

Adventures in Visual Dialogues

ADVENTURES IN

VISUAL

DIALOGUES

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Adventures in Visual Dialogues -

A course of adventures to try at home with partners of your choosing.

Most conversations we have are with the spoken, or written word. We have come to expect certain words from certain people in certain situations. Most of our dialogues have become ritualized. This can be a comfort and also a trap. Society expects certain things from us, and our language does as much to conceal the person we feel ourselves to be as it does to reveal. There is little really original heard or said.

When we want to move beyond pseudo relationship, and “speak” from our hearts of the newly emerging features of ourselves, then the old words will no longer do. We will need new ways of “speaking” if we are to communicate to and from these deeper places in ourself and others.

When you look at art that really moves you deeply, whether it inspires or troubles you, what is it that reaches out and grabs you? Beyond the actual subject of representation, all artists use very personal and particular strokes, colours, marks, gestures composed in certain patterns with vibrations that communicate where mere pictures leave off. No artist can help but transmit his own feelings, whatever the subject.

This course in visual dialogues is a way for you to experience this transmission of deeper feeling without even making art. You will experience first hand how visual language happens, and the power it plays above and beyond technical skill. It even plays a role in handwriting.

These adventures use another language to engage in a unique conversation. This language has never been spoken before, so it will need your utmost attention, caring, creativity, patience, and subtlety.

You will be creating marks with unique symbolic meaning, and composing those marks in units or patterns of your own invention. Your partner will be doing the same thing. The miracle is ***you will understand each other*** - yes, you will.

What you will need for this in-person course:

1. You will need some familiarity with the Remembrance, or other contemplative practice. An introduction to the Remembrance and what is meant by “heart” starts on page 9 of the free workbook: **“Reaching the Heart of Your Wild Creative Potential”** you received when you subscribed to Fresh Horses.
2. Some simple coloured media like coloured pastels, chalk, crayons, and/or paint.
3. A few sheets of large paper, roughly 18” X 24” (45 cm X 60 cm).
4. A friend, spouse, child, or relative for each adventure who is willing to have a visual conversation. Each partnership you engage with will be unique and create its own language. So, try this with different partners if you can.

There are a few simple rules.

1. No talking, hand or facial gestures.
2. No written words.
3. No symbols (like stars, lightning bolts, hearts, arrows, happy faces, suns, stop signs, etc.
4. No drawing recognizable things.
5. **Everything will be invented.**

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Adventure # 1 – Holding a basic visual dialogue

Part 1

Before you work on these projects each time, drop into the Remembrance a few moments so you can “read” and make marks from your heart. Just sit for awhile doing nothing but breathing into your heart. You are the leader in each of these adventures, so tell your partner the rules and suggest they 'go inside' gently at the start to tune into their heart too.

Sit side by side at a table, sharing a large sheet of paper. Each person will have their chosen media beside them, or you could share the same tools. Decide who will start.

One person begins, with an opening remark, just like in verbal communication. “How’s it going ?” or anything that feels right. The first one puts down her/his tools when she’s finished. Then it’s the other person’s turn to respond, one at a time.

This continues back and forth a few times until the conversation feels complete. Each response might take a few minutes or less. Any visual conversation that lasts shorter than 5 minutes, generally remains superficial. Most dialogues of this type are not more than about 15 minutes. Anything longer generally falls apart, as too 'wordy'.

When it **feels** complete, one or both of you will sense this and then you may talk all you want. You'll probably be bursting to talk after a few minutes of this.

Afterwards, to help you process your insights, you will both want to consider your answers to these questions:

1. What role did you play – initiator ? follower ? challenger ? smoother ?
2. How much territory did your marks take up on the page ? How close to your side did you stay ? How widespread were your marks ?
3. How often did you allow your marks to touch ? How close did they come ? Were your marks parallel ? Did they cross ? Did you ignore the other’s marks ? Extend them ? Modify them ? Simplify your partners ?

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4. What did you do to make yourself understood ?
5. How did you try to understand ?
6. Was this work for you ? Play ? Sharing intimacies ? A display of power, dominance, skill, or cleverness ?
7. What did you have to deny yourself because of sharing space ? What did you negotiate ? Assert ? Claim ? Grab ?
8. How did it feel to be “seen” ? How did it feel not to be “seen” ?
9. Did you adapt your ways as a result of seeing your partner’s work ?
10. What did you talk about, anyway ?

That was probably revealing. Remember it was your first try, so don't judge yourself too harshly. Have another go soon.

Part 2

Repeat this exercise, changing who goes first, or with a different partner. After this different dialogue, ask these additional questions:

11. How was it different this time ? What changed from the first time ?
12. Could you assert yourself without preventing your partner from doing it too ?
13. Did you extend your visual range ? Did you extend your perception ?

Take at least a day or more between these adventures.

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Adventure # 2 : Switching roles.

This time, you get to switch roles. You take on the whole persona of your partner and she takes on yours. This is especially revealing and/or fun with a child-parent, or husband-wife duo, but friends can be just as revealing, depending on the nature of your relationship.

Choose the media you'd like to use in this new persona. Review the rules. Take time in remembrance before setting out as someone else. Start the same way, one of you going first, and take turns to "speak" and respond to what you perceive, staying 'in character' the whole time.

When the conversation has run its course, take time to talk it out, laugh, or whatever comes forth from this scenario. Then ask yourselves these questions to gain insights:

1. Was it difficult or easy to 'read' and 'speak' from the other's persona ?
2. Did you keep to your usual pattern: leader, follower, staying on your own side, mixing it up, etc. or did the other person's habits show in your marks this time ?
3. How was it to observe yourself interpreted through someone else's eyes ?
4. Was anything new revealed to you about yourself or the other that you hadn't noticed before ? In your work or your partner's ?
5. What did you 'talk' about anyway: the usual, or something altogether different ?
6. Did you gain any insights into the other person's usual way of relating with you ? Into your own way of relating with them ?
7. Did you gain any new appreciation for this person ? For yourself ?
8. Were there any surprises in store for how you transmit your heart's deeper feelings ?
9. Did you feel heard or seen ?

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Adventure # 3: An imagined scenario.

You are visiting Venice, Florence, St. Petersburg, Geneva, Paris, or anywhere you'd like to visit on a holiday. You do not speak the local language, though you've used a phrase book to order a coffee, ask directions, and visit museums and art galleries.

You are sitting in an outdoor cafe watching couples stroll along. About now, you're wishing you weren't all alone. Then you spot a handsome / beautiful stranger sitting at a table near you. You can't take your eyes off them, and they are alone. How can you possibly strike up a casual conversation without speaking a word of Italian / French / Russian / Dutch / etc. ?

Then the gorgeous stranger walks over to your table and smiles a disarming smile.

Part 1:

Choose your partner for this visual dialogue, and 'talk' to this stranger. You be the 'you' in the story, and your partner will be the stranger. You might want to review the process and rules of visual dialogues. Sit a few minutes in remembrance before beginning, then begin with your remark upon greeting this stranger.

After about 15 minutes, or when it feels complete, or you can't stop laughing – whichever comes first – then stop and talk all you like.

You might consider your answers to these questions:

1. Was the foreign language barrier a surmountable hurdle ? Were you both able to stay within the bounds of cultural acceptance, or did you throw all caution to the wind ?
2. How far did you get – acquainted that is ?
3. Did you or your partner reveal anything new about yourselves ?
4. Was it more challenging or less to invent a visual language ? Did you think it might be easier to learn a foreign language, or remain mysteriously visual only ?
5. Was this fun ? Work ? Challenging ? Easy ?

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6. How did your usual shyness / outgoing-ness impede your getting to know a stranger ? Did it bring you out of your shell, or stuff you back into one ?
7. Was it hard to stay in visual marks mode and not make gestures or draw symbols ?

Part 2:

Change roles, either with the same partner or a new one. You be the stranger this time and let your partner be the tourist. You can throw in any ethnic or cultural orientation curves you want to change the situation.

When this dialogue has run its course, take time to talk and laugh, and then ask the same questions as in Part 1, plus these:

8. How was your experience different this time ?
9. Did you have any new insights, or make any discoveries about yourself this time ?
10. To what would you attribute your new insight ?
11. Did the switching of roles have any effect on your ability to understand or to be understood ?

Adventure #4 - Stranded on a Desert Island

Relax with your partner in preparation for this adventure, as you take awhile with your eyes closed in guided imagery. Of course one of you will have to read this, but you could take turns.

You were alone on a small cruise ship, when one night you fell overboard unseen by anyone else. It's a calm warm night and you swim in the moonlight to a tiny atoll of an island not far away. When you climb out of the sea up onto the sand and under the palms, you see some footprints leading from the beach.

Where do they lead ? What do you see when you get there ? Someone is there, and you want and need to communicate with them.

Givens: Of course you knew you weren't going to be able to communicate with verbal language. You may invent the reason for this. Do they speak a language you don't know ? Also, your coloured chalks, pastels, crayons or paints need not be part of the guided imagery. This is a course in speaking a visual language, so you will each be inventing this language for the situation and details that arise out of it.

One of you takes the shipwrecked person's role and the other the native islander's. With a large paper between you, no talking, and all the other rules of the game, go ahead and have a conversation about your plight.

Then change roles with the same or a different person, so you get a chance to play both roles.

Processing questions:

1. Did the question of contacting the outside world come up ? How did you attempt to communicate this ?
2. Were you understood at any point ? How did it feel to be understood or not understood ?
3. What else did you talk about ?

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4. Did you invent anything surprising to bridge this communication gap of cultures ?
5. What became of your own personalities during this adventure ? Was the real you still discernible ? What about that of your partner ?
6. How were your true characteristics transmitted ?
7. Did you discover any new characteristics you haven't noticed before ?

Adventure # 5 - Your own inventions.

By now, you may have started to dream up situations you would like to try out using visual dialogues. Alone or with a partner, work out a scenario and try it out. Change roles too.

Ask yourselves:

1. How successful were you in communicating visually ?
2. Was your invented scenario more or less conducive to invention than the others you've done ?
3. Was this more or less difficult ?
4. Have you exercised your visual inventiveness and stretched your possibilities ?
5. If you do take part in any visual expression, like drawing, painting, or sculpting, has your inventive facility been felt in your area of art making ?
6. If you have not begun to make visual images - art - yet, would you like to start ?

Finally, for a digital adventure - a visual conversation with a distant friend – with a surprising, built-in “time” factor.

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Adventure # 6 - Long Distance Dialogues

For distance dialoguing, you and your partner will both need a scanner and a printer. Regular 8 ½ “ by 11” paper works best. If you don't have a scanner, a digital camera can work.

One person begins, with an opening remark, just like in verbal communication. “How's it going ?” or anything that feels right. At a distance, one person starts, then scans or photographs her paper, and sends it to the partner.

The partner prints off this first “comment”, and then adds her response right on that paper. Then she photographs or scans the page with both “comments” on it and sends it back to the first person.

This continues back and forth a few times until the conversation feels complete. Each response might take a few minutes and you only need to make one response a day. Works out to every other day for each person.

Then when it feels finished, one or both of you will sense this and then arrange to talk on the phone all you want. Then you will both want to consider the questions at the processing part of each adventure above.

A strange phenomenon occurs doing it this way.

The more times an image is scanned and printed, the more it is degraded – or aged. So the original “remarks” become faded according to their “age”, and the most recent (re)marks are strongest.

This actually mimics the human memory in a visual way, but the time factor is telescoped. Try it out and see for yourself. Discuss with your partner any insights that come clear with real and digital distance combined.

* * * * *

Visual Dialogues show you first hand how visual marks, images, or art really do communicate a great deal without your express intention. Even in spite of any intention, some of your true self gets communicated from your heart *every time you make a mark*.

You have just witnessed great personal power, so now you're aware of it, you have the opportunity to invite it in as a part of your everyday visual expression. I hope you enjoyed these adventures. May you be blessed to continue to receive the heart essence in all you see and do.

Best wishes for heart-centred art, Celeste

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