



The Threshing Floor

November 2014

Newsletter of the Guild for Psychological Studies

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Guild Vision: The Guild envisions a world in which the significance of each person's truth, authority, and inspired purpose finds fulfillment in life and community.

Guild Mission: Guild seminars offer a way of psychological and spiritual transformation that inspires individuals to live their purpose, expand consciousness, and discover and create meaning in their lives and community.

Human Possibilities: A response to Norman McMullen and Chris Weil

--from Harry Henderson

I was gratified to be engaged by several responses to my September article in *The Threshing Floor*—in particular, both Norman McMullen and Chris Weil direct us, I believe, to crucial questions.

As modern humans we can focus on our needs as individuals, on the ego level. But we can also think about the needs of our community, the fate of our species on a rapidly changing planet, and even consider ourselves as a *phenomenon* “from outside” as it were. No other animal, and no computer can do this (at least not yet).

This ability to switch among several perspectives has helped us cope with significant shifts in how we see the universe and ourselves. Notice how this shift began with our place in the universe (Copernicus), then the nature of life (Darwin), and finally, the nature of consciousness (depth psychology and neuroscience). Meanwhile, technology moved from relatively simple power substitution (steam) to the transmission and modulation of power (electricity) and finally the encoding and transmission of information (electronics). A movement from the physical to the “spiritual.” At the same time the *pace* of change has sped up exponentially.

These shifts have hit increasingly closer to home—first the physical, then the biological, and finally the psychological. I believe that these are just the foreshocks of a logical earthquake, and will call for every bit of perspective and intuition we can muster.

I believe the generation represented by most of us in the Guild, having rather successfully negotiated many social and cultural changes over the decades, tends to see what is happening with technology and the changing nature of work and production to be only external factors or characteristics of the environment. They may be challenging, but they don't reach the core of our being.

So when Norman says “There is that within us that can make choices whatever computers are offering us in a personalized way,” I would say yes, we experience ourselves as making choices, as part of the narrative and sense of self that we create. But, allowing our perspective to shift, we find that there is more than one standpoint from which to tell the story. Just as it's not enough to understand “the idea of squirrelness” by observing only an individual squirrel without regard to the species and the ecosystem as a whole, I would argue that “the idea of the human” requires a larger perspective than only the subjective experience of each of us as human individuals. We are embedded in an ecology of ideas that have taken on a life of their own, of which the Web is an increasingly important part.

Consider the “digital natives,” the young people under 20 years old or so who grew up with today's technology. Many of them don't remember, and can hardly conceive of, a time when information on any subject wasn't instantly available anywhere. The social web, too, has “always” been there. There is hardly a perceptible pause between emotion, thought, and tweet or Instagram photo. And while there may be exciting jobs available if one has the right skills (big data analytics, social marketing?), what is this “career” that grandpa or grandma says you should be planning for?

Norman suggests that it is only the “work status,” not the “actual status” of the individual that is becoming problematic. But work has always been bound up with one's sense of identity, stability, and purpose. When this changes, the sense of self also changes—the answer to “who are you?” and “what do you do?” Is that not part of the “actual status”?

What about our social life? A few years ago, when I asked a young friend about his dating and girlfriends he was puzzled. Rather than “dating,” there now seems to be a kind of molecular movement of people who connect and hook up in various ways for different purposes, individually or in ad hoc groups. As a thoughtful observer of technology and its effects, I can understand some of this conceptually, but it is not my *experience*. It hasn't constituted me in the way it has for that young person.

Each idea has a historical genesis. The idea that there is a fixed “core” of individuality that has an essential freedom to choose is an expression of a particular time and place—roughly, among reasonably well-educated people living in the Western world starting around the middle of the 19th century. (As is often the case, the idea was anticipated by philosophers and writers a couple of centuries earlier, but I am talking about the “governing idea” that the majority of people “live as.”) If the idea of the human is now changing, then how individuals are being constituted and how they see themselves are also changing. This is what I mean by a “logical shift in the status of the individual.” It is important to differentiate this logical shift from the experience of particular individuals, where the circumstances of upbringing, life

experience, and age all help form that specific person.

So how does this relate to the Guild and its vision, which Chris cites? Before modernity, the question of “each person's truth, authority, and inspired vision” came from religion (God) and from being part of a society and its institutions. It was experienced, but not really carried by, the individual. However, Jung observed more than half a century ago that “Our myth has become mute and gives no answers. The blank barrenness of the world reaches up to the very stars.” (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 332 and *Collected Works* vol. 9i §29).

Jung recognized that there no longer could be some absolute “metaphysical” source of truth or authority any more. Nothing fixed. Each of us as an individual must find the truth of “what we exist as” and any authority we can exercise can only come from the authenticity of that truth. But our greatest legacy from Jung and the Guild founders is that we have experienced an “Other” to the ego. We know that “the soul [is] for the greater part outside the body” (*Collected Works*, vol. 11 §389). We know that in dream and myth *and in the phenomena of our world* psyche (soul) “speaks about itself.” What is needed here is to apply the attitude and perspective of our psychological work not just to our personal “inner world” but also at another level, to soul that is constantly creating itself in culture and history.

I certainly don't know what the “idea of the human” might become later this century. I do know that we humans can bring multiple perspectives to it, and reflect upon and try to cope with the differences and tensions between these perspectives. And after all, it is difference and perspective and dynamic tension that constitute soul.



Haiku from 1999 Seminar

Alyzsa Van Til
in gratitude for the richness of my Guild experiences

Acorns leave behind
a chalice fit for a queen.
Drink now: winter comes.

Raining of leaves begins--
is this the time of dying?
Now my own tears flow.

Golden browns of fall
speak harvest richness of earth
which my heart
desires.

November Birthdays

Lela Noble	Nov 1
Judith Collins	Nov 3
Irene Scholtens	Nov 7
Sally Blackburn	Nov 11
Shirley Fritchhoff	Nov 11
Marilyn Watson	Nov 14
Helen Saul	Nov 16
Ray Flachmeier	Nov 19
Eleanore Stanton	Nov 21
Louise Miller	Nov 22
Deborah Bowes	Nov 23
Dian Greenwood	Nov 26
Gene Sandretto	Nov 26

Hold The Date:

Solstice seminar at Four Springs

December 5 – 7, 2014

Casting Seeds Group

If the deepening dark of the year is a mirror, what does it reflect?

Full write-up and details will be sent out by email in the next two weeks.

Project Proposals accepted

Nourishing the Soul, 2015

April 13 to 16, Monday thru Thursday
The Guild Board approved the “Nourishing the Soul” seminar planned for 2015. The proposal has a balanced budget as well as scholarship monies available for participants who might need some assistance with the fee. The deposit has been made to Bishop’s Ranch.

Casting Seeds, 2014-2015

The Guild Board approved a new project proposal for Casting Seeds, 2014-2015.

Ideas change, people change and organizations change. With regard to the Guild’s leadership training class Casting Seeds, there has been a change in its core self-defining idea.

Casting Seeds has been the Guild's leadership training class for eight years. Over the last two years the class has stabilized into a group of five dedicated people committed to leadership and leadership development within the Guild. The idea that has emerged out of the group’s work together is to now see itself as a Research and Development Laboratory within which ideas, research, events and seminars are fertilized, nourished, cultivated and performed. The group will continue to have two leader/facilitators and each of us will be project and idea researchers and generators, working together to explore soul and ways to bring soul work to the public in order to fulfill the Guild's mission and vision statements. The group will no longer be an open class for training leaders, and is now a self-contained working group within the Guild.

While the group essentially works year round, the budget for the group spans the ten-month academic year, September through June, 2014-2015.



In Bleak Midwinter
A Solstice Meditation
at Four Springs
Dec 5-7, 2014

Leaders: Faith Mason and Hal Childs
With the Casting Seeds group

Fee: \$350, plus a nonrefundable \$50 registration fee.

Scholarships are available; contact the Guild office for scholarship information: office@guildsf.org

To register, contact: The Guild for Psychological Studies,
PO Box 29385, San Francisco CA 94129-0385

Or register online with PayPal at:

www.guildsf.org/seminar-registration

For more information, email

halchilds@earthlink.net or faithmasonmft@yahoo.com

Creeping darkness, thinning light, another approaching winter solstice. No matter how dark it gets, we know the season will turn toward spring.

The creeping darkness of the human heart and mind is another matter. It comes upon us at a moment's notice, triggered by who knows what. States of despair and meaninglessness can swallow us whole. And what of the world's despair, the world's bleak midwinter? Now that the heavens are empty of the gods, and history seems meaningless, what are we to do? When struck with insignificance, are we powerless to help ourselves?

What attitude is called for by the bleak midwinter, whether personal and/or existential? Within these dark states, is soul longing, is soul calling, for our attention? Is it possible to stand and face meaninglessness, within or without, and discover some truth? Can we meet our midwinter with courage, love and openness?

Come and help us deepen our exploration of this dark season as a mirror of soul.

What question is addressed to you by this year's dark midwinter, your inner solstice?

Silence, group discussion, expressive arts, body awareness, nature, good food and good company will help us work together as we open to the dark's own voice.

Donations

The Guild is a nonprofit group, with 501(c)(3) status, and so your donations are tax deductible.

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Please note: Items for inclusion in the Threshing Floor should be mailed to the Guild Office, Attn. Threshing Floor Editor, or emailed to office@guildsf.org. The deadline for each issue is the 20th of the month. Items received after that date will be published the following month.

Friends and Members

Friends of the Guild are donors and others interested in receiving Guild information who are not Voting Members. Voting membership requires active participation in some form of leadership or committee role, or other volunteer effort, and the payment of annual dues. Voting members may receive a print subscription to the Threshing Floor upon request.

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Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this newsletter (by contributors other than staff and directors) are the writers' and not necessarily an official position of the Guild.

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