

# Mindful Schizophrenia



Keeping one's sanity  
in face of  
the ecological emergency

This presentation is built  
on narratives, resemblances, metaphors,  
undercurrents,  
and seemingly insurmountable paradoxes.

It is an open invitation to you,  
to interweave it with your own stories.

# Facing extinction

# Facing Extinction

by Catherine Ingram



Catherine Ingram is an international dharma teacher. She is a former journalist, specializing in issues of consciousness and activism, and author of two books of non-fiction. In February 2019, her essay 'Facing Extinction' appeared and it has regularly been updated since then.

<https://www.catherineingram.com/facingextinction/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9LIIDvoDEg>



“My photographs tell stories of loss, human struggle, and personal exploration within landscapes scarred by technology and over-use.... They strive to metaphorically and poetically link laborious actions, idiosyncratic rituals and strangely crude machines into tales about our modern experience.””

Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison

We also find it difficult to think exponentially. We might grasp the concept of an exponential factor but it is not our natural way to perceive. Therefore, as exponential warming triggers other imbalances that also become exponential, we perceive them only as linear problems and assume we will have time to address them. We carry on with business-as-usual and return to “the Matrix,” the illusion that things are fairly normal, where our ordinary problems, comforts and entertainments await our attention, just like in the movie. But we have now come to the point of “amusing ourselves to death,” as Neil Postman put it in his 1985 book by that title.

Catherine Ingram, excerpt from her reading ‘Facing Extinction’



Along with all of the other threats we face, co-extinction within the natural world is becoming one of the most pressing problems. For anyone familiar with General Systems Theory, this is easily intuited. Yet many people compartmentalize information when they hear of extinctions of the other plants and creatures and think it has little to do with their own existence. They see the iconic image of the polar bear floating on a small ice chunk and think, “What does the loss of polar bears mean to my life? Nothing.” They might, however, be surprised to learn that the loss of the world’s insects is going to impact everyone on the food chain as the pollination of plant life dramatically slows.

Catherine Ingram, excerpt from her reading ‘Facing Extinction’



As you begin to awaken to the spectre of extinction, you will likely feel the powerful lure of your usual distractions. You may want to go back to sleep. But denial will become harder and harder to maintain because once your attention has turned to this subject, you will see the evidence of it everywhere, both locally and globally ...

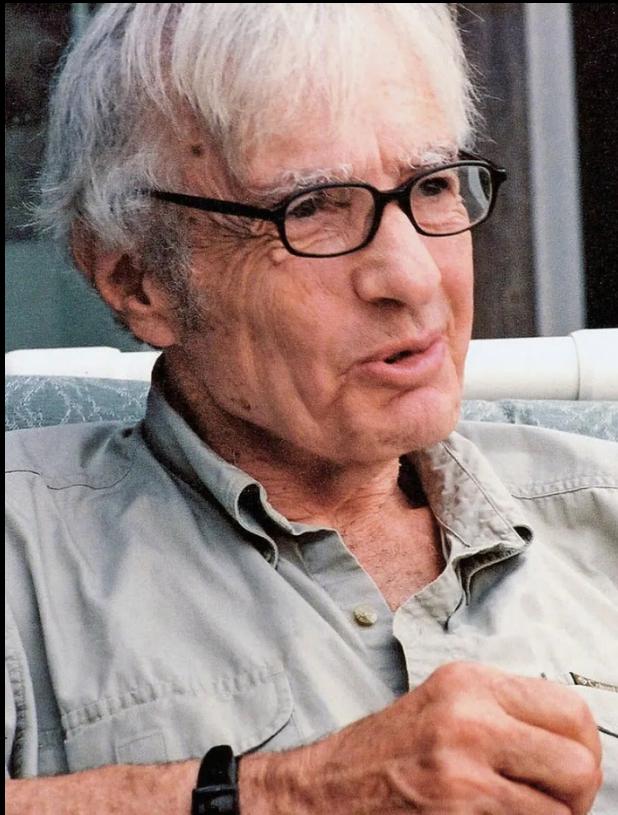
You may find yourself in the company of people who seem to have no awareness of the consequences we face or who don't want to know or who might have a momentary inkling but cannot bear to face it ...

You may find that people become angry if you steer the conversation in the direction of planetary crisis. You may sense that you are becoming a social pariah due to what you see, even when you don't mention it, and you may feel lonely in the company of most people you know. For you, it's not just the elephant in the room; it's the elephant *on fire* in the room, and yet you feel you can rarely say its name.

Catherine Ingram, excerpt from her reading 'Facing Extinction'



# Psychic numbing



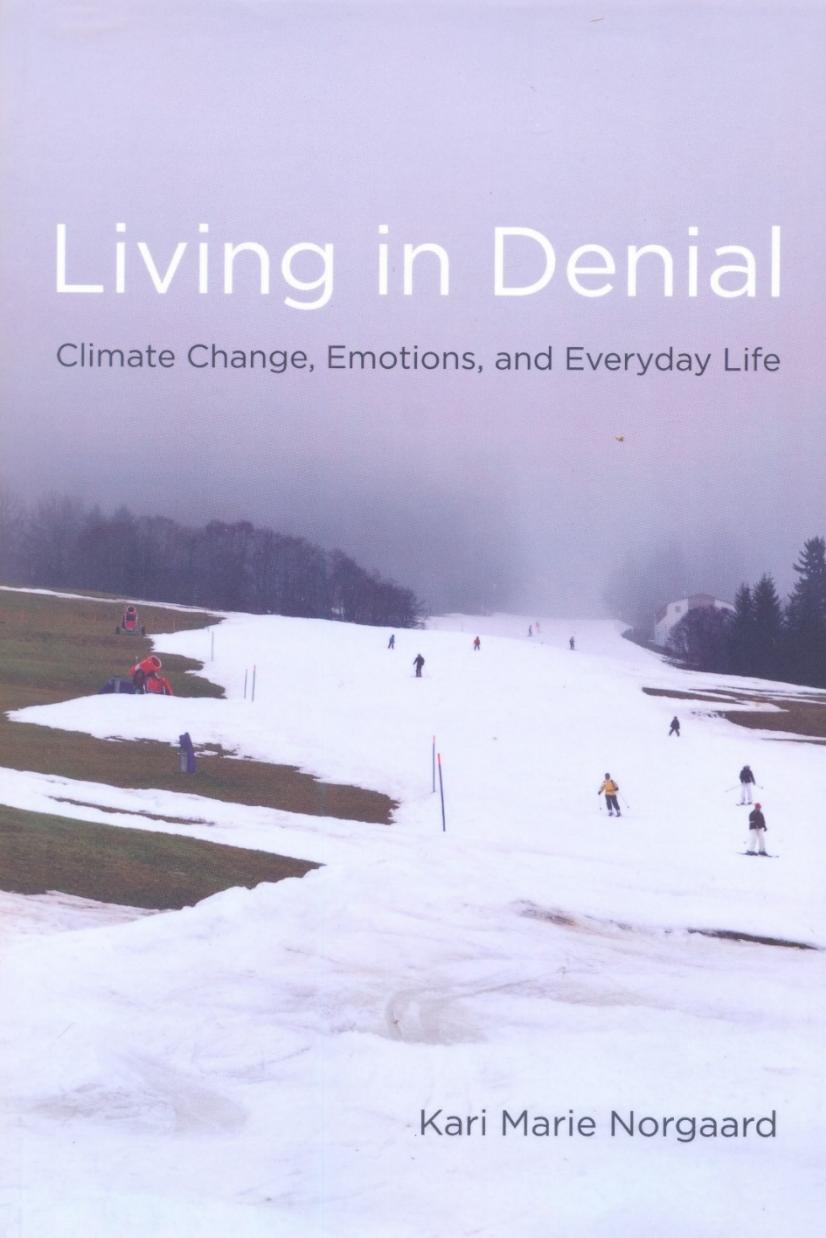
Psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton

Psychic numbing describes the “turning off” of feeling that enabled rescue workers to function during the horrific aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing.

“Psychic numbing is about the way a culture or society withdraws from issues that would otherwise be too overwhelming for the human mind to comprehend. It is a societal reaction to impending doom, chaos, and ultimately mankind’s extinction.”

Psychic numbing can be viewed from either a collectivist or an individualist standpoint.

Today, people live in “an age of numbing”.



# Living in Denial

Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life

Case study of ‘Bygdaby’, Norway.

Norgaard found, that as evidence for climate change pours in, interest in the issue is declining. Respondents with higher levels of information about global warming show less concern. People stop paying attention when they realize there are no easy answers for it; they do not integrate this knowledge into everyday life.

Kari Marie Norgaard

Numbing does not come from a traumatic event, but from a crisis in meaning. All of us who live in the nuclear age, experience some degree of psychic numbing. We know that our lives can end at any moment, *yet we live as though we do not know this.*

For Lifton, this is “the **absurdity** of the double life.”



# Doubling

A process of *socialization to evil*.

*The Nazi doctors:* How physicians, trained to *heal*, became part of the killing.

Two selves: their **prior self**, and their **Auschwitz self**.

A major function of doubling is the avoidance of guilt: the second self tends to be the one performing the “dirty work”.

Doubling takes place largely **outside of awareness** and involves a significant change in moral consciousness.

Robert Jay Lifton

*The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing  
and the Psychology of Genocide*, 1986

According to Lifton, one cannot understand the syndrome of doubling in terms of multiple personality.

In the end, it belongs to the psychology of normalcy:

“In general psychological terms, the adaptive potential for doubling is integral to the human psyche and can, at times, be life saving: for a soldier in combat, for instance; or for a victim of brutality such as an Auschwitz inmate, who must undergo a form of doubling in order to survive.”

# Premature maturity

# WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE



STORY AND PICTURES BY MAURICE SENDAK



*“He tamed them with the magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking once. And they were frightened and called him the most wild thing of all.”*

Educator David Sobel believes we teach children too abstractly, too early, about the environment:

“If we prematurely ask children to deal with problems beyond their understanding and control, prematurely recruit them to solve the mammoth problems of an adult world, then we cut them off from the possible sources of their strength ...

What is emerging is a strange kind of schizophrenia. Children are disconnected from the world outside their doors and connected with endangered animals and ecosystems through electronic media.”

Environmental education has an honourable motive:  
If children are aware of the problems of too many people  
utilizing too few resources, they will grow up to be  
environmentally responsible adults.

David Sobel fears the *very opposite* is occurring:

“In our zest for making them aware of and responsible for the world’s problems, we cut our children off from their roots ... What really happens when we put the weight of the world’s environmental problems on eight and nine year olds already haunted with too many concerns and not enough real contact with nature?”



**En die baseren hun beleid  
op die premature volwassenheid.**

Literary critic George Steiner in *Nauwgezet en Wanhopig*  
(‘With Care and Desperation’), directed by Wim Kayzer, VPRO, 1989  
<https://youtu.be/srozVaei22g?t=3139>

“Until very recently, there was always an open window on a dream ... It's now over. My students know that there are no such open windows ... That young people should know very early today, that the dreams are a cheat, is very, very sad, and I am very bewildered by it. We, as teachers, know this. We don't talk about it very much, out loud. It has become enormously difficult to be a teacher, because what you do with young people – young in every other way – who are very old men in their political-social insight? Who know that there are no solutions ... *Premature* maturity. Premature: to-be-ripe-too-early. All around us, on the universities, there are little old men and little old women, who will no longer do the foolish thing ... for whom there is no more window on tomorrow. This is one of the most difficult questions, it seems to me, we are facing today. We are giving to the generations after us the most terrible kind of early wisdom.”

Literary critic George Steiner in *Nauwgezet en Wanhopig*  
('With Care and Desperation'), directed by Wim Kayzer, VPRO, 1989  
<https://youtu.be/srozVaei22g?t=3139>



A group of students in Cologne, Germany, drawing attention to the climate crisis as part of a school project (2019).

**Vanessa Andreotti (at Climate Existence, 2018):**

“Where I come from, in Brazil, we say: ‘As the flood rises, and the water is lapping around your ankles, you can’t start swimming yet. When the water reaches your knees, it’s not time to start swimming. But when the water gets up to your bum, *then* you can start swimming.’”

**Dougald Hine:**

“There is a threshold at which things get bad enough, so that things move from being impossible to possible. Now whereabouts in our societies are the waters highest? I’m not sure it is actually climate change. If we want impossible things to happen, it may paradoxically be that we need to start from places like loneliness, mental health amongst teenagers, addiction to network technologies. These, I think, are the places where things are getting bad enough, that we could consider a radical break from what we’ve been taking for granted.”

## Varför har den psykiska ohälsan ökat bland barn och unga i Sverige?

Utvecklingen under perioden 1985–2014

- School stress  
(performance drive)
- Greater challenges  
on the labor market  
for young people

## Summary

Why have multiple health complaints increased among children and adolescents in Sweden?

The development between 1985 and 2014.

**The proportion of Swedish 13- and 15-year-old girls and boys reporting multiple health complaints has doubled since around 1985. Health complaints include difficulties in getting to sleep, feeling low, feeling irritable or bad tempered, feeling nervous, having headaches, stomach aches, backaches, and feeling dizzy.**

In 2013/14, more than half of the 15-year-old girls and almost one third of the boys reported multiple health complaints. Complaints are thus more common among girls, but the increase has been the same among boys. In comparison with other Nordic countries, the increase in multiple health complaints has been more pronounced in Sweden.



JONATHAN HAIDT, PhD

NYU Stern School of Business Social Psychologist

Author *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*

## The Social Dilemma (Netflix, 2020)



The Social Dilemma

53:51





TIM KENDALL

Facebook | Former Executive  
Pinterest | Former President  
Moment | CEO

Tim Kendall:  
“It’s plain as day to me: these services are killing people,  
and causing people to kill themselves.”

# Persona

*the aspect of someone's character  
that is presented to or perceived by others*



# The Top Fashion Trends of the Fall 2021 Season

It's officially time to pack up your sweats.



BY [NICOLE FRITTON](#), [KERRY PIERI](#) AND [BARRY SAMAHY](#) / AUG 3 2021, 3:54 PM EDT





**It took  
you up to  
1 WEEK  
to eat this  
credit card**



“The average person swallows a credit-card sized amount of plastic each week”, *The Guardian* (2020)



Shop till you drop

# Static patterns and dynamic quality

# ROBERT M. PIRSIG

The Sequel to  
**Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance**



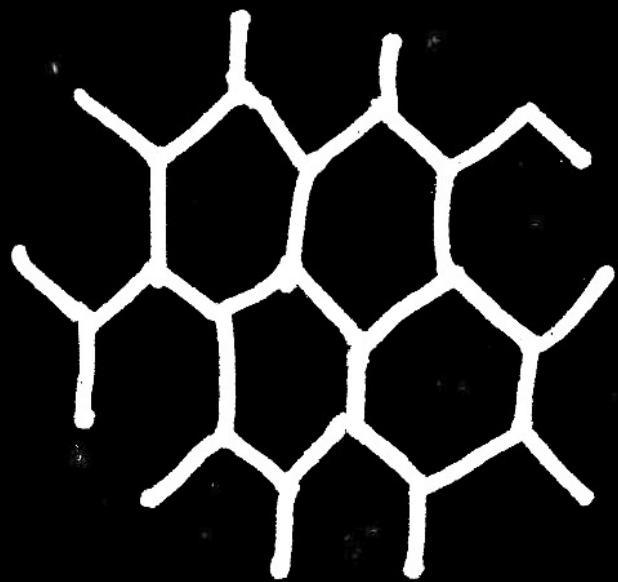
# LILA



Honeycomb – Static patterns



Maidenhair fern – Dynamic quality



Static



Dynamic

# Static and dynamic on the individual level



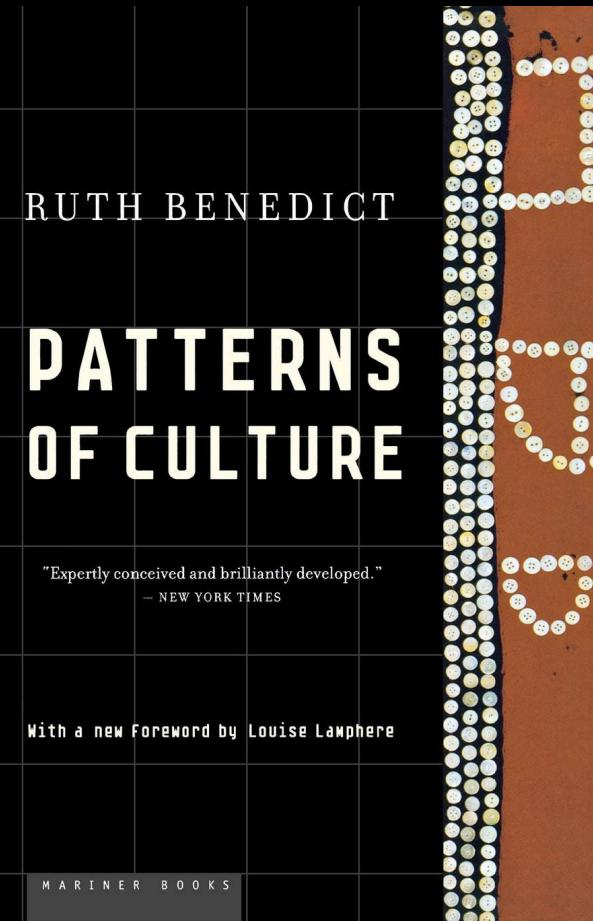
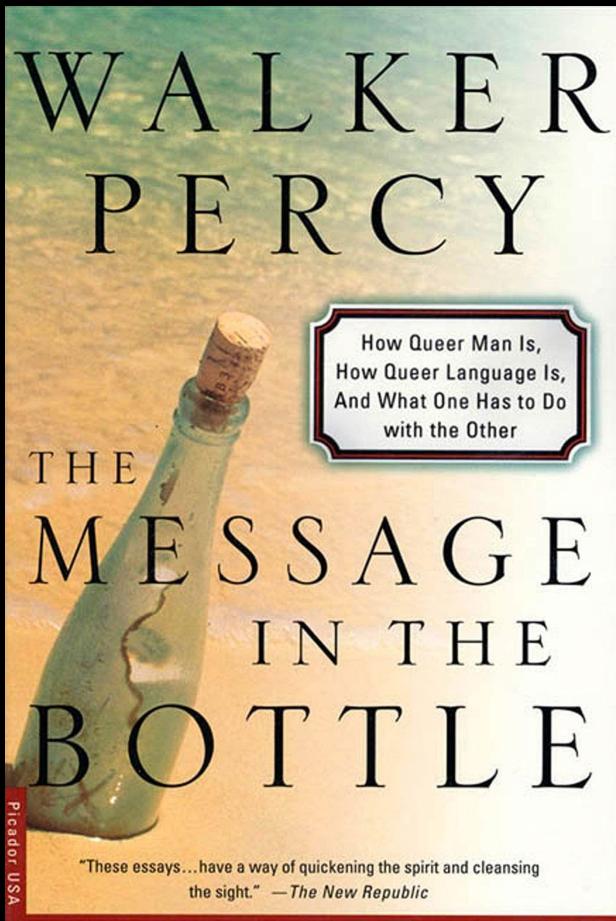
“One can imagine how an infant in the womb acquires awareness of simple distinctions such as pressure and sound, and then at birth acquires more complex ones of light and warmth and hunger.

We know these distinctions are pressure and sound and light and warmth and hunger and so on, but the baby doesn't ...

From the baby's point of view, something, he knows not what, compels attention. This generalized ‘something’ is **dynamic quality** ...

When he is a few months old, the baby studies his hand or a rattle, not knowing it is a hand or a rattle, with a sense of wonder and mystery and excitement.”

Robert M. Pirsig  
*Lila, An Inquiry into Morals, 1991*



“Why is it that a man riding a commuter train to New York, whose needs and drives are satisfied, who has a good home, job, loving wife and family ... often feels bad, without knowing why?

Why is it, that if such a man suffers a heart attack and, taken off the train at New Rochelle, regains consciousness and finds himself in a strange place, he then comes to himself for the first time in years, perhaps in his life, and begins to gaze at his own hand with a sense of wonder and delight?”

Excerpt from *Message in a Bottle* by Walker Percy (1975),  
which is reflected upon in Robert M. Pirsig's *Lila* (1991).



New Rochelle  
Railway station



# Static and dynamic on the cultural level



RUTH BENEDICT

## PATTERNS OF CULTURE

"Expertly conceived and brilliantly developed."  
— NEW YORK TIMES

With a new Foreword by Louise Lamphere

MARINER BOOKS

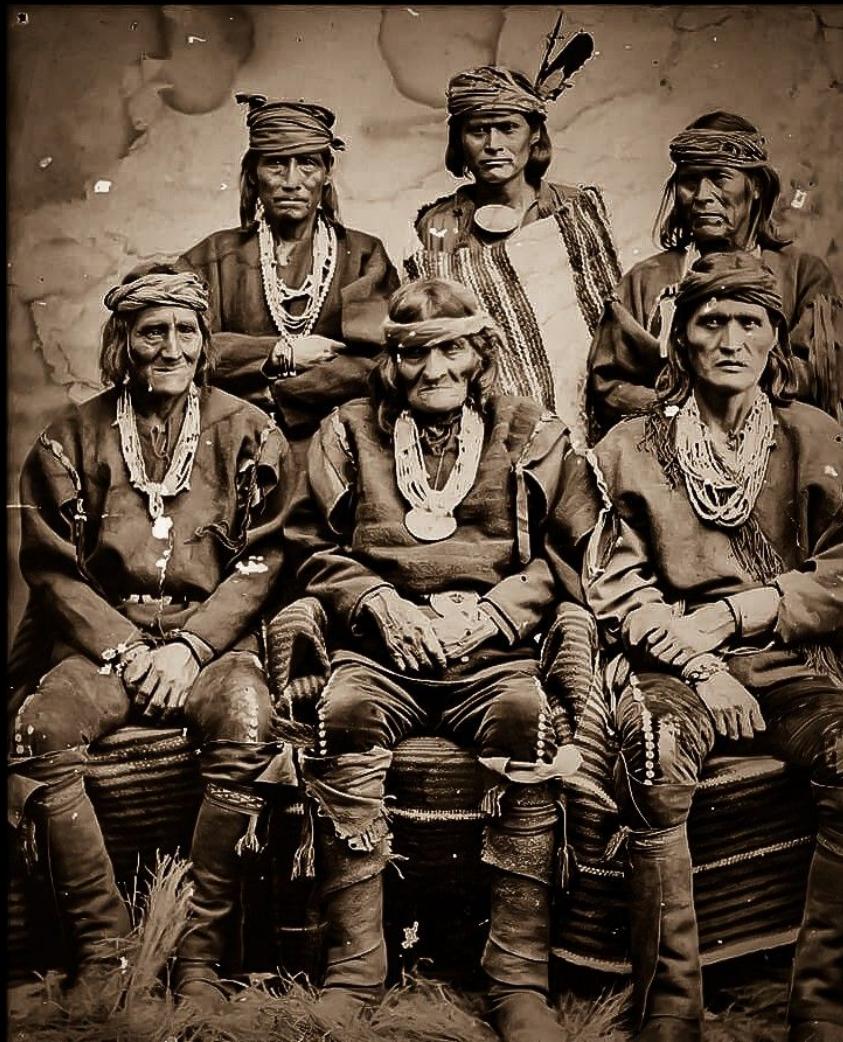


1934

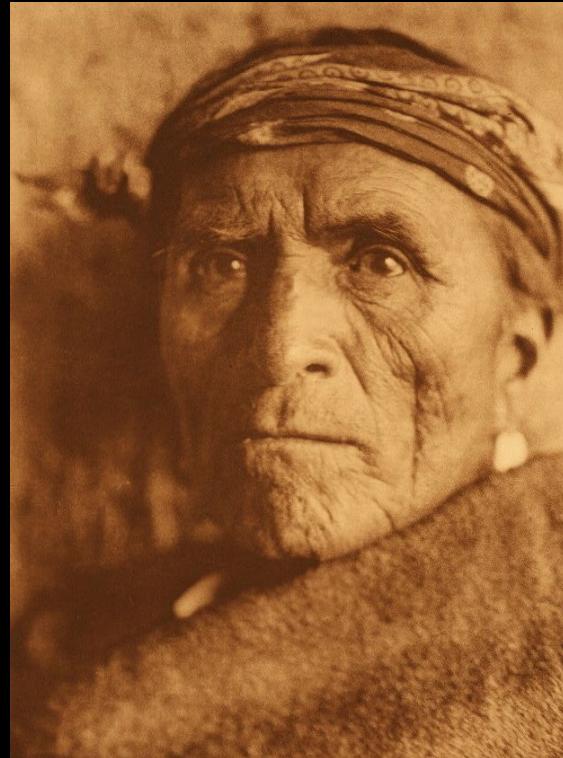
Excerpt from  
Ruth Benedict's  
*Patterns of Culture*  
(1934), on which  
Robert M. Pirsig  
Reflects in his  
*Lila* (1991);

solved by doing violence to his strongest natural impulses and accepting the rôle the culture honours. In case he is a person to whom social recognition is necessary, it is ordinarily his only possible course. One of the most striking individuals in Zuñi had accepted this necessity. In a society that thoroughly distrusts authority of any sort, he had a native personal magnetism that singled him out in any group. In a society that exalts moderation and the easiest way, he was turbulent and could act violently upon occasion. In a society that praises a pliant personality that "talks lots"—that is, that chatters in a friendly fashion—he was scornful and aloof. Zuñi's only reaction to such personalities is to brand them as witches. He was said to have been seen peering through a window from outside, and this is a sure mark of a witch. At any rate, he got drunk one day and boasted that they could not kill him. He was taken before the war priests who hung him by his thumbs from the rafters till he should confess to his witchcraft. This is the usual procedure in a charge of witchcraft. However, he dispatched a messenger to the government troops. When they came, his shoulders were already crippled for life, and the officer of the law was left with no recourse but to imprison the war priests who had been responsible for the enormity. One of these war priests was probably the most respected and important person in recent Zuñi history, and when he returned after imprisonment in the state penitentiary he never resumed his priestly offices. He regarded his power as broken. It was a revenge that is probably unique in Zuñi history. It involved, of course, a challenge to the priesthoods, against whom the witch by his act openly aligned himself.

The course of his life in the forty years that followed this



Zuni Pueblo leaders. New Mexico, 1882



Lutakawi, Zuni governor,  
(photo from before 1925)

Phaedrus thought that the story of the old Pueblo Indian, seen in this way, made deep and broad sense, and justified the enormous feeling of drama that it produced. After many months of thinking about it, he was left with a reward of two terms: **dynamic good** and **static good**, which became the basic division of his emerging Metaphysics of Quality.

It certainly felt right. Not subject and object but **static** and **dynamic** is the basic division of reality. When A.N. Whitehead wrote that ‘mankind is driven forward by dim apprehensions of things too obscure for its existing language,’ he was writing about **dynamic quality**. **Dynamic quality** is the pre-intellectual cutting edge of reality, the source of all things, completely simple and always new. It was the moral force that had motivated the *brujo* in Zuni. It contains no pattern of fixed rewards and punishments. Its only perceived good is freedom and its only perceived evil is **static quality** itself – any pattern of one-sided fixed values that tries to contain and kill the ongoing free force of life.

**Static quality**, the moral force of the priests, emerges in the wake of **dynamic quality**. It is old and complex. It always contains a component of memory. Good is conformity to an established pattern of fixed values and value objects. Justice and law are identical. **Static morality** is full of heroes and villains, loves and hatreds, carrots and sticks. Its values don’t change by themselves. Unless they are altered by **dynamic quality** they say the same thing year after year. Sometimes they say it more loudly, sometimes more softly, but the message is always the same.

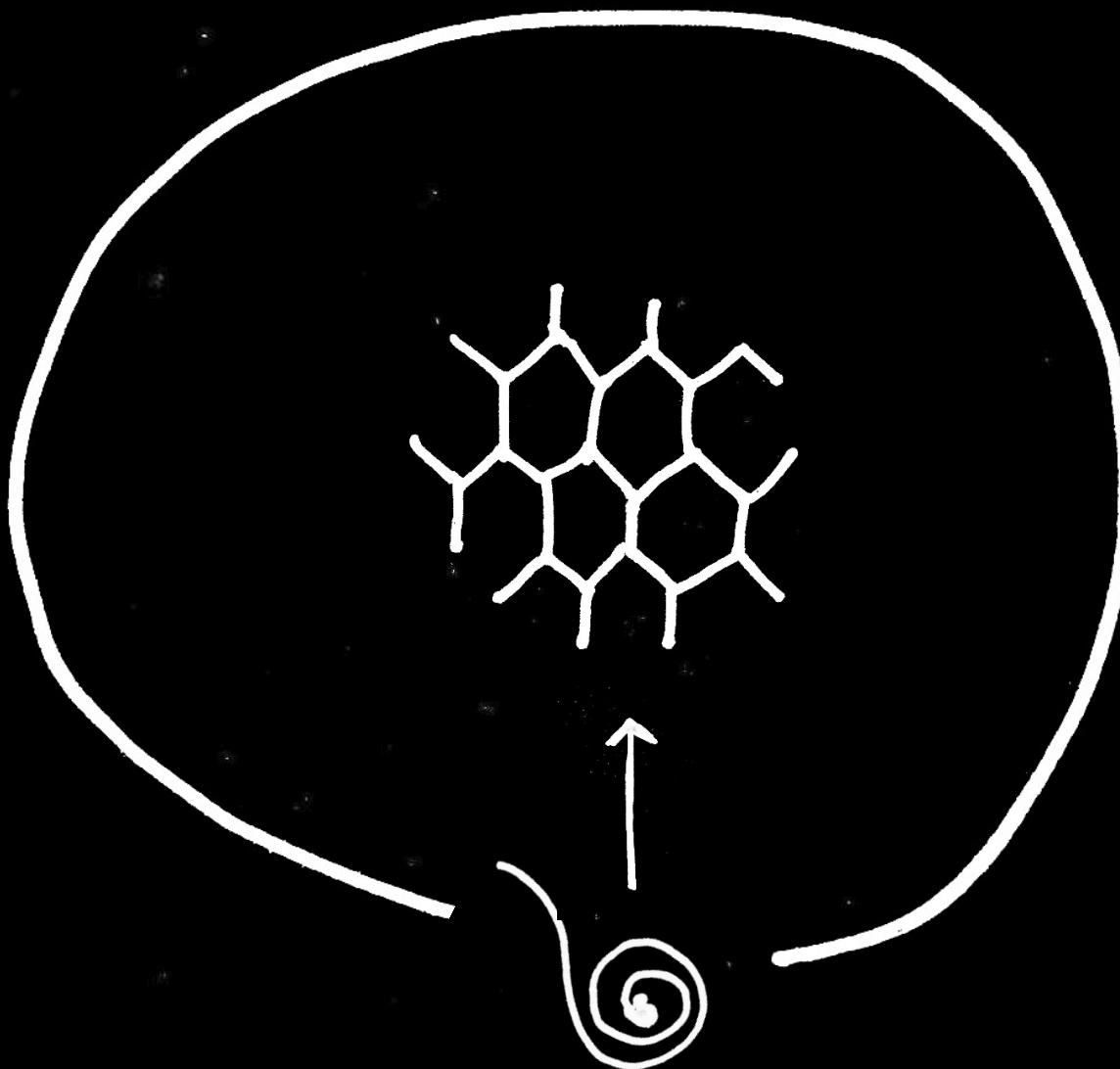
Robert M. Pirsig  
*Lila*, 1991

“For a system to be *truly* complete,  
incompleteness must also be part of it.

It is at this point where a system  
*learns to learn.*

If the system doesn’t do that,  
it becomes static, and eventually dies.”

Nora Bateson,  
in her film *An Ecology of Mind*, 2010



# Black or white



**TEDxStockholm**

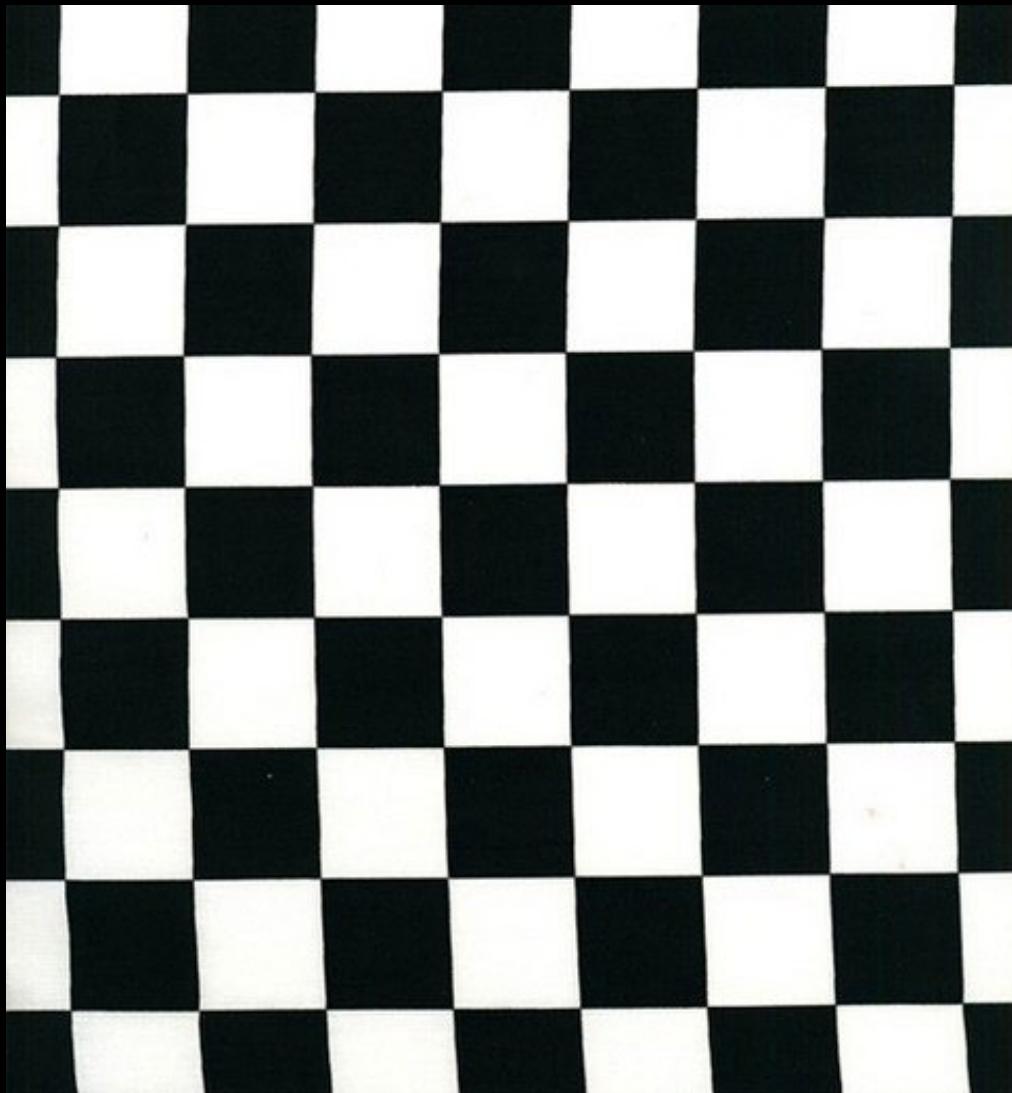
“So when I was 11, I became ill. I fell into depression, I stopped talking, and I stopped eating. In two months, I lost about 10 kilos of weight. Later on, I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, OCD and selective mutism. That basically means I only speak when I think it's necessary - now is one of those moments.

For those of us who are on the spectrum, almost everything is black or white. We aren't very good at lying, and we usually don't enjoy participating in this social game that the rest of you seem so fond of.

I think in many ways that we autistic are the normal ones, and the rest of the people are pretty strange, especially when it comes to the sustainability crisis, where everyone keeps saying climate change is an existential threat and the most important issue of all, and yet they just carry on like before. I don't understand that, because if the emissions have to stop, then we must stop the emissions. To me that is black or white. There are no gray areas when it comes to survival.”

[https://www.ted.com/talks/greta\\_thunberg\\_the\\_disarming\\_case\\_to\\_act\\_right\\_now\\_on\\_climate\\_change/transcript](https://www.ted.com/talks/greta_thunberg_the_disarming_case_to_act_right_now_on_climate_change/transcript)

Greta Thunberg, TEDxStockholm, November 2018



“There are no grey areas,  
when it comes to survival.”

# Undercurrents

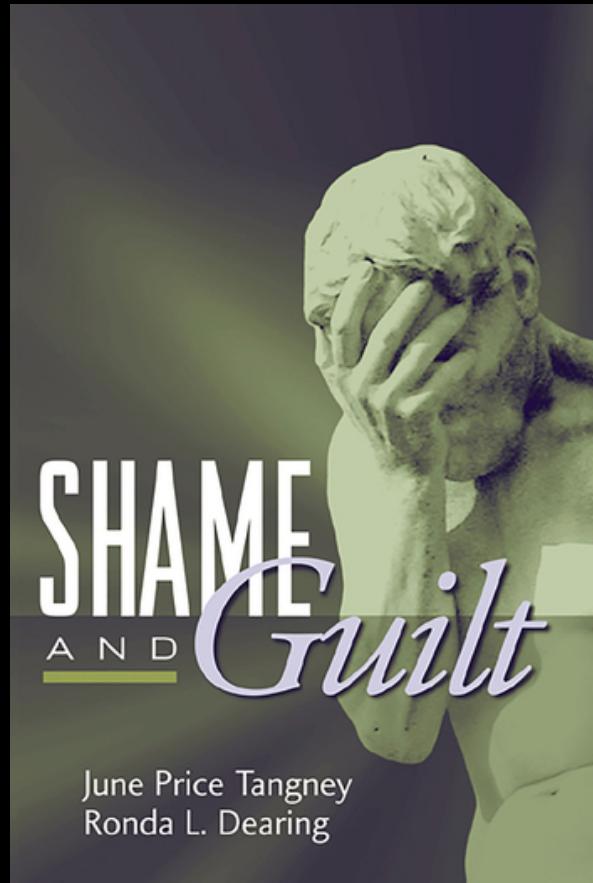
Jesus: “Whoever is not with Me, is against Me,  
and whoever does not gather with Me, scatters” (Matthew 12:30)

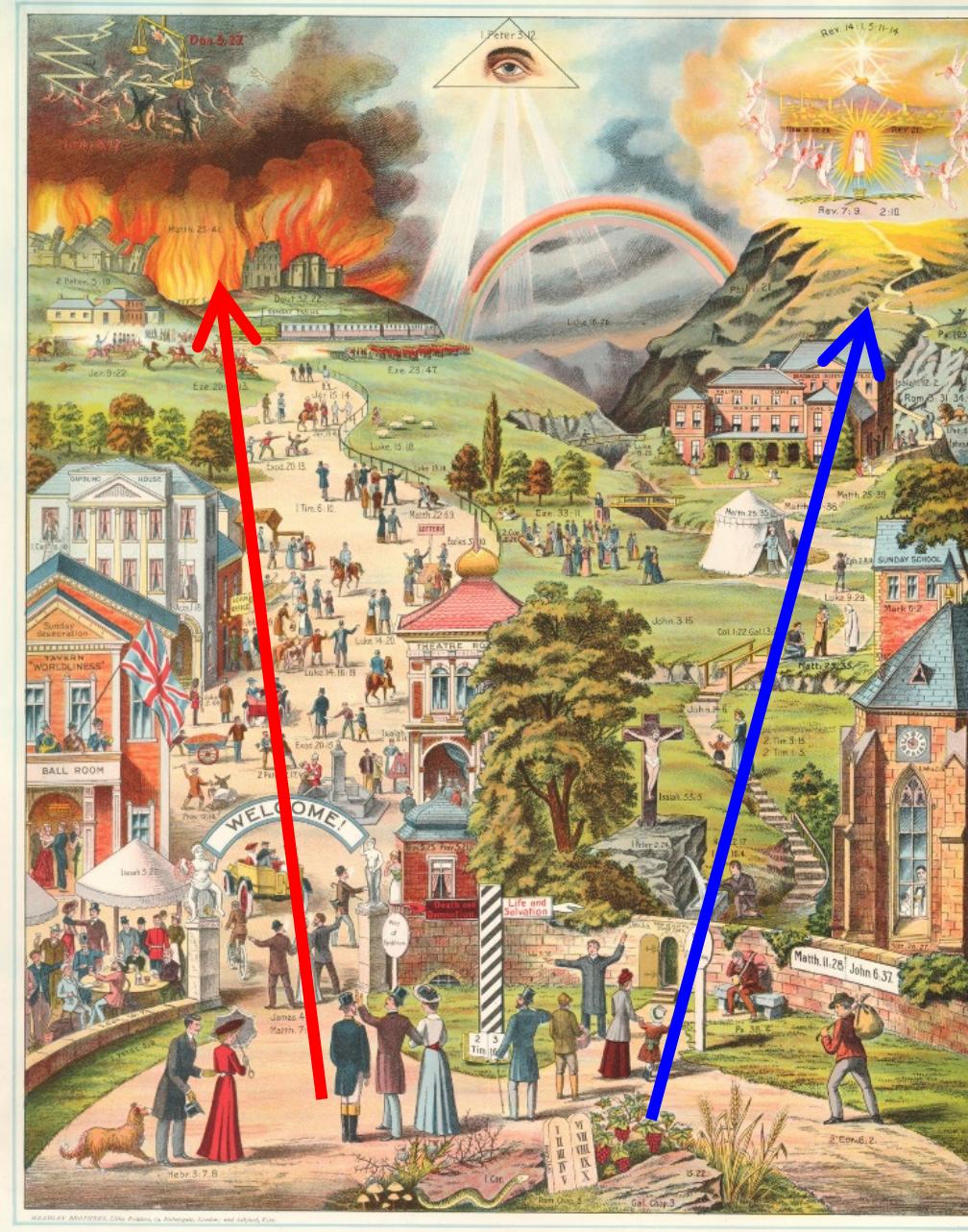
Flight shame (*flygskam*)

“Humanity is in grave danger,  
and it is our own fault.”

Calls for individuals to change  
their sinful ways and do penance  
were repeatedly decreed  
as a means to avoid future calamities ...  
Can these ideas be seen  
as a deeply entrenched cultural pattern  
in the Judeo-Christian World?

David L. Heidenblad,  
*Vårt eget fel.* 2012





## THE BROAD AND NARROW WAY.

Matthew VII., 13, 14.

This Picture is of German Origin. It was designed by Mrs. CHARLOTTE REHLEN, of Stuttgart, in 1862; and, at her request, was painted by HENRICK STACHEK, a young Artist, also of Stuttgart. A Dutch Edition was published in Holland in 1863. One of these Dutch copies was brought from Amsterdam in 1868 by Mr. GAWIN KIRKHAM, from an enlarged copy of which he has learned nearly a dozen times. This English Edition was issued in 1883. The "History and Explanation of the Pictures," with Portraits of Mrs. REHLEN and Mr. KIRKHAM, may also be had of the Publishers, One Penny each.



Matthew 25:41: “Then he will say to those on his left:  
You are cursed! Go away from me into the fire that burns forever.”

WHAT DO YOU DO IN YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE THAT IS BAD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT?

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONFESSION!

# To confess

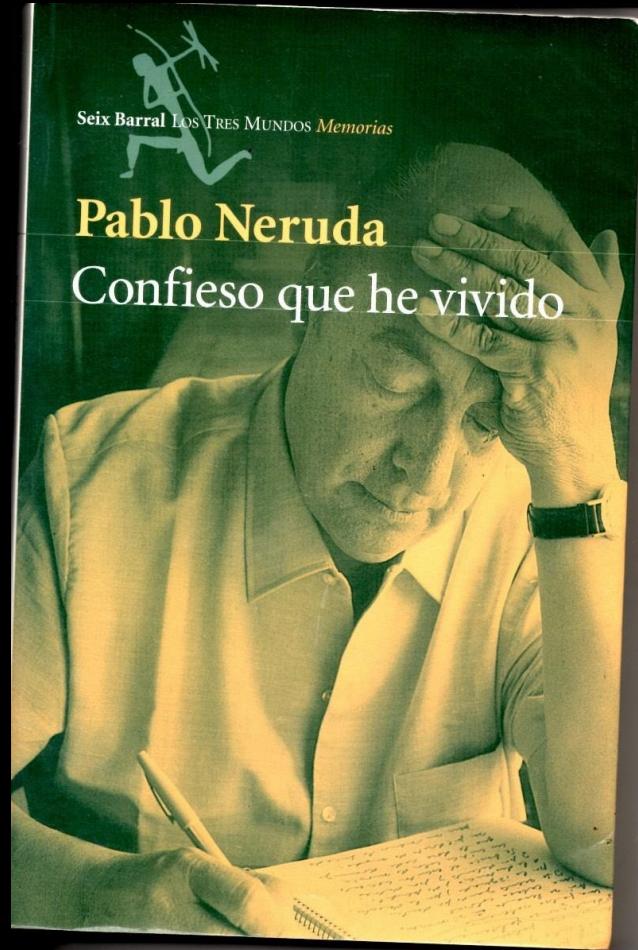
From Latin *confiteri*:

“to acknowledge”, the admission of a fault, crime, sin, or debt. Originally, in religion: the disclosing of sin or faults to a priest.

“*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and foresaketh them shall have mercy*” (Proverbs 28:13).

**Repentance:** sincere regret or remorse. The act of confession might include an admission of guilt, an intent not to repeat the offense, and an attempt to make restitution for the wrong.

Pablo Neruda:  
“I confess, I have lived.”





# Humour

*You got me singing, even though the world is gone*

*You got me thinking that I'd like to carry on*

*You got me singing, even though it all looks grim*

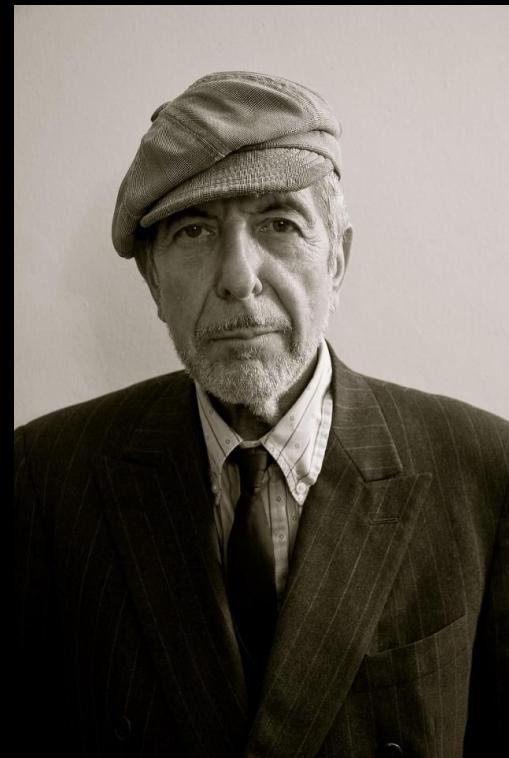
*You got me singing the Hallelujah hymn*

For the last quarter of his life, Leonard Cohen was one of my closest friends ...  
In his company I never censored my thoughts. Since his passing I have  
realized that he was not only a close friend but a life mentor.

One of the most inspiring aspects in this regard was what one could call his  
heart bravery. It is, in my way of seeing, the highest form of courage. In fact,  
the word *courage* comes from the Latin *coeur*, meaning *heart*. Leonard's special  
genius was his ability to communicate both the sorrow and the beauty of the  
world, even in the same sentence. He never looked away from either, not even  
in his final months when pain wracked his body. He had a twinkle in one eye  
and a tear in the other.

Catherine Ingram, excerpt from her reading 'Facing Extinction'





In those last years of his life, we had many conversations about climate chaos, as he knew I was studying the subject. He always listened intently and asked pertinent questions throughout our discussions. Although climate had not been his own focus (his was more a passion for world politics), there was no surprise for him in seeing how close we are to the edge. He understood human nature and assumed we would do ourselves in. One need only listen to his song *The Future* to know how prescient he was on the matter.

And yet, we laughed over all the years. Laughed like crazy. Leonard was a master of gallows humour, and I have a well-honed appreciation for that form as well. The power of gallows humour, and I highly recommend it in these times, is that it allows a sideways glance at the gathering clouds while one is still sipping tea in the garden. All of these small moments of recognition serve to accustom our awareness to difficult realities, to hammer at the chains that bind, to allow us to let go a bit. In sharing gallows humour, it is also comforting to know that your friend sees the tragi-comedy as well. There is an amortizing of the burden when we share a heavy load.

Courage is often confused with stoicism, the stiff upper lip, the bravado that masks fear. There is another kind of courage. It is the courage to live with a broken heart, to face fear and allow vulnerability, and it is the courage to keep loving what you love “even though the world is gone.”

Catherine Ingram, excerpt from her reading ‘Facing Extinction’



# Lifeline to sanity and survival

Viktor Frankl reflected on the inner acts of rebellion by which prisoners maintained their dignity, sanity, and zest for life in the concentration camp, such as making art in secret, reading smuggled books.

“Humour, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above *any* situation, even if only for a few seconds.”



Viktor E. Frankl  
*Man's Search for Meaning*, 1946

# Grappling with double binds

# Paradox

A *seemingly* absurd or contradictory statement which, when investigated, may prove to be well-founded or true.

Examples:

- *Be spontaneous!*
- Epimenides the Cretan says: '*All the Cretans are liars!*'

Paradox is healthy; the truth is always one of complexity, of engaging in the dance of Shiva, in which the whole of good and evil gets wrapped up. Good and evil are so intimately joined that they can never be disentangled: “The first evil evidently was the *separation of good and evil.*”

Dwelling with paradoxes, riding *with* the dichotomy, is like embarking on a sort of voyage:

*“You come out knowing something you didn’t know before, something about the nature of where you are in the universe.”*

Gregory Bateson

# Dilemma



A choice between two undesirable alternatives.

A person is forced to choose between two possibilities,  
which are *both* unfavorable to him or her.

The alternatives are called the *horns* of a dilemma.

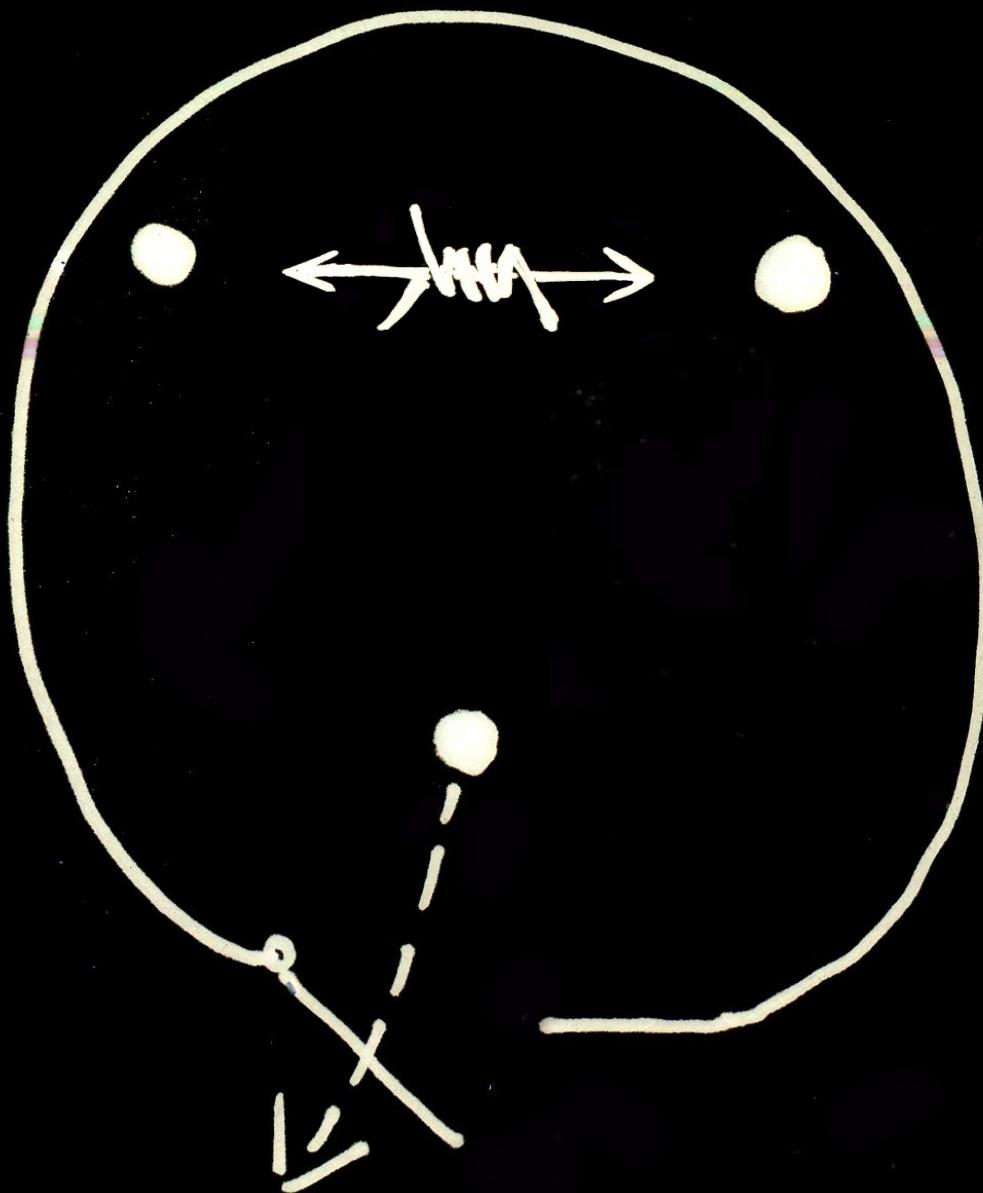


# Double bind

*“Damned if you dare, and damned if you don’t.”*

Three defining characteristics





# Double binds at the micro (family) level

“A young man who had fairly well recovered from an acute schizophrenic episode, was visited in the hospital by his mother.

He was glad to see her and impulsively put his arm around her shoulders, whereupon she stiffened.

He withdrew his arm and she asked,  
*‘Don't you love me any more?’*

He then blushed and she said,

*‘Dear, you must not be so easily embarrassed and afraid of your feelings.’*

The patient was able to stay with her only a few minutes more and following her departure, he assaulted an aide and was put in the tubs.”

Gregory Bateson  
*Toward a theory of schizophrenia, 1956*

“We have predominantly thought of the double bind as a destructive experience – a trauma. But while the experience of the double bind must always be partly unpleasant, it is also possible that this type of experience is an integral part of what we may vaguely call characterological growth. Without it, the individual would be in some sense static, even though with too much of it, he may be driven to schizophrenia.”

Gregory Bateson

# **Learning Non-Aggression**

The Experience of Non-Literate  
Societies / Edited by

**Ashley Montagu**

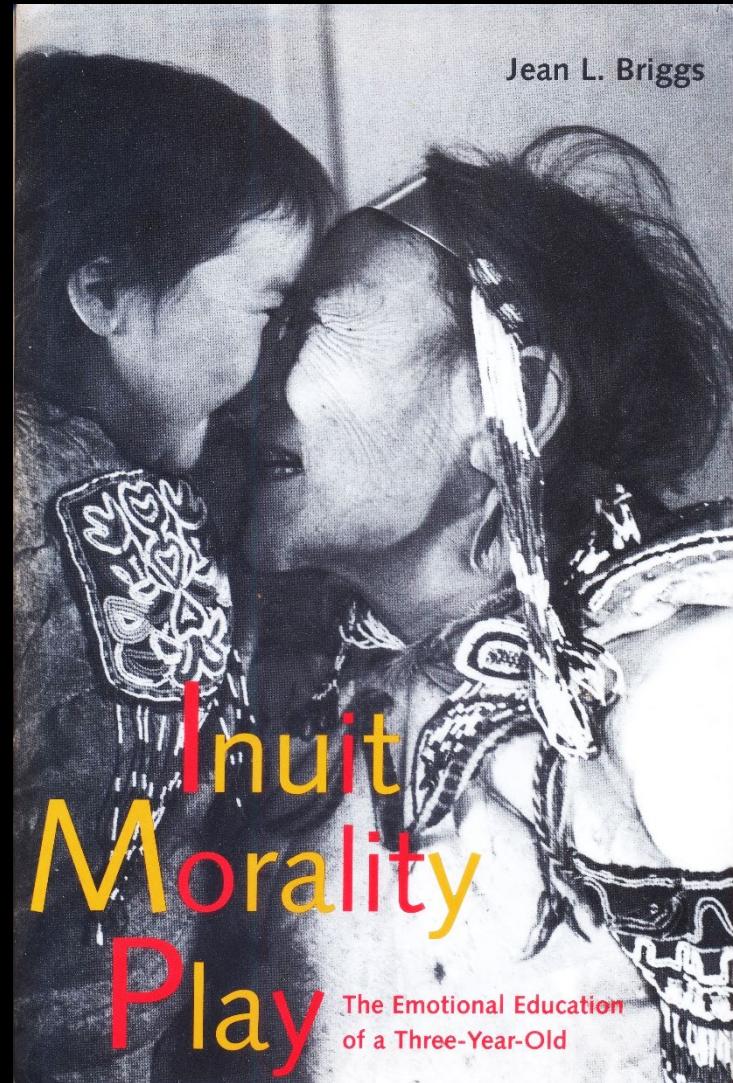
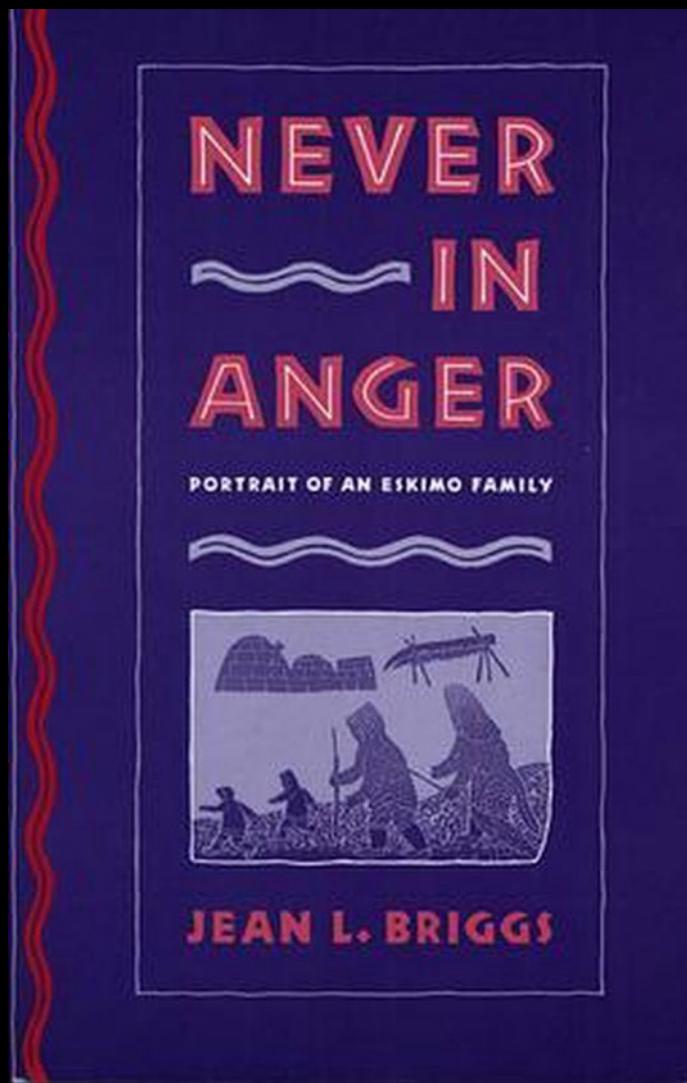
JEAN L. BRIGGS

The Origins of Nonviolence:  
Inuit Management of Aggression

1978



Jean Briggs (1929–2016), pictured during a 1974 visit to Baffin Island, Canada



# Loving Anger



*Ugiangu* in Qipik Inuit language:  
‘affectionately aggressive behaviour’

‘Mmmmm, doesn’t that [*bite*] taste good?’  
‘Wasn’t that [*slap*] fun?’





Photo: Johan Hallberg-Campbell for NPR

Briggs: “They don’t physically injure the child and the affectionate aggressive behavior is accompanied by smiles, laughs, and noises. It may be carried out to the point where the child cries or tries to appease the aggressive adult by hugging him or offering him a bit of food. Adults see the child is upset; they interpret the reaction as fear of affection and comfort him tenderly. The relationship which Inuit see between this aggressive behavior and affectionate emotion is clearly shown by the explanation of one woman: ‘A hurt child is more lovable.’”

# Learning Non-Aggression

The Experience of Non-Literate  
Societies / Edited by

Ashley Montagu

double  
Bind

11. The resemblance between this situation and the double bind described by Bateson (1956) is striking. There is a significant difference, however, in that the Inuit child is consistently taught how to interpret the apparently conflicting messages. He is told that the "I love you" message should always be given priority; and, whether he responds with laughter to that message or with tears to the apparently hostile message, he is rewarded by affection: encouragement or reassurance, as the case may be. In other words, "You see? I do love you." Thus, Bateson's third condition for the establishment of a double bind situation is not fulfilled; the child is able "to correct his discrimination of what order of message to respond to" (p. 176).

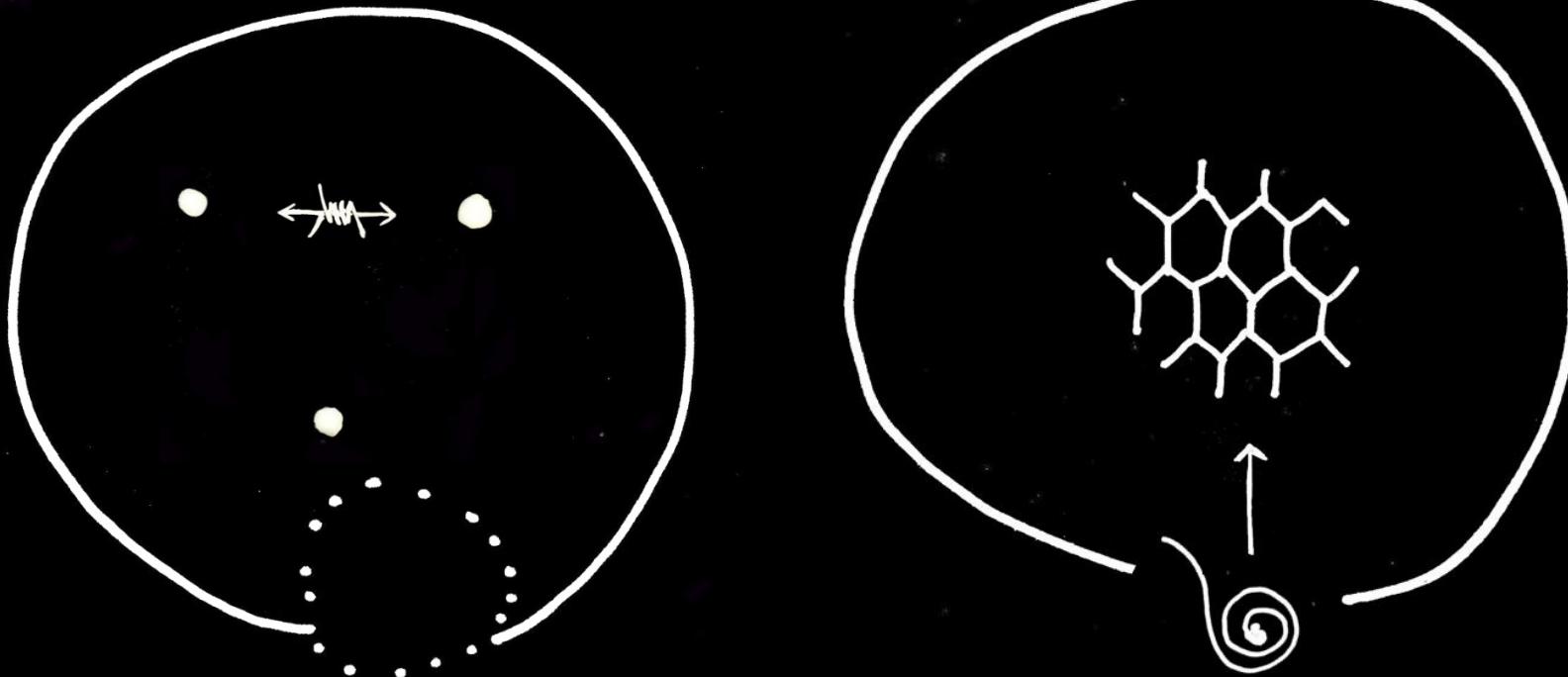
## Double bind

# Double bind at macro-level: dirty trick of nature



“Nature plays a sort of dirty trick upon the well-adapted organism. For many generations, she has let this organism act on the assumption that some characteristic of hers could be relied upon ... And now, the characteristic of the environment undergoes change. This is, in a sense, *most unfair*. Nature encourages the organism to rely upon her and then shifts tactics and says, “*You see. You relied on me. Now look at you. You are a mess.*” But in another sense or looked at in a wider perspective, this unfairness is the recurrent condition for evolutionary creativity.

Gregory Bateson



Conflicting imperatives, paradoxes and no-win situations, Bateson insisted, might well drive us mad, but they also spawn creativity, and even art. Faced with an impossible choice – a ‘koan’ as Zen Buddhists call it – you will be forced to revolutionise the way you think, in order to move on.

# The absurd



Video by Joseph Cronk, Wake Island in the western Pacific Ocean  
<https://youtu.be/cdjs5raf0BE>

Albert Camus, in 1942, at 28 years of age:

“There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy” (*The Myth of Sisyphus*).

And in an interview in 1945, he said:

“Accepting the absurdity of everything around us is one step, a necessary experience: it should not become a dead end. It arouses a revolt that can become fruitful. An analysis of the idea of revolt could help us to discover ideas capable of restoring a relative meaning to existence, although a meaning that would always be in danger.”



The Absurd, for Camus, is the result of the “confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.”

He takes of the old myth of Sisyphus, which tells the story of how Sisyphus betrays Zeus, the father of the Gods. For this he is punished by having Death sent to him. Subsequently, in the shadow realm, he is forced to drag a big piece of marble up to the top of the hill, But when he is almost there, the stone rolls all the way back again and he has to start anew.

Camus focuses on Sisyphus’ thoughts when marching down the mountain, to start anew.



“It is during that return, that Sisyphus interests me.  
A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself!  
I see that man going back down with a heavy  
yet measured step toward the torment  
of which he will never know the end.”

This is the truly tragic moment, when the hero becomes conscious of his wretched condition. When Sisyphus acknowledges the futility of his task and the certainty of his fate, he is freed to realize the absurdity of his situation and to reach a state of contented acceptance.

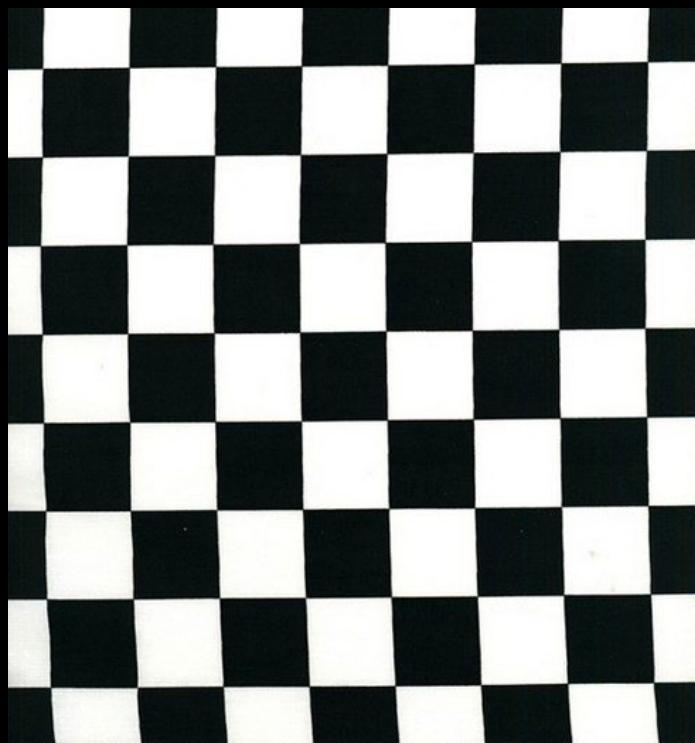
Camus says, “There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night”, implying perhaps that it is crucial to accept an irrational, even absurd, suffering as part of the human experience.

“I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain. One always finds one’s burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks ... He too concludes that all is well ... The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. *One must imagine Sisyphus happy.*”



Albert Camus,  
*The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942

# Mindful schizophrenia



“There is something wrong with you if you are *not* profoundly saddened or depressed by the state of things at the moment. You need help, to work out why you are *not* depressed.”

Stephan Harding,  
resident ecologist  
at Schumacher College, UK



# THE SCHIZOPHRENIC SOCIETY

Lost in a make-believe world  
while we destroy the real one

ROGER BOYD  
B.Sc., M.B.A., M.A.

“Industrialized societies have only been able to continue with their destructive and suicidal ways through the development of delusional beliefs, manufactured hallucinations that hide reality behind the cloak of an imaginary world, and deeply flawed logic ...”

Confronted with an individual showing such symptoms, a psychiatrist would quickly recognize the manifestations of ... schizophrenia.

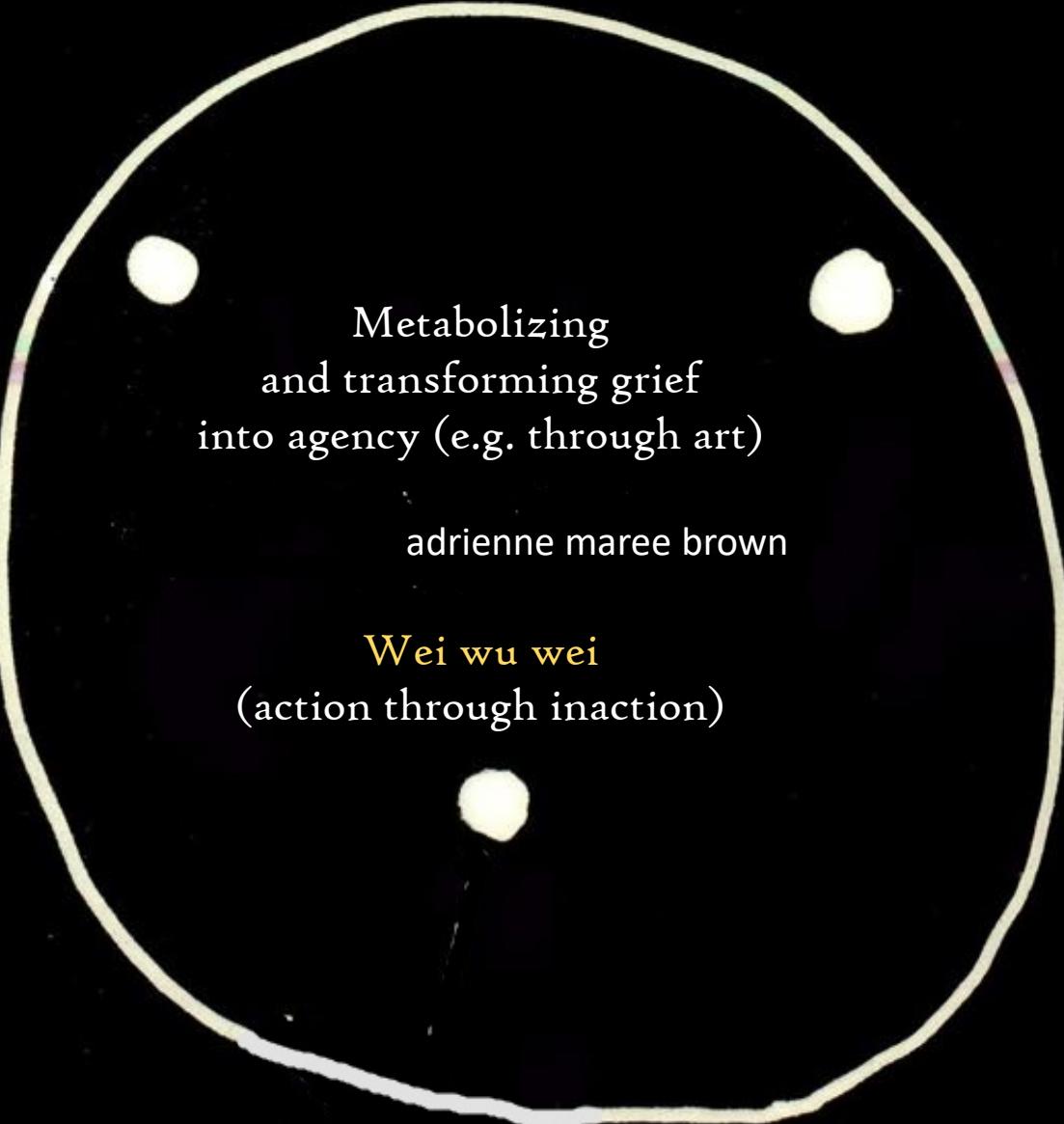
The very nature and functioning of complex modern human societies rely upon **group-level schizophrenia**.”

**Schizophrenia**, etymologically, refers roughly to a “splitting of the mind”. The Greek *schizein* (“to split”) and *phrēn* (“mind”). The term schizophrenia used to be associated with split personality by the general public, but that usage went into decline when split personality became known as a separate disorder.

**Mindful schizophrenia**, I would suggest, involves consciously embracing the concurrence of a multiplicity of antagonistic voices. The mindfulness consists of accepting being engaged in situations and practices that are (or appear to be) in contradiction with each other, but to do so with one’s full awareness: exercising the practice of deliberately bringing one’s attention in the present moment without judgment.

The idea of mindful schizophrenia is not a kind of “legitimatization” of cognitive dissonance. It does not imply “anything goes”.

*Staying with  
the trouble*



Metabolizing  
and transforming grief  
into agency (e.g. through art)

adrienne maree brown

Wei wu wei  
(action through inaction)

# A tragic optimism

To remain optimistic, in spite of the “tragic triad,” which consists of **suffering, guilt, and death** (all three experiences that often lead to existential crisis).

*How is it possible to say yes to life, in spite of all that?*

“Tragic optimism presupposes that life is potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable. And this in turn presupposes the human capacity to creatively turn life’s negative aspects into something positive or constructive.”

Viktor Frankl (1984)

# A distance from beauty

David Sobel often cites a woman who narrowly survived California's 1989 *Loma Prieta* earthquake ... This woman believed that the earthquake, far from destroying her life, saved it. She had been combating a borderline psychological state at the time, and then the earthquake came. She said later that the process of coming to terms with this massive natural act was more effective than any of the therapy she had received. Something about that experience shook her back to earth.

Sobel:

“The phrase that stood out is the diagnosis she came up with for herself. She said she had suffered from a ‘*distance from beauty*.’ That idea has become a part of me. I know when I am suffering from that distance from beauty. The solution for me is to find my way back to a closeness with nature.”

cited in Richard Louv  
*Last Child in the Woods*, 2005



“Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree”

Purely following reason, this makes no sense.

- (i) *Either you believe that the world will end tomorrow, and then any effort to try to stop this from happening would be a waste of energy. Why not celebrate the time that is still left and resign to the inevitable?*

# Nature Bats Last

*Our days are numbered. Passionately pursue a life of excellence.*

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## Abrupt, Irreversible Climate Change

December 13, 2019

Nothing will remain on earth, or under the earth or in the waters which will not be persecuted, disturbed and spoiled, and those of one country removed into another. And their bodies will become the sepulture and means of transit of all they have killed. ~ Leonardo da Vinci  
Donald Trump's Director of National ...

[Read more ▶](#)

## Sapience Project Interview

December 12, 2019

On 5 December 2019 I was interviewed by Frank Forencich for his Sapience Project. Forencich edited our conversation into video and audio formats, both embedded here. Published February, 2019: McPherson, Guy R. 2019. Only Love Remains: Dancing at the Edge of Extinction. Woodthrush Productions, New York. Cloth edition Paper edition Electronic edition McPherson, ...

[Read more ▶](#)

## Round Twelve with Peter Miller

December 12, 2019

Special Notification: The 57-acre homestead I occupied in western Belize has been re-listed for sale (click here for listing). My partner, who owns the property, must spend time with her family in Florida. She is selling the homestead at a monetary loss to be closer to her family as the planet burns. At the edge.

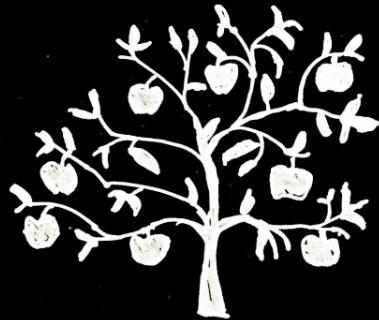


## Contemplating Suicide? Please Read This

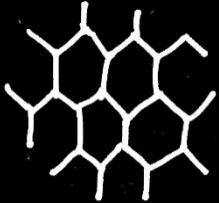
July 8, 2014

If you are contemplating suicide, please re-consider. And then click here for awareness, prevention, and support on the topic of suicide. I'm not advocating for or against suicide. [...]

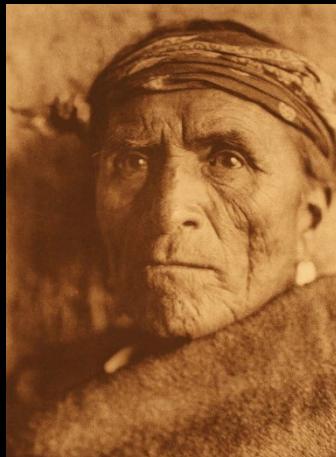
The *other* position – *planting* the apple tree and ignoring, repressing or denying the news that ecological collapse may be inevitable – would constitute a kind of ostrich behaviour which might leave one ill-prepared when dramatic changes *do* start to unfold, when there indeed is ‘no escape’.



However, if one is able to mindfully embody the paradox, one may possibly develop a degree of equanimity, allowing one to retain one’s sanity – without feeling forced to settle for either one of these two contrary positions.



Now what might this all mean?





“...a position  
that allows  
a sideways glance  
at the gathering  
clouds,  
while one  
is still sipping tea  
in the garden.”



Photo:  
Robert and Shana  
ParkeHarrison

Jan van Boeckel  
Professor Art & Sustainability  
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