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Within and Without : Imaging the Inscape

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WITHIN AND WITHOUT

IMAGING THE INSCAPE

Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights: the accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like Braille. I like to keep my body rolled up away from prying eyes.

Jeanette Winterson

Psychotherapy is an unfortunate word which does not resist the suffocating grasp of the language and ideology of psychiatry. The words 'therapist' and its distant cousin 'analyst' sustain the position of the enemy, in that for many, the therapist represents a moral standpoint of normality, an inequality between the relationship and pact entered into by both people. Where art in psychotherapy is concerned, the therapy embarked upon is a transformative journey into a person's inscape: the unmapped terrain of the psychic self. It is a pilgrimage beyond consciousness where language loses its rational potency and the intellect must be left behind. The cool, neutrality of empiricism has no place here, where instincts live before representation and so both parties must risk letting go of conscious control and its defences. These internal processes can no longer be observed for some things cannot be reduced for they live in images. The therapist must suspend judgements and remain a companion and poet, a negotiator at the periphery of consciousness. Every action in this landscape is an encoded message surrounded by mystery and beautiful adaptations. The therapist's purpose is in assisting imagery to traverse the great impasse into awareness and is not to discover simple metaphors, but to respectfully accompany the often weary traveller through territory which is no longer governed by the laws of surface knowing, where perspective, gravity and inertia give reason to our actions.

Deep below the surface, *the disembodied feelings of every thought float in a private sky, and disguised truths are deeply encoded in the earth beneath. Every grain of this sand has made its lonely journey here; each has its own story and has been moved by unexplored seas to come to rest on these internal shores. These are the true seas of madness where no compass works, where shipwrecked moments have come to lie deep below the watery surface. No logical invention could survive the crushing weight of every abandoned tear of despair, beneath which all lenses would break and the breath is squeezed from sentences as in sobbing. Only the imagination can emerge from these waters without crying; “stop the experiment! The water is freezing”. Below the depths of each person’s inscape where the tyrannical sun can offer no perspective, there exists in this darkness, long forgotten creatures and mythical monsters whose fantastical adaptations find new ways of speaking out in phosphorescent pulses of colour amongst this fuzzy grey edgelessness. Only recollected images can transcribe these vivid scenes without loss. These creatures have long, feeling tendrils that find their way to the ends of fingertips and communicate their evolution vividly on paper.*

The therapist should repeat these poetic journeys to the end if they are able and the traveller is willing, to discover together pieces of cloaks and disguises torn by dense thickets, and to wonder out loud at these encoded signs. Each journey’s step can be retraced, leaving territory we know well behind to hear the breathing walls that whisper of times forgotten only by the moment and to help prise open floorboards like wounds to find those things that the body has not yet forgotten. Although we cannot read the writing on these internal walls nor here birds beating their wings against attic windows, these memories can be at last allowed to emerge from where they have remained, incarcerated, for they were too ghastly to be remembered.

Not everything can be fixed nor mended in this landscape and were we to work such rough magic here, as in mesmerism, of what use would this be on this side of consciousness? Were we to follow our spades and excavate long forgotten selves and figures known to us like legends, we could not reach their huge hearts before the worms have done their duty.

Yet this revisiting reminds us of why they lie buried here and the grieving can begin and then be ended.

*Just as in the landscapes of our dreams, there is richness in the inscape where meaning resonates at every level of being, though this meaning cannot be snatched back to reality with reasonable words without compromise. The therapist is no doctor, no diagnosis should be made, no samples taken, and no analysis should take place. Within this terrain the tricks and tools of science are useless and wonders will not vanish with evidence. Far beyond the idea of the mind, the body has a deep understanding, which penetrates the surface (the façade of the self.) When we won't listen to the body or allow its expression, a person's identity can't be declared in the world. This is not a search for a singular truth but a **drawing** back of the layers of disguise that have protected the true self in its emotional fragility. We can mean and feel many ways at once and remnants of each costume survive despite the odds. Where old methods no longer work and true meaning is eroded and explained away, the self becomes buried when old **methods are madness** and the body will cry out.*

*These cries mean unwellness for some, and if not well restrained, truths may come close to becoming undone. We could call each defence and distraction **diseases**, but illness makes a person passive and powerless against their bodies. We should take note of these signs and play a more active role in each transformation. Dream therapists believe that an ignored communication from the unconscious will call out again and again until noticed, for **emotional noise** can't be switched off. When we wake from dreams with a start, has the message been important enough to break through the barriers of sleep and **reach out into awareness**? Similarly, the body may send up a swelling of feeling to drown out our words, but these moods are never forgotten, they only subside to rise again and again from our internal seas until they are attended to. If thoughts become disembodied from feelings a person may as well inhabit their body like a boarder, who means to make no real attachments so that he can move on without pain, without*

loss. There are many ways of knowing, we feel it in our bones, the imaginative mark is a secret code communicated by the body and uncurtailed by logic. We shouldn't fear visiting the place of nightmares and the making of meaning, the contrivance of codes. Sweep away the dust from the rims of pictures hanging in the hallways to unconsciousness, for these images compel and command our attention!

The art therapist is not a doctor and so the images which emerge through the process of the therapeutic journey, are not analysed for the purpose of classification nor diagnosis. Instead she extends her hand out to the traveller as an invitation to step beyond the ever-shifting boundaries of conformity and reason for these battlefields must be left behind for any transformation to occur. For those accused of defecting to the other side of reason, they may greatly fear leaving their state of high alert, where they may have stood their ground, guardian at the borders of awareness for too long.

Each traveller must hatch a plan of escape lest he be swept away by the flow of things, for complete attention must be devoted to this process of perpetual becoming. Some people have retreated long ago to the safety of their inscapes, where madmen dressed as kings will not relinquish the control that they wield in this inverted world. Yet if they could glimpse the images and idioms of their symbolic behaviour and begin to understand what their bodies already know, soon the shapes and colours of their fears and beliefs will come to be noticed and the secret signs and symbols of our collective knowledge can begin to be transcribed. By re-imagining the inscape they will come to know what thoughts can look like and the body, no longer silenced, may draw out with emotive power the true extent and wholeness of the self. This process can not be forced by the therapist and she cannot locate that moment of becoming, where the client gains a greater maturity and the truth that was known to him only below the surface, emerges into awareness and can be seen and felt and known in wholeness.

*At first her necessary silences might cause anger in the client as he has been taught to want for answers. Slowly though he will see this silence as, at first, **permission** and then **possibility** and all a therapist can hope to be is a companion, aware of her part in this journey, as it will stir up truths and deceits in her too. She can also speak of signs and symbols, and translate the myths and legends and instincts known to us all, (Jung called this the collective unconscious). The therapist, I believe should be an **artist** and **poet** to translate the imagery and poetry of psychic life without reducing its mystery, beauty and multiple meanings to simple metaphors and its content to the laws of aesthetics. Talent has no purpose here, yet some fluency in the language of the imagination is paramount. Those parts of our lives that exist only as flashes and glimpses of feeling, alongside the dusty shelves of the memory, those forgotten moments that lay strewn around the library floor, **unlabelled** nor ordered and in a foreign tongue, had come to be abandoned there before we could read, or speak of things not fully felt nor understood. Only through images can these pages be transcribed and finally shelved in their proper place. I am an artist not a typographer of the human inscape, but I hope to become the **unimpeachable witness to many acts of self-recognition.***

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