

Brainspotting and Creativity – All the world's a stage (excerpted from Brainspotting: The Revolutionary New Therapy for Rapid and Effective Change)

I have coined the saying, “There is no healing without creativity and there is no creativity without healing.” The healing process of Brainspotting is a creative one, and BSP can also be directly applied to unleashing and expanding creativity in artists. Therapeutically, BSP is not protocol driven. There are no steps and procedures that have to be followed. Anything predetermined interrupts and distracts the therapist’s intuitive attunement to the client in the moment. BSP works simultaneously with the right brain and the left brain, and as such both mirrors and integrates the neural art and science. Art incorporates form and structure, tools and technique. BSP utilizes the Dual Attunement Frame and a host of techniques described already in this book.

Survival, resilience and recovery require and reveal our creativity. BSP accesses the genius of the deeper brain. In the BSP healing process I get to see how intuitive, inventive and intelligent all humans truly are. The processing I observe with clients, activated on and focused by a Brainspot, is deep, rapid and unpredictable. I am always waiting for the surprise and I am rarely disappointed. Scenes from different life events emerge as flipping images, only to morph into emotion and body sensations. Questions pop up in the client only to be followed by cogent answers that seem to respond out of nowhere. It only seems like nowhere because it comes from the deeper, creative recesses of the brain, usually inaccessible to conscious awareness. Somehow, in response to the processing, the client’s SUDS level inexorably drops toward zero with occasional spikes upward as new material emerges. This is quite parallel to the creative process, where the artist receives and observes the flow of ideas that emerge from their deeper self.

I have worked with hundreds of artists from countless disciplines including acting, singing, dance, composing, writing, painting, drawing and sculpting. I have worked with these artists with BSP around their personal problems as well as their creative issues. I have also developed BSP as a method for acting coaching. In working with BSP with artists, around creative expansion and with specific coaching, I have observed profound healing simultaneous to the creative opening and deepening. I have actually come to believe that

the baseline of creative enhancement is healing. “There is no healing without creativity and there is no creativity without healing.”

Some people mistakenly believe that Brainspots only locate trauma in the brain. There are, in fact, countless points in our field of vision that access any and all aspects of ourselves. Brainspots are access points for creativity as well as woundedness. Additionally, there are a variety of creativity Brainspots. An actor who also sings will likely have different Brainspots for connecting with their acting and singing abilities. A composer can derive words and music for the same song on different visual access points. A writer who switches from comedy to drama will often have to switch their writer’s Brainspot.

Many artists hold the belief that if they are healed from their traumas they will lose their creativity. This is an erroneous, superstitious notion that runs the gamut from actors to painters to writers. The truth is that trauma doesn’t generate creativity, it inhibits it. Trauma doesn’t grant access to experience, it blocks it with reflexive barriers of dissociation. An artist can create from trauma, but it is a narrow band-width. A canvas can be covered with jagged streaks of black and red and an actor can represent a tortured soul. When you use BSP to heal the artist of their wounds, their spectrum of creativity widens dramatically. The painter can use all the colors on the palette and the actor can bring nuance and hope to even the most tortured character. Trauma encapsulates artistry (literally in the brain), while BSP liberates creativity to its exponential possibilities.

Oftentimes an artist is gifted in many different modes of creativity. Soren was in his mid-thirties when he first came to me for sessions. He emigrated to the US from his native Denmark at age twenty-two. Soren came to me to help unblock his creativity and overcome his deep feelings of inadequacy. At the beginning of treatment he was working as a lead dancer on Broadway. He couldn’t help but be graceful, as it was simply in his nature. As he unfolded his story, Soren gradually revealed his talents to me one by one. First he shared that he was also an aspiring actor. Next he unveiled his singing abilities to me. I thought Soren was finished as he let me in on his “triple threat” talents. He then shared that he was a playwright and had completed the book on a musical. Soren then let me in on the fact that he had written the words and lyrics for the play as well.

My work with Soren progressed over time from BSP trauma processing to creative expansion work. Soren was one of four siblings. His mother was a powerhouse who overshadowed and often belittled Soren's father. By extension, Soren's mother directly communicated hostility towards all men as a gender. As far as Soren could tell, his mother didn't seem to notice that he was male. It felt to Soren like his mother was trying to draw him into her belief system that men are crude and incompetent. This only sowed the seeds of his feelings of insecurity and inferiority. "I'm not good enough" became his mantra. Based on his creative giftedness, it's not surprising that Soren was highly sensitive. Teachers and coaches of artists can be demanding and critical to the point of abusive. Soren's teachers were no exception, especially the head instructor of the dance academy that Soren attended throughout his teens. He was his teacher's pet which somehow also made him the prime recipient of her scorn. Soren couldn't tell if she was pushing him hard because of his talent or his lack of it. Once, as an act of retribution, the teacher shut Soren out of the academy's annual performance. Instead of shining as the production's star, Soren watched from the audience. Although he knew his banishment was capricious and unfair, he couldn't escape the ringing in his ears, "I'm not good enough". But somewhere deep inside Soren knew he was not only good enough, but special.

Creatively gifted people, starting in childhood, get wounded in their giftedness. It is the unkindest cut of all and it is the most deeply wounding one as well. Abuse to one's giftedness has a dual effect; it wounds the soul and it lays down the foundation of later creative blocks. Artist clients see the world differently than most of the population. In fact, some see a different universe than other people. These perceptions may be in image, sound, movement or concept. Artists usually possess this intuitiveness from their earliest years. When the creatively gifted share this awareness, it is not usually understood or well received by parents, teachers, siblings and peers. Throughout my decades of practice my artist clients have uniformly shared the abuse they have suffered to their creative nature. "You don't know what you're talking about", "you're stupid", "you're crazy", "you're a trouble-maker" and the ubiquitous, "you're too sensitive", are epithets usually directed at the gifted. It was no surprise that Soren crawled into a shell believing he was inadequate.

Artists, like athletes, are often physically injured doing their art. These injuries are well-known among dancers who push their bodies to the point of agony in practice and performance. This process starts early in the

career of child dancers and lasts a lifetime. Dancers are at the nexus of art and athletics and are vulnerable to both sports and creative injuries. Soren was not exempt from this cruel reality. When an injury occurs during an important stage performance, it is multiply compounded. But dancers are not alone in being subject to physical injuries. Actors both use and abuse their bodies for the stage and the camera. Robert DeNiro first whipped himself into incredible shape to portray boxer Jake LaMotta in the film *Raging Bull*. DeNiro then gained fifty pounds to play the older LaMotta for the latter stages of the movie. Singer Idina Menzel, in her second-to-last performance of *Wicked* on Broadway, fell through a trap door and cracked her ribs. I worked with a name film actor who suffered multiple concussions in the making of an action film. Then, when exposed to a strobe light, he actually went completely blind for two hours. Musicians often suffer repetitive motion and carpal tunnel injuries that can set back or end their careers. These same injuries befall graphic artists like sculptors and painters. As these physical injuries during the artistic process are simultaneous psychological injuries, the two are locked indecipherably together just as with athletes. Movement and art are inseparable, and any inhibition to movement inhibits the creative process and infuses it with anxiety. The precision and focus of *Brainspotting* is able to find, untangle and release these traumas intertwined in the brain and body of artists, as it does with athletes.

The most pernicious trauma that artists face is rejection. This applies to every art form. For every acceptance there are hundreds, if not thousands, of rejections. It is a wonder any artist can survive and prevail through this phalanx of rejection. Auditions are often intentionally or inadvertently abusive. These “tryouts” can be somewhere between a banishment and an execution. No matter how many times it happens, hearing “next!” or “thank you!” in the middle of a monologue is jarring and humiliating. Sometimes an actor or singer “brings down the house” with an amazing audition and doesn’t receive the courtesy of a call informing them they were not chosen. Actors are uniformly told things like, “We like you but your eyes are too close together” or “we don’t like your shoulders”. All too often, performers are left in a silent, isolation chamber with no idea why they didn’t book the part. Even when they do get the role, actors, singers and dancers are frequently screamed at and humiliated by abusive directors. Some performers are fired capriciously in rehearsal or on set. I have worked with graphic artists who have had their favorite works stolen or defaced.

The term “starving artist” is no myth. Some of the most gifted artists and performers live on subsistence incomes. The goal in acting is not to become a star, it is to become a “working actor” This phrase means simply to be able to support oneself from ones acting. With an office in Manhattan I am privileged to do BSP with many of the artists who flock to the city as a Mecca. I of course have to often lower my fee, at times drastically. It’s my way of being a patron of the arts.

It can take many sessions of Brainspotting to heal the core wounds of artists. Thus was the case with my work with Soren. Fortunately, he was what I call a “high responder” to BSP. With the headphones on with the BioLateral sound, ensconced on any form of Brainspot, Soren was off to the races. His processing was as amazing as his artistry. I wish I could have seen the trauma-to-healing images in his head that eluded his description. Sometimes I simply watched the shifting phases of emotion, realization and release on Soren’s face with wonderment. The creatively gifted heal in the most creative of ways. Artists have amazing neural pathways by genetics and the constant development of their craft. One by one, Soren’s traumas released as he healed. It was extremely important to him that I understood the intricate creativity that had been so wounded throughout his life. Not only didn’t I judge anything, I attuned to his giftedness. I may have been the first person to realize how brilliant he was and reflect it to him. While holding the pointer attracting his gaze, I was dazzled with exhilaration to discover new aspects of his talent. I have seen some therapists intimidated or even diminished by clients of special ability. For me working with Soren was like a trip to the ultimate Disneyland. It is ideal when a creatively gifted therapist works with a creatively gifted client.

Gradually our work morphed from emotional healing to performance expansion work. First, Soren brought in an audition monologue that he wanted to work on to improve his acting. I had him read through the monologue once and then I helped him to find the “character spot”. I guided Soren with Inside Window BSP. I moved the pointer first to the right, then the middle, then the left, followed by above and below eye level. I asked, “Where do you feel him (the character) the most?” Soren pointed left and up and I asked, “Where do you feel him in your body the most?” Soren, without words, put his hand on his heart. I asked Soren, “What line from the monologue pops into your head now?” and he answered, “I never knew”. I guided Soren to observe his processing with the notion that it was the character who was processing, not the actor. Soren had

a series of memories that flashed by with deep emotional and body resonance. There was a twist, however. The memories were not Soren's but those of the character. Locked on the Brainspot, sights, sounds, smells all flashed in front of Soren. They seemed to come out of nowhere but they were all organic to the character and the monologue. Actors spend hours and days trying to create and connect with characters, and Soren was doing it in almost no time. After fifteen minutes he recited the monologue. Chills ran up my spine as Soren embodied the character right in my office. Exhilarated, Soren said, "I blew myself away!" But the process wasn't over. When you take an actor so deeply into character it is unwise to leave them there. So we found the Soren, or self-spot, and helped him process out of the character and back into himself. Soren said, "I want to hold onto a bit of the character for the audition". So the only traces of the character were left in Soren's left hand. I had a final suggestion to him. "Just before the audition, place your left hand back on your heart and look to the left and up and locate the character spot we worked with today". Soren followed my instructions and killed at the audition. He got the part.

The acting session was the beginning of Soren working with me on all aspects of his creative process. One day he came in with a tape recorder and said, "I want to work on a song". I knew Soren was taking singing lessons but his voice amazed me. Then he asked, "Can you help me with this?" I thought to myself, "What could I do to make his song better?" Through my work with artists I have discovered that creativity is exponential. It is remarkable that the higher you go, the further your upside potential becomes. During the session, Soren's vocal resonance and emotional connection to his song increased. Another session he started by saying, "I'm working on a dance routine and I'm stuck in one place." We went out to my waiting room, for more space, with my pointer and went to work. I got to see another side of Soren's giftedness and it was exhilarating. He showed me the move he was struggling with and it looked fine to me. But he knew where the problem was, so we found the Brainspot that identified where he felt blocked. We worked it through, step by step, literally. Soren almost flew across my waiting room when we were done.

The final chapter of the story was when Soren came into my office with the script of a play. He said, "I wrote this", as he handed it to me. "Would you read this for me?" I had done script consultant work on films and plays before to ensure that the stories were psychologically sound. So I took the script and answered, "Sure".

Soren told me that he wrote the entire play listening to my BioLateral CDs. The play was about a multi-talented entertainer and I saw how Soren infused himself into the lead character. In my reading of his play I was struck by two things. First, Soren had a wicked sense of humor that he had never shared with me before. Second, his written English, Soren's second language, was impeccable. Not one grammatical error, not one misspelling. It was perfect, which is almost impossible for a non-native speaker. Soren's play, which included the score that he composed, and the lyrics that he wrote, was incredible. I was able to make a few helpful notes on the psychology of the main character, and Soren was more than appreciative.

Soren had a crucial decision to make about who should direct his play. He was considering doing it himself but knew that financial backers would want to bring in a name director. I took out my pointer and said, "Let's find your decision spot". The Brainspot was dead center. Soren stared down the spot for ten minutes then closed his eyes. I could see that he was still staring at the same spot inside. Soren went for ten more minutes as I waited patiently. Finally he opened his eyes and said, "I'm directing it". Soren also decided to produce and choreograph his play as well and he never looked back. We have continued Brainspotting on every creative and personal issue that have emerged in the process of making his play a reality. Occasionally, under duress, Soren has a temporary lapse into insecurity. It doesn't take much Brainspotting and he is back on track. He has staged a major workshop of his play and is now in the process of raising the copious amount of money required to stage a Broadway musical. Soren's mantra is no longer, "I'm not good enough". The mantra has evolved into, "I'm a proud artist".