

# **A** Methodology of the Heart

## **Making Space for the Heart's Wisdom in the Research Process**

by Dr Louise Livingstone

### **Abstract**

This paper proceeds on the understanding that the heart is a producer of knowledge and considers the possibility that heart-based knowledge can be taken seriously at the socio-political level. Consequently, this paper lays the foundations for a methodology of the heart that can be engaged with across many areas of life to help interpret the deep complexity of the world. While this might sound impractical or impossible from within contemporary Western discourse, such a methodology honours, and makes space for, different realities. By tracing the journey of the heart in human awareness from ancient to modern times, profound limitations with our current knowledge base can be perceived, and consequently it becomes possible to consider the validity of developing knowledge about the world through the inherent qualities and capabilities of the heart. This heart-centred knowledge, I suggest, is something that each of us possesses but have forgotten how to interpret.

### **Introduction**

In this paper I am considering the possibility of a methodology of the heart as a basis for engaging philosophically and practically with *the deep complexity of life itself*– across the personal, political and universal circle of human experience.<sup>61</sup> My doctorate, ongoing research, and therapeutic practice, endeavours to respond meaningfully to archetypal psychologist James Hillman's (1926-2011) lament that in contemporary society we are bereft of an "adequate psychology and philosophy of the heart".<sup>62</sup> Indeed, in modern consciousness the heart has been reduced to a biological organ understood through a medical science narrative,<sup>63</sup> which itself is the generally accepted way of making sense of the world. However, this does not mean that such an explanation is adequate; particularly in relation to how we make meaning in, and consequently engage with, the complexity of our world.

This statement is important, particularly considering the turbulent times that global humanity is currently experiencing. Across millennia, the heart has been known in a myriad

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<sup>61</sup> Anderson, 1998, p.79

<sup>62</sup> Hillman, 2007, p.6; Livingstone, 2019, p.17

<sup>63</sup> Bound Alberti, 2012

of different ways, affecting perception and action. This paper considers the idea that the heart is a producer of knowledge about the world that can be genuinely relied and acted upon. An important step in making this claim is to trace the journey of the heart in human awareness over the past several hundred centuries. By doing this, it is possible to see limitations in our current understanding in relation to where we generate knowledge from. Consequently a space can be created from which to bring forth a methodology for engaging more expansively with academic research, and life itself, that arises directly from the wisdom of the heart. In this sense, the heart is seen as an organ for the expansion of knowledge that can show us aspects of reality that are often overlooked. It is a research method that joins the wisdom of the heart (and its accompanying benevolent qualities) to critical reflection – a co-operative movement between heart *and* head. This movement seeks to bring deeper insights into life, which are often missed through the rational or scientific approach. The latter statement suggests that there are multiple ways that the world presents itself to us for interpretation, requiring many lenses (namely the intellect, accompanied by the senses, intuition and imagination) to help bring the world into expression and to participate fully with it.<sup>64</sup>

### Introducing the methodology

Firstly, and most importantly, this methodology requires that the researcher be willing to enter an imaginative mode of consciousness to connect with the soft whisperings of their own hearts. In the context of my research and this methodology, when I talk about imaginative consciousness, I am referring specifically to a type of attention towards life that offers the possibility to access a more expanded sense of the world itself, or as independent scholar in consciousness studies and esotericism Gary Lachman suggests, “create it, or...collaborate in its creation”.<sup>65</sup> The imagination here is being used in its broadest sense; that is, as a way to engage seriously with whatever might lie beneath outward appearances. This is in stark contrast to contemporary understanding that defines the imagination as an escape from, or substitute for, reality,<sup>66</sup> equated with “the unreal”,<sup>67</sup> and never in the sense of offering someone a deeper engagement with it.

The methodology brought forward in this paper is largely informed by Hillman and Carl Jung’s (1875-1961) depth psychological approach where imagination is seen as a bridge

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<sup>64</sup> For numerous religious these ideas are not new. For example, Buddhism, Sufism and Orthodox Christianity understands that the heart is the centre of the human being; a spiritual organ of transformation and perception that receives the emanations of subtler levels of existence (Livingstone, 2019)

<sup>65</sup> Lachman, 2017, p.31

<sup>66</sup> Lachman, 2017, p.31

<sup>67</sup> Corbin, 1997, p.181

between the unconscious and conscious realms of the psyche, and religious scholar Henry Corbin's (1903-1978) philosophical-religious understanding of the imagination, where the imagination acts as a bridge between the physical and divine realms. Influenced by the work of Muslim scholar and mystic Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240), Corbin understood the heart as the organ of the imagination – an organ of knowledge that mediates between the material world of flesh and the transcendent world of spirit.<sup>68</sup> An imaginal mode of consciousness, therefore, arises primarily through the organ of the imagination – the heart. It is the heart itself, that first receives the world as it speaks to us through images.<sup>69</sup> The heart then offers this understanding up to the abstract world of the intellect for rational critique. The imagination, and the heart as its organ of perception, is a facilitator for interacting with life itself as it unfolds in each living moment. It is the space which is able to hold the balance between opposite poles of reality.

Before moving on, it is important for me to point out that there are subtle differences in the understanding of the imagination from the point of view of Corbin on the one hand, and Hillman and Jung on the other. Specifically, Corbin's view did not embrace the depth psychological interpretation of the imagination mediating between the conscious and unconscious realms. In a similar fashion, Hillman's work does not embrace the transcendental nature of Corbin's imaginal world – a world that is deeply spiritual and infinitely real. However, despite their differences, it is the heart as the organ of imaginal perception that seeks to include all of these realms and interpretations, and as we shall see, it is the approach of this particular heart that embodies the methodology being drawn out in this paper.

In developing a methodology of the heart, I am building on the work of not just Jung, Hillman and Corbin, but present-day scholars of the imagination including Jeremy Naydler, Marie Angelo, Robert Romanyshyn, Rosemarie Anderson, William Braud and Angela Voss.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, each of these scholars understand that the imagination and intuition are essential ways of knowing that offer the possibility of revealing more of the world through the language that the world speaks. What I mean here is that, as Hillman states, the “world is a place of living images, and our hearts are the organs that tell us so”.<sup>71</sup> As our hearts receive the images of the living, breathing world of which we are an integral part, they move in conversation with the world through a living language of symbol and metaphor often revealed to us through daydreams, meditations, reveries or dreams. In such a state

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<sup>68</sup> Corbin, 1997, pp. 221-236

<sup>69</sup> Hillman, 2007

<sup>70</sup> See Voss' excellent paper, *Methodology of the Imagination* for further insight (2009)

<sup>71</sup> Hillman, 2007, p.16

of awareness, we find it possible to “move with the heart toward the world”,<sup>72</sup> offering the living quality of our experience of these images back to the world itself – keeping the world alive.<sup>73</sup> This visionary or perceptive imagination offers possibilities for engaging with the world that are not visible to the recognised bodily senses or intellect. In developing this methodology, I draw particularly on the discourses of depth psychology, esotericism, religious mysticism and holistic science which all provide imaginal approaches that can assist an individual to engage in a broad, deep and transcendent sense with life. With its roots in Plato and later in Sufism, the category of the imaginal is closely associated with Corbin who understood “the imaginal to be a noetic organ that accessed a real dimension of reality whose appearances to us were...shaped by what he termed the ‘creative imagination’”.<sup>74</sup>

A methodology of the heart requires that a researcher be *willing to commit to the approach as fully as possible* in order to bring forth the rich experience and information that it makes feasible. It is deeply important to make clear that working with a methodology of the heart is not for every researcher or every topic. Indeed, for this methodology to offer up its riches – that is, for more of the world to reveal itself through the heart as an organ of perception – researchers must be willing to experience an enhanced worldview; valuing direct, lived experience in relationship with the world, their own hearts and with their topic of enquiry. If such willingness is absent, what wishes to make itself known in the enquiry will remain hidden. From the outset, researchers explore topics that resonate with their own hearts, honouring their own life experiences within the wider world and the requests that these experiences make on them. In this sense, a researcher must be open to the transformative learning potential of their subject as understood through the wisdom of their own hearts in relationship with life itself.

### **Expansion of research methods**

Two scholars who have influenced the development of my methodology of the heart are transformative learning theorist Rosemarie Anderson and depth psychologist Robert Romanyshyn. Both scholars find common ground under the general umbrella of transpersonal research methodology – defined as qualitative rather than quantitative.<sup>75</sup> Anderson describes her intuitive methodology as an “epistemology of the heart that joins intuition to intellectual precision in a hermeneutical process of interpretation”.<sup>76</sup> In

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<sup>72</sup> Hillman, 2007, p.112

<sup>73</sup> See Hillman (2007) and Corbin (1997) for their appreciation of a living, ensouled world

<sup>74</sup> Kripal, 2017, p. 233

<sup>75</sup> Voss, 2009

<sup>76</sup> 2004, p.308

intuitive enquiry, the heart's wisdom nourishes and balances analytic ways of knowing, seeking to bridge the gap between art and science.<sup>77</sup> It is a direct perception of knowledge, an experience of the living world, that carries with it a sense that one "is tapping into a collective or unconscious source of knowing".<sup>78</sup> To capture the meaning arising from intuition, researchers are required to navigate between "often diffuse or dreamlike states that accompany intuitions and analytical reason and reflection".<sup>79</sup> With practice, researchers can "learn to witness...intuitive perceptions and integrate them with other ways of knowing".<sup>80</sup> The word practice here is of optimum importance. *Heart knowing, as we shall discover, cannot simply be understood as a process to implement.* It is a way of engaging with the world that takes on a unique quality and meaning for each person, which needs to be contemplated deeply over a period of time for understanding to arise.

Inspired by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), Romanyshyn speaks of knowing through the heart as beginning with a "turning where you lose your mind for the sake of the heart".<sup>81</sup> In his book, *The Wounded Researcher*,<sup>82</sup> Romanyshyn illustrates an imaginal methodology that enables a researcher to dialogue with the soul of the work. Romanyshyn states that the heart is particularly suited to an imaginal approach, suggesting what he terms "cardiognosis" – that is, "the place of the heart in knowing"<sup>83</sup> – as a method.<sup>84</sup> Cardiognosis is a term originally used by Annmarie Schimmel in her book *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*.<sup>85</sup> Taking inspiration from Schimmel, Romanyshyn defines cardiognosis as a way of knowing that is "neither about mind nor measurement...neither about the empiricism of facts nor the logic of reason",<sup>86</sup> aligned to inspiration, religious experience, enlightenment, vision.<sup>87</sup> In this context, the heart is understood as the place where one feels in relationship with an-other. In this sense, the path of the heart makes place for feeling in the work – where the researcher becomes like the work by "feeling with it and into it"; suffering in the sense of allowing the work to be what it wishes to be.<sup>88</sup> By using Anderson's and Romanyshyn's methodologies, in my own doctoral research I was able to speak to the soul of my work, which was the heart itself.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Anderson, 2004, p. 308

<sup>78</sup> Anderson and Braud, 2011, p. 20

<sup>79</sup> Anderson and Braud, 2011, p. 20

<sup>80</sup> Anderson and Braud, 2011, p. 20

<sup>81</sup> Romanyshyn, 2001, p.146

<sup>82</sup> Romanyshyn, 2013

<sup>83</sup> Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 115

<sup>84</sup> Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 287

<sup>85</sup> Schimmel, 1994

<sup>86</sup> Romanyshyn, 2002, p. 156

<sup>87</sup> Schimmel, 1994

<sup>88</sup> Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 288

<sup>89</sup> Livingstone, 2019

This enabled me to dialogue with my heart and bring forward the methodology of the heart that I describe later in this paper.

It must be pointed out that there are potential pitfalls with this approach in relation to research becoming a narcissistic therapy journey. However, I wish to make clear that this type of research is always focussed on what the heart or the work wishes to say in relationship with the researcher – it is, in essence, a constant “marrying of worlds”.<sup>90</sup> While the researcher is an integral part of the work, in recognising and remaining aware that one is in service to the work, the methodology described demands that the researcher continues to self-reflect and return to the work – an act which in itself provides the necessary benchmark/red flag for knowing when one might be moving into territory that is too personal or too self-indulgent.<sup>91</sup> In the same way, the heart itself, when engaged with authentically in relation to the work being carried out, is the intermediary between the work and the researcher – bringing worlds together and holding them with curiosity for interpretation. The heart, therefore, maintains the balance between the researcher and the research – acting as the focal point for critique and reflection.

### **Existing work that aims to honour the heart**

It is important to acknowledge that valuable work in the public arena is currently being carried out by several organisations that aim to bring the wisdom of the heart into contemporary discourse. Specifically, the HeartMath Institute in the USA has been focussing on the importance of the heart as an organ of intelligence,<sup>92</sup> since the early 1990s.<sup>93</sup> The HeartMath Institute aims to help people bring their physical, mental and emotional systems into balanced alignment with their heart’s intuitive guidance. The organisation conducts scientific research on the physical qualities of the heart, and offers training based on this research.<sup>94</sup>

Heart Shift is an organisation based in the UK. Heart Shift’s work aims to challenge outdated ways of thinking, clarifying and promoting a perspective of kindness as a new mode of being.<sup>95</sup> In this sense, Heart Shift’s engagement with the heart is framed around

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<sup>90</sup> Voss, 2009, p.52

<sup>91</sup> Romanyshyn, 2013, pp.139-140

<sup>92</sup> Chilton Pearce, 2004, 2012

<sup>93</sup> Childre and Martin, 2000

<sup>94</sup> See [www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org) for more information

<sup>95</sup> See [heart-shift.org](http://heart-shift.org).

the quality of kindness.<sup>96</sup> The work that these organisations carry out is deeply important and I wholeheartedly advocate their contribution to our turbulent times, however, where my work differs is in the sense that within many organisations, and within contemporary society in general, the heart is generally engaged with from the standpoint of a head-based narrative. This means that the heart is *thought about* from a particular, scientific perspective – what the heart *is like*, and what *it does*. While this approach has its place, it is a limited viewpoint, as we shall soon see that the heart offers an entirely different way of knowing the world as it perceives differently. Therefore, to truly gain a heart-centred perspective, it is imperative to *sit within the space that wishes to speak*. My research and practical therapeutic work therefore approaches the heart by *sinking into it and committing to thinking with the heart* – letting the heart speak first and the head follow. A subtle, yet deeply important difference, which plays into the head/heart dichotomy that I will illuminate shortly.

Indeed, approaching the heart from head-based intellect results in a number of problems as I have highlighted in my thesis.<sup>97</sup> Specifically, many scholars often mention the heart in relation to their work across the discourses of science, feminism and conflict resolution, but never precisely define what this heart is, or what it might mean in practice.<sup>98</sup> In each case, the role that the heart plays is left implicit - as though readers must understand what this heart is. In most cases, the heart being called for in the literature is generally associated with love, feelings, emotions, compassion and kindness. However, while we may intuitively know what we might mean by this heart, the issue is that a dominant narrative generally perceives any other heart (beyond that of a pump) as a sentimental add-on, and consequently nothing that we need to seriously concern ourselves with in relation to dealing with life. With this narrative and perspective firmly in place, it is impossible to explore understanding of the world arising in conversation with the heart itself or hope to develop a true methodology of the heart. It is also easy to see why heart-centred traits, like kindness, love, compassion, are often deemed irrelevant or unnecessary at the socio-political level, because of our consensus reality and subconscious bias towards the heart as a symbol of triviality and sentimentality beyond our understanding of it as a biological pump.<sup>99</sup> In contrast, a methodology of the heart carries a foundational intention to put the heart first, and to place value on the wisdom and benevolent qualities associated with the heart itself. Indeed, we cannot go any further in our endeavour without this commitment in place.

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<sup>96</sup> Please also see my PhD thesis which references numerous other initiatives taking place across the world (Livingstone, 2019)

<sup>97</sup> Livingstone, 2019

<sup>98</sup> Livingstone, 2019, p. 23

<sup>99</sup> I will explore this further as the paper progresses

## Important considerations before moving on

At the end of each *gate* of the methodology presented below, you are asked to enter into a reflection before moving on to the next. This is a useful way of a) beginning a relationship with your own heart, b) discerning whether this methodology is right for you. I would encourage you to make notes in a journal to refer to later. It is also important to be aware that the difficulty with this kind of work is the uneasy tension that arises when moving between different modes of being and knowing. That is, between the experiential, contemplative mode (within which the heart's experience of the world is understood as the primary means of knowledge production), and analytical, critical reflection (which, whilst important, is placed secondary to knowledge developed in relationship with one's own heart). Each gate supports you to move carefully into an experiential space, opening your awareness to the validity of your heart's knowledge. In this sense, your heart's way of being in the world, and consequent knowledge generated, comes first. This 'flips' one's usual approach towards knowledge production, learning firstly through experience in direct relationship with your heart in conversation with the world, followed by critical reflection upon the experience itself.<sup>100</sup>

Finally, I have used the term *gate* to try and make clear that this approach is contemplative, and in this sense, gates are symbolic. This means that this approach has its own time, opening out into different perspectives. This process cannot be rushed, and therefore is not something to be 'completed' in a rational sense. Each gate is a point of limited entry. Through reflection and contemplation, it is possible to move into a space where something 'more'/'other' is given the opportunity to enter.

### GATE ONE: Are you ready?

As already stated, this approach requires a willingness to engage with the world differently – that is, through an imaginative mode of consciousness. There will be many researchers who are comfortable with this type of enquiry, perhaps engaging with their intuition and imagination in personal life, for example. The gates below may therefore prove more comfortable for such a person; however, I do encourage those people to read on, and to answer the questions in the next paragraph.

For those who do not have a great deal of experience engaging with their imaginative consciousness, I ask you to seriously reflect on why you are here. Focus your attention on

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<sup>100</sup> See my thesis for practical examples. Also, see academic references throughout this paper



your heart-space and allow yourself the time to seriously contemplate why you feel drawn to this method. Why are you drawn to the heart? Are you willing to entertain the possibility that your heart has something different to say about your experience of the world itself? How does this statement make you feel? Interestingly, both Anderson and Romanyshyn speak of “wounds” as the place where something ‘other’ can break through;<sup>101</sup> where change is invited, and transformation is given an opportunity to take place. What feels uncomfortable to you about this type of work? This is a valuable place to start.

**Reflections** - Perhaps you feel that there is more to life than your current awareness makes possible? What does this look or feel like to you? What/who is making this claim upon you? Do you feel uncomfortable, or conflicted thinking about this? If so, stay with this feeling if you can, as this often illuminates something important; a place where the rational mind has to give way to something ‘other’/‘more’ calling to you from the world and making its claim upon you.<sup>102</sup>

## **GATE TWO: Exploring and uncovering modern perceptions of the heart**

Once you have spent some time discerning whether this approach is right for you, an essential element in engaging with a methodology of the heart, is to become reacquainted with the heart’s story to maximise the potential to create a space to hear voice of the heart. Certainly, we cannot proceed without first understanding the heart’s place in our collective history and how the heart has changed in our perceptions; consequently, affecting our understanding of, and engagement in, the world. This might seem like a strange statement to make; however, I am suggesting that how we currently understand the heart in modern times is obfuscating our authentic hearts and consequently the knowledge that our hearts have to offer. Without challenging our current perception of the heart’s place in modern society, it will prove difficult to enter authentically into the methodology itself. I now invite readers to read carefully the following text, feeling into your heart and contemplating these words in your heart as you read on.

Over the past several decades, numerous scholars from discourses including depth psychology, philosophy and religious studies have written about the “anaesthetised”,<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Anderson, 2004; Romanyshyn, 2013

<sup>102</sup> See Jung’s understanding of the transcendent function which bursts forth from a conflict of opposites (1969; Miller, 2004)

<sup>103</sup> Romanyshyn, 2000, p. 173

“exile[d]” (Hillman, 2007, p. 4),<sup>104</sup> “wound[ed]”,<sup>105</sup> “cold...frozen...dried up...careless...trivialized...mechanical”,<sup>106</sup> heart of contemporary society. According to postmodern theologian Matthew Fox, troubles exist in our modern world “because our hearts are not living fully”.<sup>107</sup> From the time of the scientific Enlightenment, our hearts have been continually reduced to fit into a machine narrative, no longer able to respond imaginatively to the calls of the world.<sup>108</sup> The subtle heart that was once understood to link us to expanded realities now cries out in our “contemporary heart diseases”,<sup>109</sup> sitting in our chests “divided”,<sup>110</sup> and “empty”.<sup>111</sup> What happened to our understanding of the heart, and is there something about how we create knowledge about the world that has manifested this heart in our day-to-day reality?

Romanyshyn suggests that when English physician William Harvey (1578-1657) defined the physical heart as divided (with a wall separating left from right sides), and empty (in terms of its function of discharging blood), these terms could equally be seen as psychological realities “mirrored or reflected in the events of the age.”<sup>112 113</sup> This was the time of the Scientific Enlightenment; a period in Western history which heralded the dawn of modern science. Since this time, heart and mind have become increasingly separated (and their function/meaning changed), reflecting a much longer tradition of separating out phenomena from their customary partners (spirit from matter, mind from body) beginning at the time of the pre-Socratics.<sup>114 115</sup> In today’s contemporary world the very organ that once connected us to the deep mystery of life,<sup>116</sup> is now “too small” to support us to engage in life in its fullest sense,<sup>117</sup> and consequently we find it hard to see how to birth creative “ways of living in the world, ways of education, of worship, of politics, of economics, of relationships of all kinds, including our relationship to all the earth systems”.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Hillman, 2007, p. 4

<sup>105</sup> Baring, 1998, pp. 342–356

<sup>106</sup> Fox, 1998, p. 326

<sup>107</sup> 1998, p. 326

<sup>108</sup> Hillman, 2007, pp. 6–7

<sup>109</sup> Hillman, 2007, p. 4

<sup>110</sup> Romanyshyn, 1982, pp. 113–120; Hillman, 2007, pp. 24–25

<sup>111</sup> Romanyshyn, 1982, pp. 122–130

<sup>112</sup> Romanyshyn, 2000, pp. 238–239

<sup>113</sup> Harvey’s classic *Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus* (commonly called, *De Motu Cordis - On The Motion of The Heart and Blood in Animals*), describes the heart in more functional terms. It was first published in 1628 and is now available freely in multiple versions on the internet, most commonly as the Robert Willis translation. A printed version is also available (Harvey, 1993)

<sup>114</sup> McGilchrist, 2012; Naydler, 2009, p.168; Tarnas, 2000

<sup>115</sup> Presocratics – 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> BCE Greek thinkers

<sup>116</sup> Webb, 2010, pp. 1-9

<sup>117</sup> Fox, 1998, p. 327

<sup>118</sup> Fox, 1998, p. 327

Relating to this point, cultural historian Fay Bound Alberti observes that as scientific knowledge developed in the nineteenth century, contemporary Western society moved from a cardio-centric worldview to a cranio-centric worldview at the level of medical theory.<sup>119</sup> While the heart occupied a key place across millennia, both as a physical organ and as a place of wisdom and intellect,<sup>120</sup> in our modern world, knowledge is now generally accepted and understood as being generated through head-based mental logic, which seeks to abstract, extract, isolate and fragment; set within a dominant narrative of materialism and reductionism.

Through this lens, the heart is only able to live in modern awareness as a biological organ. *In this sense, any knowledge arising through our wise, feeling, thinking, experiencing heart is consequently unable to gain any kind of validity at the level at which important decisions about our world are made.* This point forms the central theme of my thesis and ongoing research,<sup>121</sup> and I ask the reader to carry this idea with them in their own hearts as they proceed through this paper. Certainly, this is of absolute importance in relation to genuinely engaging with a methodology of the heart. Particularly because, for the past century at least, any other heart (beyond the scientific organ) can only ever be perceived as a sentimental add-on at best,<sup>122</sup> and trivial or irrational at worst. Therefore, any knowledge arising from our hearts is labelled as nothing that we need to seriously concern ourselves with in relation to dealing with the practicalities of life at the socio-political level.

Perhaps this is why, according to Bound Alberti and psychotherapist Elizabeth McCormick, there are two hearts in our lives today. The first being the “worker heart”,<sup>123</sup> or “heart of science”,<sup>124</sup> and the second, the “feeling heart”,<sup>125</sup> or “heart of culture”.<sup>126</sup> The heart of science/worker heart generally takes precedence, and the heart of culture/feeling heart is seen as trivial and sentimental. However, as Romanyshyn so clearly states, while many of us know our heart is a biological organ, “no-one...experiences the heart in this fashion”.<sup>127</sup>  
<sup>128</sup> Indeed, despite the medicalised narrative attached to our modern understanding of the heart, our own hearts are continually moving in conversation with the world and guiding

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<sup>119</sup> Bound Alberti, 2012, p.7

<sup>120</sup> Childre and Martin, 2000, pp. 7–8; Young, 2002; Arguelles, McCraty and Rees, 2003, p. 13; Hoystad, 2007; Perloff, 2010, p. 1502

<sup>121</sup> Livingstone, 2019

<sup>122</sup> Guénon, 2004b, p. 61

<sup>123</sup> McCormick, 1988, pp. 37–38

<sup>124</sup> Bound Alberti, 2012, p. 166

<sup>125</sup> McCormick, 1988, pp. 37–38

<sup>126</sup> Bound Alberti, 2012, p. 166

<sup>127</sup> Romanyshyn, 2000, p.173

<sup>128</sup> Except in cases of illness or accident

us onward. As I have already outlined, this strongly suggests that our modern perception of the heart beyond the heart of science narrative requires exploring in more depth.

This move introduces two initial difficulties. The first, that we must commit to the validity of a heart that lies beyond the scientific narrative. The second, is to open towards what this heart wants to say. From a psychological perspective, Romanyshyn suggests that in modern society we have been immersed in a process of abandoning our bodies, and consequently our hearts, to a way of seeing that states the medicalised, objectified body/heart are the only reality, the way they are, the only heart and body that there is.<sup>129</sup> However, to paraphrase Romanyshyn once more, no one really experiences their own hearts in this way.<sup>130</sup> The problem with consensus reality is that it is generally deemed inappropriate to talk of the heart in other ways in relation to important decision making. In this context, perhaps it is possible to comprehend how the heart beyond the scientific organ can only ever be reduced to ideas of sentimentalism and mere metaphor (in the contemporary sense of the word), consequently having little to offer at the level at which valid knowledge about the world is created and agreed upon. However, as already highlighted, many ancient cultures including the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Hindus, Greeks and early Christians, understood the heart as a physical organ, and the place of spiritual destiny,<sup>131</sup> the seat of conscience, wisdom, mind or intelligence,<sup>132</sup> and the source of life.<sup>133</sup> Most importantly, their understanding of the centrality of the heart in their lives affected engagement in the world as a result.

**Reflections** – What is your current perception and understanding of the heart? In proceeding through this second *gate*, has anything changed? If so, how? What do you need to do (if anything) to make space for the heart’s wisdom in your life? Make notes. (Discern whether this method is for you).

### **GATE THREE: Contemplating heart/mind, body/mind knowing**

When you are ready, focus your attention once more in the space of your heart. Invite your awareness to contemplate the idea of the problematic relationship between the heart and the mind/brain, and the mind/body that has developed over the past several hundred years since the time of the Scientific Enlightenment, affecting our ways of knowing and ways of making meaning in the world. Certainly, reflecting on the heart’s history through ancient

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<sup>129</sup> Romanyshyn, 2000, p. 173

<sup>130</sup> Romanyshyn, 2000, p.173

<sup>131</sup> Naydler, 1996, pp. 249–250

<sup>132</sup> Loe & Edwards, 2004, p. 286; Taylor, 2010, p. 17

<sup>133</sup> Meslin, 1987, p. 234

and modern eyes, it is clear that something significant has taken place in terms of how we relate to our hearts, minds, bodies, and consequently our sense of self. From a social perspective, transformative learning scholar Laura Formenti suggests that it is through our body “that we communicate, think, and *tell* anything”.<sup>134</sup> In agreement researcher and sociology lecturer Alexandra Howson states that our bodies shape our daily perceptions and interactions.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, neuroscientist and English literature specialist Iain McGilchrist suggests that the body is the “necessary context for all human experience”.<sup>136</sup>

It is interesting to consider the wealth of research over the latter part of the last century in relation to the body and how it seems to have become increasingly separated from, and rendered subservient to, the mind.<sup>137</sup> Specifically, I am referring to ideas about the body and mind as integral factors in how we generate knowledge about ourselves and our place in the world. Certainly, ideas of the body have been changing dramatically for hundreds of years; from the Enlightenment notion of the body being something to command and discipline - subsequently becoming the domain of biology -<sup>138</sup> to in recent years, becoming a “problem for linguistic, cultural and social analysis”.<sup>139</sup>

Building on the insights of Marxist historicism, psychoanalytic theory, literary theory and sociology of knowledge,<sup>140</sup> feminist discourse has been challenging contemporary approaches to knowledge production for almost half a century. Feminist researcher Susan Bordo suggests that thinking in contemporary Western culture is in large part due to the dualist epistemology and ontology put forward by seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650).<sup>141</sup> This philosophy posited that mind and body are distinct, that body is subordinate to mind, and that mind is the source of thought through which the self is produced through cognitive rationalisation and through which we see the world as external to us.<sup>142</sup> This perspective has had the long-term effect of separating the “universal from the particular, culture from nature, mind from body, and reason from emotion”.<sup>143</sup> Perhaps this list could also contain head/brain from heart (and the body as a whole), particularly as Bound Alberti points out that often heart and brain are considered as

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<sup>134</sup> Formenti, 2015, p. 12, italics in original

<sup>135</sup> Howson, 2013, p.2

<sup>136</sup> McGilchrist, 2012, p. 118, italics in original

<sup>137</sup> Howson, 2013, p. 3; Jaggar & Bordo, 1992, p. 3

<sup>138</sup> Hancock et al., 2000, pp. 1-2

<sup>139</sup> Hancock et al., 2000, p. 2

<sup>140</sup> Jaggar & Bordo, 1992, p. 4

<sup>141</sup> Jaggar & Bordo, 1992, p. 3

<sup>142</sup> Howson, 2013, pp. 3-4

<sup>143</sup> Jaggar & Bordo, 1992, p. 3

“competing objects in the construction of personal identity”.<sup>144</sup> <sup>145</sup> With the body (and consequently the heart) regularly associated with the female, and as the “chief enemy of objectivity”,<sup>146</sup> it is interesting to consider how the heart and body have become seen as separate, and subordinate, to the head and mind, with immediate embodied experience also subject to this perception.

Returning here to Romanyshyn, he states that since the growth of the empirical method of observation, modern society has become ever more detached from our lived experience, becoming impartial observers of the world, locked in a process of abandoning/escaping the living body,<sup>147</sup> moving our awareness to the head/mind/brain. A consequence of this has been to leave the living, experiencing, sensual body in the shadows, in the unconscious, lost and forgotten, subordinate to the head/mind. As Bordo states, the divide between mind and body is not a philosophical position, but a “*practical metaphysics*” that has been socially embodied in most aspects of life.<sup>148</sup> In modern parlance, this has led to the head and the heart being frequently contrasted with each other in relation to their purported functions.<sup>149</sup> Certainly, according to Norwegian philologist Toril Swan, the head is rational, and the heart is emotional.<sup>150</sup> In this sense, the location of mind, rationality and intelligence have been presumed to be in the head since the emergence of brain anatomy.<sup>151</sup> In relation to this point, American physicist and Buddhist Viktor Mansfield (1942-2008) states that today the head is generally equated with intellectual pursuits and analytical approaches to knowledge, whereas heart knowledge is receptive, intuitive, and gained through identification with an-other.<sup>152</sup> To put both into context, as Romanyshyn states, there is an important and recognisable difference between an understanding that arises from mind and the understanding of the human heart.<sup>153</sup> While both are equally as valuable, in our modern world, the head (mind/brain) is given priority with its aptitude for abstract, linear thinking *about* the world, with many of us now unable to hear the soft whisperings of our own, loving, compassionate, and wise hearts that respond directly to the calls of the world,<sup>154</sup> *in direct, living relationship with life itself.*

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<sup>144</sup> Bound Alberti, 2016, p. 16

<sup>145</sup> See also the work of feminist writers Val Plumwood (1939-2008) and Joanna Hodge (1988) who explore the idea of separation between Western binaries which places value to one side of the binary and relegates the other to a position of “oppositional subordination” (Bird Rose, 2013, p.94)

<sup>146</sup> Jaggar & Bordo, 1992, p.4

<sup>147</sup> Romanyshyn, 2000

<sup>148</sup> Bordo, 1995, 4%, italics in original

<sup>149</sup> Fetterman & Robinson, 2013, p.317; Swan, 2009

<sup>150</sup> Swan, 2009

<sup>151</sup> Niemeier, 2008, p.358

<sup>152</sup> Mansfield, 2002, p.226

<sup>153</sup> Romanyshyn, 1982, p.10

<sup>154</sup> Hillman, 2007

**Reflections** – How do you ordinarily make decisions about life? Do you have a sense of where you make your decisions from (in a bodily context)? What are your thoughts about your own brain/heart relationship? Has your perception and understanding of the heart changed? If so, how? Make notes. (Discern whether this method is for you)

#### **GATE FOUR: Different ways of knowing?**

Focus your attention once more on your heart-space, and begin to contemplate the idea that “The intellect is a valuable adviser but a lousy king”.<sup>155</sup> Do you have some sense of what this statement might mean? Certainly this methodology moves forward on the understanding that there are multiple ways that the world presents itself to us for interpretation, requiring many lenses. Specifically, the intellect (which one might associate with the mind/brain), *plus our senses, intuition and imagination* (which one might associate with the heart), all offer the opportunity to bring the living world into expression and help us to participate fully with it. Indeed, this idea appears to have close links with the ancient Greeks who did not draw firm dividing lines between different ways of gaining knowledge about the world.<sup>156</sup> According to philosopher and cultural historian David Fideler, all was part of an “integral enterprise, rooted in a desire to understand our place in the cosmic pattern”.<sup>157</sup> The discursive intellect was therefore “a tool that could lead beyond itself”, thereby illuminating bonds “with the deepest levels of reality”.<sup>158</sup> This suggests that in every living moment, there is an opportunity for us to look into the world, beyond outward appearances, and into the depths (in psychological terms) or heights (in religious terms) of phenomena. Indeed, this is the guiding principle of knowledge as offered through the imagination.

In relation to this point, Hillman (inspired by Corbin) suggests one responds to the calls of the world through the very organ that is touched and moved by the world itself, namely the heart.<sup>159</sup> To linger in the heart, the organ of perception and seat of the imagination, is to move into a way of knowing that is not about facts or ideas,<sup>160</sup> situated in a world ‘out there’. In depth psychological terms, it is a way of knowing that has an aesthetic quality.<sup>161</sup> That is, “a gnosis where one is capable of being touched and moved by the otherness of

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<sup>155</sup> Kastrup, 2016, p.47

<sup>156</sup> Shaw, 1995; Naydler, 1996; Tarnas, 2000; McGilchrist, 2012; Kingsley, 2013

<sup>157</sup> Fideler, 2000, p. 41

<sup>158</sup> Fideler, 2000, p. 41

<sup>159</sup> Hillman, 2007

<sup>160</sup> Romanyshyn, 2001, p. 145

<sup>161</sup> Hillman, 2007, p. 107; Romanyshyn, 2001, p. 145

this world where the dead and the living have already been transformed into matters of and for the heart”.<sup>162</sup> For Hillman, this way of knowing is awake to the soul in the world speaking to us through images - namely, the “*anima mundi* [that] stirs our hearts to respond”.<sup>163</sup> By turning back towards the world through the thought of the heart we can “regard the world anew....We pay respect to it simply by looking again, re-respecting, that second look with the eye of the heart.”<sup>164</sup>

Considering Hillman’s comments, it is interesting to ponder on the type of attention that such a heart-based approach towards the world engenders; pointing towards qualities that are generally identified with the heart like love, truth, courage, affection.<sup>165</sup> Adding the benevolent qualities of the heart to knowledge arising through the perceptive imagination offers us the type of empathy, openness and curiosity to connect genuinely and directly with others. Indeed, these qualities are illustrative of a style of manners and set of values which automatically spring forth from the heart.<sup>166</sup> Such an approach moves from inner knowing from the personal depths of the heart, outwards into the world. Creating knowledge about the world in this way, evokes an approach to seeing and developing awareness that is self-reflexive, open to universal truths, and the imaginative potential of the world. It is a place where the world attends to us, and we return that attention back to the world, in a reciprocal, nourishing relationship.<sup>167</sup> As Romanyshyn states, there is a marked difference between mind and heart as attitudes which portray ways of experiencing the world.<sup>168</sup> Taking inspiration from scholar Angela Voss’ paper *Methodology of the Imagination*,<sup>169</sup> and extending her work, to bring the heart to bear on a research project, or on any personal/professional issues, requires that the imagination and symbolic/metaphorical mode of knowing is honoured as a primary means of investigation, supported by rational critique. Both are equally important, and both have their place. This kind of work is deeply challenging and requires sharp skills in self-awareness and critical reflection because of the complex information that arises.

**Reflections** – has your perception and understanding of the heart changed? If so, how? Make notes. (Discern whether this method is for you)

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<sup>162</sup> Romanyshyn, 2001, p. 146

<sup>163</sup> Hillman, 2007, p. 126, italics in original

<sup>164</sup> Hillman, 2007, p. 129

<sup>165</sup> Bound Alberti, 2012, p. 3; Young, 2002, pp. xx-xxvii

<sup>166</sup> Romanyshyn, 1982, p. 105

<sup>167</sup> It is important to point out again here, that this possibility of relationship and reciprocity created by the heart precludes the charge that heart knowledge is narcissistic – for in this sense, it cannot be.

<sup>168</sup> Romanyshyn, 1982, p. 101

<sup>169</sup> Voss, 2009



## GATE FIVE: Exploring the different manifestations of the heart for research purposes

Bring your attention back to your heart-space. Allow yourself to consider that despite the contemporary scientific narrative that generally understands the heart as a biological organ, the heart continues to be understood in modern culture as the place of subjective emotions and feelings via metaphoric language and symbolic imagery.<sup>170</sup> In this sense, the heart, with all of its benevolent qualities and in its many guises, offers an effective way to explore and engage with life that seemingly stands in contrast to knowledge generated through head-based intellect. Indeed, the heart actually complements and greatly enhances our traditional ways of gaining knowledge about the world, offering opportunities for deeper engagement with life issues. While it is true that many religious traditions value the heart, and heart wisdom - Sufism, Orthodox Christianity, Buddhism -<sup>171</sup> the aim of this paper, my academic research in general, and my practical therapeutic work, is to make the case for bringing the innate wisdom and knowledge of the heart into conscious awareness to help us make sense of, and navigate, daily life at the level at which important decisions about our world are made. This means that heart wisdom and knowledge must be taken seriously at the level of socio-political discourse; brought in from the margins of religion and day-to-day personal experience.

### Exercise: Experiencing four different hearts

**1. Physical heart (heart of science):** close your eyes and set an intention to connect with your physical heart. Place your palms on your heart and feel it beating, animating your whole body. Allow yourself to appreciate that each day, your heart beats approximately 100,000 times, and pumps over 7,500 litres of blood.<sup>172</sup> Now move your awareness into months and years; appreciating that in one year, your own heart will beat approximately 40 million times.<sup>173</sup> Over the course of a lifetime of 70 years, your heart will beat approximately three billion times.<sup>174</sup> Allow yourself to sit in the wonder of your physical, beating heart; keeping you alive.<sup>175</sup> ***Make notes in relation to how you feel as you consider your physical heart***

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<sup>170</sup> Bound Alberti, 2012; Livingstone, 2019

<sup>171</sup> Livingstone, 2019

<sup>172</sup> Childre & Martin, 2000, p. 9; Loe & Edwards, 2004, p. 282

<sup>173</sup> Childre & Martin, 2000, p. 9

<sup>174</sup> Childre & Martin, 2000, p. 9; Loe & Edwards, 2004, p. 283

<sup>175</sup> Interestingly, ideas about the heart are changing in some circles. Cardiologist Francisco Torrent-Guasp (1931-2005) advanced an ancient theory that the heart is a helical shape and thus functions in a twisting, spiralling motion (Buckberg et al, 2018). In this view, the heart is no longer seen as divided, comprised of two sides. It is whole, consisting of spiralling muscle fibres with seemingly no beginning nor end. Such a

**2. Emotional heart (heart of culture):** close your eyes and set an intention to connect with your emotional, feeling heart. Place your palms on your heart and feel into the qualities of your heart. Perhaps you feel warmth, or waves of compassion, love and/or other benevolent qualities associated with the heart. Perhaps you are feeling other things. Become aware of your feelings, bodily sensations, and images/thoughts arising in your awareness. Contemplate the experience of connecting with your heart in this way, bringing into your awareness all the ways that the emotional heart makes itself known in your life. ***Make notes about the experience.***

**3. Symbolic/metaphoric:** (*Please be aware that this work now becomes more difficult, as we are moving into subtler domains that often defy rational logic or words*). Close your eyes and set an intention to connect with your symbolic/metaphoric heart. Allow yourself to contemplate the idea that the heart is directly connected to the world as it speaks to you in images. Your heart responds to the images that the world offers to you; responding through symbolic language in the form of insight, inspiration or dream image. Open yourself to the possibility that this is the world's way of speaking to you through your own heart.

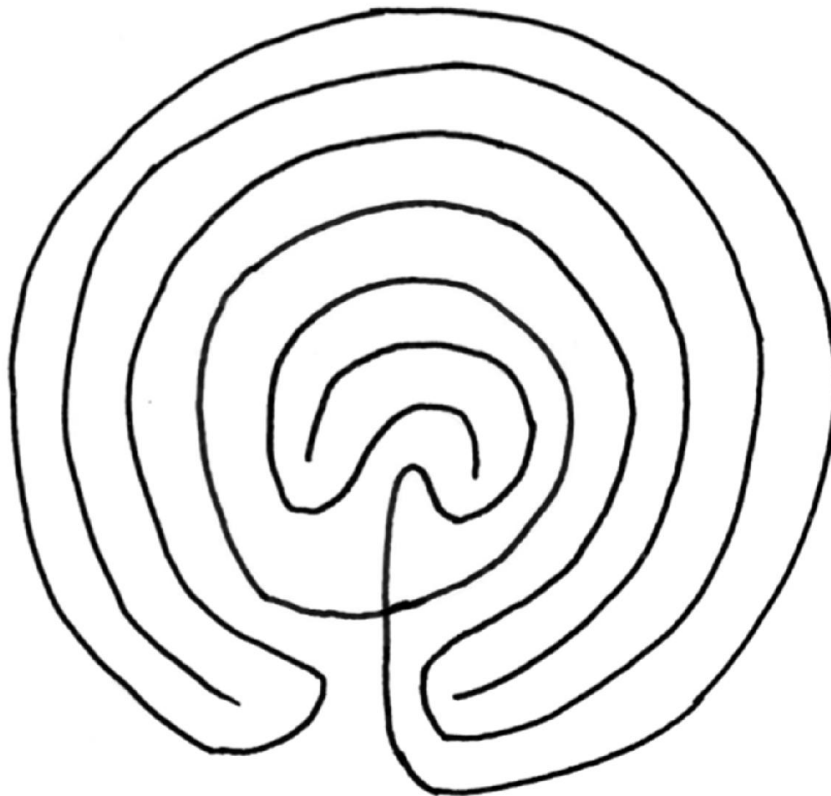
You might like to meditate on the picture of the labyrinth shown below (see figure 1). Find a calm, relaxing space where you will not be disturbed. Sink into your heart space by bringing your attention to your heart – breathe deeply and rhythmically into your heart. When you feel ready, trace the pathway of the labyrinth slowly with your finger, from the entrance to the centre. As you move deeper into the labyrinth, towards the centre, open your awareness to contemplate the idea that the labyrinth is acting as a symbolic journey deep into the centre of your own heart. In the centre, rest a while – for as long as is comfortable. Be aware of your thoughts and feelings. You might hear or intuit something – words, or an image. Be open to the idea of co-creating with the world. Open your awareness to whatever arises in the heart-space between yourself and world. When you are ready, slowly trace your finger back out of the labyrinth, understanding that this journey is a symbolic journey back out of your own heart.<sup>176</sup>

***Make notes about the experience.***

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view is radically changing how cardiologists see, understand, and treat cardiac patients (Livingstone, 2019, pp. 214-220).

<sup>176</sup> For more information, see Livingstone, 2019, pp. 162-194



*Figure 1: Labyrinth*

**4. Holistic:** Close your eyes and set an intention to connect with your holistic heart. This heart holds within itself all of the previous hearts you have connected with. This heart is also *so much more*. This heart embodies the dancing forces of the universe, merging and separating. You might like to contemplate the following text to help you connect with your own holistic heart. When you are ready, bring your attention back into your heart-space. Breathe calmly, rhythmically, in and out of your heart-space. Now recognise and appreciate each heart that you have met along this journey – your physical heart, your emotional heart, and your symbolic, metaphoric heart. When you are ready, ask your heart to show itself to you, beyond what you have already been shown in relation to your experiences thus far. The following excerpt from my thesis detailing my experience with the holistic heart may also help you:

I recall the looping, swirling butterflies, bees and birds. The flow of the river. Aromas wafting on the breeze. My heart inside me. Me, inside my heart, in the garden. Everything in the garden, in my heart, is dancing. The world is dancing.... The woman reaches out to me with a delicate, graceful hand. Staring deep into my eyes she holds my gaze. I have never before felt such love and compassion from

another being. “Your heart still beats. The world still turns” she says gently, and dancing once more, she holds my hand. Together we slowly and gently weave our way through the garden. With each step, I gain more confidence. We move forwards and backwards, left and right, up and down. I am particularly aware of how important the back and forth, left and right, up and down movements are to me. We whirl and twirl, spiral, loop and twist around and around the garden. “Is this one dance?” she asks me with a twinkle in her eye and a graceful smile on her lips, “or many dances merging into each other?” I can’t speak. I am at once entranced and confused – on one level I understand the question, on another, I do not. She continues, “Remember my love, you have never stopped dancing, therefore you can never forget. All you ever are is between dances, and yet you are also the dance itself, and the dance is you!” And then she is gone. Life continues, but I know that I will never be the same.<sup>177</sup>

As you contemplate this dream, allow yourself to consider that the movement of the dance is encapsulated within every living thing, and within life itself. Indeed, the dance embodies the movement of the heart – that is, the physical heart continually dances between contraction and expansion, moving rhythmically between poles. In this sense, the heart stands as a qualitative representation of the back and forth flow of life. That is, a physical organ that keeps us alive, and if we allow ourselves to see, a heart that is also many other things – emotional, symbolic. Moving between poles, our hearts are physical, and they are also emotional, symbolic, loving, kind, compassionate. The heart can carry multiple meanings within itself, and at the same time, provide us with the kind of approach/gesture that is open to deeper/expansive ways of seeing because of its association with the qualities of kindness, compassion, love, openness, non-judgement. This approach offers deep implications for our engagement with the world, guiding us towards a sense of our relatedness to others, and to a wider sense of our connection with the universe itself.

[I]t was possible for me to learn to perceive a number of different hearts as entirely legitimate....[T]he hearts I met in the labyrinth no longer needed to be in conflict, as I could hold them comfortably within my consciousness – having experienced their reality within myself, creating something new in the process. Immediately I am taken by the quality of the action that helped transform my perspective. Specifically, through the act of expanding my awareness and cycling between imaginal and rational ways of knowing, it was possible for previously conflicting phenomena to come together to create something new.<sup>178</sup>

Contemplate how the heart symbolises the dance of life. The heart beats rhythmically in our chests, moving between contraction and expansion. Philosophically, this demonstrates the significance of being willing to move with whatever life brings our way – to move between different viewpoints, at all levels of scale. Additionally, as a powerful symbol of

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<sup>177</sup> Livingstone, 2019, pp. 195-196

<sup>178</sup> Livingstone, 2019, p.200

love, kindness, compassion and openness, the heart creates the conditions for us to be able to seriously consider the importance of being willing to move, dance, between any phenomenon that we face in life – just as the physical heart moves between states. For example, this idea can be applied when considering moving between heart wisdom and head thinking or engaging with ideas from other people (your own ideas/viewpoints, and another’s ideas/viewpoints). By embodying the archetypal movement and benevolent qualities of the heart, we can learn to see that if the heart did not move from one pole to another, it would no longer function, and it would die. In the same way, we must be willing to bring in other data-points and information, lest we stop, become conflicted, and perhaps, die.

This heart is also creating the possibility for people to perceive the world around them differently, more deeply, with an expanded sense of awareness. As the heart moves between contraction and expansion, moving rhythmically between poles, “mediating and balancing between extremes”,<sup>179</sup> the pulsating heart in the centre of our chests stands as a qualitative representation of the spiral flow of life – a physical organ that keeps us alive and, if we allow ourselves to see, connects us to a sense of the wider cosmos. In this way, the heart is our own personal, physical reminder of the primordial spiral pattern that directs life, and subsequently the organ through which we can navigate our way through the contrasting forces that express themselves in each and every minute of our lives. The pattern of the spiral is within us, given expression through the heart, connecting us to disparate realms, to ‘others’ - in whatever forms these ‘others’ may take.<sup>180</sup>

**Considering the different hearts you have met through each stage of this exercise, have you noticed anything different happening to you? Are you more aware of your heart? How/in what way? Make notes on what you sense, feel and know about your experience of the holistic heart.**

**Reflections** – As you have moved through this methodology and the exercises above, how do you think about the heart now? Has anything changed? Are you able to give equal value to each of the hearts illuminated above? If not, why? If yes, please outline what has changed for you.

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<sup>179</sup> Holdrege, 2002, p. 16

<sup>180</sup> Livingstone, 2019, pp. 221-222

## GATE SIX: 'Heart-sense'

Place your attention in your heart-space once more, and spend some time reflecting on your experiences thus far. Remain in your heart-space, and open yourself up to receive a way of engaging with the world that was shown to me over three years of continuous dialoguing with my own heart. Using Romanyshyn's imaginal methodology,<sup>181</sup> based on Carl Jung's understanding of the active imagination,<sup>182</sup> I set the imaginal space for the heart to speak to me. This involved loosening my rational mind and creating space for my intuition and imagination. Over the course of three years I learnt how to listen to my heart through what Romanyshyn calls transference dialogues.<sup>183</sup> These dialogues are entered into through the creation of a ritual space of reverie, which involves letting go and falling into a kind of daydream.<sup>184</sup> The transference dialogues help to open out into what the work (in my own case, my heart) wants to say to me, speaking through daydreams, reveries, mood, spontaneous dream image or bodily sensation.<sup>185</sup> This meant being willing to move between intuitive insight and logical/rational deduction.

In practical terms, as I sank into this way of working and set a clear intention to engage with the wisdom of the heart, I discovered that my heart was indeed speaking to me through images which manifested in the form of dreams, synchronistic events, and daydreams. In a sense, I moved into a different realm of knowing – just as real, and just as true to rational ways of knowing. I learnt that my heart speaks to me constantly throughout my life, however up until I began my research, I had not learnt to listen to my heart, or understand my heart's language. Eventually, as I became more familiar with the imaginal methodology I was using, I would simply 'know' when my heart was speaking to me, as events taking place in my life took on a special kind of quality; a richness that is hard to describe.<sup>186</sup> The difficulty in doing this kind of work is bringing the insights of each experience back to a different discourse, the physical realm, moving from one world to the other.<sup>187</sup> Moving through knowledge in such a way requires the kind of qualities that one might associate with the heart: that is, openness, non-judgement and compassion for what is arising. Being able to fall into the transference dialogues was made easier for me through my commitment to understand the heart's history, and how the heart has been slowly silenced in our own lives since the Scientific Revolution. This then gave me the

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<sup>181</sup> Romanyshyn, 2013; Livingstone, 2019, pp. 46-57

<sup>182</sup> Romanyshyn, 2013, p.137

<sup>183</sup> Romanyshyn, 2013

<sup>184</sup> Romanyshyn, 2013, p.143

<sup>185</sup> Romanyshyn, 2013, p.156. Also, see my thesis for more in depth information (Livingstone, 2019)

<sup>186</sup> See chapters 4, 5 and 6 of my thesis for an in depth exploration of the difficulty of putting the experience with my heart into words (Livingstone, 2019)

<sup>187</sup> Voss, 2009

permission to move into a space of discomfort but to speak exactly what happened, without immediately falling into a rational re-reading. By doing this, I began to see a pattern emerging which I have formulated into an approach detailed below:

**Connecting with your heart:**

1. Find a quiet space where you can remain undisturbed for an hour
2. If it feels comfortable, close your eyes, and place your palms over your heart.
3. Commit to sinking into your heart - physically feel the qualities and characteristics that would normally be associated with it; that is, love, openness, compassion, kindness.
4. Rest there for a while; breathe deeply into your heart.
5. If it helps, pull up a chair for your heart. Invite your heart to sit on the chair next to you and acknowledge each other
6. From your heart-space, recognise your heart and that you are in relationship with each other.
7. From your heart-space, encourage your heart to reveal itself and to tell its story
8. From the heart-space, listen deeply and authentically, look for connections, honour differences – how does this work make you feel? Can you understand what your heart wishes to say to you?
9. Cultivate a sense of wonder at the different conversations you might be able to have
10. Continue to move in the space of the heart together to co-create the possibility of a different story
11. Continue to be aware even after meeting with your heart. Keep a notepad close to you to jot down experiences or flashes of insight, knowing that this is your heart speaking to you.

**Make notes on your experience. Repeat this exercise as required.**

**Connecting with an-other (your research, a person, a dilemma you are working on):**

1. Find a space where you can remain undisturbed for an hour
2. If it feels comfortable, close your eyes and place your palms over your heart.
3. Commit to sinking into your heart - physically feel the qualities and characteristics that would normally be associated with it; that is, love, openness, compassion, kindness.
4. Rest there for a while; breathe deeply into your heart.
5. If it helps, pull up a chair for your heart. Invite your heart to sit on the chair next to you and acknowledge each other.
6. From your heart-space, recognise your heart and that you are in relationship with each other. Then extend this perspective outwards, to any 'others' in relationship

- with you (in whatever form that ‘other’ takes – your research, a person, a challenging situation)
7. From your heart-space, recognise the ‘other’ in relationship with you (in whatever form that ‘other’ takes – your research, a person, a challenging situation)
  8. From your heart-space, encourage the ‘other’ to tell their story and reveal themselves, just as the ‘other’ opens a space for you to do the same
  9. From the heart-space, listen deeply and authentically, look for connections, honour differences. Be curious about the other’s view of the world, notice where you feel blocked or contracted. This is information. Write this down. Why are you reacting in a particular way?
  10. Cultivate a sense of wonder at the different conversations you might be able to have; despite alternate points of view
  11. Continue to move in the space of the heart together to co-create the possibility of a different story.
  12. Continue to be aware even after your meeting. Keep a notepad close to you to jot down experiences or flashes of insight, knowing that this is your research speaking to you through your heart.

While the steps presented above might appear simple, I want to make it clear that this is not the case. I have discovered through direct experience of this process that knowledge arising from the heart does not necessarily result in curing or fixing something. Neither is the heart’s way about some idea of perfection, or even improvement, or creating an ideal, trouble-free existence. In building a relationship with my own heart, myself, and others in my external world, I have found that knowledge developed through the heart is about being willing to sit in discomfort, to experience challenging feelings and emotions, and to embrace imperfections, whilst at the same time committing to reach towards harmony and relationship. Working with the heart demands a commitment to openness, kindness, courage and bravery, to find comfort in discomfort, to resist reaching immediately for solutions, and instead to respond to life’s invitation with as much of ourselves as we can muster – despite how challenging that may be. Certainly this is a different way of gaining knowledge about, and acting in, the world – placing heart wisdom first, followed by head-based critique.

### **Methodological considerations:**

- Commit whole-heartedly to the process – it is only possible to move to the heart when one allows oneself to perceive it as a genuine place of knowledge and wisdom.



- In this sense, you move towards meeting the world halfway.
- Let life come to you firstly through the organ through which the world speaks – the heart (before moving to the head/brain and critical reflection).
- This approach asks that you let your heart have its way with you – that is, you must give permission for your heart to move you into a different mode of awareness
- Remember, whatever you receive must be balanced with critical reflection – heart insight AND head/mind intellect working together (as the methodology of the heart makes possible).
- See the work of Anderson,<sup>188</sup> McGilchrist,<sup>189</sup> Fidler,<sup>190</sup> Kastrup,<sup>191</sup> and Romanyshyn.<sup>192</sup> I suggest that their ideas embody the movement of the heart. Specifically, all speak about the importance of being willing to *cycle between* different ways of knowing and allowing this to inform and shape experience and resultant meaning making.
- This means that this kind of work is hard work, because it requires the cultivation of deep discernment and precise critical reflection. Romanyshyn, quoting Rilke, states that the capacity to listen to what is received through this type of work is “hard work because it is heart work”.<sup>193</sup>
- As you become more practiced in this work, you will find that you become a better, clearer organism of perception in relationship with the world
- Most importantly, value your experience, value your intuition, and take seriously what arises
- Your experience matters.

## Final notes

As I conclude this paper I wonder, through the adoption and engagement with the heart beyond the biological organ, what unheard voices might be found that can give us guidance for our modern world? How do we find it within ourselves to genuinely meet the ‘other’ and go deeper into the realms of our experience that have been overlooked for centuries? I suggest that the heart described in this paper, and its approach towards the world, is a powerful symbol for our times. It proposes a model for deepening relationships, revisioning and re-imagining deep rifts that we see in social, cultural and ecological terms. In this sense, this heart is a reminder to keep ourselves open to the calls of a world that needs our

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<sup>188</sup> 2004

<sup>189</sup> 2012

<sup>190</sup> 2014

<sup>191</sup> 2016

<sup>192</sup> 1982

<sup>193</sup> Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 340

loving and careful attention; now more than ever, as we reach towards opening spaces for creative ways of “living in the world, ways of education, of worship, of politics, of economics, of relationships of all kinds, including our relationship to all the earth systems”.<sup>194</sup>

In this sense, we are called into relationship with the world, and therefore need nurturing spaces for interaction, communication, participation and multiple perspectives.<sup>195</sup> This is where the methodology of the heart can offer guidance. Indeed, being willing to step into the learning space of the heart itself, in connection with the rational, mind-based intellect, could help us, at this time of great uncertainty on our planet, to develop knowledge, reflexivity and creativity at all levels and enhance “our ability to learn from different and conflicting views”.<sup>196</sup> As we move towards the future, is it possible for us to open our imaginations and rational intellect, hearts and minds, and learn from these different, yet equally as important ways of knowing? My hope is that this methodology offers an opportunity for others to do this and move forward into a world that flourishes for all.

**“We see differently, and the heart changes”  
(Romanyshyn)<sup>197</sup>**

.... and, in this dynamic heart space of reciprocity and relationship between ourselves and world, we also change....

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<sup>194</sup> Fox, 1998, p. 327

<sup>195</sup> Formenti and West, 2018, p. 177

<sup>196</sup> Formenti and West, 2018, pp. 177– 178

<sup>197</sup> 1982, p. 141

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