrooms, a part of us has been exceedingly well trained to be the smart one or independent one, the gadfly or the disinterested scowling one in the back row. If we allow the Enlarging

to shrink and returns to the familiar tunnel vision, we will skate on some of the Work we know we need to do. Or we may make absurdly brief inquiries, then go on to something new, doing a drive-by of reflection.

I suppose that in the Warming up, at the very least, we have invited some heat into the cold bones. To persist requires that we decide to give our life the loving attention it deserves. In the Enlarging, we must commit to following energy, to push the force of creativity against the energy forms that want to pull us off course. We want to perturb the status quo, bring up the disturbing. Invite the dramatic. Speak the unrehearsed, welcome the uncomfortable, create confusion and, prompt and harness enough anticipatory anxiety (moving from fear to seeking) to better allow us to slip the confines of passive experience.

Can we be the Child, the Artist, the Lover, even the Visionary? Or will we tell well-rehearsed stories or ask predictable questions, letting the sediment clog the filter to the moment, starving the enlivened Heart of oxygen, until the mind-machine returns to make its usual judgments? What will you decide?

**Upside down:**

This Work is for you. If you are doing it for anyone else, then you will lose momentum.

Too often in this society, what the ego (Abnormal energy) might think is safe is just snarky debate and smug intellectualization or meaningless aggression. And, if we announce to our acquaintances, our colleagues, our family members that we are doing this creative expressive Work, we will often hear the ego talking from their mouths. “What exactly is the point of this?” Trying to provide answers risks inviting others to question you further, until you enter a kind of philosophical courtroom, and feel increasingly defended and at a loss. However well-meaning they may seem, don’t let anyone become such a distraction. The ego craves distraction and wants you to pursue a career as a prosecutor or defense attorney. My suggestion, if you feel scrutinized: Do not defend yourself unless you are in an actual court of law. And then, hire an attorney.

It is important to remind ourselves, in Enlarging, there is an aim but not *a point that satisfies the ego*. We seek only to create a refuge where everything can be explored. We’re removing the screens, the coverings, and looking deeply. We’re taking the time to join in a Heartful place, promoting Mindfulness, Flow, Attunement and Spirituality. With these Enlarging energies, as Moreno has written, we seek to create a “living laboratory for experimentation.”<sup>lxxxvi</sup> But we must choose carefully who we tell about what we find.

## The E in EXPAND.

*What falls away is always. And is near.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I learn by going where I have to go.* Theodore Roethke. The Waking <sup>lxxxvii</sup>

Slow down. Begin with settling on an experience to explore and consider what you hope to come away with. Make sure that the outcome you seek from this practice is something that is feasible. We can sabotage ourselves by framing questions in certain ways. For instance, “How do I get this person in my life to change?” I doubt you have the power to do that, but you could ask, “What do I need to comprehend about this relationship--something that I might be missing?”

Invite willingness, an inherent quality of an inquiry. Be willing to reflect on what comes up. To go where your Heart needs to. As a therapist I don’t presume to know what I will discover as I enter a session with a client, but I do want to understand the outcome they seek. Similarly, as I start my contemplative Work, I don’t know what I will find as it progresses, though I start with an intention, a willingness and trust that what is important eventually reveals itself. This is the Artist’s process, always a meeting of the known and the unknown. Whether you consider yourself creative or not, give yourself over to being influenced by whatever arises. It is helpful to believe, “I’m not creating this alone.”

From the beginning Warmup you have been widening your awareness, shifting states, and inviting more Inspired modes of attention so that everything and anything can be explored. Enlarging maintains this attitude, but now focuses on what we have before us. As we reflect, we want to get deeper than our first thought.

As we remove the screens, the coverings, and look deeply, one way to tap creative juices is to “double.” This entails speaking for the card or the imagery in a collage, or a colored scarf or for the people or being(s) that you feel must be on your imaginative stage. This is a powerful strategy in psychodrama. It encourages what has not been spoken yet to be heard. In a Heart-drama, I would encourage that you take the time to “double” for whatever shows up. Of course, you *don’t know* what needs to be verbalized until it finds a way to language. Sometimes you will recognize some intelligence, even a brilliance, that is not yours but is speaking Truth, if not necessarily fact.

*It is a psychic fact that this fantasy is happening, and it is as real as you—as a psychic entity—are real.*  
Carl Jung <sup>lxxxviii</sup>, CW, paragraph 753

Use a pad of paper and write down what occurs to you in this moment, however crazy it sounds. When possible, reduce it to a short statement. If that feels right, then go with that. If it doesn’t feel quite right, then take a breath and write down a different statement. It could even be a gesture or a sound that captures the attitude and stance. Ahhh! Ow! Shit or damn. This can take some time.

When we Enlarge, we gain:



- Awareness of different internal voices
- A “felt sense” of different states and energy forms.
- Awareness of the social systems that provide different attitudes and perspectives.
- Resources that have been elusive, both internal and external.
- We begin to differentiate from (rather than project on) others, and/or separate our own subjective ego-states, one from another.

I will list below some common directions a drama might take. But be aware, these are only where a drama could start or they are some of the landscapes you might traverse, terrain that opens up. It is not an exhaustive list, and frequently the inquiry will pivot to something different all together or you will traverse many places. Enlarging can take the most time within any given drama. Resist jumping to “the problem” so the ego can rush to “the solution.” Slow down. The reason we can feel disempowered in our attempt to heal and grow is that we don’t fully appreciate the territory, and we forget that challenges in life are not things to be solved.

## 1. Broken at Heart

### Drama of Differentiation

*“Neuroscience, social psychology, and artificial intelligence all agree that each of us consists of a multiplicity of identities that account for the richness and complexity of the human experience. In other words, no one is a “unitary” self.”*

Daniel Siegel and Richard Schwartz

*The Myth of Unitary Self: A Dialogue on the Multiplicity of Mind*<sup>lxxxix</sup>

In this drama, the focus is on internal differentiation. This is an important psychological property to explore, especially when you are conflicted, overwhelmed by competing pushes and pulls. Parts of the psyche can seem glommed together, with different revolving voices and urges. In such a noisy state, often we feel paralyzed, or we swing from position to position, not making any traction nor clarifying what we want or need.

Here it is necessary to deconstruct the notion of *one mind*. If I’m one mind, I can be diagnosed as a narcissist. If one mind, I can be judged as needy. Or I am the person who screws up relationships. If one mind, I’m the addict or the people-pleaser, the rage-aholic. I am the problem. These are the typical storyteller narratives (fallacies) that are coherent and thus so seductive. But what can I do if *my one broken mind* is the problem? If I am a singular unhealthy psychological identity, what is there to do except become a patient? Or become an inmate needing to be monitored or jailed?

Finding other energies in us, recognizing and separating out the conflicting and polarizing voices in us, identifying and naming whatever turns up, moves us beyond the common delusion that we’re one damaged thing. Such differentiation is what, I believe, IFS means by *unblending*. There’s tremendous power for healing in this. There’s also a clarity, and relief that comes from encountering and getting to

know the true madness that has controlled, distracted, and impeded our psyche's maturation. Coming to discern the neuro-gravitational pulls and inner personalities in conflict, the fragmentation that developed from mental injuries, we see the inner characters (and the dramas between characters) that have prompted so much of the repetitive life "problems."

As we begin to make distinctions among these impulses and energies, as a variety of characters begin to people the stage in our imagination, we can experiment by bringing some closer, propelling others farther away. As we make these decisions, deliberately choreographing our inner realm, we begin to wonder, "Who is able to orchestrate in this way, to be this director?" Of course, I am arguing that the only capable director is Inspiration or the Inspired Self, sometimes called our True Self. It is remarkably liberating to channel the power to do this, freeing us from learned helplessness, disempowering diagnoses, and discouraging symptom-stories. Even if nothing more occurs in your Work, this can kick free enough debris so that the river of spontaneity and creativity begins to flow again. When that happens, healing continues long after you are consciously aware of it.

Differentiation is liberation.

### **Playing to Invite Discernment**

*Good conversation has an edge; it opens your eyes to something, quickens your ears. And good conversation reverberates.* Hillman, The Soul's Code.<sup>xc</sup>

To start, you might identify some aspect or inner voice, and then take an object or a scarf or something with color or designate a chair where this identified part of you—a voice, a feeling, a belief or injunction— can sit. If there is a conflict between parts, then designate two chairs or objects, etcetera, and stand outside the immediate drama to invite more insight. From this new vantage point, you may be able to speak *soliloquies* about their immediate thoughts and feelings; take turns sitting in their places, notice the sensation in their bodies, then step away again. This promotes dual awareness. How old are they? How do they feel about the other? Discern how their reality differs from your own time and place.

As you get to understand these energies, then they may be more willing and able to speak at length. They may be able to explain what they have long believed. To share their fears. To tell you what has driven them. This becomes an opening to share what you—as Inspired—know now, what they did not grasp then: an interpretation perhaps or understanding that is closer to the Truth.

Such a simple Enlarging strategy can lead to a new perspective. Or a softening of the inner conflict.

Image 23 *Stuck in the House*



### **Challenging the Unitary Self**

*If one does not understand a person, one tends to regard him as a fool.*

Carl Jung, Mysterium Conjunctions 14, paragraph 147

*Stuck in the House*, we can spend time lingering on the different characters, the unexpected bear climbing out from under the crib, the bear-child clearly wanting to escape but stuck straddling the bars, half in-half out. The girl in the cellar, the dominant distressed bear on the stairs, the frightening Monster peering in. We can experiment, bringing some characters closer and inviting them to tell their compelling tales, propelling others farther away so we can better focus and return a sense of order. As we make these decisions, deliberately choreographing this inner realm, we are accessing Inspiration. This is remarkably liberating, especially if we have solely identified with just one of these personalities or if we have been stuck in the overwhelm and learned helplessness.

No longer simply painted, we are the viewer of the painting and better able to decide if we have outlived the disempowering diagnoses and discouraging stories.

### **Why this painting?**

In the energies of Enlarging, we can see without just projecting our fears (bringing less projective identification to these energy forms in our psyche). We might identify with the bear on the stairs who seems stuck, at her wits end, unable to view what is True. But we see the whole—more of the house—so we are less confined in an ego story where life is predetermined. “Our painting has been painted! Life has been written! And we are flawed. irrevocably damaged, unlovable, incapable, bad or shameful.”

### **Inside Out:**

The painting encourages us to step back and witness conflicts and paralysis and dissociative responses. If we are to be the Director (Artist) of your own drama, we must remain sufficiently in the Inspiration to stay separate enough from the characters and the action and to take different points of view. We must become a visitor to our own paintings, those individual representations that do not tell the whole story, conscious of the larger gallery, remaining curious, freed of the fear that we—one psychic entity—are fundamentally flawed, at core pathological.

Off course, early on in our Work, we may be flying blind, not fully seeing what is in front of us. This takes effort and time, however long it takes, before we can shift into a witnessing position. What we find (because so many of us have been traumatized), the internal dialogues and the repetitive cycles can be rather predictable (common and, *as patterns*, often not very complex). We notice triggered states, activating sequences of the sympathetic nervous system. We fight, flee, submit, or collapse.

### **Upside down:**

Paradoxically, recognizing that there is a complex inner world does not make us more fragmented but less. Differentiation prompts awareness, more connectivity and flexibility while stabilizing our sense of self. As we achieve increasing authentic integration, we are better able to push against the pressures to be absorbed into the hive-mind, to refuse the well-advertised narrative we are one person, capable of being diagnosed and treatment planned or punished. I will warn you; this Work makes it difficult to remain a content creative, especially if you are regurgitating the usual content from the culture and not creating art. Or if you are filling out applications requesting funding from the military industrial complex or from the pharmaceutical industrial complex or any other industrial complex. You could find it hard to even construct an elevator pitch to sell a product to the masses, or to design an enemies list.

And begin to see that whatever Influencers peddle to fix the apparent problem miss a fundamental multifaceted reality.

## **2. Heart Stopping**

### **Drama of Internal Resistance**

*“It’s the part of our brain that worries about safety and dishes out anger. Being laughed at is the lizard brain’s worst nightmare. And so it shuts down our art.”* Seth Godin <sup>xci</sup>

When the drama of internal resistance takes shape, we explore what is keeping us from our objectives. Eventually, inevitably, we must meet the saboteur. Self-sabotage, of course, is not a new concept. We have all experienced a force that “shuts down our art.” Indeed, many writers have described internal resistance as a devilish creature living in our mind, an entity responsible for writer’s block, seeking to squash our best plans. It keeps us from evolving. It sets out to close the eyes of the Awakened

Child, to denigrate the creations of the Artist, to ravage relationships or diminish our spiritual awareness and gratitude.

What animates the usual oppositional character is the fear that we (they) will fail, become overwhelmed, feel weak or powerless, or will be made fun of, “the lizard’s worst nightmare.” The usual calculus is that underneath you will find a wounded soul.

In the language of Internal Family Systems, resistance is an uncooperative Manager, a type of Protector. That seems closer to the reality of what we find, since the administrator refuses to cooperate, is filled with self-importance, resentment, and a commitment to easy dishonesty. It may have tapped a lot of our psychic energy over time, and, so, we can’t just get rid of it. In IFS, we must work to help re-channel its power. The objective is to eventually integrate all parts, align them to Beauty and Truth.

Perhaps that goal sounds bizarre? Even for a traditionally trained therapist, it can be revolutionary to see that the best way forward is to engage rather than to fight resistance. However, on the other hand, I don’t believe we want simply to accommodate, sympathize, or let sabotaging parts off the hook. The more we do this Work, the more we fully recognize and appreciate that some inner recalcitrant energies are poisonous and can stop our Heart in the very act of creation. Softness or compassion, even logic, gives some parts a license to retaliate or, at least, to dig in its heels harder. Their methods to resist us are numerous, but often take the form of distraction, condescension, invalidation, escalation, preoccupation with narrow concerns, spreading lies and contaminating others to create an echo-chamber. We may hear simple resistance internally nagging at us or it may show up around us, in the scorn of friends, coworkers, family, in the media, etc.

What to do? At the start, I encourage you to name these oppositional subpersonalities, depict them, sketch pictures of them, explore their stakes. What are the payoffs they seek? We do this examination not just for our own clarity but because some entities are prone to interpret silence or ambiguousness or confusion as capitulation. Which means they will get more persistent and confident and ugly. So, render them clearly until you recognize them when they come forward. Call them out. Spotlight them. I provide some names you can consider. But be creative. The more exotic designation and portrayal is the better. Perhaps the title: Monster, Abuser, Heart Invalidator, Soul-Erasure.

### **A Negative Aim**

*“Resistance cannot be sensed, touched, heard or smelled. But it can be felt. We experience it as an energy field radiating from a work-in-potential. It’s a repelling force. It’s negative. Its aim is to shove us away, distract us, prevent us from doing our work.”* Steven Pressfield *The War of Art*<sup>xcii</sup>

Engaging in combat is the opposite of capitulation. Like Steven Pressfield describing his constant battle with Resistance, Wayne Dyer suggested we need to clash against such pressures. His words were “scorch the ego,” recommending we make it submit—Excuses Be Gone.<sup>xciii</sup> The danger is that an internal

fracas tends to feed on itself. Resistance may get larger, more energized and become more of a looming presence in the psyche. People who are struggling with addictions typically want to rid themselves of this Self-deceptive energy, but it often has great power and cannot simply be cut off. If it is disowned, then it will go undercover—don an invisibility cloak—and pull at us without our knowledge. The method it employs here is a kind of trance induction, where you suddenly wake up and find yourself somewhere way off course.

There is a way forward that's neither people-pleasing in the face of internal bullies and oppositional sadists nor is it fighting an exhausting war against our defenses. I have mentioned this and will again. In all dramas, the technique of role-reversing allows us to encounter and differentiate. We take the role of one energy and then another. You may use scarves or colors or objects or drawings or even detailed paintings to facilitate getting to know resistance, to step in and out of unyielding characters. In every dramatic focus, it always pays off when we courageously encounter what opposes us, though it requires a lot of effort and courage to press forward and not simply retreat.

### **The Enemy**

*The restrainer or reason usurps its place and governs the unwilling.* Blake, Heaven and Hell.

In *The Four Agreements*, Don Miguel Ruiz describes a destructive force that the Toltec call "Domestication."<sup>xciv</sup> Similarly, Don Juan Matus in the Carlos Castaneda stories names "the Enemy," an entity that opposes our quest for knowledge and personal freedom.<sup>xcv</sup> Carl Jung described the archetype that animated Hitler as Wotan—a powerful psychic "restless wanderer" that seizes us or captures a whole society collectively, unleashing irrational passions and savagery, leading to apocalyptic events.<sup>xcvi</sup>

These writers all describe extremely energetic forces of greater magnitude than our personal resistances. But they all share a similar refusal to get to know or understand what *it* does not want to know. Central is the effort to grind Inspired life to a halt, ceasing our heartfelt explorations, leaving a dark emptiness in the chest and dismissive eyes and a sneer (sometimes half disguised until it feels safe enough to be exposed). This level of antagonist—Domestication, the Enemy, Wotan—of course seeks to erect barriers that hinder our personal growth and spiritual development, but it also is an immense malignancy, permeating through a culture and multiple generations, transcending our little individual struggles. It moves relentlessly and pervasively and can and has changed the course of human history, taking large swaths of people into unlivable disasters and violence.

Face-to-face with such ancient energy *larger than us*, even extensive role-play (with its potential for deep understanding) does not quiet the turmoil of the social world around us. It would take a great dose of magical thinking to imagine that we can Love such powers into accommodation.

What exactly is this force of nature (or against Nature)? How do we best denote it? Again, in our Work, we don't assume to know it. We need to name it, discern what stands before us, move it from an

abstraction to a character with some specificity so we can recognize it. Maybe we call it unfettered capitalism or misogyny or racism, or a culture of violence, slavery, authoritarianism, evil, or nationalism or hyper-religiosity. Whatever name you choose, when you encounter a person, or a family group, a collective, a nation-state that is enveloped by this dark cloak of potentially murderous opposition, expect that they will declare that you are the dangerous one, “*You don’t know what you are talking about.*” But they won’t debate or suffer questions. “*Get over it. You just sound like a mad man. It is not **that** bad!*” What you see in their eyes is blindness driven by a drive to repress what the Heart knows.

Any form of Resistance can contaminate, but these archetypal forces are especially contagious. They metastasize in the body politic and lead to pandemics of lost Heart and abandoned hope and insanity and raging fevers of hatred. When resentment fires up into mass psychosis, it prepares the ground for tyrants planning retribution.

I do believe all of us will face moments when we must refuse to capitulate. However dangerous a stance, the Heart will eventually call us to be like Gandalf who refused to allow passage to the demon from the underworld. We need to announce, *Thou Shall Not Pass!*

To bottom-line this, there are variations in appearance and different measures of magnitude in the opponents we meet when we select a drama of resistance. We do not know what we will meet at the start, not with assurance. A small egoic push back may abruptly perform a transmutation into a cultural monstrosity that haunts us (haunts us all). Sometimes what seemed humungous and unassailable will dissolve like the Cowardly Lion. What is the takeaway? Always attend carefully to what is on the stage—because fundamentally different forces can wear similar costumes and have multiple layers of meaning. I suggest we need to be flexible and to learn a variety of strategies. If something we try to settle the resistance doesn’t work, then try something else; expect different results from the same approach day to day.

Consider developing a morning practice that starts with honest reflection on how much influence self-sabotaging, self-deceptive, Heart-dissolving forces are exerting in your inner and outer life. To raise awareness, you might fill up a bag with rocks to represent the load you are carrying at the start of the day, take a moment to reflect on those ignoble powers that could have been stirred up in your dreams. Some days you may have a light burden; other days the entire social cosmos will seem contaminated by what can only be called evil. Seek to be aware of one or many vicious voices that prime you to be triggered, especially the ones that repeat. They are bombs waiting to detonate the bridge you need to cross to reach your potential. Prepare yourself for high-risk days or months or years.

*I dare you*



### **Internal Resistance**

*Just when people were congratulating themselves on having abolished all spooks, it turned out that instead of haunting the attic or old ruins the spooks were flitting about in the head of apparently normal Europeans. Jung, After the Catastrophe.<sup>xcvii</sup>*

This Fox, with his familiar attitude, anesthetizes fears, especially the ancient fears of being ostracized or laughed at, not being enough, never attaining love. Better to deny and become impervious and react with a sneer.

He meets us at the trail head with a practiced pretense of defiance. He claims he is the height of evolution, but he has abandoned pursuing anything elevated, and he is not the all-powerful growling force in the forest that he might pretend to be, though he makes a lot of noise.

However, he can still be dangerous if he comes down our path, potentially swallowing our Heart and our spirit and our courage, stopping us in our creative tracks.

### **Why this painting?**

Most likely, Resistance is only an adolescent voice, playing a character called Fierce, illuminated by hubris. Some little boys like to claim that they have eradicated the darkness with their power. Often, they have just perfected a certain makeup and carefully positioned the spotlight.

But we must be careful. We live in a blind stream of spectacle and chatter of the mass-mind, lost in distractions until introspection seems impossible. The depths dissipate in this place. What is real has been replaced by a resemblance, an appearance, an on-line portrayal, not life but a facsimile, the way an android might be imagined to be a human, the way a marriage might look like a real relationship, the way



intelligence might be mistaken for consciousness. Here the psyche dissociates. We distract away rather than face what is behind, above, below, preferring to ignore our Fierce materialism and capitalism and sexism and racism and other isms.

Enlarging allows us to meet the resistance, to know its puffery (if it has little substance), to investigate it rather than get lost in its compulsions and self-characterizations, to know the level of danger.

### **Inside out**

If something in you wants to resist what your Heart seeks, then start there. Become curious. I will again encourage the technique of role-reversing. It allows us to encounter and differentiate perspectives, to step in and out of various characters on the stage (reflecting on both internal and outer stages) and to possibly go deeper.

When we get beyond Resistance, we may hear from the Awakened child or the Artist or the Lover who has been so long denied.

### **Upside down**

Our society celebrates characters who seem stoically put together. Bros who get indignant and won't be "pushed around." Of course, there are times when we need courage to *stand-against* something, to act in the service of protecting the vulnerable. To be the firefighter who rushes toward the fire. This is real power anchored in experience. While those who present a front, a controlled surface or a defiance that protects the ego, are inhabitants of a realm where egoic gods are elevated. A land where they can remain safely ensconced, like adolescents choosing to live with their parents rather than take the voyage of discovery. We must find the courage to name them when they erect resentful boundaries to keep the Heart from growing, restricting travel to their womb-like basement and the virtual.

## **3. Heartaches-Family Mirroring**

*"Just because you got the monkey off your back, it doesn't mean the circus has left town."* George Carlin

Some dramas are focused on family or on workplaces energized by attachment injuries.

In my family, the dining table took on great significance. I can vividly recall the color and shape of it, painted a bright and cheerful orange, lime green and electric yellow, colors better belonging to an ice cream parlor.

I remember the sensation of sitting in my seat (always the same seat), the pressures in my gut, my reluctance to look up and make eye-contact. The table was small, or I experienced it as *too small* to hide everything that might attract attention from my icy faced/simmering father.

The technique of spiraling back in time (*following the familiar, or floating back*) can recall such family experiences and reveal their significance by the activation in our nervous system. Often there's a bully seated somewhere here who starts the fighting, looking for something disagreeable. They poke

narcissistically with insults or challenges to their status or objections to their rigid rules that warrant an escalation or an invalidation or a nasty correction.

As a counterpoint, there may be the passive parent or absent one.

These tables are not democratic surfaces on which the feast is shared but, rather, emotional labyrinths with twists and turns and traps, unholy dangers. Perhaps you and your siblings struggled in the tension that could not be named. Often one child will become a mirror of a perpetrator, or they become heroes or terrorized truth-tellers, while others get scapegoated, powerless to fight back or become only robust enough to create havoc.

### **Introjects of the Bully**

Describing the impact of such family systems, some therapists speak about introjects. Basically, these are aspects of important people in our life who seem to have magically been absorbed into us or recreated by us. For instance, a *perpetrator introject* is the part that looks like (has the posture of/attitude of/action of) someone who has abused us. This inner aspect of our mind may use the exact same words and act out abusively, pointing out our *faults* in a voice that is not ours, which is horrifying to recognize.

Sometimes the phrases or clichés that come out of introjects seem odd and amusing.

*“Your eyes are bigger than your stomach.”*

*Sometimes it’s more disturbing.*

*“There’s something wrong with you!”*

*“Women are such bitches!”*

*“You need to be serious like your (workaholic) sister,”*

*“Your problems are nothing!”*

*“You make me sick!”*

*“Don’t be so needy.”*

*“Suck it up, don’t be so weak.”*

A question worth asking is: “Who does that sound like?”

Many of us have found that when we have our own children, similar recordings from childhood suddenly turn on. We start to mimic our parents. Generally, parts like this don’t have much depth. But they can communicate very critical attitudes and demeaning beliefs.

We may not have reflected on this parroting until some horrible thing comes out of our mouth in a triggered moment, using the precise words or taking actions or conveying feelings that belong to someone from the past who is merged with us on the imagined stage. In a Heart-drama this kind of multigenerational mirroring can become quite striking (and disturbing). When these voices are allowed to

unconsciously operate in, we feel *crazy*. But it is the craziness of a previous generation that is passed along like an idea-virus.

The mirroring can get quite multi-faceted. Frequently, there can be more than one voice. Two competing voices are common. When parents have had unresolved conflicts between them, then a polarity (like a court-room drama with defender and prosecutor) can show up in our psyche.

*“I’m driven in my career (like Dad)”*

*“I want to be spending time with the people I love (like Mom).”*

Sitting between these two conflicting parts often is a confusing mix of feeling states for us and is a drama worthy of exploring.

Image 24 *Bullying Family of Origin*



**Family Bullying**

*I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. John Keats<sup>xcviii</sup>*

Our psyches are complex and most of us carry attachment injuries. In this field, beyond the sad social persona, we can imagine the internal parts as animals. One quiet bear sits out of the way near the stream, holding her wounds, while mother simmers. Dad acts-out, and he is a model (mirror) for his offspring who are cruel, gang-like.

Every being tells a story. And all of these can elicit observations and questions. Which part of us is in center stage at any given moment? Which parts dominate? Which aspects are flexible or loving? How did members learn their roles? Why do families structure themselves around the most dysfunctional? Why does the bully so often look larger than life.

### **Why this painting?**

Enlarging allows us to slow interactions down, externalizing the tangled web of multiple worlds and multiverses. When one dominant subpersonality reacts, we can take our precious time to reflect and carefully explore what is prompted to come forward or to flee.

To borrow from Keats's metaphor of development, by Enlarging, the rooms that our earliest experiences inhabit become translucent. Our psyche turns into a glass mansion with many apartments. We can better discern the wild horses that have been freed from their barns and are banging up and down the stairs in a house that we want to call *home*. They are clunky and noisy, breaking our moments of clarity and connection. Now we see the flying squirrels that have left their attic nests at night to leap from cabinet to cabinet, distracting with hyperactive energies. Or we see other furry beings that have been sitting so still but now their outlines come into focus, startling us, as we notice the huge eyes staring back. All parts of us are sentient in their own way.

### **Inside-out**

Most attachment-informed therapists know that childhood wounds will show up in our more intimate relationships: friends, lovers, coworkers. How did you cope with your family? Did you hide? Or did you erase yourself to comply with those who had more power? Did you fight and fuss to gain some space? Those who are bullied often bully others—Did you become a bully at some point?

This painting might remind us that we need to have a one-to-one relationship with all the parts that show up in us, especially energy forms that are bullying. Many of these inner personalities will torment us or perturb us to react resentfully, even abusively. During your introspection, consider if these subpersonalities have evolved as a mirror to an individual in your most formative years, particularly a primary caretaker or an aggressive older sibling. I suggest that you journal about all the energy forms who show up. Invest the time you need to understand them, especially the most difficult characters in your inner family. Define them and give them descriptive names.

Why are we wasting time recording old family heartaches? Why would we want to lose all that potential screen time. Because.... we can't do what we are Inspired to do until we know what our inner personalities are doing. And unfortunately, they cannot be simply removed or exterminated by "thought stopping" them away once they have been wired in. Any more than we could have thought-stopped away people in our family of origin.

### **Upside down:**

Have you been called by these names? Clingy or Needy or Icy. Fat. Lazy. Stupid. Or maybe Crazy? There are endless ways for us to be emotionally injured and invalidated. There are also seemingly endless individuals in society who will act out bullying roles in workplaces, in community spaces, or when they can trap someone alone. Don't underestimate the negative impact they can have on us.

However insightful we may be, whatever the length of therapy we have had and the level of healing we may have attained, bullies can sometimes bring us back to the most painful chapters of our family life. Dramas help shatter our dangerous denial, help us recognize what we may have buried from ourselves, freeing us to acknowledge that aggressive, demeaning, sarcastic people are a problem for us. We need to take action or fortify our boundaries.

#### **4. Heart-break-Intimate Triggering**

*“Projection is one of the commonest psychic phenomena . . . Everything that’s unconscious in ourselves we discover in our neighbor, and we treat him accordingly.” Carl Jung*

We might consider intimate dramas to be a subset of family mirroring, but they have their own special heartbreaks. The problem here is not the people but the ubiquitous patterns that emerge, sending us off on escalating action and reaction.

*“Of course, I’m right That’s just common sense.”*

*“Any reasonable person would know that that’s wrong.”*

*“You’re too emotional.”*

*“You are pig headed!”*

*“It’s your father’s’ fault because he treated you like a princess.”*

*“My daddy is a good man. Don’t blame anything on him.”*

*“Thank God I came from a good family.”*

*“Well then, let’s talk about your family. They are the ones who are screwed up.”*

We get emotionally triggered and then trigger a partner who then is more triggered, and thus we get caught into an escalating loop.

People in intimate relationships, after such arguments, are left with a distorted and partial perception of what just happened. They often get stuck in blame games.

As a witness to this on a psychodrama stage or as a counselor observing a couple in their office, it is easy to see how partners are reacting to how things appear to them. While in an activated state, their mind is in me, me, me mode, rehearsing their painful stories, accusing others, cutting off any heart-felt comprehension. There are defensive pushes and pulls, angers and fears and anxieties vying for attention,

In a Heart-drama we learn and practice being a witness or counselor to ourselves, providing us the opportunity to recognize the Self-Deception and the Abnormal energies stirred by Pain, to visualize what’s happening as if from the outside. When we become an impartial observer in the courtroom, when we are no longer feeling like we must defend ourselves, the relationship dynamics are exposed with searing clarity. The challenge is to remain *present* on the stage in our imagination, find the honesty to notice what is happening, and consider what is occurring and role-play heart-felt requests and practice more sensitive responses.

## Couples on stage

“Couple’s work is not about behavior change. It’s about transformation of the childhood attachment experience in a way that enables us to live in harmony (the ability to have conflict and to recover from it).” Janina Fisher <sup>xcix</sup>

The following is a snapshot of intimate triggering. Imagine a woman who has been severely neglected as a child, ignored by her parents, carrying a deep wound. She is feeling betrayed, but she is barely conscious of that energy. Her emotional brain feels hungry for connection, while her Abnormal propagates a story about how she will be invalidated by anyone who seeks to get close.

*“I never get what I need, and my partner always fails me.”*

Resentful, angry, she shows up hostile, hardened, attacking. When challenged, if she could respond truthfully, she might say fighting is better than nothing.

Imagine, then, she is sitting across from a male partner. He has been physically and emotionally battered as a child. When attacked he tends to hide, maybe even fragment internally. His emotional brain sees threats and possible punishment everywhere; and he has an Abnormal story that he is unworthy of love, incompetent, even permanently flawed. When attacked, he implodes, turning toward overwhelming shame.

Our psyches are complex. But in our Work, we have an opportunity to see the Inside-out, internal parts that act out alongside the parts that tell stories alongside parts that hold wounds. Our inquiry starts to elicit the important questions. Which part is in center stage at any given moment? Which parts dominate? Which aspects are flexible or loving? When we have access to some degree of mindfulness, flow, attuned states, or spiritual peace, it becomes apparent that a lack of skills rarely is the problem. When we are maintaining a heartfelt perspective, we can generally muddle through without setting each other off and battling to the death.

The Inspired stage of conscious awareness allows us to slow interactions down. And, by externalizing the tangled web of two worlds, to see what is Upside-down and Inside-out, to spot abuse and defensiveness. As one subpersonality in us reacts, we can explore which aspect of our partner is prompted to come forward or to flee.

Is Pain in one person, overly intense and hair triggered, talking to Pain in the other? Then that’s going to be a frightening mess to come home to.

Is the Abnormal responding to criticism with prosecutorial courtroom or bureaucratic aloofness, or acting emotionally clueless, dismissive, or intellectualizing? That is sure to escalate the partner who now feels emotionally abandoned.

Or is Self-deception hiding secrets or pumping up with protective grandiosity? Or obsessing about another drink? Then that is sure to go sideways.

## 5. Heart Loss—Tragic Vision

*“Recall that attuned play amplifies joy, excitement and yes indeed surprise. A positive state in turn allows individuals to experience a situation as safe, to feel unrestrained to take risks, to explore novel pathways and to be creative.”* Allan Schore <sup>c</sup>

Inspiration notices an emotional rippling, checks it out, explores how it shows up in the physiology of the characters. If it’s important, then it’s *familiar*. In *Working Without a Net*, 1995, Morris Schectman, writing about the workplace, described “the familiar,” as a reaction in our gut that leads us back to a deeper, earlier source of emotional angst. <sup>ci</sup>We follow the *familiar* to identify the origin of this energy that has been driving us into predictable actions that may have served us in our family but now undermines us.

When faithfully followed, the *familiar* often leads to the Tragic Vision. Following the *familiar* is the same as an EMDR therapist encouraging a client to “float-back,” following a feeling state that leads back in time to the Touchstone Memory of their traumatic history, an early, symbolic, memory that will then become a target for therapeutic work.

An emotional response is also the guide for “a spiral” in a typical psychodrama, transporting the protagonist to where they need to go, back or forward, or to some other emotionally charged realm. In Moreno’s terms, we move to the birth moment (the status nascendi), the place (the locus), where the problematic response (the matrix) first emerged. <sup>cii</sup>

In the Heart-drama, the feeling often leads us to the core drama, allowing us to bring vitally important obstacles on to the stage, making what has been a largely unconscious more conscious. Here, we intentionally slow down the pace.

### **Into the Neuro-Biological-Creation Story.**

*“In the middle of the journey of our life  
I found myself within a dark woods  
Where the straight way was lost.”*

Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy* <sup>ciii</sup>

You may have the awareness to articulate at the start the tragic trail that you need to explore. But sometimes, in the Enlarging, you can feel suddenly compelled in an unexpected direction. However we get there, our most compelling dramas have embedded in them a bleak portrayal of reality and a right hemisphere knowledge of the deepest injuries. For those of us who have an attachment disruption, or for whom other trauma has fundamentally altered our reality, we can find ourselves inexplicably immersed in the *surplus* place where we lost our Heart. Though the details differ, and the actors and settings are personal, though the wounds vary, and the perpetrated acts of evil can be quite specific or fragmented or

barely remembered (an indeterminate feeling of dis-ease), one soul-destroying, psyche splintering, Heart laceration is often indistinguishable from another.

Often, we remember a young child hurt by those who they turned to for protection and nurturance. Because young children need caregivers for survival, they will suppress their own needs and drives, will cease living in their own bodies and even in their own reality. To maintain a low-quality attachment, they lose their authenticity.

Of course, that's not the only tale your Heart-drama may depict. There are many different portraits of calamity and unspeakable heartbreak. A sudden death of a loved one. Illness. Accidents. Natural disasters. Violence and cruelty. Abuse. War.

### **The Core**

*In a dark time, the eye begins to see,  
I meet my shadow in the deepening shade;  
I hear my echo in the echoing wood.  
Theodore Roethke, In a Dark Time*

Like a village enacting a ritual to invigorate the world, returning to the creation story, with hopes of flooding the present with renewing life energy, the Heart drama similarly transports us in time and place. Following the *familiar*, returns us to a personal mythic moment, a turning point; but rather than finding renewal, this territory feels hopeless, even paralyzing. Especially the first time you return, you recognize there are hostile transpersonal forces that have no concern or compassion. It's commonly a place of remembered despair and great suffering that was beyond the ability to confront. And, when this is the core of our trauma, expect to be triggered, to be back **in** emotional excess. And, though old voices might be quite insistent, what they know is not objective knowledge.

“The world is dangerous.”

“I'm flawed and unlovable.”

In the face of these right-brained cognitive flashbacks, the left-brain chokes and offers nothing intelligible.

This is the heart of a heart-drama for so many because we live in a traumatized and traumatizing world. Where we find ourselves is not an accurate historical time, but rather a representation of how events have been stored in our nervous system. Expect the Heart-drama to depict both what has happened and the adaptation. At this level of Work, you may notice how a protective response began to solidify into a façade or Abnormal defense structure, driving Pain underground, and/or fueling addictions. You may notice what pushed self-sabotaging repetitive patterns that have enslaved us or left us frozen.

When we get to this moment in a psychodrama, everyone in the room can feel it.



A warning. Prepare yourself. Make sure you have someone to call. Make sure you have a list of ways to ground yourself. Take baby steps on this trail of tears.

Image 25 *Heart-drama*



### **A Tragic Vision**

*“The main interest of my work is not concerned with the treatment of neuroses but rather with the approach to the numinous. But the fact that the approach to the numinous is the real therapy, and inasmuch as you attain to the numinous experience you are released from the curse of pathology. Even the very disease takes on a numinous character.”* Carl Jung <sup>civ</sup>, Letters (ed. 1973)

At the Heart of the Heart-drama, there is a woman sprawled on the ground, surrounded by animal beings, a gathering of mute but protective energies. This is an ancient imagining. There is a mythic, archetypal nature to these important places. We *return*, when we spiral back, approaching a very personal historical agony, but this space also holds a “surplus” which we may unpack, later in reflection, as a multigenerational wound, an energy formation, a constant in human suffering. It is a reality filled with a symbolic excess, sacred in some inexplicable way. Such an encounter has been called a *mysterium tremendum*, a tremendous mystery. It is profound and can trigger dread when we first return to these Fallen landscapes.

What makes it possible for us to revisit this darkness without being further traumatized is the light of Inspiration, our Inspired Self, our great capacity to witness Truth and Beauty. We are protected as if by the Holy, held in the arms of the numinous, a spiritual presence that allows us to attain profound clarity.

### **Why this painting?**

This painting asks only for awareness and curiosity.

Here I will warn you to titrate in and out of this Heartbreak. Prepare yourself for this exploration as if you are crossing the gates of Hell, where the character(s) you find may have abandoned all hope.

You will need clear resources. What actions can you do to pull you out of drama? Walks in the woods? Community activities? Who can you call? Sponsors? Mentors? Therapist? Friends who are open to walking with you in the dark?

### **Inside Out:**

A despairing composition evolves from this center, the locus, the birth moment. Injury shrieks a tale from deep recesses in our embodied nervous system. The story is a hopeless description of reality. For those of us who have an attachment disruption, or for whom other trauma has fundamentally altered reality, we can find ourselves inexplicably in this Fallen world, sometimes abruptly, sometimes waking into it from dream. Sometimes it is a slow-motion immersive flashback.

A terrorized girl is locked in a cage, with an addiction poking at her, a criminal ex-boyfriend sexually demeaning her, while the present boyfriend is telling her it's her fault that she has been so abused. "You whore!"

A physician enacts his fantasy life as a cabin boy plodding about a whaling ship. He wishes to be left to his own thoughts, focusing on his small sphere of responsibility, avoiding contact, and ignoring the way his wife prods him. He interprets her cries for attention as unjust criticism, until he recalls how his father disdainfully treated his mother, their marital arguments becoming quite brutal, abusive.

We enter the Heart of it, triggered back into emotional excess Always a place of despair and great suffering. Though I believe there is a more powerful source that heals us ("the real therapy" Jung describes) even in the most broken space, especially in the most broken places, we may need to do this Work for some time before we come to this understanding in our bones.

Our first and primary challenge is to maintain sufficient Inspiration so we can remember that this is not an accurate historical time, but rather a representation of how events have been stored in our nervous system. If we can maintain enough Dual Awareness, we see how our protective response at the time solidified and hindered us, fueling Self-deception, but it was, too, a survival adaptation. There is clarity when the drama reveals how what happened to us has pushed us into self-sabotaging repetitive patterns, enslaved us or left us frozen. And we see, too, the suffering of a vulnerable mammal at the mercy of unintelligible forces.

### **Upside down:**

Many in our virtual society loudly acclaim that this inner exploration is a delusion. Or the Real Work is to become *anti-fragile*. But this belief so widely misses the mark that it must be called a pathological delusion. It invalidates the courage required to face our deepest fear. And it drives the madness of our time.

My experience has been that the most inflated right-side up, well-defended personas, are sleepwalkers, intentionally blind or not, unconscious or not, largely oblivious to the Upside-down society they drift through, numb to a culture elevating characters who are flawed, even maniacal, dangerous to us all. I believe this is a result of hiding so long from their own Heart loss. To maintain the disconnect, in the

service of fragmentation, the Abnormal works to tolerate, invalidate, deny, compartmentalize, and normalize the most apparent cruelty, and to keep the dark creation stories unremembered.

## VIII. X-posing the Fallen Individual

### **X in EXPAND.**

*If spacious stillness is missing, the relationship will be dominated by the mind and can easily be taken over by problems and conflict. If stillness is there, it can contain anything. Eckard Tolle <sup>cv</sup>*

Once you have a sense of focus, the Heart-drama will require you to set an intention. In other words, it is important to consider specifically where you wish to go and what you wish to gain. I recommend you start by giving a title to the Work. If this was a story, what would you name it?

Let that become your conscious contract with your Inspired Self, essentially committing to a particular inquiry.

At some point you may choose to change focus and direction, but, if you feel a pull to do that, before you veer off, you will benefit from a further moment of reflection. Are you shifting focus because a better path has come to mind? Are you intuitively following what has been revealed into a deeper inquiry? Or are you going with simple resistance and choosing what is emotionally safer? Are you distracted, maybe?

#### **Regulating**

*An intuitively empathic therapist attunes to and resonates with a patient's affective state, thereby cocreating with the patient a context in which the clinician can act as a regulator of the patient's physiology. Allan Schore <sup>cvi</sup>*

Helping the Protagonist of a psychodrama regulate their emotional state is a function of the Director who listens intuitively, empathically, who attunes and resonates to all the voices of resistance, the defenses, and the characters that are afraid of digging too deep, exposing too much. In a Heart-drama, you act as your own Director, so it is important to consider how you will regulate yourself during this process of unveiling. I suggest you give yourself permission to stop at any time. Interrupt the process by stepping away, calling a friend, walking in nature, journaling, watching a video, taking time to chill. You may also want to set a time limit on any given reflection. Fifteen minutes perhaps. Tolerate only what you can tolerate.

When treating trauma, Peter Levine advises “pendulation.” So too in Heart-drama work. We go in and we step away, a form of titrating the experience, so we can stay present in the room and do the Work we need to do. Take time to breathe and exhale fully. Step back. Especially if you have experienced difficult realizations, you can take a moment, announce, “*I love myself. Even though I had to hide myself and my thoughts when I was a child, I can be open and love myself.*” Say it aloud repeatedly until you

hear it. *“Even though this happened to me (fill in the blank) I can do what is right for me and I can love myself now.”*

### **A Cast of Characters**

With perseverance, your inquiry you will meet the central hurdles to freedom. You will certainly encounter things beyond what the cognitive mind knows. In a Psychodrama Moreno called whatever shows up on stage *auxiliary-egos*. Don't think this means they are extraneous, incidental or accidental actors. Ego energies are present for some purpose even if *the why* is not clear at first. Since all Barriers are expressions of activated Abnormal energies, Pain and Self-deception, though you may have very tender and joyful meetings in your drama, there will also be difficulties and distortions ahead. Expect this. Prepare yourself.

Engaging in contemplative practice is not a passive process. We must actively encounter what Inspiration lays out in front of us. We might see Barriers as our inner troubled characters or outer obstacles. We may experience Overwhelm that we have tried to push through until it became an Exhausting Monster haunting us, or we encounter beliefs that have outlived their usefulness, or dehumanizing rules we have learned to follow that we might call Expectations, Family Demands, or extraordinary capacities we call Talents that have blocked the sun, diminishing other important but less “impressive” aspects of our life, sabotaging states of mind, invalidating subpersonalities, patterns stopping us from letting go or relinquishing commitments that have become roadblocks.

We may recognize human capacities are split along gender lines, and we exist in a culture that shames us if we fall outside the roles. We see males disowning their caring impulses and women losing their voice. We may find Barriers representing traumas or illness, car-accidents, death, war, insults and injury, a marital collapse or career demands, concerns of getting old, being too young, etc.

We may encounter Barriers in life that seem more abstract. We may notice existential worries, multigenerational burdens, or spiritual struggles. If there is a central rule to follow in our inquiry, it is that we must allow ourselves to approach whatever is on stage.

Since it would be impossible and confusing to try to list every possible shape Barriers may inhabit, I depict them here as typical personalities or mammals, as metaphors, archetypal figures and motifs that I have painted and pondered. I think this is a relatable approach as many of us are drawn to and can relate to animal portrayals depicting human (or inhumane) qualities.

To clarify, Barriers are usually embedded in the focus that we have chosen at the start. So, for example, in a family system we may find a Burdened Child stuck in a cage, with a Destroyer banging on the outside to terrorize (heartless and pathological), while an Addict Mother is making ineffective whimpering noises, gazing into the cage, reaching out a hand to comfort her child but not quite touching her. In short, we start with the focus and begin to unveil the Barriers within that context and

configuration, and we seek to identify collusions, loyalties, antagonisms and/or absolute disdain, etcetera, between them.

### **Call them Aliens?**

Remember our neuro-gravitational pulls. As energies they can animate characters in us (Inside-out) and in our external worlds (Upside-down). They can pull us into Abnormal delusions or con us into taking Self-deceptive actions or drown us in Pain. Perhaps we have dissociated from the worst that happened to us, or we have a pattern of pretending these forces are benign or we hold only moments when characters that are Working for Power or Playing at Power seemed most generous or open, denying what is True. *They weren't always that way....I don't want to criticize them. I want to be loving. It's disrespectful to be angry. They meant well.*

It is potentially dangerous to use your imagination for an active inquiry *in order to* just confirm some wishful thinking or to give yourself permission to forgive the unforgivable or to dismiss or forget what needs to be remembered. This is not an excuse to childishly blame and to be critical, but X-posing does require rigorous honesty, the willingness to recognize and discern the people (parts of people), places and events that have had, and maybe still do have, accidentally or on purpose, intentionally or not, a harmful impact on your beautiful spirit.

When Barriers take the form of inner or outer personalities that we think we know, we can lose sight of their dangerousness. Rather than using real names, it can be helpful to call the characters on our stage something exotic and avoid giving labels that portray them as suffering beings that should elicit our sympathy and loyalty, or victims who just need to be understood.

I would encourage you to notice that Fallen energies are always in some form of battle. They *can't believe they have to fight with you, or they can't believe what you have done to them*, or they may express depression, anxiety, immobility in their suffering, but *they cannot find relief. There is no solution. Always, never, everyone, nobody.* They have *tried everything. It is always this way.* They *can't trust you.* You have wounded them because *you are imperfect. You inflict pain. Or you will never be able to help. You must, should, have-to.*

But don't take their egoic battle cry personally. Though they try to make it personal, this is not about you. They are critical because they are stuck in the past or maybe in an imagined future where they are injured. We rightly call them aliens because they do not live embodied on Earth. They know nothing about Inspiration. And they will invade our present world, dismissing Loving-Playfulness, Loving-Work, Powerful Work, and Powerful-Play, potentially robbing you of spontaneity and intuition, ferrying you away from creative states to a planet always engaged in warfare.

In my Prelude I hoped to suggest my dissociations but also to invite you to consider your disconnection from Nature, from Inspiration and thus from wisdom. Heart-drama is offered as a way to

come to our senses. At core, it is an exploration of the nature around us and within us. When these realities are hidden, boxed away, cast from awareness in the demands of our materialistic, technological society or other Big Stories, we remain traumatized and traumatizing to those we wish to embrace. We are fractured from the Inside-out and the Upside-down and need to do Work to awake from the trance, to hold what we have pushed away, to reclaim our rich complexity, to appreciate with gravity our worst ego pursuits, success myths, and the technocratic delusions of unending Progress. As Carl Jung comprehended, when cutoff our internal discord amplifies, the conflicts distort us. The disowned (Shadow) is projected. We see devilish forces everywhere, and so we remain on guard, preventing repair by our vigilance, remaining split and unconscious.

Awakening through a deliberate process interrupts the machine. Spontaneity is restored as our natural state. Heart-felt energies are now available, allowing us to dance with the fullness of life; creativity opens doors to our Inspired possibilities. However, also, (this needs to be understood), such an awakening humbly sits us next to our imperfections and our animal limitations, our flaws and our suffering.

## **Dissociative Complexes**

In the Fallen World, dissociation is normalized. In these lands, it is common to speak of divided-attention or multitasking or compartmentalization as a highly positive “skill.” Putting life domains into silos supports the Abnormal utilization focus. It comes with rewards and hits of dopamine of affirmation, self-reassurance, and material success while ultimately disallowing what is True and Beautiful.

Whereas the unmeasurable processes we have named Play, Love, and Work have intrinsic meaning and power us to reflect our moral center, Fallen states are like powerful magnets attracting chaos, splitting our core, until dissociative numbing can feel like a solution for a moment, but injuries are just walled off. They do not in fact go away. In contrast, the Inspired Heart maintains a healthy distance, the way an opposite magnetic pole pushes back, resistant to undifferentiated merging or collapsing, not to compartmentalize but to maintain a dual awareness, to remain creative, to keep a conscious space open.

Unaddressed internal conflicts amplify into what Carl Jung called “complexes”—groups of interconnected ideas and emotional states of various length and breadth and domination over us. They evolve into animating and driving energies that I will call Playing at Love, contrary to unconditional love; Working for Love coalesces around the belief we are not OK, and so we “get it” that we *must prove* we are lovable; Working for Power derives from the embodied sense that we judged to be No OK. In response we strive to prove that we are extraordinary, but, as soon as we reach a summit, then it all recalibrates and the goal extends ever farther; Playing at Power is fostered by a culture that sees nothing but appearance and promotes insanity and hubris.

## **Humbling**

When I first entered the helping field in the 1970's, I was captivated by *The Structure of Magic* written by Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) wizards Richard Bandler and John Grinder.<sup>cvi</sup> It completely changed the way I thought about healing, growth and change. They called themselves modelers, as they researched how extraordinary therapists and hypnotists were able to achieve “magical” results. They sought to extract the essential patterns that were useful. Their theory posits that we do not interact directly with the real world but rather through internal presentations shaped by neurological, social and personal filters. We can detect errors in subjective maps by noticing over-generalizations, deletions, distortions, universal qualifiers etc. Their meta-model distinguishes between the surface map and a deeper structure (a fuller representation of reality), which led to the familiar statement “the map is not the territory.” Limitations in the surface structure of our language contributes to our inability to see all our choices.

With this approach, the practitioner questions the client's statements to uncover what has been omitted, to challenge distorted perception and presuppositions (assumptions that are taken for granted). This helps to correct and update the maps and provide more freedom.

Earlier I mentioned there are forces that we cannot see, because evolution has given us an apparatus so we can move around in the world with certainty, but the biological *headset* is necessarily limited. Add the idea that there are language maps that we live in, rather than “reality,” and then imagine each person has developed through experience their own individual structures that operate automatically but always with some distortion, limiting the meanings made and the choices identified, we may start to feel less hubris and to seek more flexibility as we operate in the world. Interrupting the trance state (automatic pilot) is necessary if we are to get to a fuller experience, encountering a deeper or higher or more complete understanding.

Why is all that important? Because the characters I am going to describe next are stuck and circumscribed, yet they will deny it, minimize, distort, presuppose they know what is correct, what is right and wrong, what is dangerous or not, what is possible or not. Whereas Inspired creations of the human form (Child, Artist, Lover, Visionary) live in a state of curiosity, spontaneity, growing artistry and love, naturally seeking out the portals that heal our wounds and grow understanding, these Fallen personalities will tell you that there is no way to authenticity. Or assert that *they are* authentic, even as they act robotically, without generosity, humor or affection. They will tell you that Beauty is an archaic notion. It is not scientific. Or not important, potentially dangerous to a reasonable mind, or just trivial; or it at best is something childish (meaning weak and ridiculous), something nice that we left behind in kindergarten.



## **Jungian Archetypes**

*This process of coming to terms with the Other in us is well worthwhile because in the way we get to know aspects of ourselves, expression of the inner mind is the point, Coming to more awareness is about the energy forms around you is the point. Jung, Mysterium Conjunctions<sup>civiii</sup>*

What I am presenting as characters in this next section I believe are related to the foundational patterns and images that shape human consciousness. This is in line with Carl Jung's theories of the archetypal basis of mind. Archetypes are rooted in the collective unconscious, a basin of shared primal themes, symbols, and motifs passed down through generations.

When we are living dissociated from Inspiration, then archetypes influence us without our conscious knowledge, shaping our inner and outer worlds and creating and unleashing characters with limited insight. Energy forms manifest in "personalities" that are unique and personal to us, yet are also emanations of a universal unconscious, energy forms that are Barriers to wholeness and self-actualization Inside-out and Upside-down. The danger is that we can become blended with fragmented actors, channeling their thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

In this alien landscape

Jung proposed the concept of individuation which is a process of integrating the various aspects of the psyche, including the archetypal elements. I believe Heart-drama leads us toward individuation. It is a process that helps us recognize all of what is in and around us.

### **The World Soul/Spiritus Mundi**

*Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert.*

W.B. Yeats, The Second Coming<sup>cix</sup>

In Yeat's conception, Spiritus Mundi refers to the "World Spirit" or "World Soul," a shared universal consciousness much like Jung's collective unconscious. It serves as a wellspring of images, symbolic knowledge, and Inspiration, and is the source of creative energy.

In contrast, dissociated from the World Soul, masks of the Fallen world are the antithesis of the Awakened Child, Artist, Lover and Visionary; they are personifications of ego-need and a deep sense of lack. As such, we cannot expect them to access wisdom or to understand subtle matters

### **Cultural Conserve**

In Jacob Moreno's role theory, the concept of "role conserve" refers to the norms, expectations, and patterns that we learn within our society or culture. We observe and internalize particular ways of thinking, feelings and behaving, our repertoire of familiar roles. When we become inflexible, lacking the Inspiration to spontaneously role-play, one danger we face is that we can become an Android. This is the personification of a psyche applying what it knows rather than attempting to vulnerably connect. Since

machines resist letting go of the known conserve, refusing to engage in new ways when this is psychologically and relationally necessary, this results in power-plays (rather than Powerful-work)..

### **Standing Reserve**

In Martin Heidegger's philosophy, the concept of standing reserve refers to the dehumanizing way in which technological-solutionism and futurism dissociates us from our deeper needs. We view nature and human beings as mere resources or "reserves" to be utilized for efficiency and productivity, no longer valued for inherent qualities or *being*. Such a perception reduces the complexity of life (eventually all of life) to a commodity to be fed into the machinery of materialism, unrestrained consumption, and unfettered technology.

### **The Quantum Metaphor**

Allow me to strain a popular metaphor here. Some physicists and theoretical thinkers describe 2 universes existing at the same time: the quantum field and the Classical cause-effect model that in our headset we call reality. They are both real, but they operate very differently. What is not completely understood is how the "superposition" of the quantum state (seeming to be in more than one place and manifesting simultaneously as different properties e.g. particles exhibit wave-like behaviors) transitions to something we can measure and seems to have a definite state and position. The phrase used to depict this shift is a *collapse of the wave function*, which to my limited understanding means the many possibilities become a fixed property when there is a conscious observer.

I find this intriguing as a description of Heart-drama work. We Enlarge and we X-pose until we enter a symbolic world that can support many interpretations. To the observer, the one becomes many. For a time, the conscious mind wanders within the unconscious, and we encounter patterns, motifs and powers, the Inspired and the Fallen. We may spend an hour or more in this sacred space until there is a collapse, until there is a transition. We arrive back at a *certain state*. A definite position. The other world that is so strange to us, that operates by acausal or even unknowable mechanisms of the surplus, suddenly echoes in our usual (Classical) perception of reality. There is a crumbling back from the quantum field of the unconscious to our life in space and time.

The Colonizer mutates back into our ambitious brother. He is not of course this archetype, but we now see him in a new light. The Artist becomes a style of Being that we have felt in a mentor and, at times, mirrored in our own psyche in flow. The Destroyer is supplanted by a specific politician who haunts the world stage and dominates the media, providing us with more penetrating mindsight into dangerous currents of history rushing like a winter river.

In this Works, we glimpse a bit of the interwoven nature of existence while, too, the collapse into personal meaning moves us back to a human level where we can understand what has happened to us concretely enough that we can make decisions, perhaps make different decisions. Back in this reality, with

an increased inkling of what lies beneath the appearance, now we can convey our intent and act with free will.

In this ego-dissolving work of Imagination, we finally can figure out how important we are. And we are not that important. Of course, the conditioning Inside out and Upside down doesn't want to be humbled. That is blasphemy. It wants you to get with the holy programming, to dissociate from the Inspired intelligence, demanding you connect back with the mind, to play out the drama as if your life depended on it, energized by the neuro-gravitational pull rippling out into 3-dimensional space.

### **Eight Energies of the Fallen World**

*What such a universe suggests to us is resignation, acceptance of what is, approval of what is predictable, fear of what is unpredictable.*  
Northrup Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*<sup>cx</sup>

Though there are many versions, other disguises of lost and wounded energies, I will envision some characters (forms) of the Fallen World that repeat in Heart-dramas. I think you will recognize many of these personalities from the Inside-out and Upside-down. In my early life, I believe I lived primarily in the Burdened and the Outsider and was capable of befuddling and injuring the women I tried to love, especially my first wife. A psychiatric nurse I befriended at the time, who looked remarkably like the inventor of Gestalt therapy, Fritz Perls, told me that he never knew "who" was going to show up when he saw me next, which incarnation, which disguise would be at the doorstep. He was essentially noticing my chameleon-like fragmentation common to those who have been injured in childhood.

What do all these characters have in common? More than anything, they act as Barriers to our best lives because they are dissociated from our right-hemisphere generated human capacities: insight, appreciation of subtlety and nuance, humility, compassion, empathy, heart-felt passion, creativity, transcendent knowing (to name a few). In the following pages I will depict: the Outcast/Burdened, the Worker/Addict, Colonizer/Android, and the Destroyer/Shopkeeper.

<p><b>Outcast</b>  <b>Inner/Individual Fragmentation</b>  <b>Overt Enactment of Avoidance</b>  <b>Fallen Energy of Playing at Love</b></p>	<p><b>Workaholic</b>  <b>External/Individual Fragmentation</b>  <b>Overt Enactment of Busyness</b>  <b>Fallen Energy of Working for Love</b></p>
<p><b>Destroyer</b>  <b>Inner/Relational Fragmentation</b>  <b>Overt Enactment of Cruelty</b>  <b>Fallen Energy of Playing at Power</b></p>	<p><b>Colonizer</b>  <b>External/Relational Fragmentation</b>  <b>Overt Enactment of Selfishness</b>  <b>Fallen Energy of Working for Power</b></p>
<p><b>Burdened</b>  <b>Inner/Individual</b>  <b>Disguised Enactment of Helplessness</b>  <b>Fallen Energy of Playing at Love</b></p>	<p><b>Addict</b>  <b>External/Individual</b>  <b>Disguised Enactment of Isolation</b>  <b>Fallen Energy of Working for Love</b></p>
<p><b>Shopkeeper</b>  <b>Inner/Relational</b>  <b>Disguised Enactment of Grandiosity</b>  <b>Fallen Energy of Playing at Power</b></p>	<p><b>Android</b>  <b>External/Relational</b>  <b>Disguised Enactment of Superiority</b>  <b>Fallen Energy of Working for Power</b></p>

## IX. X-posing the Relationship

### *Inner Enactment of Avoidance*

#### **Flickering Triggers**

*The way passion glows sometimes in its exquisite  
sculptured lamp glass over the stair-well,  
lights up but flickers. or it's stuck on,  
or is unresponsive or it's all of this at once,  
to the point of cognitive dissonance, until the oldest  
part of me sees my travels into an intimate  
dark as dangerous, stumbling into blame  
cursing at an unintended pain, tripped up,  
or lying unconscious in the shame.  
But now in your embrace I can better navigate  
(in love and playfulness) this unfathomable  
wiring and a faulty switch.*

Image 4 *Automata Family of Origin*



### ***The Burdened***

**Erratic, Fragmented, Avoidant**

*“We all need to feel safe in the arms of another appropriate mammal.”* Steven Porges

**Automatons are sophisticated machines but know little about being “present” and so lack the capacity to Attune. Wiring that allows for deep, non-verbal bonds of communication and connection—if it has been installed at all—is so thinned down that they can only mimic comforting words and twist their faces into something they think *looks like* a heart-felt response but—for mammalian Hearts—feels predatory and frightening.**

**This is not necessarily a deception. And Heart-drama is never about blaming parents. On their plane of physical existence, some may be quite impressive and even have a PhD in frozen and one-dimensional things. But since they can see only ice, they are unmoved by waters cascading down the moonlit mountains. How can we expect them to know a child’s deepest subjective, ever moving internal seas of longings, fears, and hopes, dreams and imaginings? When they can’t see what is emotionally messy and wet, how can we blame them for blindness to what the Child’s Heart desires? It’s not in their purview.**

**However, the wounds are real.**

**When there is no Heart-felt awareness, there can be no intention of really getting to know their children. This creates a Burden, as you might imagine. Bottom-line: Automaton parents produce Burdened adults or little robots. Of course, they do.**

**Why this painting?**

It is uncomfortable to say aloud that our family traumatized us. Especially if we were not obviously abused or beaten, it can be hard to believe, even to consider that emotional neglect and

unresponsive parenting wounded us. *The family did its best, so how can I fault them? What is wrong with me that I want to blame them? Suck it up. Grow up.* These may seem like “rational” self-criticisms, but it all misses the point. We have been injured. And we need to know that we have been wounded before we can heal. This painting wonders if you are carrying such an old wound?

Martin Heidegger described our need for “un-concealment.” He criticized the technological age for reducing our reality and our authenticity to a “standing conserve,” where everything becomes raw material for manipulation, where all is objectified, and so is available for utility and control. In such a world, we yearn to be unconcealed, to be understood as more than a mere correspondence to what is already known or to what our ego thinks (or thinks it knows). We all need be more than an accurate account, or a tally of our accomplishments or list of our possessions.

What seems certain and knowable is a Fallen world delusion, a way to conceal, to restrain our spontaneity and creativity, to concretize, and to replace our fullness and freedom with a cultural interpretation.

Loving-playfulness is the primary way of uncovering the Heart, letting all the innate capacities in us and all our messiness rise to the surface. But if we are Children of the Automata Family, concealment, even dissociation seems “normal. But it is not natural. It fragments us. At some deep level, when we are not *seen* in the Inside-out or the Upside-down, we remain frightened animals who have no safe place to shelter and regulate.

### **Inside out:**

Some humanoid families are icy, never dramatic. Others windmill around in loud and painful ways. Either way, as children we are Burdened by the inability to self-regulate, because it wasn’t shown to us. We are forced to either dismiss our own emotional needs, to tamp down our sadness and our panic, or to flail in uncontrollable currents.

Playing at Love.

*Playing.* We can become amazingly complicated in our obsessions and fixations, in our attempts to hold on to someone. We can be wildly relentless and expressive in a moment of desperation. Or, going to the opposite extreme, with a stony coldness we can lack expression. Or we may go both ways, on and off, driven to excess followed by shut-down and self-erasure.

At its essence, Playing at Love is drinking the drug of an energized fantasy of connection, a driven seeking or “playing at” relationships without real intimacy. It’s superficial, without authenticity or empathic tenderness. Though the performance may seem to be about an object of desire, about love, it’s not, in truth, about anyone else; it’s about us and our past. We “play” (game) at love, driven by the pain. We “play” hard and become exhausted. We perform until we become played out.

## Upside-down

Automatons operate according to predictable algorithms that they pass along from generation to generation. For example, if you are the Golden Child raised with ample surplus resources available to an upper income family, parents may excel at supporting what you do, what you have, and what others think of you. Showering you with all the commodities the Name Brand society can provide (designer clothes, youth activities, themed birthday parties), they may celebrate your moments of perfection, as they define it. Perfect grade scores, perfect successes, playing perfect roles.

No wonder Golden sometimes seem happy to avoid and cut off from anything that might interfere with the accolades.

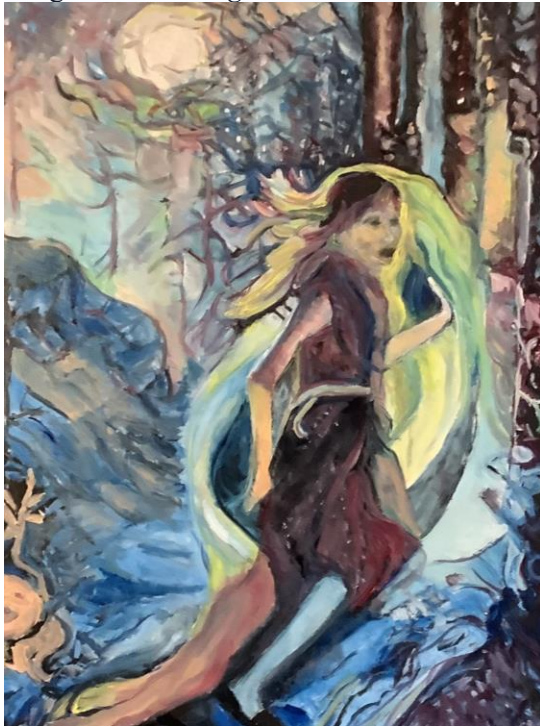
If we are not Golden, or if family is icy and chaotic, the Burden can be much more obvious. Either way, we can't have the fullness of being-in-the-world. We are top down or bottom up. We are outside or trapped in an inner hell. We are erratic, or we are rigid. We are one but not another. Or both in wild swings.

Many of us are Burdened, living life without mindfulness. Unable to stop thoughts from looping and obsessions from intruding day and night, we cannot shift emotional states; thus, when we do feel states of sadness, panic, and anguish it will feel permanent. When we don't feel (numbed), there are constant tensions in the body, and flesh can grow hardened like metal.

Many people with such saddled Hearts look "normal" on the surface because they have perfected the disguise. Yet they are in and out of a hyper-aroused and/or hypo-aroused state. They may work diligently at staying blind to what is occurring, and demand the same of others, but that is unsustainable. Because beneath the appearance, unconscious patterns run amok, throwing them into fights or flight or resentful submission or addictions and distractions.



Image 4 *Outrunning Abandonment*



### ***The Outcast***

#### **Fearful, Exposed, Lost**

*Some individuals experience a mismatch wherein the nervous system appraises the environment as dangerous, even when it's safe. This mismatch results in physiological states that support fight, flight, or freeze behaviors.* Steven Porges, *The Polyvagal Theory*<sup>cxii</sup>

#### **How do I get out of here?**

**This girl is lost in a dark forest but cannot call out as she knows it is never safe to cry for help or express a full range of her powers or to even show herself in a clearing.**

**She has many names, Rebel, Scapegoat, Derelict, Migrant, Deplorable Vagrant, Exile, Untouchable, Identified Patient, Truth-tellers, Persecuted. Whatever names she goes by, she will tell you she has been cast out, abandoned and terrorized and disowned—and those experiences may all be true—but she has also learned to be prickly, defiant, self-reliant, and dismissive. She will injure those who try to save her.**

**She has adapted. Having no place to belong, she rejects the rules, settling with the role of the black sheep and the runner. Since dashing off feels safer, she is incapable of staying in one place.**

#### **Why this painting?**

Beneath the disguises, all trauma, especially childhood trauma, speaks a demoralizing tale. Our personal largely unconscious myth (residing in our bodies, gut, heart) has a bottom line that we are flawed, and the world is blatantly hostile. Ignored or exposed to ridicule, treated poorly.

We may find both the Burdened and the Outcast with shared feeling of abandonment, in coalition with each other, for forming a clear polarity. When we begin to name their difference, we notice, whereas the Burdened implodes, seeking to be invisible and complies to hide their Pain, the

Outcast acts out, making her rebellion known. Sometimes passive aggressively, often by pointing fingers, she challenges the status quo.

With adolescent energy, we see her chronically defying people, places and things to give her life meaning.

We might see the Outcast vacillate between clinging to someone or pushing the other away (or swinging back and forth between being detached and enmeshed). We might see her people-please or shut down or act disorganized and impulsive or become preoccupied with a Self-deceptive “solution” that provides some fleeting sense of connection but numbs her to her Heart’s longing to be loved; she expects at any moment the Monster of Rejection to appear. It is exhausting to live in such tension. And, so, we understand why Outcasts are always keeping an eye on the door, always ready to escape, and may decide that it is easier to alone rather than repeat the shameful experience of being discarded.

**Inside out:**

“I can do nothing right.”

Rejecting the fawning and submission of the “good girl,” she goes to an opposite, growing insolent, rebellious, self-contained, and isolated. Often the Outcast believes exposing vulnerabilities is endangering her life.

If she is ever trapped by a compelling attraction to another, she will slip under the influence of Playing at Love; painfully trying to enact the Lover’s role, unconsciously seeking deep connection, but such human relations and related rituals become strained (and often strange) performances until the curtain closes, often abruptly.

If the Outcast can settle enough, stop pointing fingers long enough for her story to unfold on the Heart-drama stage, we learn that she is filled with a deep, inexpressible sadness. Like any unwanted child, head downward facing, cheeks full of unfallen tears, her monologue centers on unworthiness and rejection and how others are continually judging her.

If this is your drama, then of course you are finding it hard to trust. Give yourself the time to get to know someone before you rely on them. Though your Heart may want to desperately attach, or your head may be diagnosing red-flags everywhere and focusing on finding escape hatches, slow down. Consider if there is anyone who can help you discern what is real from what is fear, perhaps a therapist, or someone who accepts you without judgment.

Facing our fear is how we grow but the Outcast’s vulnerability is measured by baby-steps. She moves in increments. And it is always a dance. A step forward. A step back. Keenly alert to the moves of the other. Until the Heart can settle in the assurance that her partner is not going to leave her alone in the cold forest.

**Upside down:**

In a society where inner children are wounded and Outcast, neglected, abused, Truth is replaced by false-assurances and hardened heart. To be authentic requires that we remain in touch with ourselves, experiencing the full range of our suffering and joy. When we lose our reality, our “felt sense” of belonging, then we feel chronically uncomfortable in our own skin.

Surrounded by Outcasts, we have become a society of shallow avoiders mirroring each other, a funhouse with all the distorted mirrors but without the fun. If you are trying to be in a relationship with an Outcast, even a causal relationship, then trust your instincts. And give yourself permission to leave when you are done with the games. You cannot fix them. They can heal but you can't do this for them. Indeed, the more you chase an Outcast, the farther they will run and the more they will view you as a predator. Remember that this is not about you.

## External/Individual *Enactment of Busyness*

### *FEAR*

*slithers forth in an adaptive shape—in the fallen world and in the story that I am banished. In every family and extinction period, the inflamed limbic system Is handed down from generation to generation like a trophy.*

*There's no joy in the landscape when we control what we cannot.*

*We obsess about the danger and the shame. We have eaten of the apple.*

*Do you remember? loving playfulness in the childhood garden?*

*We have all known love in the flowering bower, or we would have died alone.*

*We have all known play or that would have killed us, like baby rats*

*Huddling in the corner covered in cat fur. You know it. Change the perception and even the mountains change from broken into glory. But you will need help.*

*You know this too. However much the infant monkey wants to cling to a metal frame to stay protected and self-contained.*

*We have a creative soulful need inside us.*

*Holy the ritual that helps EXPAND Toward Truth and Beauty.*

*Nothing you don't know in the end.*

Image 6 Workaholic Bear



### ***The Worker***

#### **Burned Out, Pained, Lethargic**

*The job is what you do when you're told what to do. The job is showing up at the factory, following instructions, meeting spec, and being managed. Someone can always do your job a little better or faster or cheaper than you can. Seth Godin, *The Lynchpin*<sup>cxii</sup>*

**Exhausted on his bedrock, the workaholic Bear has made heroic efforts, herculean efforts, *striving just to strive*. We might also call him the performer. The gifted one. *Extraordinary*. The Workhorse. The hero. His life coach/mentor will remind him he is *a high achiever who will not be content to do less than 110 percent*. His parents may deem him *special or the perfect child*. While his wife and children will wonder where he went.**

**There are rewards for being seen as a “doing.” In most occupations, Workers are praised if they stay on task for hours on end. Or sometimes “being committed to the mission” is just so baked into the business, profession, and culture that it’s hardly noticed. Work, work, work, work is noted only when it lapses.**

**Salesmen are expected to sell all the time and entertain their clients. Lawyers are expected to litigate as much as they can and help develop the firm. Doctors are on call countless days in a row and are expected to prescribe like an assembly-line machine, pushing out one patient after another. Many organizations have a tacit expectation for their managers and “important people” (senior staff): they are to be available *always*. This might come with truly little praise, but maybe with a financial incentive, a fatter paycheck. In such a workplace, vacations are not really time off, just time to catch up, until you cannot catch up anymore. And then you are replaced.**

**Why this painting?**

The painting wonders. “How are you doing? Are you always *doing*?”

We live in a society that espouses meritocracy, the belief that we achieve through herculean efforts and commitment. We will then be elevated, given power, and rewarded with the newest products on the market, heralded as a hero in all the ways Workers are valued (mostly economically).

Interestingly, many physicians immediately and seriously discount the pain of medical school and residency and their years of relentless studying, and the stress of making life and death decisions. Lawyers dismiss the years when they were pressed beyond their limits, when they had no life except working to make their way into a notable firm. CEOs often dedicate their life to the demands of the Board and investors.

*“It isn’t so bad.”* They take pride in it. *“That’s just what it takes to be a dedicated professional.”*

In the pressure cooker long enough, Workers are so estranged from life that they literally demand to be constantly driven, as if stress itself is the force that gives life meaning. There’s an energy in repetitively overcoming the impossible, an arrogance in rolling the boulder up the hill, finding glory in a superior role and the crazy amount of exertion it requires.

*“Look what I can do!”* That’s the satisfaction of a performance animal. While many other parts of life become shut out or minimized, the Worker can’t waste time for love or family, or to *chill*, or *not do* anything because that feels *lazy*.

### **Inside Out**

*“What do you expect me to do? Someone in this family must sacrifice so we can live like this!”*

If you are a Worker, I would suggest that there are less obvious, less rational-sounding reasons that you are busying yourself to death. There is some history that explains this drive, though you will likely resist making time to reflect.

Deflecting from self-exploration, Workers prefer to focus on some (maybe secret) pleasures, the titles that come from being important, the fact that they are on the right committee or are *the* crucial member of an esteemed board, being *the* decision-maker. Of course, working class heroes often have the best things that formidable efforts can buy; driving an expensive car, owning a house or two with a ridiculous amount of square footage, being early adapters of the newest technology.

Perhaps, in a depleted, more vulnerable moment, they might leak out what is below the surface, deep-seated distress, often-misdirected resentments:

*“I hate sitting in front of computer screen typing in notations demanded by the hospital. I despise it. It’s stupid. Of course, I’m sarcastic. I can’t tolerate stupidity.”*

If you are working too hard, and want to make a Heart-drama inquiry, start with investigating how your childhood set you up for this. Ask yourself these questions. Are you *Working for Love*, for some little affirmation? How often (when you’re busy, busy, busy) do you experience work as meaningless drudgery? Are your efforts to stay working long hours, even into burn-out, sometimes a way

to seek relief from the loneliness, boredom or anxiety that shows up when you try to chill? Is there an underlying sense of self-loathing, dis-ease?

**Upside down:**

In this society, we have all *Worked for Love*. By the time we enter high school most of us have learned (by the media or extended family or church or in sports or elsewhere) how to get strokes for being dutiful, obsessive, driven. We get *shaped* (to borrow Pavlovian language) to express only those thoughts and gestures that have potential to bring some crumbs of attention, acceptance, connection (if not Love exactly).

Reflect on how many people seem to avoid intimate contact and affiliation, appearing to settle for filling up their empty spaces with stuff or certificates. If they have enough available space, you might not call them a hoarder, but they have a hoarder's mentality and a Worker's anxiety buried deep in the ground. They may fear they will be forsaken in a cruel world if they stop. For the seasoned Worker, that's not a fear they want to dig up. At its best, authentic work in the world (Loving Work of the Artist) is endowed with the inherent pleasure of competence, becoming more adept at a craft that has purpose. In contrast, Workers believe (sometimes accurately) that people in authority will punish them if they slow down.

If you try to bring understanding to a Worker, expect they will deny that busyness is driven by fear. Fear. Busy. Fear. Busy. Fear. Busy. And then the Addict shows up to give some relief.

*Image 7 Deflation at Depth*





## ***The Addict***

### **Detached, Entranced, Delusional**

*The important question isn't why the addiction, but why the pain? Gabor Mate*

The Addict has lost his electric high. In his own mind, he is a King, and he can still seem exotic to his citizenry. From the outside, he may be a figure of legend, powerful because so unpredictable, so crazed and grandiose, an over-developed subpersonality, a magician with magical skills at Self-deception. A Trickster that tricks himself.

In this visual portrayal—the “high” has dissipated, the elation gone. He feels lifeless, devitalized, anything but still powerful, slumbering on his throne, remembering idealized times carved into the limbic tree.

His abuse has become *dependency*; dependency has become a restraint, a coiled serpent silently threatening to squeeze him tighter.

To his family, he has been a figure staring down from a strange height, a superhuman force, larger than anyone else in their world, and so family members have adopted roles, adaptations to survive his insanity. The familiar roles in a chemically dependent family—Enabler, Scapegoat, Hero or Golden Child, or Lost Child, or the Clown etc.—are like planets revolving around a crazed Sun in a cosmos full of lies and deceit.

#### **Why this painting?**

The Worker believes he freely and openly gives his best efforts to meet external demands, and often is fine showing off his industriousness, while the Addict defiantly believes he must steal away to pursue his drug and hide his pleasurable distractions; but they both are driven to avoid Pain. In fact, they, as characters in drama, often find a way to assist each other, become a tag team; the Worker is diligent until he is worn out and cannot take another step; the Addict then strolls on stage, making this appearance in reaction to exhaustion and anxiety. He points to “medication” that will provide a break or will ease the impact of the perpetual circus and so allow it all to continue. Wink, wink. *“Oh, you must be worn out. Let me carry you from here!”*

In addiction treatment, recovering people are often trained to recognize the Addict. He may be called a disease, a genetic disorder, or depicted as a subcortical activation, a brain state. Whatever the label, he triggers arousing, euphoric memories—the romanticized high—reminding us of how good it feels to use (*just a little, just this once*) and moving us to obsess on how the preferred drug will give us “freedom.”

Idealized memories of substance use can become a super-normal stimulus, an attractor state, an irresistible neuro-gravitational pull of Self-deception, all mixed up with a host of pleasures, sex, some semblance of human connection, the excitement in playing cops and robbers, the exhilaration of risk and relief in the escape. Perhaps the conceptual mind has no interest in using and abusing, but the limbic brain has another thought (eventually just one thought), until it overwhelms any other objections, until suddenly, or in a slow triggering way, off we go again. Rinse. Repeat. As the King deflates, collapsing into madness.

**Inside Out:**

If your True Self is just a rumor, or a balanced life seems to be part of some suspicious religious cult, then you are lost or well on your way, and your splintered psyche has already constructed damaged actors to manage day to day. The subpersonalities will figure out how to get by. To put one food in front of the other. And will get sneakier so you don't attract unwanted attention. Finding and regularly pursuing a quick relief from emotional turmoil is a desperate version of Working for Love. However easy any "remedy" comes at first, eventually it demands more and more effort to maintain. Addiction takes up a lot of time. Obsessing, planning, pursuing, using, recovering. All this consumes life and eventually it is work, slave labor in fact.

Unconsciously, or semiconsciously, both the Worker and the King have answered the existential questions posed early in life with the answers posited in the deepest circuits of their nervous system. *The world is not a safe and loving place. And I am unlovable, and I am not worthy nor capable of authentic action.* Both the Worker and the Addict are adaptations born from these dreadful conclusions. It is all we deserve.

**Upside down:**

There are endless ways to be addicted in this Upside-down society. Addiction to banana cream pie and drugs and alcohol and food are the ingested addictions. But, there are the actions and distractions, work addictions, addiction to sick or dramatic relationships, the obsessive craving for new acquisitions, the addiction to the chemicals of grandiosity and rage. All of these in the Fallen World seem to be "normal."

Speaking as a therapist, I do believe the Worker and the Addict can provide ways of meeting a variety of humans needs, but never in a manner that satisfies or sustains us; in fact, these characters always cause more problems than they solve. Of course, the sensible thing to do when behavior creates a problem is to deal with it, to be accountable, at least explore alternatives and to make changes. But these Fallen energy forms are incapable of such awareness and so they continue their insanity.

To add to the dilemma, any attempt to abruptly stop their craziness worsens symptoms. This can be called a rebound, the phenomenon where symptoms that were previously managed by medications return more intensely when the treatment is stopped. For the Worker it can be painful to take a vacation or a night off. For the Addict, their attempts to cut down on their primary drug leads to restlessness and despair. When they stop their drug, emotionally it is like watching an ice cube melt, as the unfaced Pain bubbles up from below.

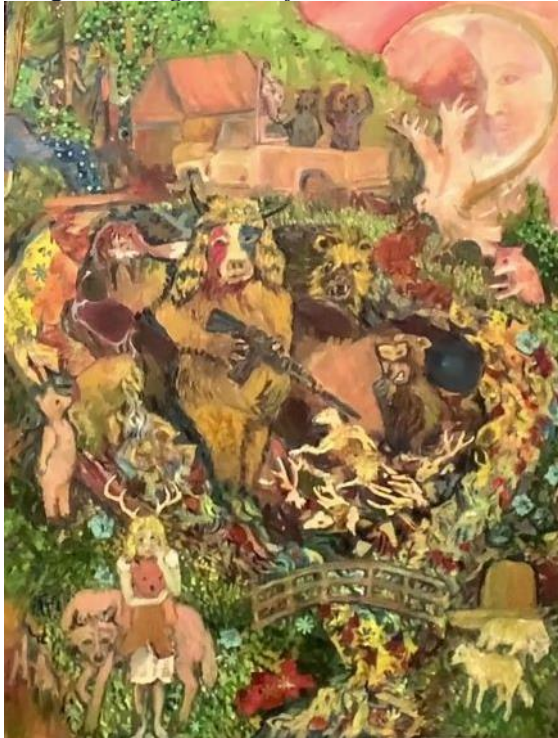
I doubt I am telling you anything you do not already understand. All of us know an Addict and a Worker whistling past the cremation factory. Because they are unconscious personalities, they have no clear center of gravity, and are prone to shapeshifting, seemingly mercurial, presenting in one



communication style, posture, and emotional display (angry, helpless, pseudo-intellectual, confused), then abruptly sliding into another. This can be disorienting if you love them.

## *Enactment of Selfishness*

Image 7 *Triangulation of the Fallen World*



### ***The Colonizer***

#### **Triangulating, Opportunistic, Gaslighting**

*We observe certain constellations of family interactions which we have epitomized as the pattern of family interdependence, roles those of destroyer or persecutor, the victim of the scapegoating attack, and the family healer or the family doctor.* Nathan Ackerman<sup>cxiii</sup>, 1968

Unconscious cyclical struggles amplify in darkness. One human pattern has been called the Karpman Triangle, first described by Dr. Ackerman, depicting shifting positions that rotate through families. You might recognize the Perpetrator by their weapons, the Victim portrayed as a helpless child, with the Rescuer(s) arriving over the hill.

You might reflect on public figures who play these roles. In the news you continually hear the tale of the intimidator, or the maltreated, or the savior. These 3 character-positions are artifices of culture, productions of history, immortalized in our fiction as villains acting against the vulnerable whose troubles are addressed by heroes. They have naturally different stakes in the game which provides narrative tension and drives the action.

The Perpetrator's form (what I am calling the Colonizer) is depicted with the machine gun and a fake shaman's hat. In society at large, this role varies from gang leaders, spoiled billionaires, angry executives, politicians, lawyers, and abusive partners, etcetera. We have all encountered bullies in our lives, and, just to avoid problems, we may have given them leeway. Often, they have "followers" who glorify them, maybe openly as a cult figure, or secretly envy them in fantasies of retribution and vengeance. This is our

primitive biology on display, interpreting power wielded with ruthlessness, rage, and targeted nastiness as the behavior of a successful leader.

### **Why this painting?**

This painting wonders if you are feeling mired in an environment where bullies get their way? Are you targeted, scapegoated? If so, then you may respond by living isolated and fearful of being dragged into the fields and set on fire. If that sounds hyperbolic, you are at some level of denial, because equivalent horrors happen every moment in the Fallen world. When we turn away or minimize that reality to stave off our overwhelm, the Oligarchs and sociopaths with their followers move in to strip us of Truth and work energetically and unapologetically to destroy what is Beautiful.

What may be even more soul-destroying, if you stay fearfully hidden you will overlook those who share your compassionate vision and could assist you in laying down a foundation of kindness.

### **Inside Out:**

Colonizers need people to victimize, to *colonize* those who are less-then, to steal their experiential territory, which prompts and fuels a Rescuer to act. To be a helper is not necessarily pathological. Compassion is a capacity of a functioning Heart, but if you find yourself playing this specific role repeatedly or constantly triangulated and sunk in conflict, then that pattern (any pattern) is worth your reflection. You will likely find the origin of this “repetition compulsion” in the familiar walk on parts you played in the original family drama.

The three-pronged division of characters Ackerman described can be active in our inner world, yet we can remain unconscious of it. Often, we recognize that our psyche has evolved an ego personality modeled after an abusive parent or caretaker when it constantly berates us in words we know well. This Colonizer/Perpetrator will trigger us by its abusive and demeaning catcalls, spot lighting a wounded child who is filled with fearful memories. Then wrestling begins, as a protecting Rescuer arrives, attempting to shield this “inner child.”

But this is just an example. Each of us struggles with our own unique dramas. What is universal is that such inner chaos depletes our ability to stay inwardly peaceful and focused. Often, we need therapy to reduce the turmoil.

### **Upside down:**

*The stage set is conceived, painted, defined by men...They have assigned themselves the most interesting, most heroic parts, giving women the supporting roles. Gerda Lerner<sup>cxiv</sup>*

Colonizers are known by many names, and of course on stage we will encounter them with their individual, particular manifestations. We may name them Narcissist, Warrior, King, CEO, or Abusive Spouse, or Culture of Male Domination, the pilot fish swimming with the predator, etc. At core, they all are Working for Power. The Colonizer, the “successful” ones, at least at the beginning, can hide in a meritocracy. Since any advancement elevates them, they *must* have earned it. They *must* be inherently

superior. We assume they *must* have put in time and effort. And, as you might expect, a Colonizer is great at accepting credit.

At bottom, the Colonizer wants more than anything to rob you of your autonomy, to project their assumptions, to pressure others to live up to their rules and expectations. This dominating stance is sometimes enforced with aggression. But Colonizers can be charismatic, seductive, even as they make you feel stupid, deflecting, or outright lying about their self-centered maneuvering, using egoic strategies popularly called *gas-lighting or bread-crumbling, or unleashing flying-monkeys* etc.

You may notice Colonizing physicians berate their nurses and call them *idiots*. Colonizing lawyers take pride in being *persecutors* because it's not sufficient to just prosecute crimes or protect their clients; they seek to disempower and dismember "the other side." Using arrogance as a weapon maybe only be a vicious competitive pastime for them but can drag you into a game that has no winner.

It may be helpful to remember that you do not need to defend yourself unless you are in a court of law; and if you are in court, then get a good defense attorney.

### **Veiled Enactment of Superiority**

Image 8 *Android Couple*



### ***The Android***

#### **Robotic, Abandoning, Still**

*Androids don't care what happens to other androids . . . that's one of the indications we look for.*

Phillip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sleep?*<sup>cxv</sup>

**This image depicts two well-prepared adults in proximity who have picked each other carefully and are compatible in important ways. They engage in rational methods of problem-solving and find satisfaction in their capacity to make commitments, to break through barriers. They can present themselves as savvy, ambitious, even heroic, and call themselves a Power-couple. However, they are so focused on meeting machine-like expectations and demanding tasks, they grow cold to the touch, often sexless. And, eventually, do not know who they each are to the other.**

**Like the Colonizer, we find they are Working for Power. Having forgotten what was most important (Powerful Work), they embraced their isolation. They may call their own existential position negotiating, compromise, ever efficient and responsible, but they are really focused on having power over others.**

### **Why This Painting?**

We might name the Android couple Super-Reasonable, Intellectualized, Strategized, or Nerd or Schizoid, Cold Fish etc. At core they are limited in relationships because novel pathways and passions and heart-felt connections are invisible to them. They are too distracted by the details of the details to see the inner depth and spiritual breath, and they arrogantly discount Mindfulness, Flow or Attunement as just ghosts in the machine. Extraordinary defensive contraptions stuck in their wiring, running on well-worn tracks, cut off from meaningful change, in families, they often leave a legacy of fragmentation, intolerance, and anxious depression.

If this speaks to you currently, then perhaps your Heart longs to live with more ardor and enthusiasm, and your eyes are opening to a lack of energy. Powerful-Work is learning how, and when, and to whom, to stay open. When discouraged, many of us settle for Working for Power, even readily cocreate the rules and expectations that now constrain us. Reflect on the state of your most important relationships. There may be great unrealized potential but only if you acknowledge courageously that you are unable to breathe in a cage.

It is vulnerable work to get beyond automatic and to understand how the artificial became so dominant. Reach out to someone who can listen without judgment, preferably someone who will not just give advice or impose their own wiring and projections and conceptual delusions.

### **Inside-Out:**

There are many roles—parent, spouse, professional etcetera—that we take in the world. But if you are not careful, they become tightening containers. In psychodrama, this is called *role-neurosis*, an increasing feeling of being trapped by rigid rules and unsustainable expectations.

Though you may have benefited from adhering to a role, obtained great success, found excitement even, Android dreams are eventual nightmares. Acknowledge if you are feeling trapped, rather than pushing down your feelings or using methods to numb yourself. Begin to talk about what you are experiencing. If everything has become too predictable, it might be optimal to close a door (at least temporarily) so you can focus on a new threshold, where you might feel some fire again and regain your freedom. Where can you play without shutting down? Where can you find novelty and excitement?

## Upside-Down:

It might seem preferable to be a machine, a robot, an android. Such beings (or non-beings) can evaluate at length what is in front of them, set an agenda that will be followed unvaryingly. They stay narrowly focused on the appearance of things. They are disconnected from their body, undistracted by the human heart. Productive. Programmable. Perfect for our materialistic consumer society that elevates machine-like transactions.

If you have become aware that you are constrained in an Android transaction, consider conveying your concerns, and offer ways to spark more spontaneity and creativity, though this will likely be received with a stoney face, or heard as a criticism. A robotic partner may cajole you or invalidate you; they may even threaten to abandon you, which is our oldest fear. You may feel like the child whose caregiver stares at you, forms a humorless smile, or speaks brilliant words that are irrelevant. Predictably our Heart response to such emotional abandonment (call it what it is) is disbelief, distress, depression, and self-doubt. But trust your gut. Living without warmth is unsustainable, and it will make you physically ill.

## Inner/Relational Fragmentation— *Enactment of Cruelty*

### Hunters

*The hunters are firing their guns around our house again.  
They are down in the thick brush, the darker slopes.  
I haven't seen all the predator's faces, but I find comfort  
To think I know the type, on their platform like playhouses,  
Covered in nets or camouflaged, in their expensive  
Outfits from the sporting goods store or bought online.  
Maybe flown in on featherless drones? I hear that's a thing  
For those who enjoy this sport and their military gear.  
They are drawn down where the deer hide, seeking refuge  
In the branches and the brambles with lingering hope  
That still beats in their animal bodies.  
The hunters are firing their guns. I even hear it at night  
In the quietest hours. I'm awakened from dream  
By their ravenous weapons slaughtering hundreds  
Of fur beings, a killing spree from the sound of it,  
Echoing in my nervous system traveling down the thick rivers  
And branching in a million directions into the cells  
Of my unconscious. It's hard to believe I'm ever going to sleep  
child-like again, while I'm too wide-eyed to ever believe  
In a God of love like the One spoken of in this one last church  
I still attend that doesn't leave me frightened in my core.  
But is hard to hear even the preaching of compassion  
When the hunters are firing their guns in this repetitive*



*Shocking merciless noise. It's hard to believe when my Heart  
Is stubbornly listening to those silent fur beings  
Trying not to lose their lives in a diminishing wood.*

Image 9 Sociopathic Support Group



### ***The Destroyer***

**Predatory, Sadistic, Deceitful**

*Man is the cruelest animal. Nietzsche*

Caring about their individual “rights” (translated as Power to act in extreme and dangerous ways), these bears have developed a shared belief. “There’s only *our* truth.” It need not be a coherent ideology, but it is a justification: better to injure every living creature, destroy the planet, poison the water, run over opposition like roadkill. At bottom, being halted on the destructive path equals unbearable humiliation.

A self-declared collection of victims, Destroyers claim the wind, the sea, the stars above, every creature they encounter is hostile to them. Their central revelation is, “I’m a hero (magical, powerful, extraordinary) living in a cosmos that treats me badly.” And so, there’s no love here. There’s nothing meaningful here. There’s “*no point*” to Mindfulness. There’s no state of Flow. There’s no Attunement.

*“We are in a hostile place, and all is against us.”*

*“We’ll not be so foolish as to believe in anything that does not enrich us.”*

Such minds never surrender (though they might reluctantly present themselves at the jail to be fingerprinted and photographed for a mug shot with a posturing glare, something to use later for

**fundraising). Most of us are not evil enough to understand this evil. We are too creative to comprehend the glee that destruction brings to the sadist. But we need to recognize that these bears are relentlessly Playing at Power, tearing down what cannot be gaslit.**

*“We deserve what we can get, and we'll get everything. Or else!”*

**Why this painting:**

William Blake portrayed Urizen (Your Reason) as a character in the fallen world that seeks to restrain the Heart, Body, and Creative Soul. Urizen plans in logical sequences and rationalizes, but he is grandiose, contained in his own hubris and dark impulses. He is a danger to the world. While the True and Beautiful human mind embodies a “felt sense” of living that gives rise to meaningful reflection and discernment, Destroyers replace this with jingoism or vague phraseology. They love their own endless monologues and so of course they form bombastic sociopathic support groups (not really for support but to gain an advantage). In a world that they have actively helped to dissemble, they love to hear themselves fill up the air with the sounds of cruelty and crudity.

Compare them to Visionaries who wrestle with an ultimate question. Their inquiry is founded in a desire to serve something greater than their tiny ego, *“What will I leave behind in this world when I’m gone?”* In contrast, if you ever could get a Destroyer to present an honest soliloquy, they would have no way to even begin to describe inner experience nor have any compassion for the neighborhood, the community, the widening circles of humanity, nor other conscious beings on the planet.

Destroyers and their groupies are proliferating, and their reality show is the greatest threat to life on earth, especially when they are billionaires. Though they will inform you that they have been elevated because of their unique brilliance, in truth, there is nothing inherently special about “strong men,” other than they are willing to Play at Power, coarsely, without shame. To their “suckers” who emulate them, they tell terrible stories of despair and of an always approaching danger, a coming apocalypse that requires a sadistic denouement. They exploit (play with) delusional myths about success, or morality, and invite our primitive archetypal adoration of oppressors, fooling followers who are longing to be fooled.

**Inside out:**

Consider the Destroyer’s mind—resentful, without the gifts of Mindfulness, Flow, Attunement, or Awe. The psyche is impoverished and isolated, weak, without any goal other than gaining unquestioned adoration and dissembling anything that gets in the way. Crushing what others love is a buzz for them, enlivening, and even more so when combined with the fire of righteous (vengeful) indignation.

If you have noticed a Destroyer’s energy rising in your psyche, then allow yourself to remember that it is an energy form we all are capable of channeling. The fact that you notice it means that you already have the necessary curiosity and the capacity to step back. Inquire more about it, rather than cutting it off. Where have you seen this schtick before? Discern where it first appeared in your life, likely

in your childhood, an introject of someone who demeaned you. Investigate it, but don't get too close. It can be sticky and so is a state that needs to be treated with caution.

In its essential core you'll find a disconnect from empathy and compassion. At worst, it will whisper in your ear to do shameful acts and drag you into a dark underworld.

**Upside down:**

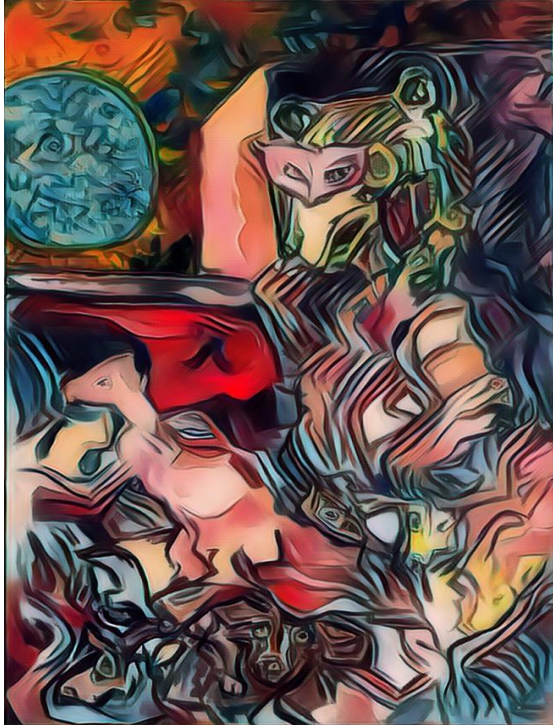
Before he settled on the term Shadow, Carl Jung described the archetype of Woten, named after the supreme god of Germanic mythology, associated with war and fury. Arising from the collective unconscious, rather than learned through personal experiences, such archetypal energy drives war and violence. In Fight with the Shadow, Jung writes, "The repressed animal bursts forth in the most savage form when it comes to the surface, and in the process of destroying itself leads to international suicide."

Today it seems that many prominent people proclaim their egoic righteousness and declare that they have an unshakable "moral compass" while bursting forth with savagery, pressing us all on to some form of suicide mission. Such Destroyers thrive in a society that objectifies and commodifies everything it touches. We see them in characters on the massive stage of social media; they are natural influencers: delusionally selfish, cruel, criminal.

We might recognize them in a religious leader whose clear and present abusiveness can't be questioned. *Don't believe your own eyes!* Or as a cold blooded murderer with their tortured manifestos, or the swindler who gleefully takes every bit of your life savings, the numbed out but ambitious schemer, the devious and the deviant who takes advantage of the weakest amongst us, raping or terrorizing or upending reputations, stealing identities, business profiteers who poison wells and landfills for a margin of profit, and the gang bosses on the streets or in congress who rape and pillage and lie to your face. The Jackboot. The Tyrant. The Psychopath. Modern energy forms like profiteers who massacred the buffalo, those astonishing creatures who once thundered across the North American landscape in the millions. Why did they do this? Simply to tear the Heart out of Native Americans who were so intertwined with Nature.



Image 10 Detail from *Triangulation*



### ***The Shopkeeper***

#### **Normalizing, Obedient, Opportunistic**

*“Stated a bit differently, (Stanley) Milgram revealed that for a remarkable number of people, it is very difficult to disobey authority figures, but quite easy for them to set aside their conscience.”*

John Dean, pg 43 Conservatives Without a Conscience.<sup>cxvi</sup>

The Shopkeeper clings to dear leader. And she uses her commerce to solidify a “relevant” place in the world; lacking spirituality and the capacity for Sacred Perception—she is focused on getting whatever will bring her ease, increase income or provide some sense of control. She frequently invents a fantasy of belonging and importance, and she is a zealous seller of whatever t-shirts and hats the Destroyer manufactures, tracking her inventory with care.

Playing with Power, she is satisfied telling lies and will do so with a straight face. In her 15 minutes of fame, she might be interviewed on specialized propagandized media, where listeners (fellow followers) will take her seriously (if she doesn’t deviate from the party line). Without being grounded in the human heart, she feels safer believing whatever the authority says to believe, even inconsistent or preposterous beliefs; It is strange and disorienting to watch when Shopkeepers easily contradict themselves and flip any story on its head with apparent shamelessness.

Infusing confusion, invalidating stabilizing structures, disrupting anything that the Heart uses for orientation, chaos creates greater circumstances where Shopkeepers can sell Destroyers as “strongmen.” An opportunistic “friend,” she defends Destroyer bullying as clear, simple “straight forward talk,” (however insane it sounds to the rest of us).

#### **Why this painting?**

The Shopkeeper has no interest in nuanced reflections and may have descended into deep cynicism where anyone outside the cult is believed to be lying. Such energy formation. It normalizes the worst urges of the Destroyer.

In his important political essay, *The Power of the Powerless*, the Czechoslovakian dramatist, political dissident and later politician, Vaclav Havel, depicts the Shopkeeper putting a politically correct sign in the window to signify the store owner's lack of resistance to the dominating regime. In a *post-totalitarian society*, obedience is not enforced with tanks in the streets but by ideology and by adopting rules and prescribed rituals. Extraordinary actions are not required to Play with Power. It is enough that compliant citizens accept the current lie; the appearance is paramount—as over time, in fact, the appearance becomes reality.

On stage, Inside-out and/or Upside-down, this energy may be called Informant, Rat, Pretender, Schmoozer, Sycophant, Influencer, Capitulation in advance, Public Relations, Enabler, Follower, etcetera. Whatever the exact personification, at core, like the Destroyer, it is Playing at Power.

### **Inside Out:**

Who are these people so obedient to authority? If we are exploring our inner world, they are likely parts of you and me, primitive parts that are not fully awake to reality. On stage, the internal Shopkeeper lacks Inspiration and so is not creative, nor loving, nor purposeful; instead, she clings to the perception that true agency is less important than security. Authenticity is less important than being significant to authority by amplifying the noise of the herd.

When we bring an inner Shopkeeper into the spotlight, it can quickly become arrogant and self-righteous, especially if questioned. But if we remain courageous enough to inquire, we begin to see that she has pledged allegiance to something or someone. We might imagine her as a helpless prisoner to dominating forces unleashed by a dominator, as puppet. The demand or mandate might be familial and multigenerational or come from places other than family of origin. It might come from organizations, from institutions, religions, cults etc. It may not be spoken, often it is not. It needs only to be some soul-destroying machinery that has a capacity to chain the mind. Her payoff? An infantile state of blissful ignorance, an eradication of inner conflict, which sets her free. Free to act on selfish and mean-spirited whims.

Sometimes in the dramatic action, there arrives a turning point that's not made, a threshold that's not crossed, because the Shopkeeper is a coward and refuses the burden of being independent and responsible. Wearing carefully constructed blinders. A few Shopkeepers have clear financial incentives for remaining enslaved. Trust fund babies typically, for example, resist insight or significant change because they fear angering a wealthy relative who is keeping their bank account filled.

*“My family would disown me if I did this other thing.”*

**Upside Down:**

When we meet such an energy form in the world, assume there is always a reward for unquestioned compliance, and some threat for non-compliance; and so there is no need for a totalitarian army patrolling the streets and shooting dissidents (yet).

Shopkeepers can be hard to pin down. They may speak against tyranny (dogmatically), asserting that they are the true Patriots on a mission to protect democracy (or at least freedom) and so should not be stopped from their great mission or they will be forced to use force. But whatever vagary they claim is hollow, full of idiocy. Whatever flag they fly tells us only that they are roped to authority of some kind or another.

Spreading a virus that is treatment resistant, they are just as dangerous as the Destroyer because they comply with the demands, enthusiastically. We are wise to remember that the Nazi party could not have perpetrated a holocaust without an army of Shopkeepers. And, because we live in a world where Destroyers have amplified voices on powerful platforms, if we enable the Shopkeeper (multiplying like cockroaches), we will inevitably lose the ability to resist, eventually compelled to put someone else's words (the full idiocracy of "authority") as our sign in the window.

# X. Pain into Ritual

## The P in EXPAND

*"We are lived by powers we pretend to understand."* Auden

Now that we see the barriers as energy-forms which enter our inner and outer stage, now that we understand "the problem," the question becomes, "*What next?*"

As I will use the word "reflection," I am referring to time spent with daydream, a withdrawal into the mind, or a reading of images laid out before us, or creating in collage or painting, asking questions of our unconscious, allowing sensations, thoughts and feelings to arise from within, playing outside of roles, stepping into the heart of another and into parts of ourselves. We are reducing projection perhaps but also getting to something that has a ring of deeper meaning, followed by a weighing of what we find, then welcoming further *reflections* leading to interpretations and insights. Greater awareness of the Inside-out or the Upside-down is a worthy and sufficient outcome for our reflections.

As I will use the word "ritual," I am referring to a deliberate and creative response to what we come to know over time from our regular reflections. Not every period of Enlarging and X-posing Barriers requires a creative response. But, eventually, sooner or later, like the peeling back of an onion, X-posing reveals persistent patterns that have an inordinate influence over our lives. These powers can maintain their sway by being invisible to us. However deep and consistent our exploration is, what we do come to know is limited, of course, because we are limited beings; yet, with the help of Inspiration, we can know more of the reality that has shaped us.

Eventually, X-posing reveals a source of Pain and some realization of the unconscious reactions that have operated for our protection and self-delusion. We notice how traumatic "solutions" have involved forms of fighting, fleeing, collapsing, or submission. Traumatic action patterns *give rise to narratives* that are lies about us, tales that shame us, tell us we are bad or broken or less than. Through courageous inquiry we recognize our survival reactions to an unsafe world (usually arising from at a time when our world **was** unsafe), reactions that still have the potential to distort and limit our ability to be fully present, impoverishing the way we attend to our lives.

Rituals that we decide upon are not what the Fallen World tells us are "solutions." The analytic mind tends to choke at the X-posing, as it tries to grasp and to "make sense," explaining the Pain (dismissing it). But the Rituals cannot be a mind-full solution to an intellectual problem. There are deep mysteries that cannot be problem-solved. Wounds cannot be behaviorally modified, nor skilled out of existence. Only our Heart is up to the task of apprehending the drama, holding our awareness of the injury, exclaiming an intention to courageously protect what needs protection, bringing compassion, and imagining a ritualistic step (however small) toward healing.

## Self-betrayal?

To what extent does a child have the agency to self-betray? Maybe there is proto-self-knowledge, a feeling in the mammalian heart/body between who we know ourselves to be, and what we know to be right, versus accommodations we make that abandon the deepest parts of us. To the adult mind, it might seem simply a question of cost. At some level there is a cost and consequence either way, whether you speak openly and stand in the clearing, or you gag your most vulnerable voice and exile it to the deepest thickets. But in our earliest and most consequential choices, we never had the luxury of weighing a conscious cost/benefits analysis. Rather we gave up what we love, what is beautiful, what is authentic, what is True, after a resistance that became so dangerous that we had to allow the killing of our innate Inspiration. The Inside out and/or Upside down scared us, pursued us, and shut us up until a switch occurred, and then this heart-betrayal was so powerful that the conflict moved quickly underground where we dared not trespass.

Until we X-posed the Barriers, when we looked backwards, we didn't even see there could have been another path. We didn't recognize a turning-point. We believed this is the way it is. Inevitable, A matter of genetics or growing up and being responsible, becoming a man or woman. Something that happens to us all with no one to be accountable.

The Pain we bring to ritual always has some shame like this and realization of our self-betrayal, even as we understand it was forced upon us. This can shake you to the core, though there is also—finally—a stance we can make that is life-affirming, self-loving.

### A creative response

*“Why was light given to man whose way is hedged in?” asks Job.*

Our creative response, Pain into Ritual, seems simple to describe. It is an action that conveys our awareness of the injury, and it is an assertion of our authentic powers. This is not simply protesting the Barriers as we now recognize them. A victim can do that, often quite loudly. In the Ritual, we are proclaiming that we will not be treated in this way (even if the reality provided no other choice, even if we were *hedged in*), **and** we assert that we will work to invite a corrective experience.

*The psyche is the starting point of all human experience, and all the knowledge we have gained eventually leads back to it. The psyche is the beginning and end of all cognition. Carl Jung<sup>cxvii</sup>*

The Barrier is a deluded and ugly construct whether it is in the Inside-out or the Upside-down. Our Ritual response is True and Beautiful, both authentic and attuned. It is speaking aloud in a way that we could not during the time of the injury. A creative response, a heart-felt response, is not necessarily a plan of attack. Often, the only way we can reply to suffering, transgression, and violation is in metaphor, music, and poetry. Or, with a ceremony or celebration. We might reply to the drama by treating our body in a more spiritual way or changing our diet. Deep meaning could be conveyed through expressive art or a

solemn act. Or playing a musical instrument or filling our house with flowers. A response is not tied to, and may not be “sensibly” aligned with, the injury. It is not an eye for an eye. Or a fix for the trouble. Sometimes it is a gesture that seems related, like helping those who have been similarly injured. It might be contributing to a community or to a rescue effort. We may dedicate much of our life to a cause. Or we may simply make a meal for a neighbor—which to the Upside-down will seem ridiculously small in relation to any horrific act of inhumanity or multigenerational depravity.

## Pain into Ritual as a Turning point

If there's to be a crucial Turning Point in the Heart-drama, if we are not just playing with a detour that returns us to the well-worn spot where we started, then we will need to embrace some daily rituals. The heart of any action we take is to *convey our intention to move from captivity to release*. This requires feeling the cage and then taking one small step toward the energies and states of true freedom.

We invite modes of attention that see a fuller landscape, recognizing our uniqueness and preciousness, but includes the wider reality and complexity. If we are not just re-embracing Self-deception, we must be able to name what has impacted us, the brutality and induced Pain, understand the survival “solutions” required at that time, which have become Barriers, and realize how this resulted in a profound distortion of life. Our mind will attempt to contain and make sense, trimming away what does not fit. Thus, only our Heart energized in Inspiration can direct us now.

We are not committing to a practice of retraumatizing ourselves, inviting dissociation and/or further desensitization to our own suffering. Pain into Ritual is not a form of flooding nor exposure therapy. The goal is to stay present and consciously remove the Barriers that have kept us from healing and growing. Take time. Resist the seductions of old patterns, to play defensively, to embrace the ancient self-loathing with more fervency, or to strive to gain self-acceptance by busyness, or to work for dominance or to invite cruelty.

Admittedly in our Name Brand quick fix society, it can appear to be a long and slow drama of reflection before we unveil a resolution that is right for us. The Upside-down and Inside-out will tell us to make some behavioral changes so we can make quick progress or to just accept the diagnosis and take a medication, or just trust the expert's infantilization, and the opinions of the collective. In contrast, Pain into Ritual directs us to what is powerful enough to alter a Fallen perception. Since Loving-playfulness, Loving-work, Powerful-work and Powerful-play have an energy that allows healing and growth, these are the only forces that can accurately illuminate a way from our Fallen place and toward a different terrain, where the appearance becomes reconnected to the deepest, intimate life within us, where we can better integrate what has been fragmented in the Upside-down and the Inside-out.

Image 22 *Three Sisters of Sorrow*



### **Pain into Ritual—Recalling**

*It's not society that's to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so everyone of us shares the supreme ordeal—carries the cross of the redeemer—not in the bright moments of his tribes great victories, but in the silence of his personal despair.*

Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*<sup>cxviii</sup>

The three sisters have been brought in as witnesses and interrupters of sorrow. In a dark night, whatever we invite, we want to name, to remember and to honor. Intuit what will be helpful. That said, I find the most effective energies are a version of the Awakened Child who remains open, spontaneous, and vulnerable, the Artist who unapologetically feels and brings creations to life, the Lover who embraces, supports, and protects the wounded.

Since forgiveness is ultimately the prerogative of the Visionary, you might want to be strategic about bringing in Sacred Perception until it is time to entertain mercy for a perpetrator and forgiveness for anyone else but your wounded self.

### **Why this painting?**

We are deliberately returning to an “origin” of our woundedness, deliberately with the determined goal of disrupting and changing the way it's remembered and embodied. But Heart-drama itself is not a form of flooding or exposure therapy; the goal is to keep us in the room—present on the imaginative stage—rather than to become dissociated from, or avoidant of, or desensitized to, the Pain.

To stay aware, we need to *Recall* Mindfulness, Flow, Attunement and/or Spiritual Perception, since these are states of the Inspired Self, represented and personified by the sisters. These are powers which we will allow us to see Beauty and Truth enough to refute the lies of the trauma narrative.

As you will remember, Dual Awareness keeps us here and there (co-consciousness), maintaining our feet in the present even as we journey into the trance of the past. Don't underestimate the difficulty of this. Heart-dramas are seductive and can lure us hastily into overwhelm where we can be "stuck," unable to access anything but what is terrifying. We need to move at a measured pace so that we don't get lost and lose the present moment. But this is a balance, because we don't want to pull out of the experience entirely, dampening the fire.

To stay emotionally regulated, we are wise to identify and access powers we can take with us on this journey, before we get too far in our exploration of the surplus.

Carol Forgash, in *Healing the Heart of Trauma and Dissociation with EMDR and Ego State Therapy*,<sup>cxix</sup> calls this "front-loading" and suggests, as do most therapists who work with severely traumatized individuals, that the more "resourcing" you do at the start, the less de-stabilizing the Work becomes. In this author's approach, such "resourcing" involves identifying capacities, abilities, traits that you can access in the unfolding drama.

### **Inside Out:**

I believe *Recalling* is the more descriptive word than resourcing.

*The goal of Recalling is to remind us of the Inspired Self* to provide a counter to traumatic overwhelm and avoidance. To be clear, Recalling is not backing away, ending tension and putting us back in our analytic mind, because that will in fact reinforce detachment and amplify fears. We seek to stay warmed-up, animated with emotional charge, as we introduce a powerful companion who can ground us when we need it.

Have you experienced something like the following:

- **Awe.** The force of an ocean slamming into a rocky shore, tossing up cold sprays that soak our skin, feeling the immensity and the wonder in such a landscape . . . Recalling brings forth implicit and explicit aspects of memory: the visual, the sensual, the thoughts of it, the emotional responses, grounded in the grandeur of Nature. Purely inventing such a moment might be helpful in other circumstances, but we need to draw on something we have experienced, real, potent, visceral, robust.
- **Love.** A wife discerns her husband's family of origin without his loyalty issues, so she can name a family member's abusive manipulations clearly. Because they love and trust each other, the



wife can sometimes be an attuned truth-teller. She points out what the husband cannot see from the distortion of his triggered state, and she so opens a doorway into his own unbiased Truth (which he must then describe in his own terms).

- **Safety.** You may already have a *safe place* visual that recalls being balanced, at peace and stable. If you have had EMDR therapy, then this will be familiar. Safe places will differ from one person to the next, and often may be counter-intuitive to others. Being at the bottom of the ocean in a bubble can be soothing for one person but would only bring fears of suffocating for another. The visual of flying over the landscape could raise a sense of freedom and flexibility for one individual while for another this would only trigger the terror of heights or loss of control.
- **Courage.** Standing at the mouth of an ancient cave with long feared monsters deep in the shadows, one young woman described herself as the Hobbit needing Gandalf. In this way she recalled her lonely childhood where she found magic and sustenance in fantasy books. She accessed her Inspired vision when she role-reversed and fully embodying the wizard with the power to demand of her demons, “Thou shalt not pass!” This need not be so dramatic but expect the idiosyncratic.

When we Recall, only we will know what is sufficient: a loving grandmother, a wise mentor or college teacher, a childhood animal companion or some more surprising representation. No one else can tell us what we need to introduce to stay regulated.

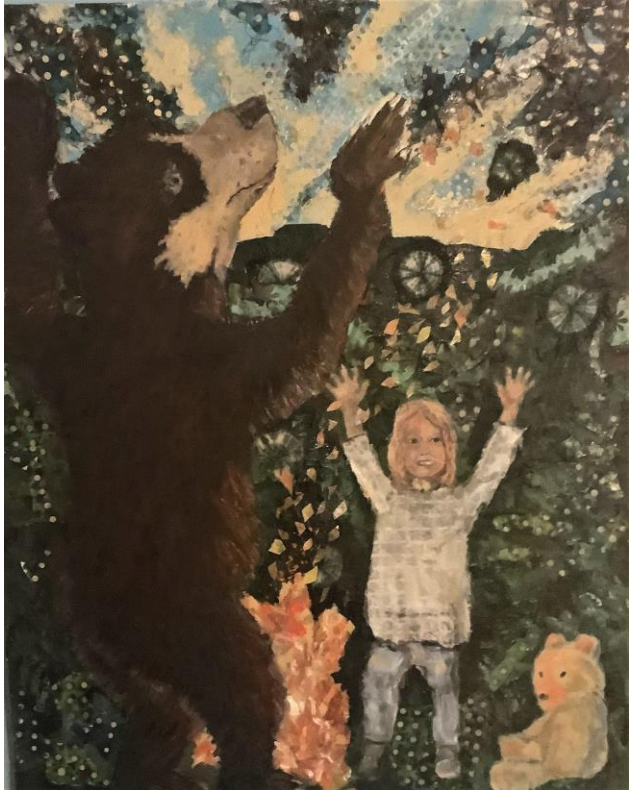
### **Upside down:**

Only share your deepest Work with those who will encounter your vulnerability with loving-kindness. Anticipate external resistance. Expect skepticism, cleverness, sarcasm.

Many will believe they are helping by giving “constructive criticism.” Unfortunately, in practice that is not constructive, and it means they will fault-find. They may tell you that your exploration is a fool’s errand. Unnecessary. Something best left to an expert.

They may communicate that you need to be medicated. Maybe you are crazy, though they may not say that exactly. Maybe you are Depressed? Borderline? Or ADHD? Broken? All of this contaminates the Work you do. Their words will talk in your head, essentially suggesting you stuff it all back in the box.

Anticipate resistance from others and get prepared to set boundaries. Find a statement that can be your mantra. Effective mantras are simple statements embodied in self-Love. For instance, “I want freedom from my past.” The Serenity Prayer may be something that works for you.



### **Pain into Ritual—A Turning Point**

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
More anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.*

B. Yeats, *The Second Coming*<sup>cxv</sup>

The Bear and child are engaged in a ritual portrayal of a Turning Point, releasing Pain and Self-deception to replace Abnormal delusions with the Truth.

In learned helpless experiments, dogs who have suffered inescapable shock **will not** break free of their pen if a door is simply left ajar. They need to experience the escape, to stamp the release from captivity onto their physiology, and this requires being dragged out. Many times. Ritual requires repetitive action. In a very real sense, inescapable shock is what we have all faced. Returning to “the moments” (when we had insufficient power to alter the outcome), we now have the possibility of changing fundamentally the helpless portrait and its tragic narrative. In some way, we will need to enact our liberation. And often we need assistance from others to be released, often a literal helping hand, or we can invoke a symbolic spirit like this Bear.

If you have no person like this in your life, then recognize that you have (you are) an Inspired Self.

#### **Why this painting?**

We must respond to the X-posing that has revealed a source for our mistaken understanding. “*I’m at fault and weak.*” “*I’m unlovable.*” “*The world is dangerous.*” “*Nothing is to be trusted.*” Such lies have been “loosed” upon the world and have lived as an embodied unraveling of our security and significance. It is where our “innocence is drowned.” In the X-posing the energy forms of the Fallen World, we see that

our adaptation (fight, flight, collapse, submit) was an attempt at a solution, but we were too limited (too small, powerless, without awareness, without support. Eventually, in this X-posing, some level of self-compassion has the potential to break through.

In the X-posing, the question we sought to answer is “*In my exploration, does this seem like I have gotten to something?*” If we can say, “yes,” then we can move forward. Now we can shift our attention. Now, what we seek to gain from Pain into Ritual is freedom from the past. The freedom to be more aligned with the Awakened Child, the Artist, Lover, and Visionary.

Of course we cannot change actual history, but that’s not the goal of the Turning Point, nor is it a reasonable intention. The focus is how to interrupt a mistaken story, to tell a different narrative, to alter the faulty wiring in the *neuro-ception*. By some act—an act of imagination that feels right—we express our wish for possibilities to be opened. Jacob Mareno describes that as moving beyond our “creative neurosis” by a “novel and adequate” response. The pertinent question now is, “*How do I want to change this narrative?*”

**Inside out:**

Action arises out of the Pain. Feeling the old emotional excess, but not getting lost in it, we must endeavor to construct a creative response. The response is always Ritual. It’s not a behavioral program nor advice nor a group consensus nor necessarily the first thought we have. These are not thought exercises; we seek Inspired actions that arise on the stage of our imagination. Our mission is to affirm spontaneity and creativity, boldness, and clear assertion—the Loving-Playful-Powerful-Work—that opens a Turning Point in the story, letting something new arise out of the moment.

We may need to fight aggressively against the forces aligned against us. As a Ritual, we could allow ourselves to feel our rage, to feel the e-motion (to put the energy in motion), while we run on a treadmill or engage in other vigorous exercise. Or could use an expressive art process to feel our grief and let paint flow until the emotional basin is emptied enough that we can choose what to fill ourselves with. In the Tragic dramas, we may seek to find “rescuers” who can intervene and support us. Eventually, we understand that rescuers who help us out of the window from the rooms where we have been retrained are stand-ins for capacities that we have now within ourselves. But as a Ritual, we could gather a group of friends or just one friend or a therapist and tell what has happened, so we begin to release our Pain to people who would have been willing to fight for us. We may decide to bring our mindful adult wisdom to past events, as a visualization, giving hope and love to the lost child. Or we may want to interact with an “ideal” parent, taking their role and writing a letter from them to us, feeling the unconditional love denied us by the less-than-ideal parents we were born to.

As we imagine a different ending that can then be enacted and felt, we become both the director of our own rescue and the wounded Heart that’s released and pulled from the cage. In this, we regain a

deep sense of personal agency. We seek until we feel assured it is time to ask the final questions, “*Does this feel like an ending in this moment?*” “*Does this feel complete for now?*” The closing of any one drama happens whenever we can answer “yes.”

### **Upside down:**

Experts will tell you what is wrong and will prescribe for you. Your family will tell you that it is better to stay the way you are because changes will disturb them. Old voices may tell you that healing in the way that you choose is disloyal, or histrionic, or selfish, and if you break the no-talk rule and speak out about what has been done to you, then you are not grateful enough. Your life coach may tell you that you just need to be “antifragile.” Suck it up, buttercup. The media will happily distract you from Pain and help you accept your addictions.

You will get confused and injured if you listen to a society that is Upside-down. At the Turning Point, only you can decide and direct the drama. The way out must be in harmony with your central beliefs. No one can drag you from this pen through an opening that they think is best. You must find your escape and imprint it anew in your Heart, mind, and body. For this to be an “adequate and novel” response to the barriers, whatever you do must be congruent with their identity.

It’s not uncommon for those who love you to think you would benefit from openly confronting an abuser, but that’s too far out of the comfort zone for many and can even be retraumatizing. More important than any clever and creative notions anyone else offers, you will heal and grow by selecting your own path. I think it is true that you will heal faster and more completely in the arms of another but only in the arms of someone who is willing to walk beside you. Repeat and refine and play with your Rituals until the body knows that it is free.

## **Rituals**

To make this more specific, if not more reasonable, I will list several actions that could be used to creatively respond to Barriers.

When the Heart-drama exposes how you have been robbed of your own inner life:

### **Honor Loving Playfulness**

Soothe yourself when upset:

- Learn some techniques to calm oneself. Try relaxing your arms and legs. Take a bath. Watch a calming TV show. Try drawing or playing with a pet develop a practice that is loving toward yourself. See physical support such as chia and use mantras, and positive self-talk or try saying, “This too will pass.”
- Learn to fight gently, master fair-fighting rules, take breaks and then return to the discussion. practice disagreeing without devaluing others.
- Try visualizing practices or meditation or focusing activities. Try opening your body intentionally, making movements if you start numbing.
- Practice yoga, martial arts, engage in any safe activity that supports self-control.
- Join a support group or find a counselor who allows you to fully express your feelings.
- Be evaluated for pharmacological agents (meds).

Express yourself through different creative channels.

- Create artistic expressions about self, place, family.
- Use magazines to create a collage that portrays your Inside-Out and/or your Outside-in.
- Start a journal that you fill with thoughts and drawings or write song lyrics or poetry.
- Paint an emotion that dominates your life or draw sketches of your family and self.
- Create a symbol of your core identity.
- Write letters of love and unconditional support to yourself from an idealized father or mother.

Be open to love and friendship and emotional support.

- Identify several people who are loving and share with them or write a gratitude letter or call them and tell them how much their friendship has meant to you.
- Practice listening to positive messages or videos that are affirming.
- Gain emotional catharsis through expression of your most painful experiences with one person you trust.
- Use role play to speak to people who have hurt you or speak to yourself at the age when you were hurt.
- Seek counseling and explore other community resources.

Develop a perception that you're a good person.

- Compose a story about your history that emphasizes strengths or abilities.
- Practice weighing the value of critical feedback, and practice blocking anyone who gives you uninvited criticisms or tries to mislead you.
- Use self-hypnosis practices or self-affirmations to challenge the negative stories about yourself.
- Keep a journal of ways you have been loving or effectively helping others.
- Find Cognitive Behavioral resources to help reprogram yourself with more rational and affirming statements and to recognize irrational self-talk.
- Role-play, becoming someone who loves you unconditionally. Role-play someone who treats you poorly, and respond to them in a way that is completely honest, allowing yourself to feel your own anger or other emotions you typically invalidate.

Understand emotions and practice self-discipline.

- Learn to dance or join a theater group or a therapy group or find a coach.
- Read self-help books or listen to audio lectures on ways to cope with difficult emotions.
- Work to observe rather than react, focusing on the outside rather than the inner turmoil.
- Use stress management techniques to lower overall stress, take deep slow breathes, tensing your muscles, then intentionally relaxing, or sighing intentionally to release physical tension.
- Use focusing techniques. Learn yoga or join a martial arts studio.
- Join a theatre group or an improv class.
- Join a skill building group: assertiveness, anger-management, parenting, couples skills etc.

Develop an interest in life-long learning.

- Explore one interest that you've not pursued before
- Find a mentor for the projects that gets stalled.
- Examine options for your career or take a career interest inventory.
- Become a student by joining a class, sign up for a workshop or a book club.
- Volunteer somewhere that feels purposeful or fun or where you might learn something new.
- Take a personality inventory to learn something about yourself.

Feel competent and capable of mastering situations and activities.

- Join an activity where you are not expected to be an expert.
- Make a commitment to join an adventure group or a sport-focused or a team for a season.
- Try a new hobby that you have wanted to try or join a class at a community college.
- Use visualization to reduce anxiety or build skills.
- Problem-solve obstacles with a person you trust.

Explore what can contribute to the greater good.

- Discuss ethical issues in a safe forum online.
- Read novels and philosophy and find a discussion group.
- Engage in a dialogue with others about significant issues.
- Choose an important value and advocate for it.
- Increase stewardship of the environment (recycle/reuse)

When the Heart-drama reveals that you have been conned into working to please others or you have lost interest in how you spend your time, feeling distracted, burned out or disillusioned.

### **Honor Loving Work**

Build the skills to discuss ideas and choices.

- Learn communication skills such as anger management or assertiveness.
- Locate some opportunities to debate your work and be open to listening.
- Practice responding skills, mirroring what others say or practicing staying present when others speak. Notice where you go in your mind when you do drift away.
- Xplore what is funny in life via a creative vehicle or method. Create a stand-up routine or a joke or two that you can try on playfully in conversations.

Pursue a career or increase education.

- Problem-solve obstacles to new opportunities.
- Find student or collegial support or mentors.
- Research training opportunities or volunteer opportunities.
- Post resumes on job related websites and go on interviews just to understand new jobs or to ask questions.
- Take a test to identify interests and try something new that seems aligned with your interests.

Demonstrate high expectations.

- Make a list of your strengths and a list of opportunities.
- Make a plan and initiate steps. Notice any fear that arises and investigate it.
- Identify good models of behavior.
- Develop a support group that can hold you accountable in a way that you can tolerate.

Pursue social opportunities and pleasurable leisure activities.

- Join a volunteer group or be involved in a new interest with others.
- Teach a skill to someone less skilled.
- Be active in sports, creative activities, social groups, and religious groups.
- Go for walks and focus on sensations, take in what is around you, invite flow.
- Do something physically active that requires concentration but not much thinking: puzzles, games, gardening, cooking, painting.

Become physically fit.

- Join a health club.
- Begin a sport activity.
- Practice aerobic activity, 20 minutes three times per week.
- Buy and eat nutritious food.
- Weight train.
- Indulge in a massage.
- Commit to an aerobic exercise.
- Take nutritional supplements.
- Develop one healthy habit.

Work on your art.

- Commit to a regular practice and invite flow experiences. Notice what interferes.

- Notice what you say about your art that diminishes it.
- Create a place for your art to occur.
- Practice resisting Inside-out or Upside-down distractions.
- Notice who disrespects your art. Notice who seems to respond authentically and without bullshit.
- Notice what you are feeling a tug to do that is different, out of your comfort zone.
- Create something that you believe has no marketable value but could be beautiful or truthful.

When the drama reveals that you are armoring in the company of others. You are mistrustful or hypervigilant with muscle tension, urges to take control and be self-protective. Or you are avoidant or submissive.

### **Honor Powerful Work**

Become an integral part of a relationship by taking on responsibilities.

- Delineate chores or discuss expectations clearly.
- Have regular times to meet with someone you feel connected to and discuss issues that are often avoided. Make a list of important issues and prioritize them and raise one that feels risky.
- Exchange roles or try some role reversals. Take on a task or experiment with an attitude that you typically avoid.
- Encourage another. Tell someone how they have positively impacted you.
- Learn communication skills-especially listening and speaking directly to the deeper concerns.
- Practice respectful assertiveness.

Have a positive influence on others.

- Create pleasurable activities with loved ones.
- Stop any escalating conflicts immediately. Consider disagreeing without resentment. Visualize what it would be like if you stopped taking things personally. Are there any fears about what would happen?
- Schedule times to talk that are mutually agreeable.
- Don't avoid; raise important concerns respectfully.
- Don't harass; learn to self-soothe.
- Find ways to enjoy life by yourself.
- Attend a church.
- Join a team sport.
- Find others who share your interests.
- Attend to destructive patterns—take them seriously, notice the consequences.

Be involved in intimate and caring relationships.

- Develop friendships. Show mercy and being generous.
- When you feel personal distress, try turning to help others. Use daily affirmation and prayers to stay grateful.
- Take 15 minutes a day to create a drawing, a mandala, a poem.
- Remind yourself that life is not all about production. Consider something active but totally meaningless just because you haven't done it in a long time or ever.
- Challenge confining roles and be more varied.
- Avoid destructive social games.
- Find people who are capable of intimacy.
- Embrace novelty and growth experiences.
- Be accountable, really ask for assistance in the plan you have for change.
- Practice going to someone and ask for help.
- Love and express love openly to the degree that you can. Then push the boundary.

Express and receive clear messages regarding rules, norms, and boundaries.

- Express your thoughts directly to yourself and then to one other person.

- Express your thoughts to the person you need to (so change can occur).
- Express feelings with the appropriate level of intensity.
- Work toward a win-win solution in a conflict. Roleplay saying, “No.” Roleplay saying, “Yes.” Practice slowing your respond to a request, wait for your heart to give you an answer
- Seek input from objective sources. Seek input from subjective sources.
- Experiment with different rules and roles.
- Empathize.
- Establish a list of things that you will not accept (final straws or bottom lines)

Be involved in mentoring relationships.

- Join sports or creative activities.
- Reexamine the people in your life, looking for positive forces and influences.
- Journal about possible role models from anywhere and everywhere.
- Mentor others.
- Wait with an open mind for someone who will benefit from and ask for your experience and understanding.

Have one-to-one relationships with extended family members.

- Talk with older relatives directly.
- Create a family tree and look for patterns.
- Attend weddings and funerals.
- Write letters or telephone relatives.
- Arrange a family gathering.

When the dramas reveal that you are painfully self-contained, narrow in your awareness of anything outside your small concerns, or acting without regard for life.

### **Honor the Landscape of Powerful Play**

Define truth and reality based on your own experiences.

- Describe your beliefs in detail, journal. Develop a manifesto.
- Find a counselor or spiritual mentor you can trust,
- Debate your beliefs often but with compassion and listen.
- Consider alternative views. Find a view that is opposite of your own and learn about the genealogy of that belief.
- Read poetry and great literature from different traditions.
- Reflect on your experiences, asking, “What do I really know?”
- Find a church or community that brings diverse people together.

Embrace exceptions to the tales others tell of you.

- Identify the times you acted differently than “the tale” expects
- Talk to people who know your history and get their impressions
- Develop a relationship with your extended family, especially those who are distant
- Creatively express your memories and history
- Write down a list of strengths and personal resources
- Ask friends for their impressions of your strengths and resources
- Develop an interest that runs counter to “the tale” others tell of you
- Imagine yourself as a superhero with one of your talents exaggerated

Embrace a story about life that’s liberating and soul nourishing.

- List inspiring goals-make them exceptional
- Write down beliefs that are affirming and that pull people together
- Write down beliefs that are demeaning and that pull people apart
- Become a mentor



- Read transcendental and motivating writers
- Become socially active
- Become politically active
- Develop diverse friendships
- Develop diverse interests
- Limit contact with people who are destructive and negative

Refuse to frame stories of others based on external sources.

- Identify your restraining and discouraging beliefs.
- Identify people you associate with who share these beliefs,
- Identify your more encouraging beliefs.
- Identify places and people that promote these affirming beliefs.
- Make clear decisions about who to associate with.
- Become a coach or mentor.
- Be involved in some form of community service.
- Notice when you are being invited into hating another or gossiping.

Be creative in ways that run counter to expectations.

- Develop a new interest.
- Find a creative-expressive outlet.
- Join a group that offers a way to grow (12 step group or synagogue group or a therapy group.
- Find a support group where you can feel safe enough to discuss your hopes and dreams.
- Challenge negative stories about yourself.

Demonstrate commitment to others over time.

- Specify your commitment.
- Develop rituals of affirmation that express commitment.
- Celebrate success in your relationship.
- Verbally affirm important people in your life regularly
- Buy small gifts that express love and give it to someone who least expects it.
- Create ceremonies or activities that reaffirm.

Develop a sense of universal coherence, a more spiritual path.

- Discuss spiritual beliefs with someone who might share your vision.
- Identify daily practices that promote spiritual development or appreciation and awe.
- Attend religious services.
- Join reading/discussion groups.
- Pray
- Meditate
- Read affirming and inspirational writing.

## More Rituals

### Assertions

*Saying Yes.* What have you put off doing that will serve you? Consider why you have procrastinated.

Does it need to fit in your life? Then schedule a time, now. What is this about? Are you not important enough? Do you allow too many distractions? If you commit to a yes, reaffirm that daily. Practice saying yes. This is important.

*Saying No.* Is there something that you have agreed to do that is no longer in your best interest? Is that a pattern? Pay attention to what your heart and gut are saying. Consider what this is about for you. When did it start? How did it seem to serve you then? What is the payoff now? Practice “no.”

*Saying I will.* Removing “maybe” from your vocabulary or *I’m sorry* or *I’m trying* or any other phrase that suggests that you are not capable enough to make something happen. And deliberately using an “I statement,” to reflect your power.

### **Boundaries and Limitations**

*List your limitations* on a piece of paper. To avoid exhaustion and burn-out, make some decisions since you are human and cannot do all things or anything perfectly, even if that is uncomfortable to admit. Identify someone or place or things that demand more than you can give, or that deplete you, or unbalance you to the point that you cannot be your best. Practice saying, “*That is more than I will do.*”

*List your boundaries.* What do you need to keep out (or limit) that depletes you? Give yourself permission to say out loud and directly what you will not allow. Practice, “That will be a problem for me.”

### **Restraints**

“*What do I have to get rid of?*” A belief that has become outworn? Is there a belief that you want to replace it with. Is there a fear that is keeping you from letting go or keeping you from your potential? If something impedes you, consider ways to be released.

Try this: Tie a rope around you. After reflecting, feel the pressure, tension. Visually see how the rope can represent the burden that restrains you. Then untie the rope. What comes up for you?

*What do you need to face?* Journal about it. What areas of your life have you been avoiding? Is there something that you want to commit to? Baby steps to address what you have put out of mind? Decide specifically what, where, when, and/or how you will do this. Specific plans will provide you with a way to determine if you are following through. And do not dismiss or minimize missing a few days here and there—Resistance is telling you something important so bring it on stage and get to know it.

### **Anchoring**

“What do I need to shift?” Sit in a chair and allow yourself to fully feel in your body what has been difficult. Imagine it as a color or a texture or a sensation or an image that can slowly seep from the top of your head into the chair. Let it fully empty out of you.

Next move to a different chair, and invite better energy, something loving towards yourself, that rises up from your feet. Feel it within your body.

Consider what you are grateful for or look forward to.

Consider something you can do with your body to support this new state. Take a walk. Call a friend. Plan an excursion.

### **A Harm Soliloquy**

“Who do I need to confront?” It is not always clear if to confront or who to confront. For example, if you have been injured as a child by a parent, they may have changed over time and may no longer be that person. They may be better or worse. I would encourage speaking about the harm first by writing a letter that you will not send. This provides both a chance to express yourself fully, without reservations, and it also has a safeguard because you know you will not send it.

If you decide to do this, then do not hold back. Curse as much as you want. Say everything and anything in any way. Tell them to burn in Hell and give details if that feels overpowering.

But also limit the time you will spend on this. An hour at most. Then put it away.

Afterwards do something physical. Go to a gym if you can and feel the energy release. As you have probably heard, emotion is E-motion which means it is energy that you need to set into motion. Exercise is probably the best for this.

If you sit with this for a time and still feel a need to remind the offender how you were injured, be clear about what you want to accomplish. Talk to someone you trust first. Listen to their response but it is your decision of course. You might ask yourself, “*Can I handle the worse that might come of this?*” There is likely to be a reaction so consider the consequences. “*Am I able to accept what comes from this?*” Maybe it is best first to speak to an empty chair where you can imagine the offender is sitting?

Or enlist a friend or counselor to practice this on.

If you do decide on a confrontation, speak directly (one-to-one) with the person who hurt you. Avoid pulling in others to punish the offender. Avoid speaking to groups of people (both parents at the same time for instance).

Do not allow yourself to be gas-lit. Do not defend yourself. Defending yourself can make you more vulnerable to attack. Decide ahead of time if it is safe to provide any details about how this has impacted you. Keep your message clear and to the point. “This is what you did, and this is how it has been a problem for me.” End the communication if it starts to escalate.

# XI. Healing and Growing

*“Everything psychic is pregnant with the future.”* Carl Jung, CW, para 53<sup>xxi</sup>

Now that I have achieved some loosening of the restraints, no longer at least helpless in the seclusion room up to my neck in a body suit with ribs of unbreakable plastics, the equation has changed. It is no longer is there a way to free myself, because there is. But what now?

What to do with my ability to look at something other than the wall. To just see the faces of those who are employed to maintain order, the conditioning agents hired to keep the population safe from disruption, to keep me safe because I have been at risk for testing limits and ignoring the rules and the lies. I see that I have been detained on this particular psychiatric floor due to caste, or class, or accident or historical moment.

*If you can't keep yourself safe, then we must impose limits by whatever means is necessary.* There were parts of me that swallowed that like medication. That commanding voice blurred the Inside-out and the Upside-down. It drowned out Inspiration with the notion that someone somewhere else knew better, and they should take control.

But now I've been somewhere else. I've been someone else more authentic and I've seen Beauty, busted through doors locked for my own good, and I know the secret that the Fallen World is just control. And I question the antiquated law of hierarchies that states the least among us must stay in charge of drawing up the treatment orders.

## **Alluring Future. The A in EXPAND.**

An Alluring Future arises out of the daily Reflections and the response to Inspired Rituals. I've found it to be true, with all creative endeavors, that eventually a transformation takes place in my experience, in my being-in-the-world. There is an ever-greater pull toward healing and growth as a result of Enlarging, X-posing barriers, and channeling Pain into Ritual.

## **Narrative of Purpose. The N in EXPAND.**

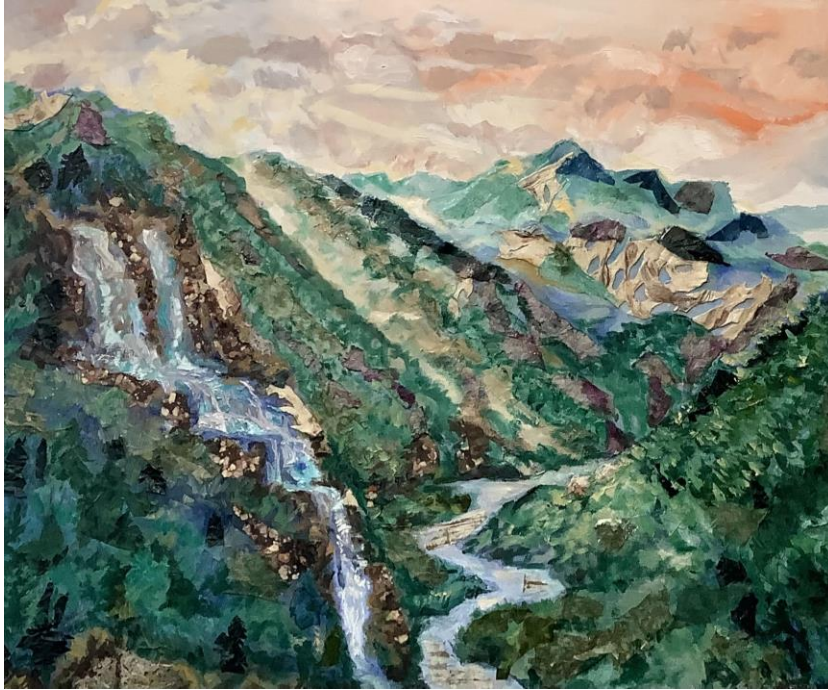
All creative work challenges limiting stories. And the artistic process itself changes the narratives and permits an embodiment of other stories. It corrects or at least alters the original distortions, shifting the horizon lines. Life feels more purposeful.

## **Develop (or Despair) The Final Letter in EXPAND.**

Develop, embrace growth as your purpose, commit to growing in internal awareness, in your actions taken in the world, in relationships in all their forms, in and with all manners of beings on the

planet, ultimately deepening the sense of life as sacred. And more importantly, *to continue*. To refuse what is akin to dying. Frankly, I've been dead in the past. And I prefer to be alive.

Image 26 *Green Mountains*



**A.N.D.**

**Promise, Redemption, Expansion**

*The key in memory work is to have no other goal than helping the client to have a different experience of an old event. That's transformation.* Janina Fisher<sup>xxxii</sup>

**A=Alluring Future**

Our future cannot be clearly imagined until *Beauty has a greater pull than Pain, and Truth has a greater pull than Self-deception*.

Whether we have the luxury of a group setting or in our individual work, our ability to enact a different outcome and to be a witness (dual awareness) leads to emotional freedom. Often, we also come to some wisdom; we know now that abuse, neglect, attachment trauma, violence, emotional abandonment, shaming etc. was clearly beyond what we could have ever expected to manage at that time. This is “corrective” because, in the letting go of self-loathing and toxic judgment, we can be more self-accepting, maybe even self-loving. And now our future seems more Alluring; it draws us to its promises.

An actual repetitive ritual of letting go of our old story is not necessary for many of us because the energy that fueled the suffering has subsided. From the observing presence—our True Self—the

historical drama is severed from who we are today. To the degree that the painful memory still arises in our minds, it seems irrelevant (or less relevant). That's the best scenario.

But every enactment has its own truth, and awareness takes time to arise out of the drama and from the rituals. Meeting with a well-trained therapist to make deep inquiries can speed up the unveiling and the healing. There's always some work to do if we give ourselves the time and make the effort.

Work becomes junk if we ignore the insights or misplace them in our daily clutter.

### **N=Narrative of Purpose**

It's a much different story if you experience yourself as victim in a tragic universe versus an actor in a world of Beauty (connection) and Truth (authenticity).

Though what we gain from this Work is difficult to put into language, and it does not fit into a simple principle, often in the end we're left with a window into a new way of living. There may be a sense of redemption that restores our relationship with ourselves and with others or with life. A debt that we never really owed may have been cleared from our slate.

Shame (I'm bad) is exchanged for a recovery of what our Heart truly came into the world to know (I'm lovable, loving, and intentional).

In the best outcome of this Work, the Tragic myth has been deconstructed to the point that we are no longer experiencing ourselves as a stranger in a strange land. Based on attachment research, Dan Siegel explains that you're very likely to pass your adaptations from a difficult childhood on to your children, if you don't take the time and find the opportunities to *make sense* out of what has felt senseless. *Making sense includes creating a coherent narrative of one's own life.*

Daniel Siegel, *The Mindful Therapist* <sup>cxiii</sup>

It is not uncommon to realize for the first time how a multigenerational evil has been mindlessly perpetuated, passed along by caregivers; the parent-figure themselves no more than unconscious postal workers delivering their own unprocessed horrors to your address (your Heart, mind and physiology).

Or we recognize that random violence and natural catastrophes were "not about me." In this place we were born into, our failure to thrive was not a result of personal failing. And we are inherently resilient.

### **D=Develop Continually**

How do we know if expansion has occurred? We know because we experience more potential to step away from Pain and Self-deception, to find some space. We become less *blended* in ego-state language, and we obtain more flexibility in our responses. In practical terms, expansion means that the things that trigger us can be recognized but don't have to hijack us to the point that we get lost in the past or get caught in the trance of an addiction. Expansion provides us at least enough metacognition so that we can quiet the voices sufficiently and move with intention.

This is never a perfect resolution, not the ending that we may wish for in our romanticized fiction. We move forward with an embodied hope but never with “truth” as many would depict it: factual certainty or something that can be used competitively or to solidify status and the status quo. Our Truth is something that we cultivate and continue to do our best to anchor in a ground of wisdom.

### ***Spring Jewels***

*Jewels and I go for a walk on our dirt road every morning.  
Back and forth, in startles and leaps. She’s unable to move in a straight line,  
While keeping her eye on dangerous tall grass in the wind. She stares at me  
with that long question, until she does the thing she cannot do. She eases back.  
Sticks her neck out. She leans low, pokes her nose in, as if therein lies  
A rabbit with gnashing teeth. I’m wondering at the brilliance of our animal being,  
making love, (one vulnerable look) so much comfort even the fearful tasks  
We come to trust. Our shared hearts enable us.*

### **Jewels: An Epilogue**

“May we learn to return  
And rest in the beauty  
Of animal being,  
Learn to lean low,  
Leave our locked mind,  
And with freed senses  
Feel the earth  
Breathing beneath us.”  
John O’Donohue  
“Eternal Echoes”<sup>cxxiv</sup>

O’Donohue describes spirituality as a state of *leaning low*, with *freed senses*. But this freedom may be unnatural for sapiens. It comes, if ever, at the end of a long earthly path for most of us. Arriving out of the long slog of our development and gradual enrichment of mindful, attuned, and flow states, we evolve the awareness that we’re not just the physiological, mental, emotional patterns we have learned and reinforced. There is something true that is not our ego in time and space only. There’s something beautiful in the universe that heals, endowed with intuitive and inventive currents. Such awareness can separate us further from self-sabotaging action patterns and survival fears, allowing *what has happened* to us to have less of a grip on us. With freed senses, we sense and begin to understand in our Heart that we’re another being amongst an infinite variety. We enter the garden that we never left.

*We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.* T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”<sup>cxxv</sup>

From the Inside out, we find that we're one beyond the forms we take, above the roles and rules we have adopted, beneath the surfaces that seem so myriad and foreign. We can step in and out of other beings, whether they wear shoes or not. We come to know and trust a deep state of energetic belonging.

We call this the oneness in all. Buddha Nature. Christ consciousness. Atman. The Inspired Self.

### **Recognizing the Collective Pain**

Powerful-play naturally moves us to discern abuse from ego created ideologies, to see with clarity the injury to the defenseless and to the most vulnerable.

We live in an unfortunate time. Or has every age been an unfortunate time? What most often passes for understanding today is delusion and "beliefs" that strangle us. There can be little doubt that our communities are filled with pathological violence, creating unimaginable suffering. We're a traumatized and traumatizing society. This is not a diagnosis but an observation of our need to do some serious repair because so many hearts are dimmed, or have never switched on fully, lost to the sociopathic machinery of our name brand society. And, so, we're unable to depend on one another; nor can the creatures who share our world count on our compassion.

*Every one of us is a rather ordinary example of an animated automaton.*

G. I. Gurdjieff, *In Search of Being: The Fourth Way*<sup>cxvii</sup>

In this unfortunate time, so much human action serves small societal or communal egos that create all manner of fiefdom and demand service to the king or the kingmaker. And all human communities seem to have their fill of lawyer-like prosecutions or defensive arguments, doctor-like prescriptions about the "problem" and the "right" corrective action, salesman-like pitches, priest-like pronouncements. There are plenty of authorities of all sorts telling us what is worthwhile, what is unhealthy and disordered, what is sinful, evil, and what beliefs, feelings, and actions need to be banished or embraced without question.

The only correct way. *My way*. This is frequently communicated implicitly or explicitly with a threat. Sometimes this gets amped up into twisted rationalizations for violence. It can mobilize armies. It is a Shadow inversion of Powerful-play.

There are some therapies teaching therapists to be dog handlers, shaping behavior by rewarding one direction and punishing another. This is something that must be resisted if we are to embody Powerful-Play. At our best, we're not striving to be an alpha dog, nor shape the action. If we think that we must be in control, that is some fallen world actor telling us a story.

*"They won't respect us unless we take charge!"*

*Or "We need to teach them, explain the meaning to them."*

*Or "We must give the solution."*



In contrast, in our own precious Work, when we can let all living beings (Inside-out or Upside-down) to speak openly, we're building trust. Does that not seem obvious? Of course, we always need to be alert to the growls in the inner forest. There are moments we may suggest the protagonist step back, take a breath. In the Heart-drama, this protagonist is our self, and so we need sufficient Dual Awareness to block inner characters that dangerous rage on to the path and attempt to dominate. Show compassion. But maintain Discernment. A balance which always reminds me of how my therapy dog, Raven, taught our Jewel in need of trauma therapy.

### **Nudging**

*We have taken our two dogs into the woods  
Our Rescued mixed girl has the largest eyes of all.  
Standing rooted, severed from the trees all around,  
Judging the rustle of every leaf, she smells something  
In a trance of the past so dark on the well-lit trail.  
I could cry when she looks so lost.  
Our beautiful flat-coated Raven princess  
Has fewer boundaries to her freedom, well loved,  
Rabbit-hopping into middle age, pausing,  
Moving to her wounded fur-sister, bringing her nose  
To nose in a soft stroke, as if across the cheek  
Of a sleeping child, to awaken her:  
The way your heart reaches out to me  
Witnessing my unworthiness without blame.*

We want to give an agency to the Jewels of our drama, letting them stick their head in places, and to move in and out. If they seem suddenly unaware, we may want to nudge them or make some noises to keep them from getting fully lost, to alert them to where we are, to pull them back to a wider view, prompt dual awareness, to be here and there.

*“Good. Good. Now talk to me . . . ”*

*“What are noticing?”*

*“What are you feeling?”*

We build trust this way. By noticing where the protagonist is moving, protecting them if they need us to call them back, providing a little refuge when they are temporarily overwhelmed, playfully waking them if they have fallen into the trance of trauma, we give them a loose leash...

### **Real Lessons Learned**

I learned my lesson from Lucky, my childhood dog, and I have stayed determined to be present with dogs I love, and I would never abandon them.

Over our years in Horseshoe, North Carolina, I calculate I have gone on at least 3,500 walks on the same dirt road. My dogs and I have become an integral part of this place, spotted every morning and

late afternoon, as familiar as a wide bend in the dirt road, as certain as the place where thickets break open to the steep valley, as foreseeable a sight as the Magnolias flowering.

For the first few years on these walks, there were three of us. Jewel's more complaint sister Raven moved freely, unburdened by a leash, because she was innately dependable. Secure about the world, she had a keen grasp on how these walks needed to work if we were going to be walkers together, whereas I kept tight to the lead with Jewels who was tense and worrisomely impulsive.

As it happens, Raven began to slow down, no longer prone to prancing around us and teasing with her long poking nose. I remember vividly one long last special walk up to a nearby mountain meadow, Raven struggling to keep up, her breathing ragged. Within a few days she was dead, leaving us all—my wife, Jewel, and I—in heavy mourning.

Jewel couldn't have had a better mentor than Raven, her surrogate mother, a gentle older fur sister. A man in the kill shelter where we rescued Jewel seemed to have a keen insight. He said, "We think she is two years old, and all we know is that she was chained out in the yard with an aggressive dog. We had to put that dog down right away because he lost his mind. So, you know, she hasn't been taught much and she is jumpy, but she wants to be a good girl."

Of course, Raven was the one who taught her to be that good girl. Much more than my wife or I, Raven showed her the ropes and conveyed how this life together needed to work if we were going to be family.

After Raven's passing, I learned to trust Jewel on these walks more and more and stopped thinking she was going to run off or lunge out at every car or truck. She remained hypervigilant, but this came to serve us, as her jumpiness acted as an early warning system. If a vehicle was heading our way, she'd know it well before I would, and she'd move to the side in the grass and sit patiently until it came into view, where she remained immovable until it passed.

However, for the sake of full disclosure, there always remained one old red chevy truck that drove too fast, and which offended her because, by this point in our story, Jewel knew how all this needed to work if we were going to remain safe together.

I don't know if it was truly necessary, but kneeling beside her, I would grab hold of the collar as Jewel growled and, to her best ability scowled at the son of a bitch, a sour-faced driver who never slowed, speeding off into the dust and around a corner, leaving us fading sounds of spitting gravel.

Once we got past the need for a constant leash, Jewels walked freely beside me—Though again in full disclosure, sometimes, when she couldn't help herself, she jumped for a few moments into a bush to chase a rabbit or a squirrel. But that was fine as I saw it. She was still the best of girls. And after her bit of excitement and failed hunt, she would quickly return where we could discuss the "cheaters," those little

creatures that swerved and hopped and spun about with ridiculous adeptness, going up or under, always out of reach. It was unfair, we agreed, if not exactly morally wrong, to have such ability.

One day my wife and I got the idea that Jewel might need a companion. But Jewel had learned to trust only one dog in her life, and when we tried to introduce a Springer pup into the mix, a gorgeous girl we named Lady Merriweather, Jewel was frayed by the experience, anxious and restless, irritable, and confused. After several weeks of trying to make it work, we gave Merri up (to a truly fine home). It was the only right choice, of course, because we had long ago made a commitment to Jewel.

She got older, as I did, our muzzles grayer.

For some who might have witnessed our walks, they would just see repetitions up and back on a road that led nowhere, an unpaved fragment on a map. It would seem we never really got to a destination. But for us the walks did lead somewhere, each time we took some further steps toward faithfully attending Love's work.

As it had to come, there came the night we found the lump, harder than the fatty tissue bumps the Vet always dismissed. This was cancer in her left leg, growing from the center of her joint. Surgically removed once, it came aggressively back, an oblivious speed demon, an ugly massive intrusion, ultimately fatal. Of course, as anyone knows who has ever loved and lost, this wasn't the way it was supposed to work.

I've known a few great lovers in my life, most of them canine. My emotional memory has trapped the last seconds of these intimate relationships in grief. It always fades with time. But I think I am a little wiser now and would never attempt to hurry away such pain. Indeed, I have found it important to remember the last moment, as important as any affirmation of this short life in a beautiful world. It is a last but infinite moment when we have both earned the right to look deeply into each other's animal eyes.

## XII. Qualities of Inspiration

Using the acronym  
**I.N.S.P.I.R.E.**

### Stalking Inspiration

Qualities of the Inspired Self



**I**nventive   **N**ourishing   **S**acred   **P**ervasive   **I**nquisitive   **R**esponsive   **E**nergetic



Image 16 *In Light*



***Inquisitive***  
**Wild, Curious, Open**

*The goal of life is to make your heartbeat match the beat  
of the universe, to match your nature with Nature.*  
Joseph Campbell. *Reflections on the Art of Living* <sup>cxvii</sup>

**Inquisitiveness—starts the Enlarging.**

**Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as complete immersion in an activity, absolute absorption, to the point you can lose all sense of time. The Fox moves in Flow, which is not a state limited to humans. Stealthy, focused, cunning, wild, and magical, the Fox relies not just on instinctual behaviors but on Intuition which in ancient Greek philosophy was thought to be a “divine madness” and a higher form of knowledge. He accepts what comes to him, trusts his gut, and pursues his Heart-desire (what some would call his purpose).**

**More than anything, Fox is animated by inquisitiveness. He is constantly investigating and is not particularly troubled if humans think he is just too nosy, and intrusive.**

**The Fox has a unique reason for existing and is engaged in the pursuit of his happiness. He has a drive to explore his own direction with excitement and anticipation. Of course, if he gets too close for comfort, make your complaint, but realize with the gleam in his eyes he is not taking your complaint all too seriously. He is a personified reminder that we need to get over ourselves.**

**Why this painting?**

A quality of the Inspired Self—Inquisitiveness—is revealed in the wild and mysterious opening that we call Enlarging.

If you are Inquisitive then what is True and Beautiful will always be speaking to you. The path – your path—is not a secret even if you do feel lost to it. But your Persona (that profoundly Abnormal thing in your head) wishes to keep you misdirected so you will buy whatever it is selling. This social ego is duplicitous marketer, and will use Nature, but not in a natural way that opens you up to new dimensions. No, you are being conned, and egoic advertisers are using energy and imagery to pick your pockets. You recognize this con job for what it is when you are embodied in the Inquisitive Fox.

**Inside Out:**

Being inquisitive is the answer to the problem you might not know you have. But then *that is the problem*. We hide from what might disturb us. You don’t need to be Freud to know that we are ridiculous mammals in this way. We live in denial and Self-deception, while what is True and Beautiful is doing its relentless best to break through.

But it is not your fault really. You have been traumatized out of your relation to reality. And there is a lot of money awash to finance advertising that skillfully lures you into an altered state. Every time you open your phone or computer, the corporate hunters are there to trick you, distract you, trap you, drain away your power, to carve the skin off you and use your fragmented remains to sell their products.

Inquisitive listening is the solution. The reason you resist the call is because you have lived so long in the Fallen World that you fear what you will hear.

**Upside-down:**

If you can’t quite stay open when you are alone, the aperture closing in your isolation, then focusing on staying Inquisitive in relationships may be a solution. No, that doesn’t make you co-

dependent. Co-dependency can be just another brand they are selling in the marketplace to keep you frightened. To keep you quiet about your loneliness and misery. To keep you, at any cost (regardless of the sacrifice), to keep you from questioning why you are feeling so detached.

What I'm suggesting, simply, is to listen to your partner. Beneath the appearance. Listen deeply to a place your partner may be totally ignorant of. Not to judge but to understand. "Tell me more about that." Sniff out and dig into the dirt and inhale the odors and stinks of life. They may be offended. They also might say you are brain-sick because you are imagining there is something beyond. Beyond your ego. Beyond the persona. Beyond Self-deception. Beyond Your Fear. Beyond their fear. Beyond what they "meant" to say. But perhaps, in the voice and sexy demeanor of the other you might finally hear depths and realities that the universe has been trying to reveal.

Wake the f-up!

Image 20 *The Chapel*



***Nourishing***  
**Child-like, Healing, Safe**

*They teased out the seed that the cold kept asleep—  
All the coils, loops, and whorls, they trellised the sun;  
they plotted for more than themselves.*

Theodore Roethke, Frau Bauman, Frau, Schmidt, and Frau Schwartz<sup>cxxviii</sup>



**Fox knows not only where to find the necessary food for health and vitality, but where to find nourishment for the spirit. There are many possible places to rest and to grow and to heal. Here she is depicted in his natural sanctuary, a chapel to which she belongs, a bower that offers renewal and respite from the two-legged predators who have claimed the world. She will return here as needed to nurse her injuries and to restore her balance.**

**She feels the sunlight on her fur, notices the vivid colors and forms and textures, the patterns of sky overhead seen between the leaves. She smells the flowers, the scent of the forest fertilizing into the ground beneath her. Her powerful muscles find some flexibility and softness. Her panting slows. Her hyper-alertness dials down. The mind is quiet, fully in the spaciousness of an infinite moment. Why this painting?**

Fox is able to relax into the safe arms of the present moment, the Nourishing energy of the Inspired Self which feeds her Heart and emboldens her. She wears a soft smile because she has a feeling of emotional balance and a sense of order. Embraced by Earth Mother energies, she is grounded in a nurturing source, and she is ever grateful for her bounty and blessings.

In this Chapel state, we can achieve the capacity that therapists call dual awareness, which in mindfulness practices is often referred to as “meta-awareness” or the “observer self.” That sounds clinical and a hard capacity to develop, but, in fact, it is a labor of love, when you want for nothing but to observe, to fertilize what is loving, to prune the overgrowth, to take care of to observe one’s thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations without getting entangled in them.

### **Inside-Out:**

If you have been struggling with distressing emotions, perhaps finding it hard to feel a sense of control and safety even in your own body, experiment with ways to relax and to self-soothe. Unfortunately, the usual mindfulness practices that involve quieting your mental chatter can paradoxically raise anxiety when it feels like an invitation to let your guard down; If you have been traumatized, chilling out can feel terrifying because you are keenly aware of the predators.

You may find it more helpful to locate a place to walk, allowing yourself to bring up emotions and put that energy into motion until you begin to relax. Or you might identify an imaginary location such as a beach, forest, or comfortable room or a fantasy world. Use your senses to imagine the details of this place, focusing on what you can see, hear, taste, sense, and touch.

If you are comfortable using visualization to self-regulate, you can also invite, imagine, and embody animals like this Fox, or any helper. Add whatever brings positivity and support. Experiment and develop a routine practice of returning to this healing vision whenever you start to feel overwhelmed. It can be a powerful safe shelter.

There are many other ways, of course, to manage triggered states which a competent therapist can suggest.

### **Upside-down:**

If you are like most of us in this Upside-down society you have been working *too* hard yet experiencing no pleasure from your work, pushing yourself to burn out. In whatever way your mind (or career, or family, or the media) cons you into thinking this is OK, your nervous system is being pushed into hypervigilance (you are stressed out), reinforcing an appraisal that the world is dangerous. Are you starting to feel paranoid?

Being a Worker bee is unsustainable. Living in stress eventually leads to looping thoughts and obsessions, increasing adverse emotional states—sadness and panic and anguish—which feel permanent and is permanent if you don't make a change. You might be able to find ways to numb what is happening, but your body will continue to live in constant tension, eventually giving rise to physical illness.

If you are finding it hard to open your Heart freely, reflect on external forces that may be promoting constant activity and draining you of focus and presence. Recognize your limitations. Recognize that you are being driven by forces that need to be explored, barriers to your well-being. Take a break and find some time for your precious self.

Image 21 *Leopard Rising*



***Sacred***  
**Insightful, Spacious, Sensual**



**Fox is grounded in Tiger energy. Though clearly there is immense potency within her, she moves as if floating on a river current, leaving an undisturbed trail, barely bending the grasses. For this moment she has settled in place and surveys the landscape with sustained focus. With her silent animal mind so fully embodied, she watches the shimmering heat give rise to the changing multiplicity of forms. In her, there is no human resistance or skeptical thought that interferes with a full connection to power deep as the roots that bind us all. She knows a transcendent reality effortlessly springing possibility into existence.**

### **Why This Painting?**

This sacred quality of the Inspired Self consecrates the stage. Transforming every inch, moving us beyond the profane, an experience that cannot be explained in words. All is holy.

In this Surplus Reality, what had seemed ordinary is illuminated, multidimensional (beyond the left hemisphere's maps and goals). Allow yourself to enter the Artist/Child. Here insightful awareness is spacious and sensual.

This portrait of Fox calling on the resources of the Tiger encourages us to hold the center beyond apparent division. In the face of chattering squirrels and the sonorous one-notes of self-important bullfrogs, and the multiplicity of fluttering life, paw down 6 inches and remind yourself of the rooted force that holds the landscape entwined. There is a Oneness mightier than any one of us. Everything is connected to source at the deepest level, despite the animosity and division that could distract us and spoil the day.

Practicing this open state does not weaken, it makes us more flexible, wiser. In psychodynamic and experiential therapies, insight is the uncovering of unconscious conflicts, unresolved childhood experiences and protective defense-mechanisms that operate automatically and can contribute to psychological distress. Gaining comprehensive and deep sight requires the courage of a Tiger to guide us to personal transformation.

### **Inside-Out**

Consider the ways you can remain grounded despite the conflicts around you. Even in supposed professional meetings and in intimate spaces, if there is pettiness, it can feel as if judgements are pointing at you, especially if *they are* looking at you when they chatter (though I have found most likely they are in a trance state and don't see you at all). Like all mammals, you will feel a gravitational pull toward some old familiar ways to deal with conflict, such as hiding away, fawning, or savagely attacking. Old wounds may even call you to dissociate when you are unable to physically respond.

If your wounded child is already primed by stress and distress that you have been ignoring (pushing down), unconscious energies will call the Child's Heart to remember the ancient burdens more deeply. Feeling increasingly raw, you will want nothing more than to slide away, slide out further and for longer from the body, abandoning your Truth, finding yourself acting in a way you will later regret.

But the Tiger in you does not lose its stripes. Remind yourself that you are joined with a force that moves through all things. Her power surges through you when you are spacious. Focus on breathing through anxiety. Give yourself time to move your sensual body. Walk in Nature to inspire peace and awe. Remind yourself of your great Heart that cannot be intimidated by the foolishness of little animals. And begin to journal.

**Upside-Down:**

If someone is attempting to drive you away from the land where you belong, they don't know who they are dealing with. They apparently have no awareness of your connection to an Inspired source. Don't dismiss them or, like Pollyanna, try to convince yourself that they really mean no harm, or they are just not informed enough, or they are simply misunderstood people with good intentions. However obviously ridiculous or inconsequential they may seem, they can create chaos; and, like the wicked witch of the West, they may have trained monkeys ready to fly at their command.

Do not defend yourself because that is likely to cause more attacks. Avoid the tendency to be self-contained. Seek out other Tigers and spend time with those who share your awareness. Those who are mighty but kind. This increases the Inspired play, love and power available to you in your experiential landscape, and it tends to silence the morons.

Image 27 *Magical Fox*



***Inventiveness***  
**Creative, Magical, Captivating**

**Fox is known to be inventive and resourceful, solutions coming quickly to her, miraculously pulling her from danger at the last moment. Though she is a deliberate, confident creature of the day, she is also sure of herself in the illuminated moonlight of a night forest, moving deftly in the subconscious realms filled with Goddess' energy.**

**Some underestimate her power or are bewildered by her. Timid creatures will stay blindly burrowed, rather than risk her enchantments. Only kindred spirits risk leaving the path with her to become a worthy companion to her magical imagination and drive for self-discovery.**

#### **Why this painting?**

X-posing requires Inventiveness. It seems magical to the ego (and it is) when what is True is now portrayed. For many of us in Pain, we have blamed ourselves and felt hopeless trying to solve problems that were not real or were not solvable with the diagnosis, methods, and treatment other people prescribed (however well intentioned).

As we become better aligned with our Heart, Inspired creative impulses draw us ever more deeply. Spirit senses a path to Fulfillment, inventiveness acts as a guide and support to artistic development. We become creative in the way an Artist understands this. It is not some flashy or arbitrary impulse but an ancient energy of revelation—which aligns with Beauty and has the potential to uncover what is True (for us).

Inventiveness is an inherent state of the Inspired Self. If you are seeking guidance and a light to navigate through a time of darkness or uncertainty, you won't find it in the familiar habits that you cultivate to keep you safe. Consider if now is a time to move past some worn ways that no longer serve you, thoughts that bind you, feelings that restrain your passions, and those well-practiced skills that ignore your spiritual yearnings. We move forward on strange paths, meandering trails, embodied as the Artist in Loving-Work, with Negative Capability (the ability to embrace uncertainty, ambiguity, and the absence of definite and logical explanations) and Fulfilment (the ability to envision a destination). The egoic drive must be suspended so that multiple possibilities can be considered. If you cannot allow the Surplus of the Imagination to naturally arise (because of fear or obsessive focus on a predetermined outcome) what is produced is a reconfiguring of what is already known. And the Ritual of Pain that you choose will be a product of the mind. Be still. Invite the Magical Fox.

#### **Inside out:**

It takes some time to discern the neglected paths because they are often hidden behind what has been reinforced and overgrown. But like the moon, our life has cycles; and the Heart requires regular curiosity and exploration if you are to stay alive and resourceful. Consider what might be helpful to invite into your life? What thoughts would be more novel and liberating? What freshly arouses you? What actions can you take to exploit small openings that expose wider meadows?

If you cannot literally dance in the wild fields, maybe you can allow yourself some magic or romance, or, at the very least, moments to take in Beauty beyond the fences.

### **Upside down:**

Be aware that others may have grown accustomed to your domestication; predictably they will resist as you invent a new experiential territory in alignment with your personal vision. So, as you more fully embody this magical energy of Inventiveness, be prepared to frighten the timid with your passion and genius.

In this culture, what often passes for wildness is spectacle and purposeless adornment. But, as you embody the Artist, experiment with ways to move toward something that has real value for you. It might seem that everyone else is clear and articulate about what they are pursuing (a job, a career, an object that they can wear around their neck), while you are apparently speaking another language. Resolve—as part and parcel of your mission—to care less.

Those who are securely leashed to the predictable will describe you as suddenly boring or may want to help you understand your “problem,” because they are just bewildered by the time you are taking for introspection and self-discovery. They may pressure you to return to the “normal” circus. True magic is often undervalued by those who have not experienced the wild forces of originality and ingenuity. Don’t ever dilute your power by trying to explain your vision to anyone who isn’t open to your influence.

*Image 24 Spots Rising*



***Responsive***  
**Self-Mastery, Strength, Engaged**

**This force is frightening for many because we have all been preyed upon, and we are uncomfortable with assertions of strength, reflectively disowning our potency or letting it flash abusively.**

**There is enormous power in the rise of leopard energy. Though languid when at rest, harmless when not yet in motion, the bulky paws are heavy and willful, unexpectedly resistant, and the body is all muscle, a massive hyperalert predator, capable of alarming speed. When spots are rising into Fox, it reminds us of the deep mammalian circuits that are designed to protect us and those we love. It can also tear apart prey with a burst of effort.**

**Why this painting?**

Being alive and in synch is necessary if our Rituals are to arise from the Pain and not just from our mind attempting to think through the absurdity. All trauma looks nonsensical and preposterous to the Abnormal which recoils while providing some “explanation.” What is needed is a right-brain embodied understanding of what has occurred and recognition of the wound. Only in this awareness, in response to the full X-posing, can a response be developed that is Powerful and rigorous enough.

When you are Responsive, which is an Inspired state of your authentic self, you are merging with the leopard. He is such an effective animal in the wild because he is always alert, relaxed, until the moment he needs to act. Let that be your mirror. Look until you can see your inner fierceness staring back at you, and honor it. This is a strategic resource which you squander at your peril.

Without focused intention, as leopards know, you will just lose your power, get outmaneuvered by panicked creatures who do not deserve to get away, and you will feel humiliated standing in the dust.

Leopard merged with Fox can be a confusing portrait for those who do not understand the Power required for Unconditional love and Discernment. To provide empathy and support to all our parts and to the fragments of others without self-centered judgment or criticism or denial is extraordinarily difficult for mammals. Imagine the Artist and Lover, two together, exploring what has inflicted misery and Pain, working together to co-create a healthy response to our traumas

**Inside Out:**

What do you call your strength? Give it a name, so that you can call it to you when you need it. It is a living energy. It wants to be named because there is magic in such familiarity. Here naming helps you direct your ferocity with Responsive intention. But that will require effort to balance. So, if you allow yourself to be depleted by the societal or interpersonal spectacles, you will simply be too depleted. You will not have the resources to engage or even to see beneath the veil, and you will just mirror the conclusions of unenlightened monkeys. You will drop out of Love and into Fear. Your response will be ineffective or destructive.

**Upside Down:**

No matter what lies you have been told, you have the capacity to stand against injustice and express yourself with conviction. When potency is required, gather your strength for what is to come. Though there are many times when the best response is to take no action; when spots are rising, you are

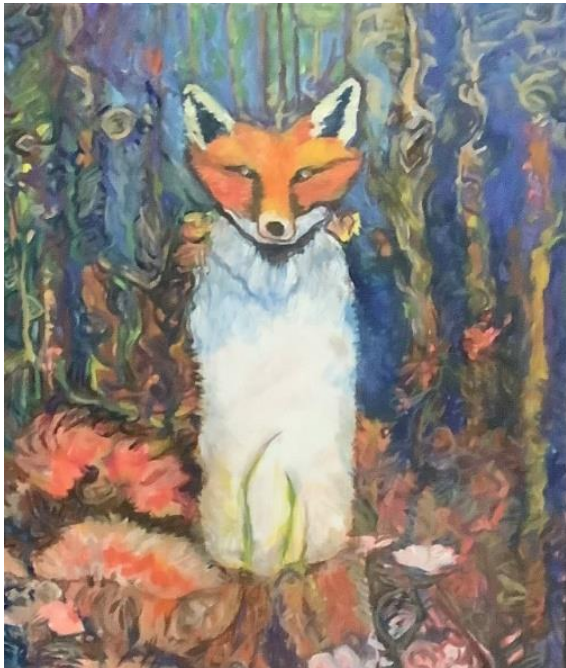


being tested and challenged in a way that will require speaking up and putting ample weight behind your assertions. Step out of the forest into the light. Recognize your great Heart which resists hiding in the bushes.

If you have had an ambivalent relationship to your own anger, then consider *loving anger*, which is simply protecting what needs your protection, as a grown leopard will stand between danger and vulnerable cubs. Loving anger holds both boldness and self-mastery; strength and wisdom; care and assertion. You are a complex creature, capable of keeping your Fox wits about you, while growling out a clear no or an unequivocal yes.

But staying in this energy is not sustainable. It takes effort to modulate such animal energy according to the needs of the moment. Tangling with Narcissistic personalities (Working for Power energy) is especially draining. If you have a prolonged need to assert yourself, you will need equal time to chill out in a safe refuge. Give yourself permission to rest and to be nurtured when you can.

Image 25 *The Huntress*



***Energetic***  
**Cunning Unleashed, Penetrating**

**Hunters prefer to believe in their destructive illusions and ego-invented creeds and are blind to the mammalian need to love the world. But the Queen of the forest long ago recognized their selfish gospels created suffering. She has tasted the bitter weeds that numb her soul and turn her cold. She is not blind to the traps of Narcissists (however clever the snares) and is intuitive to Sociopath's poison set out to kill her.**

**She's blended with Trickster energy, too powerful for comfort. She penetrates and anticipates. And so is well prepared when she confronts the liars or jumps beyond the barbed wires. Farmers will say she is crazy, of course, too emotional, and wild, rabid even, a danger on the farm. But, if there is any hope for humankind, it will come from such powerful female Heart energy (called the Anima in the male psyche) impossible to catch! Beings who love the world enough to raid the henhouse, stealing all the eggs from dominators, and their best laid plans, before they hatch.**

### **Why this painting?**

In relation to the Lover and in support of the wounded Child, the Artist understands that she needs to interrupt and release what the body has held, and to take an action that is just right for her leading towards Fulfillment. Sensing the Turning Point is near, the moment that the drama has led her to, she will call upon Energetic Fox, to assist with the Ritual of Pain. For effective Ritual she needs to tap a force that is passionate (penetrating and unleashed) yet Responsive (with self-mastery).

Energetic is an inherent state of the Inspired Self. Notice within you this Power that requires you to face circumstances clearly, energetically, and warns you not to be hemmed in. Since we live in a traumatized society, and each of us have some Heart-dramas needing enactment, perhaps for you there is something in the present you need to face. Or there is some unresolved adversity from long ago. Avoiding what feels perilous, prey animals will hide. Herd animals will pretend. Less energetic animals will flee and refuse to face their wounds and their secrets that can be weights about their neck. With the image of the Huntress, you are being called to remember a bolder attitude.

Though she too may hide, pretend, and flee with her secrets (she is flexible and so no action is out of the question), she maintains her wits, moving freely but strategically, aware but uncowed by the very real dangers. In the landscape of Narcissists and Sociopaths, she is a powerful inner entity and personal resource. This courageous personality (subjugators would call her a nightmare) understands that only arduous, dangerous, and wild work can help her maintain her sanity. The hunters who live fully in projection of their own nightmares would never comprehend that she lives in Love, and in Unconditional Love, and embodies the capacity of Discernment.

### **Inside Out:**

There are consequences for remaining unconscious. A caged Huntress becomes increasingly neurotic, depressed, anxious, or self-destructive, erratic, even dangerous to those who try to love you.

Find the being in you that is sufficiently alive to hunt down what is most important and worthy of your life. Be animated and sufficiently bold. Drive the action. Take a step onto some lands that rulers have colonized and have tried to keep closed to you.

This Huntress can be an aid to you in therapeutic work. She is plucky, spontaneous and refuses to be deterred from exploring places that are frightening. In experiential therapies, it is especially helpful to be a shapeshifter, to switch in and out of roles and to step into other worlds. Role reversals can accelerate

awareness of the crucial players, both internal and external, who have influenced your actions and reactions.

Trust the Huntress Fox in you to decide what is ultimately worthwhile to seek out. Trust yourself that there are points of view you do not want to even try to understand. Heed her warning; empathy for those who will injure you is not beneficial, especially if they still exist in your experiential landscape and can exert influence.

**Upside down:**

Beware of encouragement to “compartmentalize,” a clinically polite word for denial. Understand that dampening your wild spirit undermines your more creative efforts.

Watch out for people, inner voices, external family members or organizations who support avoidance and caution you not to dig deeply. Often the most fervent accomplices for Self-deception can be people in “intimate” relationships, siblings, spouses, friends. Well-meaning, perhaps, but more likely self-serving, they encourage silence, conformity, and limits to your potential. You may recognize their seductive counsel by their empty cliches or some fixed belief they push. They may attempt to excuse or veil or minimize abuse, with versions of tribalism, racism, sexism, hateful multi-generational traditions, mind-numbing theocracy, systems of male domination or simply wishful thinking and the refusal to face the Truth.

Image 27 *The Symbolic World*



**Pervasive**  
**Pervasive, Symbolic, Enlarged**



*A theology of immanence means treating each thing, animate and inanimate...natural and mand-made, as if it were alive, requiring what each living thing requires above all else: careful attention to its' properties, their specific qualities. James Hillman, Kinds of Power<sup>cxxix</sup>*

**If Fox was a philosopher, he would posit that flowing in the Beauty of this world is a moral act. He would wisely nip arrogant humans who argue that he is deluded, those who say that his landscape is composed only of particles drifting randomly. He would give a side-eyed glance to those who claim that all the precious creatures he loves are little more than stimulus-response machines. Our Fox is an instinctual Buddhist, sensing that the sacred is not something separate or distant from the ordinary and the profane. For those who can finally see, a transcendent reality and energy permeates all and is Pervasive, not limited to specific places, times, nor things. In the zone he enters the deepest level of reality.**

### **Why this painting?**

Simply put, living in a symbolic world means understanding that everything has meaning and is connected to something larger than itself. Ordinary objects, actions, and events can be seen as symbols that point to deeper truths and realities.

In this painting, Fox flows with energy that moves through the landscape. Some have referred to this force as loving, compassionate, nurturing, some capitalize Love, differentiating it from the ordinary, and using this word interchangeably with God. It is sometimes recognized to be playful, yet has a push that moves us from below, or above, or within, into making something extraordinary, which takes work, takes effort, sometimes extraordinary effort, and yet feels purposeful and is restorative, even weightless. It brings continuity that we often lose in modern society, and so this energy is felt to be connecting and at odds with our woundedness that has led to fragmentation and meaninglessness. This pervasive force has been depicted as a field, that spread across what otherwise seems to be emptiness; it changes things, impacts us and each other from a distance, spooky, operating according to an *acasual* principle, with revelatory synchronicity.

Even with regular Work, you will have moments of feeling radically disconnected. That is a time to return to the small fox in the painting who sees that the Universe is worthy of reverence. Everywhere is the manifestation of a divine or ultimate reality. He senses the sacred that permeates all aspects of existence, and he lets it move him.

This painting invites you to see the Beauty all around. Recognize that the magical and creative source pulses within and without. Though the human mind can appreciate only so little--the depth and breadth of our holy source we cannot see—still we can open our Heart and mind. Cultivate veneration and gratitude. Cultivate a Heart of Enlarging.

Enlarging. As I have told you my vision, to begin a Heart-drama that may bring you closer to what is True and Beautiful, you must start with Enlarging your state. Pay attention to your body, and step back, be an observer. There is a form of theatre playing out before you. You are a performer playing a familiar role, getting a payoff, a weekly allowance of emotional charge that keeps you sticky in it. Notice

if you've adhered to characters and are invested in the drama. Have you memorized all the lines you have been given? If so, of course, your ego is quite proud of what you have been able to do on stage with this limited character. You may have imagined that you will receive at least an honorable mention at the Golden Globe's. You won't.

X-posing the Barriers. Stepping back requires shifting your attention. And Pain into Ritual requires some spontaneous action to move you. You will know that you have been released because there may be some audible pop, as your rigidity is momentarily pulled away. Or not. You may feel a jolt, or nothing, or feel disoriented, as a chorus of negative voices have gone quiet. Don't worry, they will show up again, probably at the next moment. That is why you need to practice.

Making the effort to step out from of the Barriers around you and in you is EXPANDING into the natural spaciousness of a human Heart.

EXPANDING is embracing the spontaneous. Learn to dance, or better yet unlearn any practiced dance by getting into rhythm with a being in front of you or in a natural setting. Play with your dog. They think humans are crazy anyway because they know us so well, so they won't judge you any more than they already do, and they will at least enjoy the game. The point is to regularly get out of the sobriety of your Abnormal persona that hides the Pain and minimizes our Self-deception.

### **Inside-out**

Pervasive is an energy that flows into all aspects of our life and work. It permeates with insight, seeps Sacred understanding into areas we don't expect to be receptive, until we feel the results. Where there has been production for material profit, there is connection and purpose, as art brings forth Beauty and reveals what has been hidden. Where we have been rigid there is softening. Where we have been obsessive and distracted, we find open focus and a wider view, even a vision that holds disparate parts together. Or, equally true, there is a strengthening in the areas of our lives that have been confusing and confused. But this can be hard to see except perhaps by looking back. In retrospect.

As you end a session of Work, let the Inspiration flow everywhere. Let the Inspiration speak through you as you move through your day or evening. Recognize that you have touched symbolic depths in these ancient narratives that you X-pose (they are not just old because they arise from your past, but they are also archetypal, constant over generations, ancient as human experience). They are not simple signifiers or allegories, *this equals that*, but symbolic, so they will never fit into a box. As spiritual teachers have tried to convey to us for a millennium, symbols in narration, surplus images laid out in front of us showing us a surplus reality, is the language of our sacred experience. which is a language very difficult to speak without sounding psychotic. Engineers or anyone trained to speak monologues from the left brain are notorious for having no idea what we are talking about.

But our Child, our Artist, our Lover and Visionary knows in our natural world, in our relationships, in our mindful states of attention, in our engagement with our art. symbols are not a thing, but a potential pathway into a deeper plane of knowing.

But why should we care? If we have lived our life perhaps entirely in a consumer space, with plenty enough spectacles to keep us entertained (until they don't), why should the sacred or ineffable concern us? As I learned from years of providing therapy, it's pointless to prescribe to a doctor or argue with a lawyer or attempt to sell anything to a salesman. I can only say I believe that knowing that there is more than one room (the small one you have rented) in the house of our existence matters because the voice of our Self, true essence, lies in a world beyond the daily walls and mental barriers. When we are aware, when we break the trance of tunnel vision, we find what is True; the path of our Heart-desire is aligned perfectly with the Heart of the universe. If that sounds too "woke" then perhaps you have been engulfed by some mindless political campaign (don't forget to buy the hat). And I suspect Fear is at the root of your resistance.

To begin or to maintain life in depth, you could collect small objects that you find, feathers, stones that call to you for some reason (or better, for no reason). Hold on to quotes, wisdom, poems, anything that helps you to remember to find as William Blake wrote, "Infinity in a grain of sand." Reflect regularly on your collection, letting this give rise to different thoughts on different days. Such small rituals can help to infuse our lives with meaning and purpose. At the same time, be warned as you cultivate a more Sacred Perception, widening your circle of compassion, you will be struck, if for some reason you are not already, by the deepest grief for all those glorious being that humanity often has treated as roadkill.

### **Upside down:**

The knowledge that you are on a spiritual path unique to you will not sit well with those who think they are the only authority. Reflect if you are being challenged by a "rational" self-assured, overly optimistic, even bullying persona or community that has found its way to mass insanity. Dominators and their minions have some status in their own tiny fishbowl and believe they have earned a right to convey the special knowledge that they have acquired from sources, derivations sometime murky or absurdly precise. As self-proclaimed models for others on how to live, they can be dangerously persuasive, and their influence can be pervasive.

Do not allow authoritarian-leaning out-of-control egos to influence you. Consider what is driving them. It has nothing to do with you. Mommy or daddy may have told them they were Golden children because they were so good at adhering to the party line. Or maybe their uniqueness was unrecognized in their family, and now is the time for them to prove they are special and get retribution. Perhaps religion taught them "the only truth" and they now must convince you of something. Or their specialness is the

result of a medical residency or similar profession, where empathy and the ability for awe was deconstructed by mentors who preached compartmentalization with the fervor of religion.

You don't need to ask them where their delusions come from. Unless you hope to be their therapist, it's not your job to trace a contagion back to its origin. The message here is to find a way to a source that is larger than anyone's ego-created God.

END

## Dramas and Notes

### **If We're Not Blind**

It's not always easy to witness what is in front of our noses or in our heart. Our history may have done much to leave us sightless.

I recall a woman in treatment who was employed full time in a darkened lab. She worked skillfully with high-tech machines to peer into the brain and body tissues. Her career was to look deeply, penetratingly. But she adamantly refused to look at her own body in a mirror. She would weep in sessions but couldn't say why she was so distraught and resisted naming what she was feeling.

She had sex with her husband, but dutifully and only with the lights off. She reported that he berated her continually, but she didn't see this as a problem though her eyes worked perfectly, probably 20/20 vision. But of course, this had nothing to do with light rays transformed by the retina into electrical signals transmitted to the brain via the optic nerve. She had been severely abused and had had too few experiences of being loved. So, she existed outside her senses. She lived outside her life.

### **Desperate Me**

She pursued him around the world, literally, from Australia to Europe to the United States. He complains, "I was stuck with her."

At some point he acquiesced, married her, and they had children together. "But it was always obvious that she loved me more than I loved her."

Now her demands just *piss him off*.

In this enactment, as his workaholicism progresses, she becomes hardened, brutally angry at his disregard, furious. He hates that she has been a witness to his decline that eventually leads to his "out of control stage of life" that he names "Desperate Me."

It's a long slow slog of a drama. He does not want to bring this Desperate character on stage or admit to its insanity. He fights every step of the way, intellectualizes, invents something to debate.

### **How Do I Find Time?**

We all need to have security and certainty. On the hierarchy of needs, it's logical that it's difficult to feel passion for our art without first feeling safe, having enough to eat, obtaining shelter, etc.

But I've met a few people who are artists first and foremost. Deprived of even bread and water, they will exude passion and devotion for their work. Their lives are extraordinary and full because they don't require anything *before* they express their true nature (which is to create their art). They may live in poverty, but they create. They may be tormented by challenges and continually struggling, but they create.

We should all admire and honor these rare creatures, though it would be a mistake to think we have to become just like them. There's nothing seriously amiss if you experience barriers to inspiration sometimes because of something that's not right in the world.

The bigger problem is when you continually put demands and conditions *before* you're willing to embrace your art fully.

Perhaps you're unable to paint expressively until all the dishes are done and put away?

Or you cannot relax when there remains any dog hair on the carpet?

That's not a temporary lapse but a stance to life, an existential condition. This can be changed by experimenting with putting art first for a day, a week or even an hour. Pick up your brush, start to write, start in some way. There are many ways to live in the world but those who have learned to put creating first, even just some of the time, have a life worth celebrating.

### **Love and Make Love**

I address this to men. The woman you love will know two women. One has a keen eye on the children and can suffer the ordeal of childbirth with a sweaty smile. She will sacrifice her days and health and her own dreams to create opportunities for the people she loves.

The second woman is the *awful one* if she gains weight—as if that was akin to mainlining heroin—or if she talks loudly, enjoys sensuality, or speaks her mind. She could become *annoying* if she is too forward or too backward.

The first woman wants to believe that she is pure, the way white clothes are supposed to look when you use the right detergent, while the second woman is stained.

You need to know this, because while you snuggle up to your beloved at night, you also snuggle up with her infinite dimensions. In that moment, she may be comparing herself to these two women. She will ask you if she is unlovable (too sleazy, selfish, overweight, not good enough, etc.).

She could be thinking that she needs to always be the first (pure) woman . . . which is a role lacking spontaneity, often the role of a mother, sister, daughter, wife.

To prevent an injury that can be difficult to heal, you must keep both women spotlighted and do two things at the same time.

#1 Remind her of all the ways she has been a force for good. You need to be detailed. Since you know this conversation is coming, there's no excuse not to have this on the tip of your tongue. Make detailed notes of all the ways she has been like the first (pure) woman through all the days of her life (dedicated, nurturing, hard-working, self-controlled).

#2 The second thing you must do is seduce her, slowly, in subtle ways. Lure her into a romantic evening, where candles are burning, and there's a luscious dinner (something *she* did not cook). Sit close and feel her deeply and remind her of a passion that is unknown to social roles like a mother, sister, daughter, wife.

Love her sweetly, until she opens to you and forgets all the simplistic messages about who she needs to become or who she must fear becoming. Always, and all the time (write this down), you must do two things at the same time: love her for the good she does and make love to her.

### **Penalty Box**

This young woman is in committed relationship with a "busy" older man who "makes no effort to know me." "I come from a really good background," she asserts randomly.

When asked to describe herself, she says "I guess there's nothing to know." "I'm nobody." She was an only child. Her father worked long hours and was never at home.

She says her mother often sent her to her bedroom (the penalty box) for "being a bother." She admits she drinks alcoholically "at people," to numb her anger and loneliness.

### **Emergency Shutdown**

He was a 30-year-old dedicated teacher asked to explore his pattern of bolting out of

relationships.

His most recent girlfriend developed a serious illness; and as she grew more incapacitated, he became preoccupied with escaping, yet he was filled with shame for wanting to leave when she most needed him. As a result of this tension, he drank himself into rehab.

At first the Heart-drama circled predictably around a traumatic moment in time when he was literally stuck in a classroom with his autistic students as a gunman was randomly shooting people in the school hallways. At that instant, the school's emergency shut-down protocols seemed wholly inadequate.

The classroom door was barricaded but there was no way to escape.

In a sudden twist, the dramatic action quickly spiraled back to his eight-year-old self, filled with dread, bullied at school, terrified at home.

*"What an embarrassment of a son. Weak. Pathetic,"* his father raged.

*"You have no room to talk,"* his mother yelled. *"You're an appalling excuse for a father!"*

On stage the child was hopelessly triangulated into their constant battles, with no exit other than an emotional emergency shutdown.

### **Christmas**

A man in his seventies is the CEO of a nationwide company. He admits that he is a workaholic, and, without any apparent regret, he tells the group that his wife (whom he loves) complains that he ignores her.

The children are grown, married with their own children, but he still pays their expenses, mortgages. With a sad face but with a gleam in his eyes, he says, "I'll never be able to retire." He tells the strange story of a Christmas tree he keeps up year-round, with all the lights and ornaments.

"My wife doesn't like it, but I think it makes up for my childhood, how every holiday was hijacked by my sister's problems."

"When I was a kid, she was always in trouble, so my folks never got around to decorating or buying presents. I spent my holidays visiting her in detention or drug programs.

Looking at all the other houses in our neighborhood, I just wanted one string of lights."

### **Performance**

Her older brother was an *"asshole."* But he was treated *"like a king."* She remembers how she tried to get noticed by *"my performance,"* though she never felt like a success.

She was valedictorian in high school, but her parents didn't come to the ceremony. She doesn't remember why.

She is now in law school, but constantly fears she is *"running out of time."* She calls this *"crazy,"* but she is *"obsessed"* with wanting to *"turn back time."*

She abuses Adderall to manage her "self-inflicted" expectations.

*"My addict speaks to me like a Life Coach."*

### **Celebrity**

He had just arrived in drug treatment, and he immediately made everyone in the community aware that he was an artist with a national reputation. He had recently given the keynote speech at a convention for thousands of attendees, and he said his paintings were "selling wildly+ in Russia.

Awash in self-admiration, he portrayed his artistic endeavors as following a “life plan,” and he claimed all the successes were due to his hard work.

On stage, he repeatedly stepped out of the roles into random story telling. A master of mystification, using language to veil rather than unfold, he even refused to title the drama. But in retrospect I think of it as the Abnormal telling a tale about his “magnificent unconditional love,” which was heroic in some way. Though it was hard to know if he rejected his partner or she rejected him, he clearly depicted his pain as a shameful weakness (his “only real failing”). About his lover, when prompted several times, we heard, “She worshipped me.” And then everything ground to a halt.

### **Anorexia’s Code of Silence**

She says she is in “a hole of self-pity.” Intellectually brilliant, in her second successful year of medical residency, she is struggling with Anorexia again. She was hospitalized as a teen for “an eating disorder with suicidal thoughts.” Describing herself as a failure, “beneath my code of silence, I hate myself.”

A scathing critical part of her scowls on the stage, as she remembers at nine years of age when her “loving” father abandoned the family, quickly remarrying.

Her mother became emotionally “shut down for years afterward.” In the drama she covers her mother is a drop-cloth, to represent her being “distant.” She resists bringing her father into the spotlight.

### **Screw it**

Though I often tell groups that relationship skills are *insufficient*, less important than maintaining a loving attitude, I do sometimes use skills-training as warm-up. In one group my plan was to teach a communication process, emphasizing active listening, while utilizing a beautiful Native American talking stick.

To begin, the questions I posed were: *How do you help your intimate partner, when they are focusing on emotional issues and getting excessively worked up? Can you stay present, allowing them to express their concerns?*

*If you let them tell you what feels true for them in that moment, even when you know it’s not exactly right or maybe is even completely mistaken, without making them wrong, might they feel more connected to you?*

*More trusting of you?*

*Maybe more willing to listen to you in return?*

This was not about agreeing to everything a partner says, just practicing how to listen fully when it’s difficult to hear.

In this context I sought a volunteer to explore an intimate relationship.

The woman who immediately jumped up and stepped forward soon became hesitant as the role-play began. She seemed to be hoping the exercise would give her permission to criticize her significant other at length. When she recognized that wasn’t the point, she stopped participating. When encouraged, she became increasingly blocked, and, abruptly, abandoned her seat.

Another woman volunteered to take her place, but this woman moved to open defiance. Rather than trying to mirror her partner’s expressions of pain, she ridiculed the exercise, denouncing it as *pointless and humiliating*.



In the sharing afterwards, several members reported “*confusion*.” To their minds, if someone criticizes you, then you’re justified in hitting back, using whatever weapons you’ve at your disposal. The air now thick with hubris, one male insisted, “Of course, *I tell my partner to take me as I am. And screw it if you’re going to complain.*”

Of course? You demean or destroy what threatens the ego? Of course, you refuse to be creative and compassionate in the face of a partner’s complaints.

Better to “Screw it,” then be vulnerable?

### **Being in the Middle**

A middle-aged executive was defensive in the warmup. Members were asked to describe a role that they played in their family of origin. Jungian inspired cards with suggestive imagery were used to prompt creative thinking about roles.

But the executive said disdainfully that he didn’t play any *role*, and insisted that his family was “good.” When members probed the *good family*, he became inexplicably animated in defending his mother.

Given his resistance, it seemed odd when he volunteered to let us meet his mother. Role-reversing into her, and playing out their “typical” interactions, it was clear that he focused only on his single-mother’s hard work and her love for her only child. Anything “bad,” worries, unarticulated wants, sadness etc., was pushed away.

Exploring how this impacted him today, he played out a recent dialogue with his wife. Quickly his wife became nonplused by his singular focus on “positives.” She had some concerns, and she expressed she felt invalidated when he avoided responding to her worries, wants, and sadness. As it got heated, he responded by calling her *crazy*, seemingly in an effort to blunt her influence.

When the couple conversation moved to parenting, he seemed compelled to relay his mother’s parenting advice, whereupon his wife loudly accused him of undermining her as a parent.

Spiraling back in time, he depicted a young boy whose survival depended on maintaining his unquestioning relationship with his mother. He feared angering her and portrayed the voice from his childhood warning him that he would lose his mother if he stood at his wife’s side, if he failed to simply pass along his “good” mother’s criticism and advice.

It seemed helpful when he stood back and remembered how long ago his childhood was and acknowledged his mother’s resilience. As an adult looking back, he recognized that she was unlikely to be crushed by her adult son or to cut him off if he set reasonable boundaries with her to protect his marriage.

### **Bunch of Parts**

“I feel like I have a bunch of parts, but I don’t know who I am. There’s nothing solid.”

She had had years of therapy, and I suspected she was quoting a therapist. She sounded like a therapist.

From the first moment on stage, she was distracted, and, when prompted, she brought that unfocused subpersonality forward. and named it ADD. She titrated in and out of this entity until it seemed to surrender a bit, allowing other parts of her to speak. She soon was surrounded by fragments of her psyche in a semi-circle: the eating-disorder and cutting part, the self-loathing and alone teen, a chatty constant defender of her family, the college-aged budding alcoholic. She certainly revealed a “bunch of parts.”

At some later point in the drama, after painstakingly portraying her family of origin, she stepped back to witness. Here too her observations sounded disorganized, emotionally detached, intellectualized in one moment and, in the next, spoken in a baby's voice. What was consistent was her firm loyalty to her parents. "They are great people. They did their best, but I was a problem."

When she spiraled back in time to a girl of six, *the child* was "the burden" for her family. She had arrived on the doorstep just when her parents had many other important tasks to manage. Her mother was a busy lawyer, after all, and should not have had to deal with her daughter's *issues*, and her father was occupied elsewhere (though where he was wasn't known exactly). She laid down a translucent drop cloth that flowed across the stage and arranged several colored scarves to represent a crucial but unnamed force; it blocked her from her parents, but she insisted she was "solely responsible" for it.

The work eventually consisted of seeking resources, anything she had experienced that felt like mindfulness, flow, attunement, or spiritual states, something to help her feel more aware. She settled some, and, near the end, she found some meager moments when she had felt "grounded" and "seen." It wasn't much to hang her identity on.

After nearly two hours, she settled on a place to stop in the drama. By then, of course, I had realized she had not just been quoting therapy language. She has been largely Lost to herself and, more often than not, feeling fragmented.

Her individual therapist was in the room, and though, to be honest, I found the drama sad, her therapist expressed some hope, with renewed thoughts about targets for their therapy.

### **The Glue**

The thirty-something protagonist launches into a story. From her earliest memories, Dad was the "glue" holding the immediate family together, and he was her protector from a cruel, self-obsessed mother. As cancer diminished him, he told his beloved daughter that she now needed to keep the family together.

In the protagonist's mind, he was passing the "glue" role like a baton, even though he had himself largely failed at this task; as she remembered, only occasionally was Dad able to tame the worst of his wife's narcissism. It was an impossible job for a daughter to do.

Floating elsewhere, to years after his death, she depicted how she learned to numb her fears, her guilt and loss with pain killers. Her recent recovery from substances was hard fought.

She spirals to another time. Reluctantly, emotionally flat, she brings addiction on stage. Here, she is certain—and there's sudden emotional energy in her assertion, "*Addiction wants to kill me!*"

As she portrays Addiction, she reveals that fighting, "warring," even impolite "sassiness" is the attitude of the personified Addiction. She rejects it, and, to stay substance free, she has "had to" disown all of her "sassiness," including her self-protective vitality.

"She continues, "I was such a jerk as Addiction, hateful. I sounded like the worst of my mother. I'll never be that again!"

Standing back from the action, accessing a more accurate perception, she realizes why she has found it so hard to keep anything in her life energetically spot lighted. She had equated "pushing back," being any sort of assertive force, with both the murderous Addiction she has worked so hard to contain and with her vitriolic mother. As a result, she had become faded and largely self-erased.

Confusion and false equivalencies short-circuited her power to confront those who would take advantage of her. We see this next in the intimate relationships she plays out on stage. We quickly see Abusers come and go.

Next, in another scene change, she acts out a dialogue with her mother, but she freezes as she attempts to use her voice.

Stepping back again, she makes more connections. She warms to the thought of resurrecting Dad to refuse his impossible last wish. In that action, she hears her loving Dad release her from a request he never could have imagined would upend her in this way. As she reclaims her voice, she sobs deeply, vulnerably, for her loss.

### **We're All Family**

*It was good for the skin to touch the earth, and the old people liked to remove their moccasins and walk with bare feet on the sacred earth.* Chief Luther Standing Bear, Tetox Sioux <sup>cxxx</sup>

The protagonist identifies himself as a wealthy middle-aged building contractor whose life has deteriorated with his drinking. He now faces divorce and is filled with self-loathing.

On stage, he portrays the “emotional death” in his marriage.

Next, he follows *the familiar* back in time, describing the childhood family farm in such detail and in such feeling terms that the group is transported there.

He tells us that after the sudden death of his mother from cancer, the boy’s father was busy and aloof. The father is role-played as “emotionally dead.”

Their large house feels oppressive, but the stable is liberating, becoming the boy’s refuge. He finds his most meaningful connection with the horses. We see a horse towering over the drama, an animal spirit that seems unconditionally loving, a role taken by the largest man in the room.

Spontaneously, the protagonist recalls his grandfather. He too is represented as an over-sized power; the small boy sits at the knee of this visionary figure.

We learn that grandfather was part Native American and liked to tell stories, conveying the spiritual belief that all of Nature is related and interconnected, “We’re all family.”

After remembering these powerful affirming entities that now surround him, stepping in and out of them, the protagonist is reconnected to the boy’s sense of wonder and engagement. the protagonist now seems better ready to face his Pain and fear.

### **Drama of Family Dynamics**

The protagonist wasn’t sure but maybe she could explore her childhood dynamics.

She took an hour or more to sculpt the family of origin, entering each character, in and out, and back again, talking to them, then standing back and providing asides about them.

At one point early on, she became the voice of Father when he was a young child. She didn’t know many details but had heard he often went to school covered in bruises.

Next, she inhabited her mother as a young girl, an imagined posture and tone of voice (here too she didn’t know many details). The protagonist portrayed her mother’s terror of two raging alcoholic parents (her grandparents).

Remarkably, Mother and Father together became great successes, focusing on opportunities, external assets. Education, status possessions, appearances provided the stability and certainty they had lacked in childhood.

But there's an ominous box in the room with a no-talk label on the cover. Most of the multi-generational unknown family history is in there, "weaknesses" they are called. They have been stuck away, especially anything "religious," because these parents were both passionately atheistic. They relied proudly on their wits, skills and problem-solving. And on nothing else. The protagonist steps back and examines the family still sculpted in the center of the room. Her older sibling is named Successful depicted as emotionally shallow, a mirror of the parents. Her sister, the youngest sibling, is placed next to an immense threatening entity represented by the largest man in the group standing on a chair next to her. He personifies *Eating Disorder*. The protagonist is role-played by a tinniest woman from the group. She has her own "demon," called "Addiction," another man representing this force looming over her. Meanwhile, the parents have been turned away. They are directed to act dismissively toward these strange emotional entities in the room, occasionally turning back to blame the children for their lack of willpower or to intellectually offer ineffective solutions. Next, the protagonist brought Dementia on stage. It came forward, covered in a scarf printed with skulls. Dementia wrapped the father in rope while threatening to rob him of his identity. Standing back and watching the family sculpture now in motions, the protagonist has the realization that this family has been so detached from the most frightening forces in life, they were incapable of turning to each other when they needed to most. However, in her own life journey that she expresses in a soliloquy, facing her own demons, she has learned to lean into a recovery community, knowing she cannot stay sober alone. She brings her Sponsor on the stage and a character she calls Higher Power, a force in her life with the strength and wisdom to face fears alongside her. At the Turning Point, the question then becomes: "How do you want to change this story?"

### **Left and Right Brain Integration**

The left side of the brain is a technical writer who outlines the meaning and the logic, but the schematics leave you puzzling on what contraption you're trying to build.

The left is determined to tell in an orderly progression from chapter to chapter, focusing on what will suffice in the telling but in the process boiling it down to the uninspired Cliff's notes.

The right side is the autobiographical memory, enacting a captivating drama, but blowing your mindsight with an over-abundance of detail, while the right remembers a mythic tale of what is, layered within layers, and ultimately what is shared is just too much for any storyteller.

The right is an emotionally charged how and what and who, while the left is bewildered unless it can arrive at the why.

The right is the dream.

The left is a reflection in the morning of what is only half-remembered, while the right is the nighttime, shadows of both human suffering and joy.

The left is the daylight and the justifications.

The left without the right is dismissive and autistic and avoidant of the music, while the right without the left is a tangle of dissonant singers.

The left without the right is a poverty of speech, while the right without the left is overwhelmed and tormented, lost in symbols and a daze of impressions.

Together they can find a passionate dance with intricate but harmonious steps. Together they can craft an understanding of life's meaning spoken with the power of an epic poem.

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