

# The Lost Dialogue of Artists: Negotiating the Conjuring of Art

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**Abstract:** This article examines the nature of the duologue between artist and creative source, as a lost interplay and negotiation within the gestation of the work in a uniquely individual language that can never be fully revealed, translated, or understood by a viewer. The author, an elder, late career studio artist draws comparisons to sacred language and interpretation positing that the conversations and relationships that form between artist and art are very different from those between works of art and humanity and have never been appropriately examined from an insider perspective. She offers reflections and writings of master artists as an attempt to illuminate the intimate exchange between artist, medium, and creative source.

**Keywords:** *artists, divine conversation, transformation in art, muse, artistic dialogue, creative language, ta'wil, harmonic perception, creative process*

Art is something greater and higher than our own adroitness or accomplishments or knowledge . . . art is something which although produced by human hands, is not created by these hands alone, but something which wells up from a deeper source in our souls. (van Gogh, 1958, pp. 399-400)

In my experience as a studio artist and teacher of art I've observed artists emerging from one of two types of deep longing. There are artists who long to be seen and heard, and artists who long to listen and understand. They can be compelled to inform or compelled to understand. The artists who must speak and be heard began as viewers and admirers wanting to be like the art they saw and felt, and the art conveyed something to them that resonated with their urgings to become; that generative energy within them. They mirrored the art in ways that were obvious and detectable, or channeled through their intellectual, imaginal, emotional systems to produce responses that were abstractions of art's external truths. Through these explorations they encountered the darkness and the shadows of all dimensions and grew fluent in the passage from light to dark. These are artists born to be connective fiber and interpreters of humanity; they are often change agents within a society because they include as part of their artistic essence their struggle to be heard, their deeply individual voice.

The artists' longing to listen and understand began with their response to jagged perceptions and internal storms. Their need to bear and survive formed an alternate internal universe that restructured how

physical, intellectual, emotional, imaginal, and all other ways of knowing choreographed deeply meaningful truths. They pulled from those alternate truths images, poetry, and music. These are the artists born to be the voice of the divine, to be the connective fiber and interpreters of God. These artists were born to solitude and because the dialogue that passes between them and the divine that is necessary to negotiate the art is not communicable in words, the mystical language is confined to the native land of the artist and once the art is conjured into physical space the dialogue is lost and inaccessible to the viewer. The artist continues to dialogue and negotiate from the divine in continuum and will repeat this voyage and passage until he or she becomes the ancestral voice, he or she becomes the divine. It is important to clarify here that the artists I refer to are artists by vocation dedicated to their image and medium and communication through medium. I am not speaking of artists who explore art for any therapy or secondary healing purpose, nor do I refer to those artists who are product driven.

That space between the artist and the art in the creative womb is a place that is truly "off limits" and never revealed, the lost landscape where everyone speaks a different language and the only other in the dialogue

is one who understands and can respond to every query. It is a reflection of the unique wizardry and sorcery of artists as they communicate across time and extend past the limits of their physical realm.

As a watercolor painter for over forty years, I have found that my own evolution as an artist provided the armature for my spirituality. I learned to rely heavily on the dialogues between my art and spirit for peace, reassurance, affirmation and healing. Each element in my medium (as paper, brush, pigment, water, time and spirit) offered facility to that divine conversation while receiving assistance, bringing order to the whole, rendering and glorifying color, space, balance, light, and harmony. From my collective experience, I believe that the artist does not create alone, that there is a higher force, power, muse, or God that assists. Within that experience, those occurrences in the work where an artist is confronted by the work itself, I refer to as artistic crises; pivotal moments when the artist is assisted in transcendence.

In my dissertation (Meyer, 2014) and current research I have been cautious about placing determinations within the literature and research conducted by art historians and philosophers. Instead, I've attempted to offer pieces to the broader conceptual framework by connecting my own lived experience to those of my fellow artists, considering my data from an insider perspective with an attempt to set aside the misconceptions that transpire through assumption and myth. I would argue that any research about artists and the artistic process should consider this same light for what is known, has been conceived, and written primarily by non-artists.

Historically, the literature describes the dialogue and transformative impact of art on the viewer or beholding societies offered from an outsider perspective. These two forms of exchange are quite different, the first and primary dialogue of artist to art is re-contextualized the moment the artist completes the work. What the world sees as art is not what the artist witnessed and queried during the gestation of the work, the answers that the artist received are very different from the answers a viewer receives. There is great potential here for exploration and further research as an elder artist citizen, it is my hope to inspire other artists to become researchers of their lost dialogue.

My dissertation, (Meyer, 2014) presented works of art as contained, evolving cultures and discussed the

linguistic nuances that belong exclusively to artist, art, and creative source.

There are two ways that I refer to culture in this study. Both references sprout from the ground of indigenous cultural psychology. Simply offered in Matsumoto (2001, p. 22), indigenous culture is an emergent property of individuals interacting with their natural and human environment. Considering the internal world of the artist as a fertile field consisting of emotion, imagination, and human experience; then considering medium as a natural resource, culture would encompass the internal world of the artist, the world of the work of art, and the external environment in much the same way our respiratory system begins with breathing, but extends to the plants and atmosphere.

I regard this as culture in the sense that I am including all aspects, influences, and tools as embodied in their essential voice and purpose or steeped in ancestral or archetypal significances and contributing to the art as interpreters of the creative source. Though limited to their physicality, they speak. From this definition of culture as indigenous, it really refers to cultures that occur naturally in a special place and time, under the conditions that exist. The artist's conversation with medium and creativity then becomes the artist's indigenous language. (p. 16)

The outsider makes assumptions that are completely based on their own experience without real awareness of the artist's truth in the experience, as if the work was created by the spectator in his or her own imagination. Researchers often erroneously believe that they hold knowledge about art from within their own research history. Observers of art are inherently limited in their understanding of artwork, as it is filtered by the lens of their own life experience; that experience rarely involving hands-on working with a medium over years of struggle.

There is much written by art historians and philosophers, describing the effects of completed works on the individual and humanity (i.e., Arnold Hauser's, *The Social History of Art*, or Hans-Georg Gadamer's, *Truth and Method*) but almost no research has been done by late career artists about late career artists. Hauser (1951/1962) discusses the development and meaning of art as it correlates to the social movements

of the times. The work remains fixed within the context of its emergent time and the artist experience within the work only viewed from a socially reactive perspective. Hauser was a historian and not an artist. He interpreted art from a perspective that was blind to the human artist, and blind to the eternal and adaptive voice of the art.

Gadamer (1975/1989) examines the influence of art on society as it transforms the individual who is viewing and experiencing the art. The meaning or the truth of the work of art relates to the degree of self-understanding that is impacted by the work of art. The truth of the work, while the artist's hand still influences and responds, is quite a different circumstance and remains as a uniquely and eternally private truth of art and artist. At finish, when the artist releases the work of art, the experiences of the work lie in the exchange of work and outsider. The art/artist truth continues to speak and evolve for the artist as new work begins. Gadamer understands the changing and mutable truths in art as art begins to change and transform the individual and society.

Transpersonally, there is much being attempted to understand nonverbal dialogue and transcendence within undefined systems of knowing, I say undefined as "un-traditionalized." Artist researchers have yet to arrive, and the reasons for the obscurity offer opportunities for further investigation. The act of stepping into the role of researcher for an artist is a path that requires additional commitment and willingness to temporarily set his or her own art making aside. Moreover, the voices of the historian, philosopher, and critic are very strong and can powerfully drown out the artist's inner voice. I have known many developing artists who adapted their artistic intention after receiving the authoritative interpretations and meaning making of the outsider-writer (Meyer, 2014, p. 108).

The journey of this article offers the perspective of artists, my experience with them as a practicing fellow elder artist and artist researcher, and one who shares their knowing of the divine conversation within their own lived experience as artists. I include a few accounts of artists through history and as contemporaries who related similar connections and urgings within their work. My own experiences as a painter and my relationship with my medium, watercolor, have led me along the jagged edges of fault lines as parlance between my soul and the work, ultimately resulting in artistic and spiritual transformation. I examine the private dialogue that ensues between artist and source, and the artist and the work,

and offer a heightened awareness and understanding of what denotes the transformative point as crisis when an artist moves from an I-it frame of reference to a we-awareness and finds redemption through the dialogue and understanding of the other, realizing he or she is no longer solitary in the creating body.

My doctoral research (Meyer, 2014) sought other elder artists in late career. These were artists who have spent their entire adult lives interacting with their medium, their ages ranging from 55 to 86 years. My findings revealed six major themes from our dialogues and interviews. They followed a similar cycle with one another, not always exact in order but included six alchemical essentials: (a) they all began in a safe, sacred, and hallowed place; (b) each had an individual ritual of evoking; (c) they encountered the influence of other whether by voice or visual language; (d) there was always an artistic crisis that appeared at some point in the journey where the art challenged the artist; (e) all artist-participants had developed a psychological faith that assisted them in transcending their crises; and (f) all the artists offered that after so many years of engagement with their medium they felt there was magic or mysticism steeped into the process and stepped away from the hallowed space of their studios with the experience of discovery, transformation, a sense of awe, and gratitude. Each artist felt that every ingredient was critical to the artist's process. To remove any one of them would destroy that silken dragline, much like breaking the lifeline of a journeying spider and the artist is lost, or impaired and must begin again (Meyer, 2014, p. 201). This is a story that offers value to heuristic researchers and those who explore the farther reaches of the human spirit, spiritual psychologists, philosophers, and those magicians who practice the conjuring of hope.

#### **Listening for the Beat of Art**

As artists, I have observed, we go to the studio with intention to conjure. It seems to have always been this way from the earliest days of cave painting. From a spiritual perspective, what artists hope to conjure runs the gamut from prayerful dialogue with God and universal meaning, to discovery of sacred places within our solitary pasture. This is illumination and then extracting, evoking, uncovering, remembering, negotiating and traveling along that which has always been and will ever be.

Things appear before us, as objects, shapes, movements, and colors and by their behavior within these environments of the work we speak back with a

wordless language. We adjust and alter; we discard and destroy by our inner instincts of balance and rightness within the two or three-dimensional plane that is artfully activating. Where the conjuring runs smoothly we say we are in flow, we say we have our “mojo going” but there is an awareness of an outside force, an other that provides. This generous or stringent source that is sensed within any creative endeavor whether seen or unseen manifests according to its own nature but makes no distinction, shows no preference in realms; physical, imaginal, dream, emotional, spiritual or otherwise. This source serves as the giver of life and harvest, binds all elements and ideas, connects memories to narrative and meaning, and enables our utilities of knowing by way of contrasts and complements.

The studio is within us, it is not a building or a room it is a space of pregnancy, a space of gravitaire and awaiting, allowing, and gestating. The studio is a place in the mind of the heart and as artists, especially the long-lived artists; we have learned to always leave the door ajar.

There are truths in art that get lost to a viewer, truths that seem to serve as stanchions to the outward message of the painting, (or any art form). These are indescribable truths that the artist knows innately and yet has no verbal language to assist in releasing to the outer world.

We are rattled out of our comfort zone by blocks, depressions, illness, events, or spiritual dilemmas. Though severe challenges within the work are generally viewed as tragic or dreaded, there is much to be gained and harvested from these experiences. Ultimately, understanding this point of departure, when the higher force enters the creative conversation has enhanced my own artistic health. It is my hope that this work will offer a pathway to wholeness for other creative individuals. (Meyer personal journal, January 28, 2012)

Understanding transformation in an artist's evolutionary process for the most part has only been attempted by viewers, therapists, and historians. Almost no research on the phenomenological evolution of an artist has been attempted by working studio artists simply because artists are the only experiencers of this phenomenon. Their methods and research have been the images themselves and conveyable only through the language of creative connections. By better understanding

the artistic exchanges and interactions with process and medium a greater realm of authenticity and depth can be interpreted from the artist's work.

In a study conducted by Jorge Antonio Zurek Lequerica (2010) titled *Delving into Mystical Creativity*, Zurek suggested that when art becomes a dialogue with spirit, a theological method of inquiry, “[It] has at its heart the experience of being in love in an unrestricted manner. The dynamic state of being in love with God refers to this religious experience as a state of consciousness” (p. 4). There is a rapturous feeling at the creative site, a feeling of unconditional love and a joining with the divine in flow as an altered state of consciousness. As with star-crossed lovers there is an innocent courage discussed by Rollo May (1975, 1985) that propels one deeper into a relationship comprised of a confidence/doubt paradox and accompanied by a desire for discovery and learning.

Transformation begins when a work of art emerges from nothing to something (Bayles & Orland, 1993). Transformations experienced thousands of times by the artist in his work, flat to space, raw color to intricately related color, or a mere gesture evolving into a richly rendered painting, eventually penetrate the surface tension of that experience to include the artist himself. At some point when the work process becomes the living process there is lift, and the journey leaves the ego behind. The artist experiences chaos, disorientation and a sudden awareness of something more, a new language and conversation with what can only be described as divine.

Artists by means all their own locate and follow their individual internal path of discovery and know in the experience that they have passed through a one-way door, can never return to unknowing, and must allow the process set in motion to reveal and move them forward to resolution; or completion and release of the work. In a sense they have become their own art. It is in their skin, their hair, and bones and considered during their everyday tasks of living.

Romanyshyn (2007) discussed transformation as it correlates to Six Orphic Moments, “Orpheus is, among other things, the poet of the gap, the poet of the border realms” (p. 11). Orphism teaches that human souls are divine and eternal and destined to repeated cycles of grieving in order to evolve and advance. With each stage of development, there is a looking back at the unsaid, undone, or unresolved; a letting go and then a move forward. All of these stages involve a unique character of grief.

Romanyshyn (2007) makes the analogy of these cycles to research and the search for self appropriately, and when art becomes a path of discovery, self-awakening, and spiritualization it too moves within these cycles. The Six Moments in the cycle are characterized by Romanyshyn as: Being Claimed by the Work, Losing the Work/Mourning as Invitation, Descending into the Work/Mourning as Denial, Looking Back at the Work/Mourning as Separation, Dismembered by the Work/Mourning as Transformation, and The Eurydician Question: Mourning as Individuation (2007, p. 61).

Each of these moments occur within the processes of the artists I've interviewed (Meyer, 2014, pp. 101-179). Artistic crisis enters the scene in the fifth moment, the moment of confronting dismemberment. In the fifth moment, the artist must let go of the work and imagine it in a different way, re-membered. There is a very subtle process of re-contextualizing and detaching; a moment of grief, and then movement to the stage of individuation (sixth) when the art can be released by the artist to the world.

Recently, I interviewed a local sculptor and friend, Joy Fox, a well-known ceramicist who has worked in clay since the early 60s. After a long afternoon of discussing her art I reached to hug her to say goodbye and noticed her forearms were discolored. They had taken on the color of the clay after years of contact. It struck me that the medium had gotten into her as much as she had infused herself into the medium. She and the clay had become one.

Where once the field only contained the art and the artist, it moved to a realm where something else, an additional voice seemed to enter the dialogue and through that dialogue the artist emerged as the art itself. The artist became the art. Transformation therefore is the juncture that shifts from external reasons for creating to internal and soulful reasons. The artist continues because there is a two-way exchange between self and Other that now has become a vital piece to living and sustenance.

#### **Naming the Co-creator Within the Artist-art Dialogue**

The creative force existed long before humans and speaks loudly when an artist makes art. The artists I've known have given many names to this such as the muse, the continuum, the other, spirit, our higher consciousness, or the divine, but they all describe something ultimately indescribable and beyond the containing walls of language. The word 'divine' refers

to something simply supreme and larger than what we know in ordinary life and not characterized by a deity or God, but what seems common in all of the references to God or a divine spirit is that it is referred to as an energetic moving current, an influencer and more of what Rabbi David A. Cooper (1997) coined as a "verb" (p. 70).

The references to God as an ultimate verb fit my understanding most of creative expression. Jacques Maritain (as cited in Monti, 2003) wrote, "The artist whether he knows it or not, is consulting God when he looks at things" (p. 129). My personal experience of the outside influence that engages the work, once the artistic environment has been established is greatly mystical. It has been shocking and surprising at times and can truly equate the experience as a reaching through. I have been deeply comforted and reassured by this phenomenon, my connection to this voice of creativity has taught me to persevere through difficulty and not to be afraid of chaos, confusion, or darkness.

Arnold Mindell (2010) discussed the structure of God experiences and God processes as always containing some of the four attributes: omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and flow. The four characteristics combine to define God experiences in traditional religions, but Mindell added a fifth characteristic that ties religion to physics and in a good sense describes the God experience of art making and a descriptive for those who may sense an influence from outside their rational awareness, but do not wish to create meaning within a spiritual or religious context—entanglement. Entanglement as defined by Mindell as the "deep democracy of relationships" (p. 82), whereby the activity of one particle is connected non-locally to another particle, and by knowing the one it is possible to know the other in a space-less interconnected realm. That which binds chaos and ideas together can only be described as process or creativity. When at work there is a sense of something that connects every particle in the universe, a sense of wholeness. Having experienced the sense of universal wholeness in my watercolor painting, I can best describe it as interweaving of heart and soul, paint, water, color, and process.

To name the universal wholeness as entanglement in process describes creativity in the way that even those who do not know a religion can grasp, but after years of engagement my connection to the great entanglement has grown deeply personal and follows a line of readiness, openness, and curiosity. Because artists in their lives

gradually rely upon these connections they become explainable through personal life experiences with other meaning-making inner processes. In other words, some artists will explain the connection and dialogue as spirit or God, others will call it the continuum, or the ancestors, some will refer to the muse, but all have developed a space of faith within the art exchange that allows for another voice.

### **The Conversation**

Creative language is that which activates and transpires within the work of art between the artist and the work. When an artist has mastered his or her art medium to a point where the medium or the musical instrument has been integrated into their being, it becomes an additional limb. Once the creative (visual or musical) environment has been developed, there is a shift where the process is no longer artist adding together individual notes or paint to canvas. The work takes on a life of its own and begins to speak back to the artist in a harmonic format that only the artist can understand.

I just immediately get right into that zone, and can at anytime. When I first started receiving it, I was in graduate school, and I kept hearing this chanting in my head when I was doing the three paintings that go together as one piece. It's black, but has these little green circles, they're like seeds. And as I was doing them, I started hearing this chanting in my head that went, "Womb, wombala, wombalina-lei, womb, wombala, wombalina-lei." I would hear that chant the whole time I was working on this painting, I would hear this chant in my head. And so I was sitting up in bed, and I had this little pad of paper, and I thought, "I want to phonetically sound it out, and write it out, this womb, wombala. So phonetic." So phonetically I wrote out, womb, wombala, wombalina-lei. And as soon as I got done, my hand just started writing, and writing and writing, and writing until I was all out of paper. And when I got done, I went, "Whoa, what was that all about?" Because I could feel, I could—and I'm getting goose bumps— (Katherine Josten, personal communication, May 17, 2013)

It is as if the artist creates the means for the language to become lucid. This exchange of the art conversing back to the artist has an intelligence that often broadens the awareness of the artist, brings in new discoveries and answers to the artistic challenges,

and changes the order of the work in ways the artist never predicted before the onset. The conversation is wordless. Crisis within the work of art is presented as a confrontation without words. The confrontational exchanges exist within the artistic process and flow as wordless question and answer, as language.

Mark Rothko (1903-1970) completely understood this as a utility of synchronicity, an energy system within a process. For Rothko transformation occurred in the duration of execution with his paintings (Ashton, 1983). The mystical connection between watercolor and light for Rothko was conveyed to me by his effort to capture light as if light were fleeting, mindful in its purpose, yet wild and innocent. As with the artists I have studied, he felt the need to go into the imaginal and retrieve something that was always just a reach away. To capture something with these qualities is to capture what is most divine, as spirit. It is the artist's nature, as alchemist to convert spirit to matter.

Rothko (Clearwater & Rothko, 1984) stands out as an artist deeply involved in the transformative mechanism of art making. As a painter who used both watercolor and oil, he felt that his art should sit outside of any categorization or label and that it was one way of depicting the distortion of the age in which it was created. Rothko wanted to express boundlessness within the boundaries of the painting. He was fascinated by the bleeding edges of watercolor, traces, and evidence of water—a medium present in all of life.

Many of Rothko's paintings are named after classical ancient mythological figures, but refer to an association with the art of the past. These works function as vehicles for his transformative process and the mythological figures existed within the painting for the duration of the execution of the painting. They were not representative in any way, nor were they abstractions. They were guides as he journeyed inward. "In naming my picture the Syrian Bull, I was helping the onlooker by naming an association with the art of the past, which once my picture was done, I could not but observe" (as cited in Rothko, 2006, p. 31). For Rothko, the duration of the painting experience held his transformative, spiritual conversation. Painting was his natural language where he tapped into boundless exhilaration transforming paint into radiance and magic. In many of Rothko's writings he described his process as a way to get "as close to his intuition of radiance as he could" (Clearwater & Rothko, 1984, p. 11), his own internal light.

In an effort to further substantiate, find greater dimension and description for creative nonverbal language I looked to the sacred languages, other languages of spirit that have been depicted in world religions. Most of these languages are ancient texts and operate by way of scripture. Mystical Judaism and Kabbalah described God as a verb, a way of being, and offered the concept of God as a creative source where access can be gained by physical action such as joy, prayer, or ecstatic connecting (Cooper, 1997). These activities do come into play during the creative process outside of intellect and reason.

This analogy that one accesses God through the discipline of prayer, joy, and ecstasy aligns with the creative language of an artist yet leaves an incomplete picture with regard to the artist's experience. I suspect this is because of the limits of language and translation of the ancient texts, and I wanted to find a description that had a broader context. Where I found the greatest alignment with the creative conversation within a work of art was in the teachings and writings of Henry Corbin (1998).

Corbin, a French philosopher and professor of Islamic studies, discussed divine language in ways that correlated with the experience of an artist most closely as he discussed *ta'wil*. It is not that Islam is correct and other religions are not, I was most attracted to Corbin's writing for the accuracy, as his descriptions resonated with my own descriptions. Corbin (as cited in Cheetham, 2012) described *ta'wil* as "an operation in language that is an operation in us, and it provokes and creates consciousness" (p. 96) through what the Sufis call The Test of Veils (crisis) where "the Beloved is perpetually hidden, continually receding behind an infinite series of veils" (p. 127). Corbin (as cited in Cheetham, 2012) viewed this language as more of a "harmonic perception" (p. 87) of hearing and understanding on several levels simultaneously.

Artistic language defined as the operation of harmonic perception where the perception is challenged by illusive veils, offering questions to the imagination, and then revealing answers at unpredicted moments is the terrain of this exploration. In the crisis of the veils obscuring the light, in the struggle with that darkness, artists have learned to reach through and understand the light by way of harmony.

In viewing art as an operation of harmonic perception it becomes possible to view art as a vehicle of spirit and what Einstein referred to as nonlogical, non-

inferential movements of intuitive apprehension (Monti, 2003). Einstein viewed these movements, sense data as "free creations" (Monti, 2003, p. 18) natural associations between our ideas and reality.

Morris Graves (1919-2001) is a great example of an artist who was well aware of harmonic perception. He was captured by the journey to the imaginal and he too languaged with the divine in that realm with what he related as "a most subtle correspondence" (Kass, 1983, p. 11). His calligraphic expression was his way of translating the wordless conversation into symbols, as white lines, artistic movement that has been termed "white writing" (Kass, 1983, p. 30). Originated by Mark Tobey in the mid-1930s (Kass, 1983) white writing is a process where white lines symbolize the movement of light through space while connecting ideas within the picture plane, so reminiscent of the "illusive veils" in that the white lines beckon us to look beyond what is physically there. The ideas connected to the white movements of light correspond comparatively to the description of the activity of *ta'wil*. White writing was inspired by the calligraphy of the Asian languages; this connection to symbolic writing further strengthens this correlation as two very separate discoveries of the same awareness.

To Graves, art is not so much a feast for the eye or an arena for the emotions as it is a launching pad for the spirit, and a landing area for certain ideas and truths wishing to make themselves known. (Kass, 1983, p. 14)

Symbols for Graves were manifestations of other levels of reality, and emerged in the preconscious. Graves is considered a mystic artist and a poet artist; and as mentioned earlier, one who has arrived at the far reaches of artistic evolution. Graves evoked artistic power to find truth. "For Graves, 'white writing' supported a different visual experience—the interior light of visions—which created a magical habitat for his symbolic creatures, a habitat that evoked the real mystery of the natural environment" (Kass, 1983, p. 30).

Monti (2003) maintained that there was much more to this leap from ideas to reality, looking past the veils to the realm of spirit, and why one would venture there. He supported Polanyi's summation that "we know more than we can tell" (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4). Polanyi (1958, 1966) described two types of awareness, focal awareness and subsidiary awareness. Focal awareness being the awareness of the obvious facts and knowledge of a thing or experience, the subsidiary awareness includes

the “tacit dimension”, the unspecifiable knowing (1966, p. 4). In Polanyi’s mind the two types always functioned together but were mutually exclusive.

This tacit dimension was well clarified by Thomas Torrance (1984):

It is an implicit apprehension that takes shape in our understanding under the imprint of the internal structure of that into which we inquire, and develops within the structural kinship that arises between our knowing and what we know as we make ourselves dwell in it and gain access to its meaning. . . . It is an intuitive anticipation of hitherto unknown pattern, or a novel order in things, which arises compellingly in our minds under the surprising disclosure and intrinsic claim of the subject-matter. It is an authentically heuristic act in which the understanding leaps across a logical gap in the attainment of a new conception, and then guided by an intuitive surmise evoked by that conception probes through deepening coherences to lay bare the structure of the reality being investigated. (p. 114)

As Monti (2003) observed meaning is derived through implicit, indefinable, subsidiary awareness, concluding some things can only be known through indwelling. As an artist, this indwelling refers to that individual internal culture that evolves as a result of personal sense data. On some level artists choose the lens through which to view the data, be it the rules of the many or rules of the few, but most often choose the rules of their private internal culture.

Robert Henri (1865-1929) experienced and wrote about his experiences with the indwelling of spirit and divine conversation. He truly understood intuitive empathetic connections to the tacit leaps of other artists. He wrote,

If the artist is alive in you, you may meet Greco nearer than many people. . . . Here is a sketch by Leonardo da Vinci. I enter this sketch and I see him at work and in trouble and I meet him there. (Henri, 1923/2009, p. 16)

Late in his career, Henri (1923/2009) developed faith in the “right relation of things” (p. 25). He understood the language of order that a painting begins to speak and he comments more than once in his writings about the remarkable feat of a painting being “alive in its share in the making of the unity of the whole” (Henri,

1923/2009, p. 25). There was a point for Henri when he felt a presence within his process:

There seem to be moments of revelation, moments when we see in the transition of one part to another the unification of the whole. There is a sense of comprehension and of greater happiness. We have entered into a great order and have been carried into greater knowledge by it. This sometimes in a passing face, landscape, a growing thing. We may call it a passage into another dimension than our ordinary. If one could but recorded the vision of these moments by some sort of sign! It was in this hope that the arts were invented. Signposts on the way to what may be. (Henri, 1923/2009, p. 29)

Henri spoke to and advised young artists. He wrote of the need to know and understand one’s Self, that which Walt Whitman referred to as “understanding the fine thing that [a man] really is if liberated” (as cited in Henri, 1923/2009, p. 134). With this understanding one can fully realize oneself as an artist.

#### **Creativity as Divine Communicator**

Matthew Fox (2005) supported that spiritual traditions agree on creativity as a divine source when he gave examples of Hildegard of Bingen describing divinity as music, Thomas Aquinas referring to God as “the Artist of Artists” (Fox, 2005, p. 48), and Meister Eckhart speaking of a divine indwelling, a presence. The term “spark of the soul” (Fox, 2000, p. 277) is Eckhart’s most famous image and has strong connections with Eastern Christian ideas like the divine Indwelling, which were important themes for the Eastern Church. Meister Eckhart explained it once as follows,

I have occasionally said that there is a power in the spirit that alone is free. Occasionally, I’ve said that there is a shelter of the spirit. Occasionally, I’ve said there is a light of the spirit. Occasionally, I’ve said there is a little spark. Now, however, I say it is neither this nor that. All the same, it is a something, which is more elevated above this and that than heaven is over earth. For this reason I name it now in a more noble way than I have ever named it in the past. . . . It is free of all names and bare of all forms, totally free and void just as God is void and free in himself. It is totally one and simple, just as God is one and simple, so that we can in no manner gaze into it. . . . For the Father really lives in this power, and the Spirit gives



rise along with the Father to the same only begotten Son. (Fox, 2000, p. 277)

Hillman (1975) discussed this process of being drawn in as it relates to crises and transformation within the artists' reality. Hillman aptly described this "urging" (p. 50) as psychological faith that manifests as faith arising from the psyche, a function of belief in the reality of the soul. It begins as a love of images and through this love, through increasing vivification of reveries, fantasy, and imaginings builds an interior reality "of deep significance transcending one's personal life" (Hillman, 1975, p. 50). The artist's imaginal realm grows deep and rich, the landscape more conducive to life and the fields progressively more fertile.

Hillman went on to explain that the psychological faith is activated and employed when the artist turns to her personal interior of images, reviews, and imaginings in times of darkness or at moments when there is a call to transcend. The call to research my own artistic dialoguing originated from a desire to transcend the old interpretations of my personal artist life to a more meaningful and deeper significance, by reexamining and re-remembering my interior world now after years of watering and nourishing the fields. The faith that assists me from this world is unlike any other faith. It is unlike the faith that comes from trusting other people, and it is unlike faith in the word, science, or the physical world. The moment of reaching in is that pivotal moment when the artist as re-researcher no longer stands as author, controller, and product-maker, but by way of a complex artistic question or crisis, by way of a fault line seeks to harvest nutrients from the tended land, offers herself to the work and allows the work to lead.

#### **Artists at the Threshold of Readiness**

Over time as artists struggle in their abstract world they begin to regard the influence of "other" as possessing an authority outside of him or herself. They often speak about arguing or feeling confronted within the creative conversation.

[I painted a boat there originally because] I saw this, you know these clouds [showing the painting], it has this kind of secret area that is down below, and in a crevice somewhat. I wanted to have something that said, "This is a crevice, there is some mystery in this boat." That came in as the painting spoke to me. But I took [the painting] home, and I changed it. I took the boat out of the painting it really is so much

better now. (Jeanne Porter, personal conversation, April 10, 2013)

The degree of consistency and the degree of abstraction brings one around to a place with no words or narrative. Gestures and bursts of color extend outward from the surface of the paintings. Most artists understand very private dialogue with the art, while at the same time allowing the viewer their complete right to their unique personal experience. There is a deep sense of solitude within the membrane of the artistic environment and something of a longing in this, to transcend the obvious and the mundane transient value to uncover that which is timeless and eternal.

Veronica Goodchild (2001) described this solitude as she depicted the orphan archetype.

. . . that shamanic figure, who knows how to travel between the worlds, who has mastered consciousness such that he speaks the language of neither mortal nor God, who is as much at home in the underworld as in nature, who hears the voices of the Invisibles and translates their sound into song, who, divorced from the familiar attitudes is willing to risk—and fail—for the sake of the transformation of the human into the divine, the divine into the human. (p. 80)

The orphan knows how to travel between the worlds, but speaks no one's language, and belongs to neither. There is a longing and a denial of any evidence of belonging, no faith that that will ever change and perhaps a premature grieving; rather a grief for what will be lost rather than what really has been lost. Returning to Keats, "negative capability" is the ability to inhabit "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Bate, 1939/2012, p. xii), the orphan exists in the tentative space of uncertainty, the imaginal and the magical.

William Blake (1727-1827) was a great visionary artist and perhaps the original transpersonal artist who considered the tentative space of uncertainty a source of power. Rubinov-Jacobson (2000) wrote, "Blake is a spirit I have always felt kindred to, not because of his feeble or unstable mind (which is an absurd notion to me), but because of his powerful vision and connection to other orders of reality" (p. 127). He envisioned Blake seated at the head of a great table in the Secret Lodge of Visionary Artists (p. 128). Art grounded Blake and held him together. Considered to be completely mad by

some, Blake experienced sightings and visitations of spirit regularly and integrated these conversations and images into his work and life. His drawings and paintings were primarily allegorical addressing intellectual and spiritual powers and were prophetic in nature.

Blake was a very prolific watercolor painter as well (Wick, 1957). His work in watercolor remained consistent with his work in other mediums and he enjoyed the illustrative capacity for watercolor. Moreover, his actual handling of the medium was innovative for the times (late 1700, early 1800s) in the sense that while he stayed with classical and detailed imagery, he took liberties with the water for the sheer joy of conversing with the medium. His use of abbreviation of the mark and freedom with the water taunts the viewer to make that tacit leap, in essence as transpersonal art validating the other realities, other worlds.

With the uncertainty and limitlessness of the imaginal, there is something being expressed within these conversations about power as raw material within the musing state of movement and exchange from artist to power and then from both to icon. Artists have described their experiences as being assisted in the work to bring them into physical reality as if the work itself seeks the artist/host beckoning those who are open to the voyage. Here artist Katherine Josten described the conflict within the artistic conversation:

For me it just kept coming out, but I was going through the process of, what is this? This is not art. This is not the way art is supposed to be. Because no one else was making art like I was.” She later added, “I think what it is, is it’s my conscious mind putting up a struggle, and resistance against, I’m supposed to be in control. (Katherine Josten, personal conversation May 17, 2013)

This experience of influence and being taken in by the work aligns in character to biblical annunciations (Luke 1:26-38), they are the trumpets that Cheetham (2012) declared Chapter 8 of The Book of Revelation (Revelation 8:1-2) refers to; trumpets being symbols that point to the movement of internal meaning brought forth. The trumpets are blaring and announcing fertility, presence, generation, and sprouting while working in the imaginal realm as agents of soul-intellect.

Considering the metaphor of the biblical story of The Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), it clearly describes the critical passages of creativity. The Angel Gabriel

appearing to the Virgin Mary and announcing that she would conceive, and she would conceive or facilitate the incarnation of a divine entity. These works were annunciations of the threshold of creative motivation and fulfillment, not as outcomes of that movement but of icons of *ta’wil*, and the language itself.

A quest begins in the imagination. It begins with a question that may not have words to lend it structure, but it begins with wonder and curiosity. For an artist the notion that there will be an answer whether the answer is scientific truth or deep inner knowing is the movement within the quest. How the question is asked, in what language depends on the environment, the condition and the climate where the quest is waged. The questions and answers in the artist’s work have an understood balance of truth within the paintings that have been negotiated within the uniquely evolved order over a long art-life. Strokes of paint and gesture are the vehicles for artistic truth. Françoise Gilot who is a French painter, artistic muse to Picasso, and mother of his children Claude and Paloma acknowledged that the artist speaks a silent language in her painting that reflects the order of the cosmos.

Both scientist and artist endeavor to find and assert a basic order that is an essential part of nature and the cosmos. Whatever images we produce are a result of the matrix that is producing the structures, for the brain. For the artist, the result is a series of picture images. These are a mode of communication that is not the same as but complementary to, the logical method of definition and verification used by scientists and mathematicians. (Gilot as cited in Pfenninger & Shubik, 2001, p. 165)

Can an artist explain how she or he knows the order of the cosmos and then reflects this with stroke and gesture, color, intensity, or symbol? Without a verbal language the artist bears the shaming and disbelief of those who have denied themselves participation in their own creative worlds, denied their own adventure of the quest and therefore discredit the value of the artist’s experience. The silent language of art is a language learned by the journey, by the quest where the art process becomes spiritualized in the imaginal.

#### **Bowing to the Artist Poets**

Rosemarie Anderson (Andersen & Braud, 2011) so beautifully offered that, “Beloveds” are not

only intimates but those occurrences, places, and curiosities in life that claim a person before he even knows them well. This yearning to understand is Eros or love in pure form because the intuitive inquirer wants to know his beloved topic fully. (p. 16)

The closest parallel to understanding the sacred language of an artist engaged in deep creative dialogue, where crisis and transcendence dance, where the landscape is revealed and artist moves about in exploration, reverie, and reply comes from a central concept of Shiite hermeneutics and foundation of Henry Corbin's vision. Corbin taught phenomenology in Teheran and strongly identified with classical Sufi and Shiite thought. He recognized an intermediary world, a world of spirit where "processing" creation and revealing of essence ensued. It is the act of ensuing that equates to individual artistic language, and syntax of gnostic impulse that lead to the visual resolutions of the artist. This process of wordless spiritual language and ensuing, (as mentioned earlier) what Corbin named as "*ta'wil*" (Cheetham, 2012, p. 14), a languaging movement of the soul's secret sources of energy, can only move in the imaginal world, the world that exists between reason and knowledge, that space of spirit and wonder.

Going back to Jeanne Porter's boat that appeared in her painting only to be painted out, I see the gestational nudging of Beloveds from process to poetry. The crafting of the work unfolds in the space between worlds, or the country of "Not-where" (Corbin, 1998, p. 125), and in that intermediary realm artists move about as orphans seeking evidence of belonging and reaching into the shadows to try and retrieve what seems to have escaped or evanesced.

There is sadness in this gap that Romanyshyn (2007) also understood as mourning for what has been lost. Bate (1939/2012) offered that "imagination is almost animal-like in its instinctive approach to truth; it has a purpose and its eyes are bright with it" (p. 17). Keats also so aptly characterized imagination as possessing the "alertness of a Stoat [and] the anxiety of a Deer" (Bate, 1939/2012, p. 17) but for the artist in the inability to integrate something or translate to the art what has by our limitations no utility to be heard, the artist is left to negotiate that gap, and wander in the land of "Not-where". These soul movements remain behind in the imaginal as extensions of a prism that we have not evolved to see, or the tail of a comet that can only be appreciated

in peripheral vision. These scrapings or echoes without voice serve to haunt the artist, drawing him or her back in and create the feeling with each artistic journey that something is always being left behind or abandoned, or perhaps can never be salvaged or saved.

There were many "boats" that appeared in this work, only to lead me to a new shore. They were the writings of my ancestors, the original artist "researchers," the elders who knew the sacred language of art. I mentioned Mark Rothko (1903-1970), Robert Henri (1865-1929), William Blake (1727-1827), and Morris Graves (1919-2001); there were many others, among them Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669) and Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890).

### In Closing

The moments of artistic crisis are disorienting, as Mezirow (2000) contended, and present a dilemma that is uniquely manifested within the created environment of the work. When faced head on with eyes that are bright with the instinct of truth seeking, the artist experiences a release and an open exchange in *ta'wil*.

*Ta'wil* is not a language of words, but a movement of language, or languaging. It is what poetry is to literature, and what Cheetham (2012) described as "a way of reading the text of things by the dark light of the mysteries that surround them" (p. 96). What has been left unsaid says as much as the melody in the dance and manifests as longing and artistic crisis or disturbances that require tending.

Cheetham (2012) offered an additional facet to the geography of *ta'wil* in art as it is "a report of a place and what was found, [rather than] an idea about something" (p. 97). For this finding to occur, the artist must stand at the point of wonder, of openness and be willing to ride the current of movement that *ta'wil* offers. In a certain sense an empathic gesture is required, empathy with an unknown sacred breeze that is very fragile, tentative and fleeting; or what Corbin called a condition of "sympathy with beings" (Cheetham, 2012, p. 108). In this sense the artist knows he or she is participant, and not originator, the other offers an invitation and quickening. The struggle and crisis happens at the point of access to the imaginal intermediary place when the artist struggles to locate the thermal to gain height and breath.

Cheetham suggested that there are two movements to the operation of *ta'wil*. The first movement is in the moment of the possible, the annunciation or

the call to consciousness, where there is a readiness, a fertile place. The second is the event of the symbol, not the symbol itself but the unique expression, creation of a unique reality. However there is a simultaneous aspect that seems to strengthen as the artist ages and grows confident; a faith that develops in uncertainty that all of the artists mentioned speak about as they persevere through the discomfort of the unstable.

With repeated engagement in the land of “Not-where” (Corbin, 1998, p. 125) and wagering in uncertainty not only does the artist develop a hardiness of spirit, and psychological faith in late career, but the artist has practiced a life of inhabiting other bodies, whether it is the bodies of the work environment, or the bodies of the subject matter, such as a still life, or the model being painted. With each inhabiting, each indwelling the artist in a sense leaves the self behind and in a long life of this practice becomes quite comfortable with the experience of no self; there is only the art. It is through the workings of the artist’s heart that he or she experiences a depersonalization, a very different state of being from a newly evolving artist. In a sense, the artist practices death to the point where he or she has made peace with death. Keats stated that the “chameleon poet” (as cited in Bate, 1939/2012, p. 29) is an entity without a Self, “It is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing . . . he is continually in for—and filling some other Body” (pp. iii-iv).

I took a step back from the body of this writing. With the many intricate ways I had inhabited it I seemed to only be able to see from the inside out. Asking the work, what was being left behind and thinking of Jeanne Porter’s boat that appeared in her painting, I was reminded of the vessels and vehicles that appeared only to disappear once they transport me to the opposite shore. Every work of art contains many boats, many questions that are merely modes of transport. To this I say that I now understand what changes for me and my beloved fellow artists. This alchemy is the evolution of artist to poet. We are becoming poets and kin as John Keats, William Wordsworth, and William Shakespeare; as Henry Corbin and William Blake; W. S. Merwin, and W.B. Yeats; where in the end what will remain and what will matter most is the poetic language of beauty and spirit that will set the sun, sprinkle the rain, nourish that small tree and child, and hear the fish at the depths of the ocean.

Follow, poet, follow right  
To the bottom of the night,  
With your unconstraining voice  
Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse  
Make a vineyard of the curse,  
Sing of human unsuccess  
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart  
Let the healing fountain start,  
In the prison of his days  
Teach the free man how to praise.

(Auden, n.d., para. 9)

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