

# At the River of Decentering

A Dialogue in Honour of  
the Work of Paolo Knill

Jürgen Kriz and Sally Atkins

Life, psychotherapy and counselling are processes. So is art. Although some artistic disciplines may also display a more or less static “work,” this is only an intermediate fixation in the art process. This seems to be clear when we focus on playing music or moving in a dance. The disc on which the music or the dance may be recorded is not treated as an art piece at all, at least in normal cases. Of course, you can make art also with the material of the CD or DVD by painting on it, arranging a few of them or shaping the material itself, but there is no beauty in the surface of a CD or DVD. You have to put it into a player to listen to or to watch the beauty. The same is true concerning a printed poem (while, again, the book may be laid out in a very lovely way). There may be a kind of beauty in the black marks on white, but someone has to read it or to perform it for the beauty of the poem to emerge. With a performance, the beauty of the poem and the beauty of the performance come together, hopefully supporting each other and increasing the space of beauty. Even in the case of a painting on a canvas, the art is neither as stable or “material” as the canvas itself is. Someone has to look at it, and the beauty emerges from this process of encountering this part of the world (called painting) with senses and mind. The work-piece lets the



beauty unfold via an encounter. Those paintings, especially, to which we attach responses like "ahhhh!" or "great!" are reasons to access different aspects of beauty on different days with respect to the way we feel and look at the canvas. As a consequence, process is essential when we are dealing with art.

In order to reflect on and value these process-based aspects of life and art (making), the authors of this contribution to the special issue of *POIESIS*, dedicated to the work of Paolo Knill on the occasion of his 80th birthday, decided to offer not a "finished paper" but a dialogue, which might reflect the never "ready" aspects of dealing with life and art. Moreover, a dialogue may portray the ever-flowing search for meaning and understanding. We decided to focus first on the question: *How we do understand and explain the benefits of expressive arts in psychotherapy, counselling and coaching, and how do we see the special contribution of Paolo Knill.* Although we begin our dialogue with this question, it is not a starting point but more of a whirl in the river of flowing ideas related to Paolo Knill.

**Jürgen:** In order to enter into dialogue with you, Sally, I want to begin with a very short and unpolished point concerning our "whirl" question, and then let's see how the river of dialogue may flow. My understanding of the benefits of expressive arts is deeply connected to the way I understand "problems." Problems have to do with an overly-reduced complexity of the chaotic, at least poly-semantic phenomena, in how we encounter the "world." This means the way we shape our relations to the environmental world, to other human beings, and to ourselves and, correspondingly, how we understand and describe the principles of these encounter processes. The Swiss psychologist

Piaget coined the terms *assimilation* and *accommodation* to describe these processes. *Assimilation* means to use the principles and schemata we have in order to structure the "world" and our experience. But this process might become inadequate, and we have to *accommodate* these principles and schemata to adapt them so they fit better with the experience. For example, a two-year-old boy may have a lot of success by crying very often in order to get the attention, regard and care of persons around him. However, this principle, pattern or schema will not work when he is 22, at least in most cases. So he would need to accommodate his principles (methods) of receiving attention, regard and care.

From the perspective of the "Person-Centered Systems Theory" (PCST) one would say that the structures of the life process (on many different levels) always have to adapt to the changing structures of the world. This is called a "phase transition" of patterning or structuring, or in the words of wisdom, "die and become" (because old structures must die and new ones must become). This is typical for development and works very well in many, many areas and life-spans for many people. However, there are a rather small amount of cases in our lives and in the society of human beings when this does *not* work. That is the meaning of "having a problem." Good solutions in the past are not changed in tune with the changing world but kept stable and become, therefore, inadequate.

Without going too deeply into the details of PCST, this stagnancy and lack of necessary transition often has to do with our tendency to use abstract and reduced "sense" instead of the real, vivid, complex experience of our *senses*. "My partner is not supportive," is such an

abstract description which seemingly uses the *sense* of a multitude of experiences. However, this statement is neither helpful nor adequate. What would be more helpful and true would be to very carefully look, listen, and feel the many moments in your experiences. What do you really feel, hear and see? What are your thoughts about the feelings, needs and experiences of your partner? Staying with this multitude of moments will open up new understandings, meanings and possibilities of interpretation and reaction.

These examples and descriptions clarify that the tendencies of reduction and over-stabilization are supported by language and categories (which are always at least one step removed from sense experience). Expressive arts, and especially Paolo Knill's concept of decentering, is a good way to overcome or bypass these reductive trajectories and open the human's mind to the multitude of vivid, detailed, complex, sensible differentiations in sense experiences.

**Sally:** First, I want to thank you for your invitation to join you in this dialogue. I love the word *dialogue*. For me, it conjures an encounter in which each participant holds the intention of seeking to understand the thinking that stands behind the other's words as opposed to the word *discussion* which implies more of a back-and-forth conversation.

I also love your metaphor of the whirl in the river. Dialogue about Paolo Knill's ideas and ours is much like a river which is ongoing and likely will continue long after our little whirl. As you know, I live in North Carolina, a landscape of rivers. Four rivers are born in the land where I live, and they flow in each of the cardinal directions. I can imagine Knill's ideas reaching in many directions as well. *Whirl* also makes me think of a dance, so I am happy to join you in what may be a dance of words and ideas.

There are so many ways to think about, describe, and seek to remedy human problems in living. Many theories in psychotherapy and many philosophical discourses have attempted, with varying degrees of usefulness, to do so. I agree with you that we as human beings have tendencies toward reduction, abstraction, and over-stabilization of our experience and that these tendencies often limit our capacities to experience life fully. I also think that these tendencies are shaped and reinforced by language. In the English language, the preponderance of nouns gives us the tendency to view a tree, for example, as a thing rather than a process.

The arts offer a way to counter these reductive forces and open us to the rich, complex and sensory-based nature of experience. Paolo Knill and Herbert Eberhart have offered the field of expressive arts therapy a particularly valuable method in their concept of *decentering*. This method is described in detail in their

writings. Basically, decentering in coaching or therapy involves having the client move away from a presenting problem or issue to enter a sensuous immersion in an art-making experience. With careful and detailed descriptive questioning, the client is invited to reflect upon both the process and the product of the art-making experience in order to discover internal and external resources that have potential relevance to the life situation. This is a kind of "cracking of the categories" of reductive thinking.

The decentering method uses the art-making experience as more than simply a way to express emotions or thoughts. This way of working with the arts creates an epistemology of the senses, whereby our experience and our very ways of knowing are expanded, and we are able to more fully encounter the unfolding processes of the world. What occurs in expressive arts therapy also activates and supports the innate gifts of imagination. Another way to think about human problems, and what helps address them, is to think of problems, being "stuck" somehow in life, as failures of the imagination. Then artistic experience awakens the imagination, another way of cracking the categories of reductive thinking and lets us use another kind of language than that of words.

**Jürgen:** So, we both agree that *decentering* is a very important concept, describing the way of detaching from encrusted and abstract wording of the world, and devoting oneself instead to the vivid, ever-flowing art process which reflects the process of life, both personal and ecological. In making art, you are forced to let go of the abstract description of a problem and focus on the process of micro-steps, carrying forward and unfolding an art work

that has not been planned (at least not exactly in all the details). Surprise is inevitable. And this surprise reconnects the human being to the forgotten or overlooked resources of his or her immanent creativity. Instead of an abstract "river," you have to experience at least some of the multitude of drops, each one reflecting the world around you in different colours, aspects and angles, each one running its own way in tune with the whole system called "river" and respecting the condition of the surrounding landscape. If you encounter a "problem," then by decentering, focusing on the art process, and looking back from that vivid experience, it is obvious to discover that every "problem" is, in reality, made out of a multitude of "drops of moments." Each moment reflects your worldview (i.e. where you are so far, how you are so far, what your expectations towards the world are, what the expectations of the world towards you are) from a different angle, showing different aspects, possibilities and options. This may open up the much-too-narrowed space of options and possibilities which one calls "a problem."

I hope, Sally, that you like my further metaphoric playing with the abstract "river" and the sensed "drops." That is really my inner image of solution-oriented work, where "solution" does not mean to reach a fixed end-status but to dissolve a big, seemingly solid "problem" into its multitude of particles within the water of life, making it fluid and bringing it in tune with the river.

This brings me to your last remark, concerning the idea of being or getting stuck, which I hear often in descriptions from psychotherapists (even humanistic ones). For example, one might say, "The process (of my therapy and/or development of my client) got

stuck." I don't believe that this is adequate wording with respect to a process-oriented perspective. A river, or the life process, from my understanding, never gets stuck. A river which gets stuck is not a river anymore, but a lake, and when the process of life gets stuck, we call that death. So, what do we mean when we use this phrase "being stuck?"

I am eager to hear your opinion and experiences about this.

**Sally:** I suppose that all of the words we use are in some way reductive. I agree that the river of life, the life process, does not get *stuck*. It is ongoing. So what is this experience we call *getting stuck*, or as I prefer to say, having problems in life, and how does decentering in art-making help? The river metaphor makes me think of a time some years ago when my husband and I were tandem canoeing on the North Toe River. Somehow we rammed our canoe directly onto a large boulder and for a while we were stuck there, with the front end on the rock and the back end submerged and filling with water. We were unable to disengage our canoe by ourselves and needed the help of our paddling companions to disengage from the rock, make it to the shore and empty the canoe of water before going on. This seems to me much like problems in living where for various reasons any of us might get hung up on a "rock" and need the assistance of someone to get back into the flow of life.

This is how I see the role of a psychotherapist, not to fix a problem but to offer assistance to a client to get back into the flow of the river of life. How we go about doing that is, of course, dependent upon our particular therapeutic perspective. As an expressive arts therapist, I find the art-making process, par-

ticularly the use of decentering, to be a very effective way of helping. If I make a parallel to decentering, I would say that the art-making inquiry process and subsequent discussion in the context of a therapeutic relationship can help the client to discover for themselves how to dislodge the canoe and to navigate the twists and turns of the river more successfully. What is important for me is to recognize that it is still their canoe, and they are still the ones paddling it and the river is still flowing. What I like especially about this way of working with the arts is that the client is able, through the sensuous and richly detailed art-making experience, to find resources for meeting whatever challenges the river brings.

Would you say more about how you think decentering helps us to experience life as "drops of moments?" And I am wondering if there are other factors besides a "too-reduced complexity of the chaotic" that come into play when a person faces a "problem."

**Jürgen:** Your experience of being stuck with your canoe at a big boulder in the the North Toe River gave me reason to think more about the ideas of feeling stuck in the river of life and the value of Paolo Knill's decentering approach. To start with the latter, the image of a group of paddling companions helping you to disengage from the rock seems to be a wonderful metaphor for decentering from the rocks in the stream of life. In both realms you have to step back from being too near to and fixed by the rocks, which in life you may call "a problem." However, as we already agreed, a "problem" is a solid, rock-like idea which attracts all your flowing and still-running thoughts to itself only, and in this way narrows the many possible ways of being carried forward.

I understand and accept that you wanted to “go on” with your canoe: paddling and not stopping is a reasonable way to use a canoe. And perhaps you wanted to reach a given point at a given time. You wanted to be with your paddling companions, and, moreover, as you told me, the back end of the canoe was submerged and filling with water, which is indeed rather uncomfortable. So, I wouldn’t deny that it was a necessary solution to “de-center” your boat physically from the rocks with the help of your friends in order to again reach the broad stream of possibilities past that point in the landscape.

However, when I say that “I understand and accept,” I am already within the frame of a special (and narrowed!) interpretation of “getting stuck.” I am sure that wanting to reach a final point at a final time was not the only reason that you travelled by canoe. Otherwise you would have taken a car on the nearby road. This would have been much more effective (shorter time, higher validity and reliability to reach exactly that point), because boulders on streets are more rare than in rivers. So, it was not so much the efficacy of going from point A to B (as it is suggested in today’s competitive debate on empirically-supported treatment in psychotherapy). But it was also the idea of having some fun which brought you onto the river in a canoe.

But if you look at the “facts” from this perspective, it might be interesting to discuss what “being stuck” really means besides the obvious reality of a canoe on the rocks, getting stuck on its way from A to B in time. The river was still running, as was the process of your life. So, when playing with perspectives and frames of interpretations, you could have said, “How nice it is, to be physically stopped

by this boulder,” because you now suddenly had the time to look at the wonderful flowers at the riverbanks (while previously, your mind had to be focused on keeping the canoe in the stream), or you could have been happy that you had some moments to talk with your husband or embrace him, while the other paddlers are not immediately around you. You could have focused on your body, feeling how exhausting it was, having gone at the same speed and schedule of the paddling group. You could have enjoyed the opportunity to go your own way and to detach from the expectations of the others for a short while.

Of course, I am just playing with possible frames and narrations of the facts you shared with me. If any of this would include some truth, you wouldn’t speak of a moment of “getting stuck” but, in contrast, of a moment where you made a big step in your life (despite, or better, *because*, the matter of the canoe was fixed by the matter of the boulder). What I want to stress is the point that every moment, every word you read or hear, every formation of “facts,” has a multitude of possible meanings. At least in many cases, a “problem” and the experience of “being stuck” have to do with *just one* interpretation. This might be reasonable and justified, like the focus on the canoe on the rock while you wanted to keep paddling in the running river. But even in this example, this was not the only possible way of “being in this special moment of life.” And in many other frames of “problems” which our clients are narrating to us (and to themselves), there is even no material canoe and no material rock but only a narrative which narrows so much the river of playing with their resources, that the clients don’t see their resources any more—they just focus on what is *not* running. Here a reframing would

be helpful, a stepping back from this fixation, and that is exactly what "decentering" offers. And, as we discussed before, the frame of making art is much bigger and more important, much more polysemantic than the frame of everyday words in our society, which are bound to explanations, apologies, and abstractions.

I wonder whether or not my narration concerning your canoe on the rock made any sense to you?

**Sally:** Yes, I understand your point that the stories told about so-called problems usually represent a narrowed perspective on the situation involved, and that decentering is often a very effective way of enlarging the perspective. In the situation which I described, one aspect we have not mentioned is the experience of physical and emotional distress that my husband and I were feeling from being partially submerged in very cold water and knowing that there was as well a possibility of drowning in the fast flowing whitewater. I think fear and distress are often a major factor with people who seek help for their problems and this emotional and physical stress also serves to narrow the perspective on the range of possibilities in the situation. I think that a very important aspect of decentering is that in working with the arts we enter a different space from ordinary daily life, a space in which imagination is activated and supported through the arts. In this space of art-making, clients are supported in discovering not only new perspectives on their life situations but also their available resources, both internal and external resources. An important aspect of this space, which is physical as well as psychological, is the presence of the therapist, who offers non-judgmental witnessing

and clarification of the situation.

Perhaps we are stretching the river metaphor too far, but if we consider detachment from the rock as a metaphor for decentering, we would be interested not only in getting free from the rock and righting the boat, but also in finding what resources we had to continue on and to avoid getting stuck on future rocks. My husband and I might think about our ways of working together as tandem paddlers, how we read the river and how we maneuver the canoe. We might also remember that both of us are strong swimmers and would likely not drown even if we went into the water, so that our anxiety might be reduced. I believe that by reducing our distress and focusing on our resources we might be better able to negotiate the river more successfully and even to experience some "drops of moments" more fully. Decentering in therapy, in my experience, enables clients to reduce their immediate distress, to discover or re-discover their resources and to expand their perspective on their life situation.

**Jürgen:** I am grateful that you introduced the very important point of distress and anxiety in our discourse. Indeed, I totally agree that these feelings are, at least in most cases, the emotional background that human beings carry into their reduced patterns of descriptions, actions and understanding. We know from literature as well as from our own experience as therapists, and simply as human beings, that "problems" and "symptoms" sometimes have been former "solutions" in troubling situations. In contrast to the ongoing transitions from old and inadequate patterns to new and more adequate ones, there is often not only the fear but even the experience that small changes might make these

much the amazing dialogical walk, together with you, Sally, through a cognitive landscape where a river quickly emerged and became an important focus. This river metaphorically represents the ever-flowing moments of our life processes, sometimes only being registered as the boring, well-known river, a series of always-stable whirls, with seemingly no change, as if the river got stuck. Then sometimes we experience life as an always-changing multitude of drops, patterning into wonderful whirls which can and do change when we have enough time or we can observe carefully enough what really happens. And sometimes we can even enjoy the beautiful drops of that river, particularly when a fish jumps, or when we throw a stone into the water. Then we notice the sparkling in the sun and mirroring of the trees and mountains, similar to those you see when you look out of your window. Thank you for walking dialogically with me with no concrete plan or idea as to where we wanted to go, but with trust that any dialogue makes sense if you are really interested in an encounter. The river, the trust and the dialogical capacities are good metaphors for some aspects of the decentering process. Moreover, I hope that readers may find some drops in our dialogical river that also reflect the beauty of the work of Paolo Knill, particularly the notion of decentering.

**Stephen K. Levine:** Jürgen and Sally—as Editor of the *POIESIS* journal, I cannot help being an eavesdropper on your dialogue. Perhaps it would be interesting to our readers to introduce the perspective of the “third,” the outsider who intervenes between the mutuality of a couple. This intervention might bring about the possibility of “difference,” the destabilizing perspective that opens up new views of the subject in question. Or it may be that

underneath the perceivable differences, there is a fundamental agreement that prevents the violence which arises from denial of the Other. The only way to find this out is to engage in the encounter.

In this spirit, I would like to raise two questions that come to me in reading your reflections:

1) Jürgen, if I understand you correctly, you identify the word “problem” with a reduction of the chaotic flow of life into abstract generalizations which fix a particular moment in an ongoing process. In other works of yours that I have read, you similarly emphasize the chaos underlying our too-orderly perspectives on our lives. This is an important point with which I fully agree, as I’ve written about elsewhere (cf. my book, *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering*). Chaos is frightening, and we often attempt to find stability when it would be much more effective to “go with the flow.” Moreover, the arts make room for a certain experience of chaos—one of the reasons that Plato wanted to banish them from his ideal city, founded on principles of order and hierarchy. In a therapeutic context, Winnicott emphasized the necessity of chaos and fragmentation as an essential element in the therapeutic process, even to the point of seeing most interpretations as attempts to overcome the therapist’s own fear of lack of control over and understanding of what was happening in the moment—whereas the most therapeutic thing would be to let it happen without, as Keats said, “any irritable reaching after fact and reasons.”

However, I wonder if there is another experience of chaos that is not creative flow but rather destructive violence or madness.



I am always aware of the possibility of death or destruction arising from natural or human causes. This is why I retain the words "trauma" and "tragedy" in my own thinking. There is a kind of breakdown which can occur in social or individual life that brings our existence *in extremis*—perhaps the word "problem" is inappropriate in these cases, not so much because it is abstract, but rather because it underestimates the gravity of the situation. After all, any word we use in our theoretical formulations is abstract, including "chaos" or "flow." So, my question to you is, how do you account for the tragic dimension of human existence within the framework you set forth in this dialogue? How can the "dark side of the force" be encompassed within your process-oriented and person-centered conception?

2) Sally, I'd like to ask you a similar question about language, one that comes from our mutual experience as poets. You seem to agree with Jürgen that language is necessarily reductive, and that one of the benefits of decentering in expressive arts is that it takes us away from words and brings us back into contact with our bodies and our senses. I think this is also an important point, but I wonder if in your desire to validate sensible experience you underestimate the possibility for language itself to bring us back to the real. Is not poetic speech itself a concrete use of language, which, rather than reducing experience to abstractions, opens up our lives to a new richness and plenitude? Otherwise, why write poetry?

I note that in your own words in this dialogue, you describe vividly the experience of being "stuck" in a canoe and fearing for your life. Perhaps "stuck" is an abstract word, but "canoe" is not—and in your description I feel

again that moment of fear and uncertainty that can come when life is out of my hands. Similarly, when you write about drinking a cup of tea, the sensuous apprehension of taste comes to me through your words, and I am taken into an imaginative apprehension of the real, rather than being distanced from it by your use of language. Indeed, in decentering we often use poetic and dramatic language as an essential element of the process—after all, the arts are not mute. Thus my question to you is, how as a poet can you incorporate your experience of language into your understanding of human experience and, in particular, your understanding of decentering in the expressive arts?

**Jürgen:** Steve, it is good to remind the reader and all of us of areas in human experience, when the firm fabric of our existence begins to unravel—when all, or main parts of, order collapses and we find ourselves utterly exposed to the incomprehensible, destructive, and dreadful aspects of "being in the world." I have written about this in many articles and even some books (*Chaos, Fear and Order*, for example) and even argued (in accordance with other philosophers and scientists) that our ability to reduce the incomprehensible "chaos" by inventing order is partly an answer to that challenge by the "dark side of the force" (as you called it).

However, in our dialogue, Sally and I said at the beginning that we decided to focus on the question, "How we do understand and explain the benefits of expressive arts in psychotherapy, counseling and coaching and how do we see the special contribution of Paolo Knill?" Therefore, we focused on the benefits of *decentering*—which would not be a good approach when working with a person experi-

encing this kind of breakdown. It makes sense to look at (and analytically invent) different areas of stability or safety in life. So, when a person recently had a car accident and lost his legs (safety of the body) and, because of this, his wife left him alone (safety of narrow, secure social relation) threw him out of their house (safety of a "home") and, moreover, he lost his job (safety of a job) and his income (safety of financial resources), it would be really dangerous and irresponsible to destabilize his belief-systems (as long as this gives him some stability in life); rather we ought to support all processes to find new areas of order and stability in his everyday life. However, this is not the normal case when a client or coachee comes to somebody professional to ask for help concerning a "problem" (as he might call this himself). Then, in most cases, decentering is a good (part of an) approach, to overcome the over-reduced and over-stabilized categorical description of "what life is" (including principles of understanding, relationships to the world, to other human beings and to himself).

Moreover, it is not necessarily language itself which amplifies reductive tendencies. It is the *capacity* of language to reduce the highly complex, polysemantic meaning of every moment to a nearly monosemantic term or definition—particularly in science, and (influenced by that) also in our "Western" everyday language and conversation (for example, reification—to treat processes as if they were things—is a typical structure underlying SAE=Standard Average European, as linguists have shown). Therefore, poetic language with its highly complex, polysemantic features can, of course, be used in a decentering process in order to question the seemingly self-explanatory, obvious meanings and descriptions. I

think that Sally will go into more details on this point.

**Sally:** Welcome, Steve, into our dialogical river. It is always exciting when the "third" arrives, especially when he is a poet. Thank you for your question about poetic language. This is an important topic for me as a poet, and I would say that language is fundamental to my experience of being human. We are the animals who speak in words. So when I am speaking about the arts, I am of course including poetry and poetic language. As a poet there is for me the challenge that I can never fully express in words the fullness of my experience and I love attempting to do so.

As I have said, I agree with Jürgen that our human tendencies of reduction and stabilization are supported by language and categories, and, at the same time, I also know that words can open us to further possibilities of what you, Steve, have called an "imaginative apprehension of the real." This phrase of course opens to further question of the nature of "the real," which could take us into an even bigger and wider river of dialogue.

So the arts and poetic language are a good way to bypass the reductive forces and open the human mind to a sensuous, vivid and detailed experience of the world. Words can both reduce and open, and words are tricky. Words are embedded in historical, cultural, societal, and individual contexts, so we never fully know what they are evoking in others. Yet, as we know, poetic language has the power to touch us deeply, both in the act of shaping words and in our capacity to respond to words. I am thinking now of the thirteenth century Persian mystic poet, Rumi, whose words cross barriers of language, culture and

history to touch us deeply today.

The language part of decentering is very important. Particularly in the stages of aesthetic analysis and harvesting, we ask questions in a careful and detailed way with sensitivity to what emerges in the moment. Then we help the client to name what has been experienced and discovered in the art-making, and we mine that experience for resources. I find that what is discovered in this process is often expressed in multileveled symbolic and metaphorical language. And as Herbert Eberhart often points out, we generally have a rich language for what is wrong, but an impoverished language for strengths, resources and hope. So part of the therapist's work is to help the client to enrich the language of resources.

I am glad to elaborate on the paradoxical nature of language. Words certainly can reinforce the reductive forces of categorization, and words can also crack those categories in strong ways that help us to experience life more fully.

**Steve:** Sally and Jürgen, thank you for your replies. I think they clarify some of the points at issue. Although we agree on many things, I would like to close by underlining the differences between us, as I understand them. Perhaps they will lead us to new perspectives in future discussions.

Jürgen, I think we disagree about the meaning of decentering and, consequently, about the capacity of the expressive arts to encompass human suffering. If decentering primarily means stepping away from the literal reality of an individual or community and moving into the alternative world of the imagination, then what better medium than art-making for plumbing the depths of human experience? The arts have always been vehicles for both celebration and mourning, and indeed arts therapists of all kinds have been particularly helpful in situations of overwhelming trauma.

Sally, I'm glad to see you acknowledge the capacity of poetry to enrich our lives, as your own work indeed does, but I'm not sure that we have the same understanding of the relation of language to sensible experience. In my view, sense experience does not necessarily come first and language, whether abstract or concrete, after. Rather, I think there is a complex dialectic between experience and language such that a new understanding of a phenomenon and new ways to express it verbally may change the way we experience it through our senses. A common occurrence of this kind comes when someone instructs us how to look at a landscape or a painting—we literally see it differently when we have the words to name what we see. Language, which gives sense, can literally change our senses themselves.

I think that the arts open up the world for us and thereby allow us to experi-

ence it in a new way. *Poiesis* is transformative; by affecting our experience, *poiesis* can make a home for both our suffering and our joy. In a world without foundation, perhaps this is the best place for us in which to live and take our stand.

Thank you both for allowing me to contribute to this conversation. I hope there will be more to come.

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Hillary Hatziepetrakos—*Grip*  
*Acrylic paint, charcoal, 9" x 12"*

