Article

WWW: Web Wide Warfare Part 2 - Towards a Deeper Healing of the Online Culture Wars

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Abstract

This article represents the second of two on the subject of the culture wars, especially in its online expression. The first (Anthony, 2020) analyzed problematic aspects of "blue tribe" consciousness (roughly, the political left) and how those issues are being influenced by the internet, education systems and globalization; as well as civilizational and psycho-spiritual dynamics. This second article takes a broader perspective, examining both blue and red (roughly, the political right) tribes, and argues that solutions to the broader problems surrounding the culture wars and its tribalism are unlikely to work successfully without honest introspection. To this end, "shadow" work employing processes and insights by introspective psychologists like Carl Jung and mindfulness practitioners Leonard Jacobson and Eckhart Tolle may be helpful, especially if deployed along with other systemic interventions. Anthony's (2007, 2010) Harmonic Circles process is briefly described as a specific healing process. Conversely, processes based only around technological intervention and regulation of behaviour are unlikely to work by themselves, as they typically do not address deeper psycho-spiritual drivers.

It is argued that introspection and shadow work may help facilitate a more effective dialogue with "the other" by neutralizing judgmental projections which tend to dehumanize tribal opponents, while encouraging a more honest appraisal of sources of conflict which lie within one's own group. Finally, it is argued that developing a strong motivation to transcend the tribal split is ideal.

> If you want to know who you are, look into the true mirror. The flower will reflect your beauty. The sky will reflect your vastness. The ocean will reflect your depth. The child will reflect your innocence. But if you look into the mirror that is unconscious humanity, you are looking into the wrong mirror. Your reflection will be distorted by their projections. Leonard Jacobson (2009, p. 89)

> A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats; a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking knave; a whoreson, glass-gazing, super-serviceable finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a bawd in way of good service; and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch; one whom I will beat into clamorous whining if thou deniest the least syllable of thy addition. Shakespeare (2010), King Lear, act 2, scene 2. (King Lear, n.d.).

Introduction

The tribal split between the Blue and Red tribes may represent the most divisive and potentially destabilizing conflict in the modern western world. As with the first article on this topic (Anthony, 2020) traditional political labels such as "liberal," "left," "progressive," "postmodern," "neo-Marxist," "right," "conservative," "libertarian" and so on

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will be avoided as much as possible. For the purposes of simplicity, I shall refer to the "Blue" (left) and "Red" (right) tribes, unless a more specific clarification is required.

The blue/red dichotomy is admittedly an oversimplification of the reality that the culture wars now feature multiple memetic tribes, as Limberg and Barnes (2018) outline. Roughly aligned with the Blue tribe are groups like the establishment left, social justice activists, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, Neo-Marxists and far-left radicals like Antifa; while aligned with the Red tribe are the establishment right, Benedictines, Christian right, Trumpists, Infowarriors and the Alt-right. Then there are centrist groups, who might lean a little more one way or the other, but tend to span the divide: including the Intellectual Dark Web, Integral Theorists, new atheists, and the rationalist diaspora (Limberg & Barnes, 2018).

Progressive and Neo-Marxist ideologies now typically dominate Blue-tribe spaces. For example, such language, ideas and narratives represent a strong curriculum focus of much of our university education systems (especially the humanities and much of the social sciences), and a considerable portion of the mainstream media (Haidt & Lukianoff, 2018; Murray, 2019; Wilber, 2001). This ideology has its focus upon inequalities and injustices like classism, racism, sexism, sexual identity discrimination issues and so on. Yet while critique of opposing ideologies and groups is a common aspect of the internal narrative within these spaces, such discourses tend to be far less analytical regarding their own ideological biases. Further, there is typically relatively little deep analysis of the tribal split itself, and that divide is no longer an emerging issue, but an extant problem (Anthony, 2020).

To initiate a genuine dialogue amongst competing memetic tribes, we cannot perpetuate inherently divisive and blame-based narratives, because these merely exacerbate tribalism. There is a strong need for introspection and increased emotional and psychological maturity. As Daniel Schmactenberger (in Rebel Wisdom, 2019b) has stated, unless we master "anti-rivalry," civilizational termination is the most likely outcome. It would be an irony if we were to eliminate all the "isms" of the progressive wish list, only to initiate social collapse under the great social divisions it is helping to engender" (Anthony, 2020).

A difficult and cognitively destabilizing restructuring of our competing maps of reality will likely be necessitated (Limberg & Barnes, 2018). Daniel Schmactenberger (quoted in Darkhorse Podcast, 2021) has argued that we require increased competence in at least three domains of communication with tribal others. Critically situating the position of that other party is the first and easiest aspect. This can include understanding their political alliance, their worldview and paradigmatic foundations. The second domain is the ability to deeply understand and engage with the other, including "steel manning" their position. The third is to be able to reflect deeply upon one's own biases and arguments.

Part 1 of this two-part article series (Anthony, 2020) took a multi-factored approach in an attempt to deepen the understanding of what drives the online conflict of the culture wars, with a predominant focus on the role of the Blue tribe. Sohail Inayatullah's (2018) Causal Layered Analysis was employed to this end.[1] Causal Layered Analysis is a useful analytical tool, and can also be used to garner more thorough solutions to problems by acknowledging their multi-faceted nature; by generating solutions which intervene at more than one level. Alternatively, one may wish to think at which level intervention might be most effective.

The factors driving Blue tribe divisiveness uncovered in the first article (Anthony, 2020) made reference to psycho-spiritual conceptions. Integral theory and spiral dynamics (Beck, 2018; Wilber, 2001) were used to depict the current conflict as being in part driven by the regression of liberal progressivism from "green" meme (collective, progressive, ecological) to a more fundamentalist and intolerant expression, or "mean green" (Beck, 2018; Wilber, 2001); and this relapse was linked in turn to the possibility of unresolved anger and trauma (the shadow). It was argued that the Blue tribe in general needs to become more aware of the divisiveness of its language, analytical tools and judgmental attitudes. Critical Futures Studies practitioners, who are arguably generally aligned with Blue tribe ideology, also need to be mindful here.

That first paper did not examine any equivalent ideological, systemic or psycho-spiritual drivers of the Red tribe as that was not its focus. Nonetheless, a host of similar as well as distinct drivers of tribalism can be cited or speculated in that group: including common historical and technological drivers; information and media systems; and differing values, religious predilections, nationalism and so on.

This current paper outlines several possible approaches to resolving the tribal split. It will take a trans-tribal approach, addressing the need for dialogue and healing, and the argument shall be that this is relevant to both Red and Blue tribes, as peace is preferable to perpetual conflict and violence.

Due to the multifaceted drivers of the culture wars, interventions attempting to reduce or heal the conflict will ideally need to address more than a single driver. Merely intervening at more superficial levels, such as the technological or educational, will likely fail to address the deeper dimensions of the problem. Comprehensive solutions to complex problems should ideally address as many levels of the problem as possible (Inayatullah, 2018).

The process employed in this paper moves in a general sense from the more obvious and oft-stated aspects of the problem (the litany), through successively deeper and more subtle systems, worldview aspects then myth-metaphor levels. This is in accordance with Inayatullah's (2018) Causal Layered Analysis. Yet the focus will be towards the deeper levels, especially the possible benefits of introspection and mindfulness. This shall include the idea of the "shadow" (following the teachings of Jung (1995)) and current mindfulness practitioners like Leonard Jacobson (2009) and Eckhart Tolle (2009). The author's Harmonic Circles process (Anthony, 2007, 2010) is also introduced as a practical shadow work tool.

The analysis below begins first by introducing several rather obvious possible processes which might help to address the more superficial, extant expressions of the online culture wars.

Ongoing Questioning of the Media

Much of formal traditional media (as well as social media) is deeply polarized, and many netizens glean their news predominantly from one or just a few in-tribe sources (Brenan, 2019; Kalmore & Mason, 2019; Haidt, 2012). Given their increasing unreliability and bipartisan narratives, the present widespread mistrust of media and social media spokespersons is not unwarranted, nor irrational. Further, it appears that a shift in the tribal nature of media is unlikely in the near future. Therefore, in the present culture it is up to the netizen to assume greater responsibility for their online behaviour and to develop a deeper questioning attitude towards information sources, including an awareness of how best to do that.

Firstly, political bias of most large and medium-sized news sources can be identified via web searches. There are many sites which can be employed to this end, including All Sides (allsides.com); Media Bias/Fact Check (mediabiasfactcheck.com); and The Media Bias Chart (adfontmedia.com).

A useful further source is Media Cloud (mediacloud.org), which can produce word clouds associated with a topic. By entering a media company name and other specific terms, a word cloud is generated which can give the searcher a sense of the focus of the media site's content. Of course, a problem with such sources is that they may themselves be partisan, suggesting a need to check more than one evaluation service.

Another simple way to challenge the filter bubble (Pariser, 2011) (thus ensuring that a given netizen's media bias is also challenged) is for her to deliberately check alternative news sources for reports on the same story. This habit can be facilitated by setting one's news feeds to multiple sources. Google alerts can be utilized to this effect, by including key words that name different media sources: for example "Trump impeachment AND CNN," "Trump impeachment AND Fox News." More sophisticated word groupings can be imagined to provide more specific results.

A destabilization of worldview will probably follow a new habit of habitually questioning and checking multiple sources of news for credibility. It is possible that it might also create a certain degree of cynicism towards not just the media, but towards one's own country or civilization. Many netizens older than the millennial generation will still be able to recall what it was like to hold a greater (though imperfect) trust in mainstream media organisations, whom they were able to view as generally truthful. Yet the situation has changed. An attitude of careful discretion should ideally be applied to all media organizations.

The suggested processes above are relatively common sense. However, they are best employed alongside some of the deeper "solutions" suggested below. Without motivation and introspection, it is unlikely many will choose to employ them rigorously.

Strategic Withdrawal

There is a very simple individual behavior which would likely alleviate a great deal of the issues surrounding the online culture wars. This is simply reducing one's time spent online, or at least in unhealthy online spaces. An individual can begin by identifying which sites and thinkers to avoid by asking precise questions. Is there a diversity

of voices and opinions on the site? Is the culture of the site one of respectful engagement with those with differing viewpoints? Is the site run by someone with an attitude of tribalistic aggression, or has it been overrun by such netizens? If the answer is that the web space is tribalistic, the netizen can simply choose to avoid it, and find a more reliable source of news or information.

Another simple self-test which the author has developed and written about (Anthony, 2014) merely requires a moment of introspection. If in any given moment the netizen is triggered into anger and judgment, this can be viewed as "a diminishment of consciousness," as opposed to an expansion into greater openness and receptivity towards others, their thoughts and beliefs. The key is recognizing when one's "need for drama"[2] is escalating. The following may be associated with that.

- Wishing to immediately correct the opinion of another (rather than engage them).

- Noting that you are carrying some anger, judgment or anxiety as you enter an online space. This increases the likelihood for projection of that emotion onto others. The key is to assume responsibility for the emotion, by whatever means possible. Presence techniques, "noticing" (Jacobson, 2009) and broader emotional healing and shadow work can be useful here, as will be expanded upon below.

- A sense of destructive ill-will towards the other, and a desire to ridicule or shame them. Monitoring oneself for a desire to curse the other (including literally to swear at them) is one simple test. The pejorative labels referred to in the first article on online tribalism (Anthony, 2020) are often indicators of projection: "fascist", "alt-right", "libtard" and so on. Even terms like "racist", "sexist", "bigot" and the like are often delivered with a sense of disgust at the other, a desire to shame and belittle them.

Moderating the amount of time one spends online is not complicated. It simply takes motivation and self-discipline. Clearly, if one not only eliminates the language of projection, but also withdraws from online space when the need for drama arises, the potential to engage in online drama and tribalism diminishes dramatically. The question then becomes, "Am I prepared to do that?" Here the issue of "intentionality" arises (which will be discussed towards the end of this article). In turn, we may have to address the possibility that there is an addiction factor in our online behaviour, and addiction is one of the prime drivers of the online culture wars (Limberg & Barnes, 2018).

Rebuilding Trust in Media and Social Media

Given the dramatic decline in media trust (Brenan, 2019) the formal (as opposed to social) media of both Blue and Red tribes must consciously and deliberately work to rebuild trust. To do this it seems likely that they must bring greater self-reflection on the unhealthy and often destructive culture that they are now driving (tribalism, constant spin, clickbaiting, and a marked decline in ethics including attempts to influence democratic political outcomes via extreme bipartisanship) (Brichacek, 2018). Yet many mainstream media organizations continue to present themselves as objective purveyors of truth. This attitude must pass if they are to become a trusted part of the future of public information.

To regain public trust, traditional public media must ideally first acknowledge the tribalistic nature of "the news," and admit how they now commonly violate their prior norms and reasonable standards of journalistic integrity (Brichacek, 2018; Anthony, 2020). Media outlets should thus become more transparent about their own narratives. This is similar to what Limberg and Barnes (2018) call "clean bias," where netizens and organizations acknowledge tribal and ideological affiliations. Such a shift would ideally bring covert elements of the "drama" into open discourse and facilitate a shift in focus towards solutions. Less energy would then theoretically be spent in the drama[3] of conspiracy theory and projection, and more on actual newsworthy issues, as well as generating the spirit of cooperation required to focus upon their resolution.

The shift might require what Limberg and Barnes call "a Culture War equivalent to the Hippocratic Oath." This could be affirmed by the leaders of the memetic tribes, and other netizens.

> It would prove beneficial if journalists, authors, bloggers, and professors alike took this oath, but any social media user could take the oath, by pledging their name and accepting some sort of e-badge. Promises can be broken, but breaking public promises can generate swift social feedback.

> What would this Oath consist of? At the bare minimum: a commitment to good faith dialogue, the principle of charity, and intellectual humility. The last virtue is critical. A caveat of "I could be wrong"

underlying strongly held beliefs helps even the most difficult conversations, a shared commitment to that caveat helps even more (Limberg & Barnes, 2018, Hippocratic Oath of the Cultural War section).

The question then becomes, what motivation do individuals and organisations have to transcend "outrage porn" and produce more socially responsible content?

Broader Initiatives

In the first of these two articles (Anthony, 2020), it was argued that there has been an escalation of bigotry and projection involved in the online conflict within the culture wars. It may be useful to frame such bigotry at political and ideological opponents as equally serious to that of racism, sexism and discrimination based on sexual orientation, which now dominates much of progressive discourse. In doing so, we might begin to take it seriously.

The increase in abuse and projection have led to much regulation on mainstream news websites, and effectively to the outlawing of much offensive language (varying from site to site). Should such censorship be extended to terms like "fascist", "Communist/commie", "Nazi", "hater", "SJW" and "libtard"? What about "racist", "sexist" and even the word "bigot" itself, given that "bigoteering" (Ferris, 2016) has become almost pervasive?

It should be noted that the *identification* of human behavior as racist, sexist, bigoted or even fascist is not intrinsically "immoral," and it is difficult to imagine any legal/moral code which does not operate without moral judgments. Instead, it is the misappropriation of these terms by many in the general public (and also by some institutions) that is problematic. Individuals often use the terms above for petty projection; while organizations, leaders and politicians may weaponize them for purposes of power and control: to gain moral superiority over opponents, and to discredit them (Anthony, 2020; Haidt, 2012; Haidt & Lukianoff, 2018; Limberg & Barnes, 2018; Murray, 2019).

Yet the regulation of language will probably have very limited effect on bridging the tribal divide. The limitations of regulation have been witnessed in multiple contexts across many locations on the internet, including more authoritarian expressions as found in Communist China (Chen & Yang, 2018). As in China, netizens elsewhere will probably find ways to get around the system, and the insults and tribal conflict will likely continue. Further, censorship will do little to heal the deeper historical and systemic issues which underpin online conflict between the Blue and the Red tribes. Thus, censorship is probably a limited means of "correcting" the tribal split.

Further, the prospect of any wide-scale intervention returns us to one of the key drivers of the culture wars. Attempts at social engineering can easily backfire, as we have seen with the intersectionality, which has become an unintended focus of the culture wars (Anthony, 2020; Murray, 2019; Wilber, in Rebel Wisdom, 2019a). Many in the general public have lost trust in governments, education systems and the media (Anthony, 2020), and winning back that trust will be no easy task. Whom do we trust to create and implement the policies? Such political bodies would need to demonstrate trustworthiness, and a high degree of impartiality.

Further, what should be done with those individuals and groups within society that do not comply with social reconstruction policy initiatives? This has historically been a factor which has driven the greatest evils associated with utopian-socialist ideologies. Communism sent at least 100 million humans to early graves in the twentieth century (Hicks, 2004), and the physical and mental suffering it inflicted on humanity is arguably greater than any other political ideology in history. Inevitably, a certain proportion of any society will not wish to come on board with a specific major social re-engineering project, and that number may be large. If governments pass laws regulating online behavior and language, how severe should the penalties for violations be? How might civil disobedience movements be dealt with? The question of what is "moral" is always contestable, but not always easy to define.

Beyond any kind of policy intervention in education or society, there is nothing stopping self-motivated groups and organisations from developing communities which seek to bridge the tribal split. Moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt (Haidt, 2012; Haidt & Lukianoff,2018) has done exactly this at his Heterodox Academy (www.heterodoxacademy.org), now an online community of more than 2 500. It seeks to improve education and publish scholarly articles relevant to issues associated with developing "viewpoint diversity." It also contains online discussion areas where netizens can engage in "constructive disagreement."

Other organisations seeking to resolve online conflict include the OpenMind platform (www.openmind.org, which employs psychology to depolarise campuses, organisations and communities); the Authentic Relating and

Circling Movement (which provides spaces for developing greater relating skills) (Limberg & Barnes, 2018); and Daniel Schmactenberger's The Consilience Project (www.civilizationresearchinstitute.org, which seeks to identify processes and technologies to bridge tribal divides).

However, it appears at the present time that such communities are few, and their impact limited. This suggests a troubling lag in the acknowledgement of how serious the cultural split is, and how our institutions have descended into pathological cultural decline (Anthony, 2020). There is not yet a genuine intentionality within many institutions to introspect and address their part in the issue.

Being Present with Uncomfortable Ideas

It is clear that for there to be any reduction in online tribalism, we need to individually cultivate the intention to understand the other. This will necessitate active listening and empathy. Trish Hall (2019) outlines a process developed by psychiatrist Richard Friedman, one which has the goal of facilitating empathy. The process begins by carefully observing the individual you wish to communicate with, and identifying something they stated or did that you are in disagreement with or do not understand. The second step is to identify two different explanations regarding why they may have come to their conclusions. The questioner then should invite the other person to share as much as possible regarding their experience. It is important that the questioner *not* communicate their opinion about what the other person has said (Hall, 2019). The purpose here is to open one's mind to another's perspective, to understand them and to learn as much as possible without internal or verbal editorial. Judgment is thus suspended. Hall (2019) suggests that the interrogator should persist even if such understanding is not immediately cognised.

Hall (2019) also describes a second empathetic facilitation method originally developed by Sean Blanda, which Hall refers to as "Controversial Opinion." With this process, the individual is not permitted to argue, persuade or try to win, merely to ask questions regarding why the other person feels the way they do. When confronted by ideas or facts that contradict your viewpoint, the ideas should not be dismissed, merely reflected upon. The process can help us understand that groups are rarely as homogenous as assumed, and allows others to express controversial views, whereas a more confrontational approach makes sharing less comfortable. Hall states that a second goal of the controversial opinion technique is to "get people feeling comfortable with the idea that they can be in the presence of an idea they dislike" (Hall, 2019, p. 98).

Given the current polarised political and social climate, we need to improve the way we interact with others, including those we disagree with, and the kinds of listening processes outlined here may be conducive to that end.

Mindfulness
The discussion now moves a little deeper into the psycho-spiritual aspects of the problem at hand. Mindfulness has gained much traction in educational and corporate sectors in recent years, and has been promoted as means to help fix numerous psychological social, cultural and ailments (Davis & Hayes, 2012). It is a potentially powerful tool for those wishing to assume more responsibility for their mental experience and develop greater self-awareness. It can be applied to online experience just as well as to the "real-world."

A related process follows the work of Leonard Jacobson (2009). His teaching centers on the intention to "awaken from the mind," and reflects Jacobson's own spiritual journey, having studied and applied many of the "enlightenment' teachings of Eastern traditions, as well as several western mystical traditions. For Jacobson, "awakening" is the awareness that identification with the contents of "the mind" hinders understanding of the deeper spiritual nature of "self."

It is not necessary to adopt Jacobson's spiritual worldview to utilise his mindfulness process. His is a very simple teaching, and relatively easy to apply. As Jacobson (2009) notes, "awakening" from the mind requires two essential steps.

The first is developing the capacity for mindful attention. This can be done simply by bringing focused attention to the breath, a part of the body; or alternatively an external object (such as a flower, candle or shoe). This is a relaxed focus, not a forceful concentration (Jacobson, 2009). One may also notice without judgment or censure thoughts and feelings as they arise in the mind and body.

Yet according to Jacobson, this first "noticing" step is insufficient for "awakening" to occur. The second step is being able to maintain that state at will, including overcoming any psychological or "spiritual" issues that may

impede the process. That motivation or willingness is something that only the practitioner can provide. Typically, for spiritual practitioners such a motivation is the presence of a significant amount of suffering in the person's life (but not always). For those seeking simpler goals, such as reducing online conflict, the motivation may be more mundane.

Eckhart Tolle's (2009) teaching is similar to Jacobson's, reflecting a perennial wisdom that is gleaned from meditative and mindful practice. Like Jacobson, Tolle suggests that disidentification from the sense of "self" is key to transcending the drama that can emerge from conflict with others.

> Somebody says something to you that is rude or designed to hurt. Instead of going into unconscious reaction and negativity, such as attack, defense, or withdrawal, you let it pass right through you. Offer no resistance. It is as if there is nobody there to get hurt anymore (Tolle, 2018).

The rationale and effect of such practice is simple enough.

Noticing judgment

Judging others (including demanding that *they* introspect, without subsequent *self*-introspection) is perhaps the most common source of interpersonal conflict, a truth that has long been recognized by psychologists and mental health practitioners. In Jacobson's (2009) teachings, judgments are typically seen as the mind's attempt to "annihilate" the other. To be rid of the other's perspective permits the mind to rest comfortably within whatever narrative or reality construction it has come to prefer. Judgments are mental constructs that may also prevent us from being present with others. If this idea is applied to online conflicts, using dehumanizing labels may have the unconscious intention to effectively "eliminate" the other, so that we do not have to engage their ideas, nor consider the possibility that we may be wrong.

Jacobson (2009) advocates bringing awareness (attention) to the destructive intentions which may underpin judgments. This potentially improves relationships and facilitates greater psychological maturity. It invites the deeper states of embodied presence which Jacobson sees as essential to "awakening." Jacobson's "noticing" process is simple. It is developing an attitude of detachment from thought by simply observing what arises in the mind, without judgment and without trying to eliminate the thought. In this way, the power of the thought is diminished. Jacobson's awakening process is predicated on the capacity for developing a persistent state of present-mindedness. He maintains that there is a requirement for ongoing self-discipline, focus and intention. The state of "presence" has to be valued above such other cognitive experiences as emotional projection, online conflict and personal drama.

The Ghost Watcher

A specific mindfulness tool which utilises visualisation has been created by the author. "The Ghost Watcher" (Anthony, 2021) draws on the introspective traditions. It is a disruptive tool, designed to enhance cognitive responsibility by imagining oneself (and one's online dramas) from a distance. "The Ghost" refers to the chattering voice within the mind. The process is outlined as follows (Anthony, 2021).

> When you find yourself engaging in mental role playing ("the drama")… stop and bring yourself into the present moment by feeling your feet on the floor, or focusing upon an object in the room (or place) you find yourself. Alternatively, take a breath or two and focus upon that.

> Close your eyes (if the situation grants that possibility) and imagine that you (as "the witness") are sitting in front of a big screen, say in a movie theatre…

> Now, imagine yourself and your mental adversary appearing on the screen. Visualise yourself sitting close to the "camera" (the foreground), with the other person (or people) sitting a little further away, towards the background, facing you. Alternatively, you might imagine both "you" and the other party sitting facing each other on the screen, from side on.

> Begin by replaying, word for word, what you have just been imagining in "the drama," on the big screen before you. As witness, see "yourself" from the third person perspective saying to the other person the

precise words that have just been rummaging through your head. Hear the words clearly, and make sure you get the correct *tone*… You can observe this situation for a minute or so.

Next, let the "camera" switch to being behind your opponent. See him/her looking at "you" (The Ghost). Imagine yourself as he/she/they, watching and listening to your "Ghost." Listen to both parties saying whatever you imagined them saying in the original drama…

Again, keep that witnessing position for at least a minute.

Is there anything that you (as witness) can see differently from these distanced perspectives? You might like to consider the following.

- How does the drama look to you from a distance?
- Are you comfortable with what you have just witnessed? Why or why not?
- Is the drama really necessary?
- What would you like to change?
- Is the perspective of your Ghost really your own? Or does it mirror that of a media, social media, political or tribal group?
- Do different perspectives (than that of your Ghost) better embody your Authentic Self?
- Does the drama reflect your highest values? How can you better align your mental space with your Authentic Self?
- Are there alternative mental spaces that you would prefer to inhabit, other than the internal drama you have just been witnessing? How might you better establish those mental spaces? (Anthony, 2021)

Much of the value of The Ghost Watcher lies in the disruption of the Ghost's dialogue. In choosing to observe the Ghost, the practitioner is developing the capacity to witness the mind without being controlled by it. The ideal relationship with the Ghost is that of a gentle but firm parent. The key is to develop the right relationship with the mind, and to shape it as best one can. The essence is to stop for a moment and observe the thinking mind. The Ghost Watcher has the potential to pull our minds out of the collective mindscapes of the internet.

Mindfulness is not enough

There are many studies which suggest the positive benefits that mindfulness can have in reducing rumination and stress, improving focus, and boosting working memory (Davis & Hayes, 2012). Most significantly, Ortner, Kilner, & Zelazo (2007) found mindfulness meditation reduces emotional reactivity while increasing cognitive flexibility. Further, Siegel (2007) showed that a capacity for improved self-observation is enhanced by mindful attention; while there is evidence that meditation activates brain regions correlated with greater adaptive response to stress (Cahn & Polich, 2006; Davidson, Jackson & Kalin, 2000). Notably the latter is associated with more rapid recovery to baseline after negative provocation (Davidson et al., 2000).

Yet it would be naïve to suggest that mindfulness is the ultimate "cure" for the culture wars. There are mindfulness studies which suggest the limitations of the practice (Davis & Hayes, 2012). For example, negative effects are reported in about eight per cent of those who are prescribed mindfulness as therapy, including an increase in depression or anxiety, and even suicidal impulses or psychotic episodes. Yet there are also downsides to pharmaceutical intervention and more traditional forms of psychoanalysis, including worsening of the mental or behavioral problems being addressed (Wilson, 2020).

Further, a recent study found that mindfulness practice has no significant effect in increasing tolerance in relation to political discourse (Petersen & Mitkidis, 2019). The study drew its conclusions from short, fifteen-minute mindfulness sessions. It found that that mindfulness would likely have limited effect on "generating desirable political outcomes."

Notably, however, Petersen and Mitkidis (2019) make no allowance for Jacobson's (2009) second step in the "awakening" process: a deep intention to stay in the mindful state by continuing to apply the simple methods involved in step one. And it is this intentionality which is crucial, as discussed below.

Therefore, despite their probable benefits, mindfulness practices have limitations in their capacity to help heal the tribal divide. It is unlikely that large numbers of those netizens ensnared in the culture wars will independently develop the intention to utilize the relevant processes and tools. Nonetheless, it can be speculated that if key figures and leaders involved in political and ideological online disputes can adopt and promote such processes, there may be a trickledown effect. Finally, if more educational institutions and media groups can deliberately share the wisdom of meditative and mindfulness traditions, while addressing the limitations mentioned above, the impact of mindfulness interventions can be optimized.

Mindful presence has a rarely recognized further limitation. Once the mind is stilled and attention moves deeply into the body, unpleasant and painful thoughts and feelings which have been repressed may begin to arise (Jacobson, 2009). The discussion now delves deeper into the human psyche, into the unknown country of the shadow, where we may find there is a necessity for personal or group healing.

Harmonic Circles and shadow work
Beyond systemic interventions in the online culture wars such as censorship, "re-education" or the dialogical, and even beyond the empathic and mindful, we may encounter processes which engage the deeper realms of the human psyche.

The Jungian idea of the shadow (Jung, 1995, 2014) finds that the mind is deep, and contains unpleasant aspects which we may not readily care to acknowledge, both to ourselves and others. An essential claim here is that the unconscious drives much of human behavior. This includes projections, whereupon we may transfer our denied motivations and feelings onto others. Similar conceptions can be found in many psychological and spiritual teachings today (Jacobson, 2009; Myss, 1998; Tolle, 2009; Grof, Grof, & Kornfield, 2020).

The process of Harmonic Circles (Anthony, 2007, 2010) is an attempt to bring shadow work into conflict resolution (personal and group), and to deepen self-reflection. The aim is to bring unconscious or barely acknowledged cognitive structures into awareness, where they can be "owned," thus helping one to pull out of the "drama" that projections tend to engender. The introductory Harmonic Circles process described here involves five steps. [4]

1. Relaxation and opening
2. Embodying the shadow
3. Writing
4. Witnessing without judgment
5. Reflection and future actions

The author was inspired to create the Harmonic Circles process from his experience with healing groups upon his personal healing journey. That exploration has included psycho-drama, inner child work, and emotional-cathartic healing. Inspiration for such work has included the teachings of medical intuitive Carolyn Myss (1998) and psychologist John Bradshaw (1990).[5]

The Harmonic Circles method in more detail
Harmonic Circles relies on a stream of consciousness process. Central to the author's personal understanding is that consciousness is not localised in brains, but is contained in effective fields of cognition. Such awareness can be termed "integrated intelligence" (Anthony, 2008, 2014). There are parallels with the idea of spiritual intelligence, however the construct of integrated intelligence is more precise. It details cognitive applications such as intuitive synthesis, evaluation, diagnosis, foresight and deep empathy (Anthony, 2011). Integrated intelligence entails conceptions of consciousness found in "alternative science" circles such as Dean Radin's (2006) "non-local mind" and Rupert Sheldrake's (2013) "extended mind." [6] The transpersonal aspect of mind is significant, because if integrated intelligence is extant, it means that intuitive perception may be able to bridge the gap between the knower and the known. Nonetheless, the Harmonic Circles process can be employed without any particular belief in integrated intelligence.

The following represent the five steps of Harmonic Circles in more detail.

Relaxation and opening

It is strongly recommended that the practitioner finds a private space for the Harmonic Circles process. The space should be big enough for the individual to move around. Something to write with and on is required, such as an A4 sized piece of paper or a notebook, and a pen or pencil.

Privacy is essential. Shadow work is confronting not only for the practitioner, but if witnesses do not understand the process it may result in further unhelpful conflict. It is also difficult to give voice to dark projections when untrained others are watching.

The practitioner should sit quietly and then bring their attention to their breath, surrendering to the process. If desired, the individual may say a small prayer to the universe, perhaps, "Allow whatever needs to be brought forth to be witnessed with love and without judgment. Let there be full responsibility for whatever emerges."

Embodying the shadow

The practitioner should draw a large circle on their piece of paper or notebook. The space within the circle will represent the projections and attitudes of the practitioner (and/or his or her tribe). A heading should be put above the circle. In this current article the focus is upon the tribal split, so the practitioner could choose a category of "other" that they know is triggering. This might be: "Me to Trump supporters," "Me to liberals," "Me to Brexiteers" or so on. They should relax and *imagine* facing the other party, then proceed to permit verbal and emotional expression towards the other, without censure. This can include any judgments, projections, blame or anger. If preferred, the person can imagine being their entire tribe, and giving embodiment to group consciousness. In line with the concept of integrated intelligence (Anthony, 2008), an individual can embody the consciousness fields of groups.

The simplest way to tap into the shadow is to begin to embody and verbalise judgments towards the other. The practitioner can get up and move around. The individual should let go of the need for control or self-censorship, and allow their hands and body to express their genuine feelings. Ideally, they should witness what occurs impersonally, and *without judgment of themself*. They should spend no more than about five minutes on this part. The ideal is to observe the shadow, not to expand it!
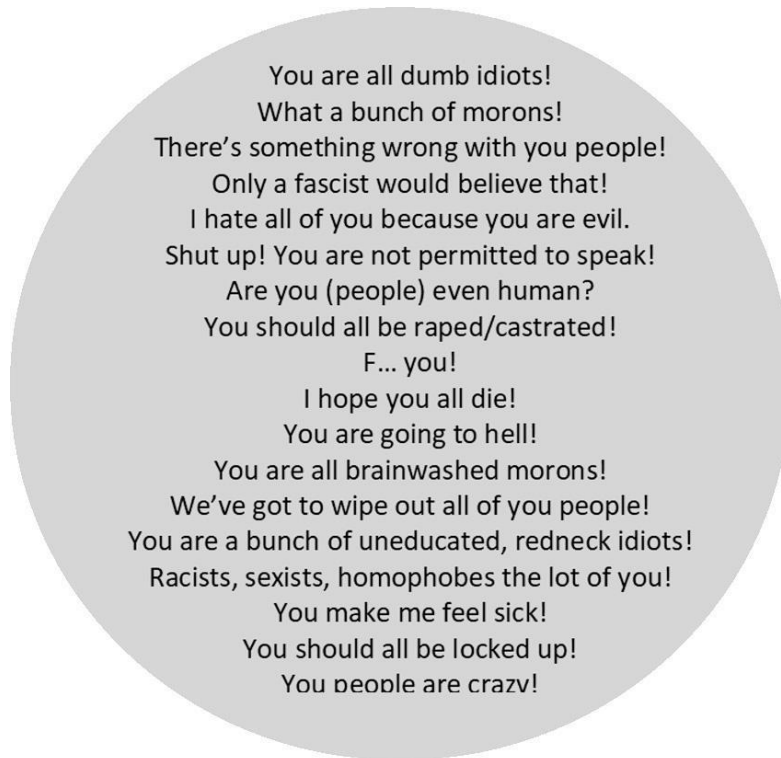
The following common projections can help facilitate the process. The practitioner might like to print them on a piece of paper, then act out and verbalise those which they feel drawn to. Note: the individual might find swearing helpful in triggering the shadow, but not everyone curses, so such words can be left out if preferred.

- I hate it when you (people)…
- I/We hate you because…
- You (people) are evil because…
- Why do you (people) always…?
- Why do you (people) never…?
- You are (all) nothing but...
- I am/We are better than you (people) because…
- Look at you, you are (all) so damn…!
- You (people) are so damn stupid, because…
- You are disgusting because…
- What I'd really like to do to you (people) is…

There are any number of possible projections that might emerge, but these kinds of phrases can get the process moving. The practitioner should then return to their seated position, after they feel they have expressed the essence of their emotional projections towards the other.

Writing

Next, the practitioner can write down into the circle the main projections that they just verbalized or acted out. The following examples (Fig. 1) are some possible common projections.

You are all dumb idiots!
What a bunch of morons!
There's something wrong with you people!
Only a fascist would believe that!
I hate all of you because you are evil.
Shut up! You are not permitted to speak!
Are you (people) even human?
You should all be raped/castrated!
F... you!
I hope you all die!
You are going to hell!
You are all brainwashed morons!
We've got to wipe out all of you people!
You are a bunch of uneducated, redneck idiots!
Racists, sexists, homophobes the lot of you!
You make me feel sick!
You should all be locked up!
You people are crazy!

Fig. 1: Possible projections using the Harmonic Circles tool

A common finding is that one has an agenda for power and control over the other: to silence, deceive, lie, cheat, set the other up for failure or humiliation and so on.

Witnessing without judgment

The key to the integration and healing process is to be able to observe the projections of the other without judgment or turning the process into some kind of drama. For this reason, a vital part of the process is returning to mindful presence after the embodiment process is complete. The practitioner should therefore sit quietly before the circle they have written in. They should relax and focus on their breath till they feel quiet and present. Then they can bring their attention to the contents of the circle.

The ideal process at this point involves both creative imagination and prayer/affirmation, and it typically looks something like the following. The practitioner can modify this in any way that preserves the essence of the process, with imagery and vocabulary which feels comfortable.

> *Close your eyes for a moment, then focus upon your breath. Allow connection with your body and feelings. Do not try to get rid of them. Simply be present with them.[7] Next, open your eyes and bring attention to the Harmonic Circle. Imagine a white of light-blue light coming from your heart and illuminating the circle. Feel a sense of love and forgiveness for the thoughts and feelings therein. It may pay to imagine your "opponent" being present with you. Acknowledge your part in the drama. "I now see that I have held these thoughts and feelings towards you, and it is my intention to assume responsibility for them." You might like to ask for forgiveness from the other, or perhaps from your preferred higher power. You might like to utter or internalize words like: "Let there be love, let there be forgiveness, let there be healing." This may be done for a minute or longer, whereupon you may express gratitude, perhaps by saying "Thank you." Then return attention to your breath, and your body. When you feel centered and relaxed, you can end the session.*

What the practitioner does with the actual piece of paper and the writing is up to them. They might symbolically fold it or tear it up and put it in the rubbish bin. Or they could place it somewhere where they could later return to it, and once again work at receiving its contents without judgment.

The Harmonic Circles process is not meant to be a cure-all for one's inner torment, but for those who develop familiarity with such shadow work, it can be very freeing. For as Jacobson (2009) notes - as did Jung (2014) - once the dark side of the mind is seen and brought to light, and when one sees that it has little or no control over us, we can begin to move into deeper levels of relaxed presence. To quote Jung:

> Filling the conscious mind with ideal conceptions is a characteristic of Western theosophy, but not the confrontation with the shadow and the world of darkness. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The later procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular. (Jung, 2014, Para. 335)

Common issues with shadow work

Needless to say, shadow work such as Harmonic Circles may not be a very pleasant inner exploration. It is uncomfortable and confronting, by definition. Indeed, it is recommended only for those who have previously done some kind of deep introspective or shadow work. The cognitive shock for those employing the method without guidance may be psychologically unsettling.

The prime function of shadow work is to acknowledge and assume responsibility for one's deep feelings and projections, which helps to pull the individual out of "drama" with others - including with the other tribe. It could help facilitate some of the deep listening and empathy processes outlined above, by increasing self-awareness of strong judgments and projections that might otherwise hinder healthy communication. What the Harmonic Circles process does not do is guarantee any change in the other party. Indeed, if we are talking about an online "drama," and if we are not in any personal relationship with the other, then any such shift is unlikely to occur.[8] Harmonic Circles is about the practitioner developing the right relationship with his or her *own* mind. Any attempt to manipulate or convert, to insist that *the other* introspect, may simply produce another layer of the "drama."

Observing or engaging the shadow (your own or another's) requires great psychological and spiritual maturity, founded in turn on an advanced capacity for personal responsibility. The limitation of such a process is that it may appeal, at least in its full depth, only to those on a committed spiritual or introspective journey. Yet various aspects of it may be able to be employed by workshop facilitators, including by futurists (Anthony, 2007, 2010).

There may be various cultural barriers to the processes involved in shadow work. Ideas like "shadow work," "the inner child" and "integrated intelligence" may be deemed "new age" or "non-scientific" by some. Alternatively, some cultures, including the religious, may find that some of the processes violate their behavioural norms.

Shadow work is thus quite problematic when conducted in groups, and this has only become more so since the author developed the process over a decade ago, as victim-centred grievance cultures have become increasingly valorized in education and media (Haidt & Lukianoff, 2018); and are now a driving force of online drama and the tribal split (Anthony, 2020). Grievance culture is incompatible with the philosophical and healing approach which underpins Harmonic Circles, because attachment to personal and group narratives (including identity) must become an explicit and open acknowledgement if the end goal of personal cognitive transparency is to be actualized. The end goal of Harmonic Circles is healing and the release of the past, not enhancing social position or personal power (although these may indirectly follow).

Surrender and forgiveness are central to the Harmonic Circles process. The author's experience indicates that any failure to release attachment to the past, including any blame of individuals or groups, often creates further conflict and drama, and tends to derail the individual's and group's healing process. Indeed, in the kind of shadow work involved in the Harmonic Circles process, unconscious attempts to sabotage healing are common, because healing is a threat to narratives founded upon blame or identification with suffering (Myss, 1998). Further, some life narratives adopted by individuals may be unconsciously put in place to ensure that their personal pain is not felt, nor taken responsibility for (Anthony, 2014; Bradshaw, 1990; Jacobson, 2009).

Therefore, the author's approach to group healing represents an inversion of certain key themes which are common in current social justice ideology. The latter tends to see the individual as a victim of environmental and historical forces, which he/she is encouraged to identify with and publicly affirm. Identity is often taken from one's

sense as a victim, where "lived experience" (especially trauma) is elevated to high status. Personal grievances are often valorized (Anthony, 2014, 2020; Haidt & Lukianoff, 2018; Murray, 2019). Conversely, the prime function of identifying trauma and oppression within the Harmonic Circles process is to heal any trauma by releasing attachment to the feelings and their associated narratives, acknowledging any blame and anger being projected at the other, and then recognizing and assuming responsibility for one's pain.

It is not necessary to do away with individual and group identity. There is nothing in shadow work which suggests that a person cannot carry a specific identity as belonging to some social, ethnic or ideological group. The process, however, may require a reexamination of one's mental attachment to that identity, and reflection upon any agenda that lies behind it.

Towards a preferred future

People will likely only change their behaviour when an alternative becomes preferable to the present situation. And for that to happen, something has to usurp the "pleasure" and reward that outrage and tribalism generate. This may include identification with a group, and group intimacy (Myss, 1998; Limberg & Barnes, 2018); social approval (Haidt & Lukianoff, 2018); and a quasi-religious sense of meaning and purpose (Anthony, 2020; Limberg & Barnes, 2018). What will the alternative, preferred future be? Ideally, the suggestion to move beyond tribalism should invite people to explore some "higher" expression of self or life.

If we wish to heal the tribal split, we ideally need to implement processes which bring about positive change via reference to the more noble parts of human nature. Telling individuals and tribes that they are deficient or immoral may not be an optimal approach. For example, people are more likely to buy environmentally friendly refrigerators if given a sales pitch which suggests their decision is one to be proud of, rather than harmful (Hall, 2019).

How many netizens today have spent time envisioning a preferable image of what it would be like to live beyond the tribal web? What we focus upon expands, which is a principle of perception. Netizens may thus need to spend more time engaging their preferred futures of the internet, and less time on the used futures which identity politics, intersectionality and nationalism tend to push (Anthony, 2020).

The argument posited here is that this ideal future can be founded upon a peaceful and loving relationship with the self; via inculcating self-disciplined online habits and honest introspection. When one is at peace with oneself, one tends to be at peace with the world. When one is in a state of inner turmoil, the world feels like an oppressive place. Shadow and presence work can be employed to help address this. But there also needs to be a more brilliant vision and a more attractive story that we can move towards.

The need for a new story

Humans need not eliminate stories, as stories are important parts of our lives. Still, care needs to be taken regarding the stories people tell and come to believe in. They need to be doubly careful, least the media and the robots (algorithms) begin telling them what stories are real, whom to exclude and whom to hate.

The current increasingly dominant story in both Blue and Red tribes (Anthony, 2020) is that the world is a terrible place, that my tribe (or tribal allies) is oppressed and that the other tribe is bad and must be silenced, converted or even eliminated. Yet what if the new story is that through first bringing peace and healing to *my* mind, and then being of service to others that I can then begin to heal the world? This narrative is deeply meaningful, returns the sense of empowerment to oneself, potentially establishes connection to the psyche and to the spirit, and then gives that back to society. It sees opportunity for healing and love now and into the future, as opposed to the increasing misanthropy and doomsdayism of current "mean green" politics (Wilber, 2001; Wilber in Rebel Wisdom, 2019a).

In order for the new story to unfold, we have to release the enemy (or at least the image which we have constructed of them), and eventually to invite them back through the city gate. This will likely require caution, because the widespread agenda for power, control and elimination of the other will not diminish on its own. There will need to be a healing process. Trust will not likely easily return. It will need to be cultivated.

The search for motivation

There is typically little social or professional reward for spiritual and psychological growth. The reward is intrinsic: the inner peace, wisdom and mindful presence that one is able to bring forth at will (or at least, can surrender to).

Spiritual practitioners I have worked with such as Leonard Jacobson (2009) and well-known practitioners like Eckhart Tolle (2009) teach that when an individual finds the light within themselves, they free not just themselves, but shine a light which helps heal the human race. If there is indeed an integrated intelligence (Anthony, 2008, 2011, 2014), the healing work we do and the inner peace we find may shine a subtle light upon the world, and into the "darkness." The society we live in, our friends and loved ones may never know what we have "done". There will be no testamur to hang on the wall, no elevation of personal or professional status. Simply the inner knowing that we have made a difference to the world and to future generations. And that will be enough.

At some level, all of us who are on an awakening journey know when we betray our own deeper selves, and our own journey. Those who continue to fight and argue in online and mental-psychic spaces know it is "wrong," for the diminishment of consciousness that follows is intuitively apparent to those who have done such inner work. Yet there are many of us who still cling to those spaces, not quite willing to release them. For at some level, we have come to identify with the tribe, the narrative, and the heroes. Even when they are "wrong." This, too, is human. Perhaps with a simple acknowledgment of that, without judgment or condemnation of ourselves or any of those involved in the drama, we can be free. Until the next moment arises.

Conclusion

Just as the breakdown of the assumed known in the twentieth century was an opportunity for post-colonial depth to emerge, the possible breakdown of progressivism in its "mean green" form (Anthony, 2020) is an opportunity for a post-progressive depth to emerge. Ideally, this will incorporate not just multiple perspectives, but enhanced virtual intelligence (of online and media systems), greater self-awareness and knowledge of the psyche. Higher levels of cognitive responsibility and emotional maturity will be required, including from those atop the current intersectional hierarchy.

It has been argued in this article that internet conflicts are often a kind of "drama," generated via the irresponsible externalisation of our inner conflicts out onto the world and its people. In turn, this is an extension of the failure to love and accept ourselves, to nurture and heal the wounded child within. Tragically, it is a drama that has become increasingly commoditised and weaponised by virtual stakeholders, with the aim of optimising power and profit.

Yet in terms of the consciousness evolution of all individuals, tribal groups and the human species as whole, the current cultures wars represent an opportunity for us to see more deeply the nature of mind and ego for what it is. It is a great opportunity to learn and grow, a moment of possible spiritual evolution for the human race. But in order for that to happen, we have to be more honest about what we have become. The mindfulness and shadow work advocated above is a chance to transcend tribal drama. The process differs from the narrative which online tribalist perspectives typically imply is the way forward. The current tribal impasse stems from agendas to establish how bad, wrong and stupid the other tribe has become; thus achieving power and control over them. The way forward should ideally involve admitting how unconscious I/we have become (how bad, wrong and stupid), and how bringing awareness to that can help heal both "us" and "them."

Ideally, human beings in the virtual age should have a commitment to introspective healing, to psychological (and possibly spiritual) development, and to narratives which transcend (and include) group identity. This can be seen not so much as a personal sacrifice, but as an act of supreme generosity: to the greater collective of humanity. Yet without introspection and a deliberate attempt to empathise with other groups (no matter how uncomfortable the process), internet-based tribalism is unlikely to be transformed in the foreseeable future. A psycho-spiritual perspective, coupled with true embodiment of its wisdom, may potentially help us rise above attachment to the quasi-religiosity of much current ideology and politics.

Notes

1- You will find a more personal detailing of my relationship to the tribal wars in my previous article (Anthony, 2020), and why I chose to focus on the Blue tribe in that article.

2- "The need for drama" is a term I have borrowed from my time doing shadow work in healing groups. This mostly unconscious drive escalates in accordance with the decrease in one's cognitive responsibility - the willingness to assume responsibility for one's own mental and emotional experience.

3- I define "drama" as conflict built on the irresponsible and unconscious projection of unresolved cognitive and emotional pathology or trauma. When this emotional discomfort is directed at another individual or group, the ensuing conflict can be seen as "drama," as opposed to healthy dialogue or disagreement.

4- In practice, the processes of Harmonic Circles are more complex and may involve group work, but for the purposes of simplicity, I outline a process here which can be utilized by almost anyone with sufficient motivation and commitment. One should be mindful when employing any process which involves bringing forth "the unconscious." If the practitioner finds the process too uncomfortable or disturbing, she can discontinue, or seek the help of a mental health professional.

5- The group healing processes I embraced, and which are part of Harmonic Circles (Anthony, 2007, 2010) are arguably more powerful means of exploring the shadow than self-work. Working with others allows one's personal judgments and projections to arise more naturally; permits more opportunity for feedback from others; and facilitates the emotional expression and vulnerability that allows for healing and the rediscovery of trust in one's fellow human beings. However, the group process requires a very skilled facilitator who has done extensive depth work.

6- For a more complete explanation of Harmonic Circles, see Anthony (2007, 2010).

7- It is possible that strong emotions might emerge during or after the embodiment process, and these in turn may be linked to personal biographical trauma. If this occurs, I strongly suggest you seek the help of a professional mental health counselor, preferably one who understands shadow work.

8- Of course, the behavior of the other might change if your own behavior becomes more open and hospitable.

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