Title: Resonant Tuning Forks: Countertransference, Applied Poetry, and Accessing the Inner Life (Psychodynamics) of Organizations

Presenter and Workshop Facilitator: Howard F. Stein, Ph.D.

Selected poems by Howard F. Stein for possible use during OSPS Presentation/Workshop. The OSPS meeting occasion itself, together with what takes place within the group’s creative space, inspire which poems I will read, and in what sequence.

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the abiding influence that my long-time friend, colleague, and frequent co-author, Dr. Seth Allcorn, has had on my writing poems inspired – and often haunted – by my workplace experience as both employee and consultant over the past thirty or more years.
Downsizing written in 2000, still applicable in 2019

What is happening
Has not happened,
And if it has,
We do not want to know.

People I worked with yesterday,
Today are suddenly whisked away;
No one asks where they go –
Or even really wants to know.

There is no blood to show
For all their disappearance;
They just are
Not around anymore.

The signs all
Read the same –
On the highways, in the stores,
On the elevators, in the halls:

What is happening
Has not happened,
And if it has,
We do not want to know.

The Wrong Ending

Rubbish is what he felt like --
garbage wrapped in newspaper
and taken out to the metal cans
near the mailbox.
After thirty years of service
fired without notice, a
company man his company disowned.
("Where did I go wrong?" he wondered.)
"Dead wood," "trim the fat,"
that's what the paper said the next morning,
just one of three thousand let go,
all in the same day.
Thrown into the street --
garbage!

Where Is the Blood?

Night at corporate headquarters –
The four of us who studied the company’s downsizing
Walk silently through a long, dim-lit,
Blank, cream-painted corridor,
A place where phantoms dwell and wait,
A place where walls seem to close in on us.
We all look around,
As if we are looking for something.
After about twenty paces into this antiseptic cave,
I ask aloud, “Where is the blood?” –
My three friends say they were thinking
The same thing.

A consultant team, all in black suits,
Had recently studied the financial books
And recommended to the CEO
That they could save lots of money
And make the company look good to shareholders
By firing a thousand employees immediately – for starters.
“Mandatory downsizing to keep the company alive,”
“A necessary sacrifice for the sake of the company,”
The leader said to those gathered
In a locked auditorium before they were ordered to stand
In long queues of people processed
Impersonally, efficiently, in a well-oiled machine,
And finally escorted to the parking lot, never to return.

The four of us knew the story,
See it unfold before us again
In that cavern, as we walk and relive it.
The walls and carpet bleed,
Cover our shoes and clothes
In still-warm, thick, crimson blood,
Like in a horror movie.
The story hovers in the air;
Its ghost will not leave.
It speaks to us with great sadness;
Even the ghost could not rid itself of the memory,
Could not abandon the prison of knowing too much.
The four of us look at each other,
The story alive in all of us.

Bathed in fresh blood, we leave the building
And re-enter the night,
Carrying the hall’s darkness with us.
We had been through the mass firing
Even before it happened.
We knew too much –
The blood will not wash off,
Not now, maybe never.

**Two Related Poems:**

**Them**

I am a “them” to you –
the banishment is
in your eyes,
in the distance
you stand from me,
in the frown
on your face
when I am the object
of your gaze.
How not to make
your judgment
my own,
and become a “them”
to me?


**Pronouncement**

For how long have you told me
I do not belong?
Each time I wince at your pronouncement –

Until one day you colonized my soul,
Your voice overtook mine,
Now mine makes the cruel announcement.

Rules

For the newcomer to this workplace, there are rules to learn: explicit rules, unstated rules, conscious rules, unconscious rules, official rules, informal rules, rules that are spoken, rules that are undiscussable, rules that make sense, rules that make no sense but are supposed to make sense.

Your main job is to obey them all, 
_and you thought you only 
came here to work!

Who We Are

A matrix of sacred clichés proclaims to the world, "This is the way we do things around here – and don't mess with it." We don't think of thinking outside the box. We are the box.

Transformational Leadership

He arrived with a flair,
the new CEO,
like a god on a chariot,
this shaman of change.
He followed Nietzsche’s dictum
that great creators must
be great destroyers,
Shiva in the flesh.
He drilled down his will
into the soul of the organization,
replaced their thought
with his thought,
until only his thought remained:
  one corporation,
  one mind,
  one will,
lockstep awe,
the culture a cult,
divine kingship returned.
His power glittered as the gold
  of productivity,
  of profit,
  of perfection,
a well-oiled machine
that submitted to one machinist,
to none else but his glory.
  Beside him
  there is
  no corporation.
“There is only I.”

Corporate Greed

The corporation has a body, a hungry body. The corporation has a mouth, a chief executive mouth, and not far below it a hungry maw, incapable of being filled.

The chief executive mouth is urged on toward greater consumption by the many other parts of the body – accountants and bankers, attorneys and consultants, directors and securities dealers, regulators and financial analysts, and shareholders.

The chief executive mouth feeds the corporation, until at last the corporation, wasted away, still empty, has consumed itself.

Coffee Cup

You, with your coffee cup securely in your hand, tell me that you keep seeing me in the hallway with a cup in my hand, either empty or full, and Didn’t I have anything better to do with my time? I decline to reply.

**Toward Outside Experts**

Be polite.
Listen.
Be respectful.
Don’t get up and walk out while they speak.
Use what you can.
Eventually they will leave.

Watch the Winter Wheat

Watch the winter wheat grow,
seed in furrowed dirt;
the faintest hint of green
in perfectly parallel rows;
a lawn of deep green;
for a time, pasture
for hungry cows in winter,
if snow is not too deep;
rising in spring dark green
until heads form,
and grass turns to grain;
broad, golden waves in the wind,
as perfect as the narrow rows last fall;
then watch, wait, hope, and pray
the wheat will not be
beaten to death by hail,
drowned and rotted by too much rain,
starved to death by too little;
then, having cheated death
by grace or luck,
wheat is ready for cutting.

I could spend a lifetime
watching winter wheat grow.

Appointment at the Doctor’s

She tries to hold her life together
With baling wire and duct tape.
Sometimes it stays, other times
It unravels and breaks apart.
She and her mother – a grocery store
Cashier and a housekeeper –
Are the sole providers.
They can’t afford a car,
And get around town by asking
Relatives for rides and taking the city bus.

It is a blustery winter day;
Her youngest of three kids
Is sick with high fever, cough,
Aches, kept her up all night.
She called the doctor’s office
In early morning and was worked in
Their schedule today. Her mom
Stayed home and watched
The two other kids. She bundled
Up her little son and walked
To the first bus stop. They waited.
The bus was late – like it was sometimes
Early, you could never count
On the schedule. Then there was
The transfer, and waiting for
The second bus. At last they walked
From the bus stop to the doctor’s
Office, more than an hour late
For their appointment. The receptionist
Scolded her for being late; so did
The nurse after her. They called her
Difficult, unreliable, inconsiderate.
Didn’t she understand what a schedule is for?
Someone in the back of the clinic
– a doctor, a nurse? –
Overheard the clamor, and said, “Let them stay. We’ll work them in. You never know what some people Have to go through to get here.”

Imagine—
age-old foes
sit down with each other
in a safe space, tell stories
of how the other is a monster
who inflicted grievous wounds
that can never be forgotten or forgiven –
only to hear the enemy's own story
of vulnerability, of suffering, and of fear.

Each begins to listen more
by having been listened to deeply
by listeners who arranged the meeting.
No miracle, but minute breakthroughs
of compassion and concern,
a tiny thaw in the ice,
a small breach in the wall—

Could the enemy be more human than monster?
Might tomorrow not be condemned
to be the same as yesterday and today?

Dialogue

Patient to therapist:
“I am so full of hate.”
Therapist to patient:
“Whose hate are you filled with?”
Patient to therapist:
“Is that why I am hearing voices?”
Therapist to patient:
“Among all these voices, Do you recognize yours?”
The patient erupted
In uncontrollable sobs.
The therapist waited,
Offered the company
Of silence as the patient wept.
Then, therapist to patient:
“I will help you get your voice back.”
Patient to therapist:
“So that’s what this is – Voice lessons.”
Then, for the longest time,
They spoke no words
Between them, but shared
The voice of silence
In their midst.