

SCHIZOLOGY:
Graphic Essays

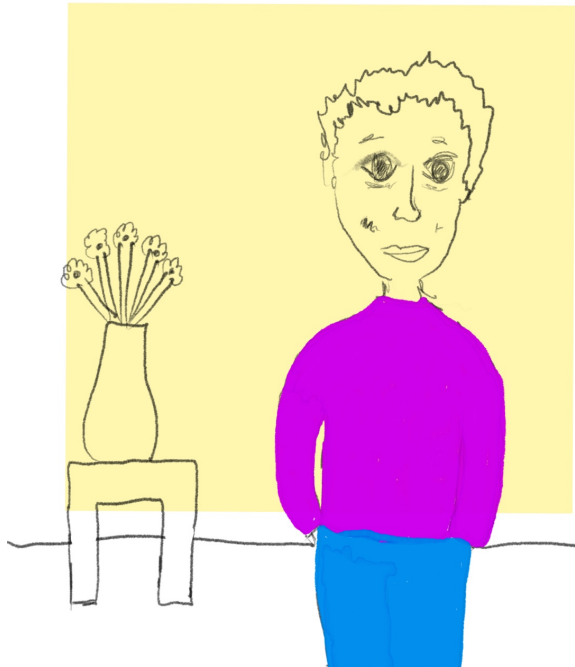


by
Andrew Field

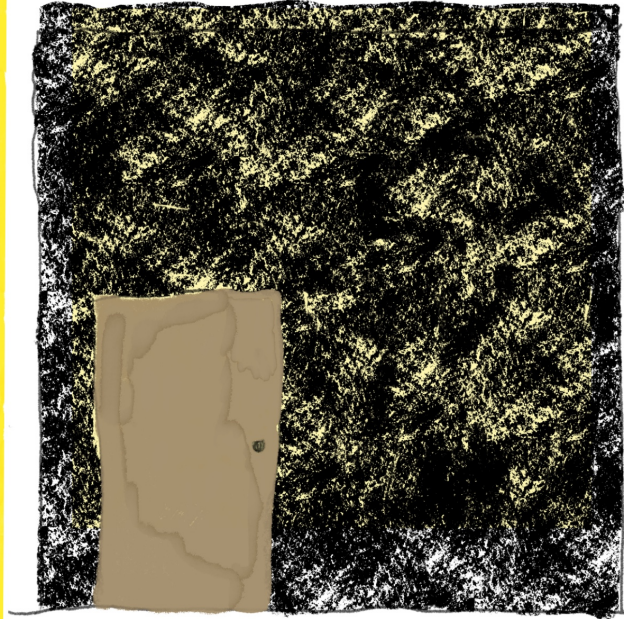
My Grandma Frieda



My paternal grandmother, Frieda, had schizophrenia.



She lived in a nursing home, with the strong smell of urine.



One time on a visit I noticed an Elizabeth Taylor biography she seemed to be reading.



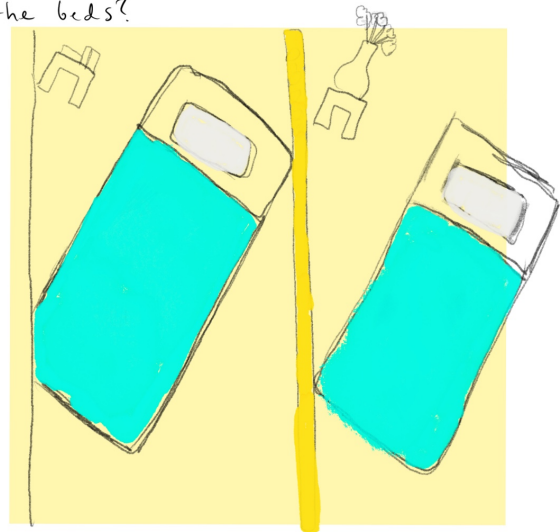
Another time I saw a calendar outside her room.

bingo	reading	writing group	music	board games	R+R	R
bingo	R+R	reading	music	book discussion	physical therapy	
bingo	physical therapy	arts+craft	lecture	memor	movie	
bingo	reading	writing group	reading	bingo	movie	
R+R	R+R	board games	music	movie		

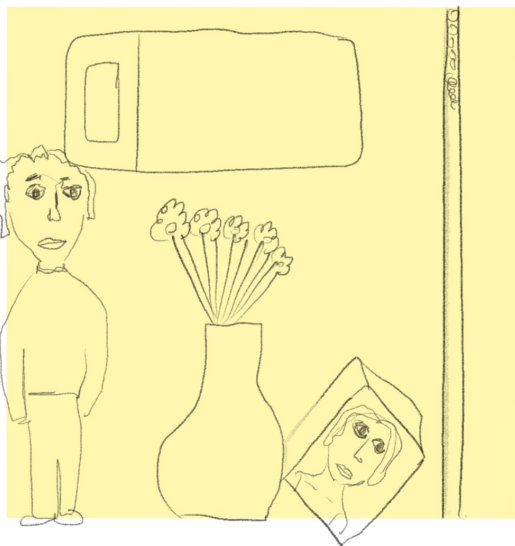
Who was she,



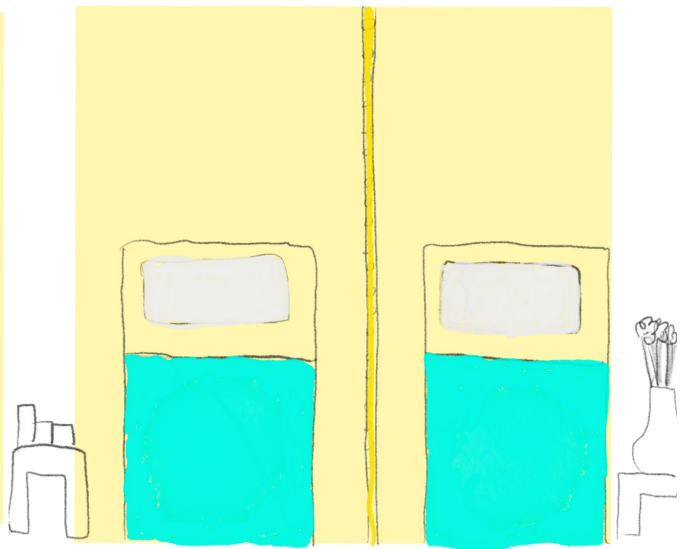
with the lined, gaunt face, in the room that was bare, with the curtain between the beds?



I never knew her.



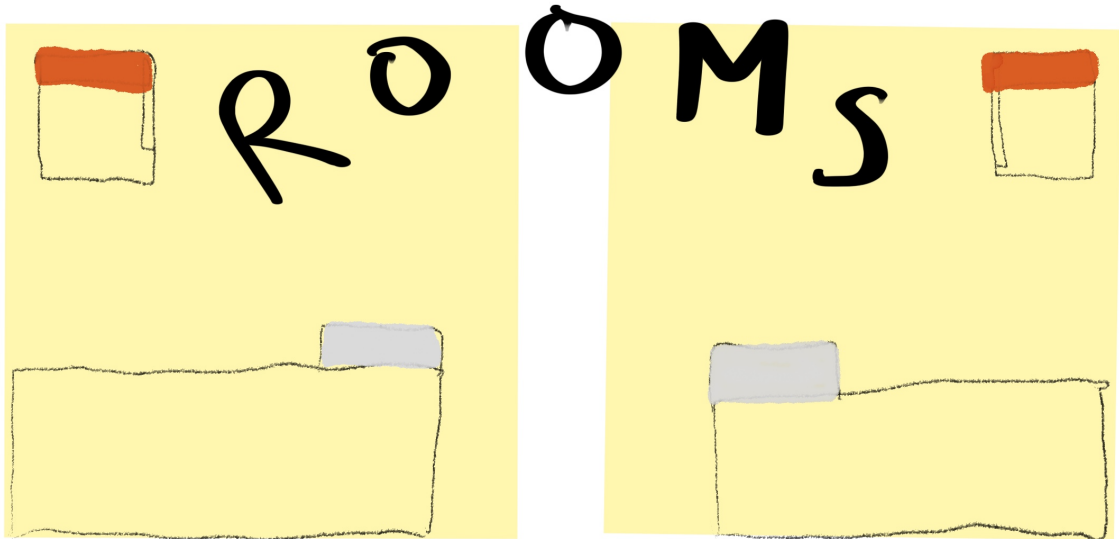
I think of the metal sound the curtain made when it was pulled open;



the word "schizophrenia,"
never uttered on our visits,

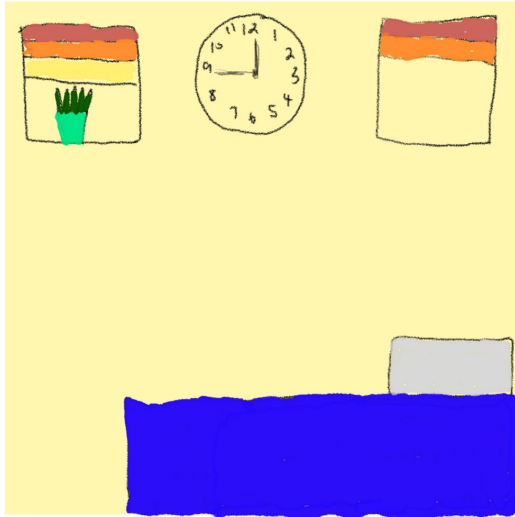
and her voice -
startled, gloomy, delighted -
when she said hello.

Well hi
there
grandson



A room—in Italian, a “stanza,” a standing place—ideally has a bed,

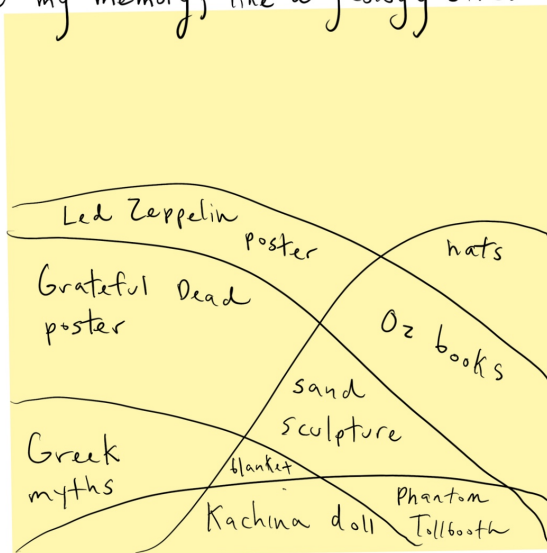
All the lives that have lived there before pass through the room.



a few windows, a desk.

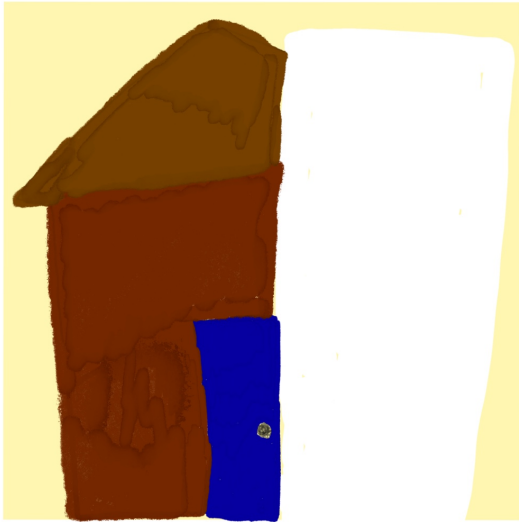


My bedroom, where I grew up, and dreamed, holds different strata in my memory, like a geology site.



But there are also rooms I lived when I was psychotic.

These rooms are half-sunk into oblivion,
like a house with one half missing.



When I try to remember the rooms
I lived in when I was psychotic,



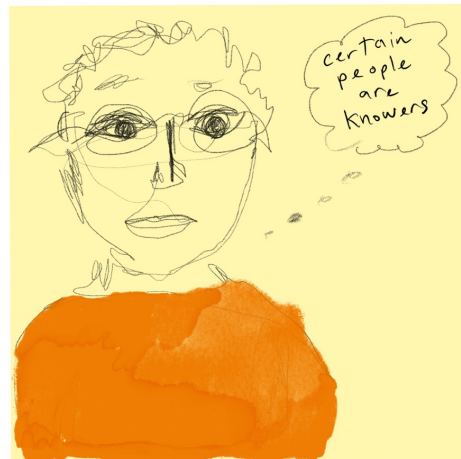
I encounter a blank space in
my memory.

I dimly remember a room in Ann
Arbor, above a Jamaican restaurant.



A man lived across the floor, older, who
wore old clothes, and sometimes we talked.

I was starting to have weird thoughts.



The knowers stood out by the way they looked, especially their eyes.

I would see the knowers at different coffee shops I visited.



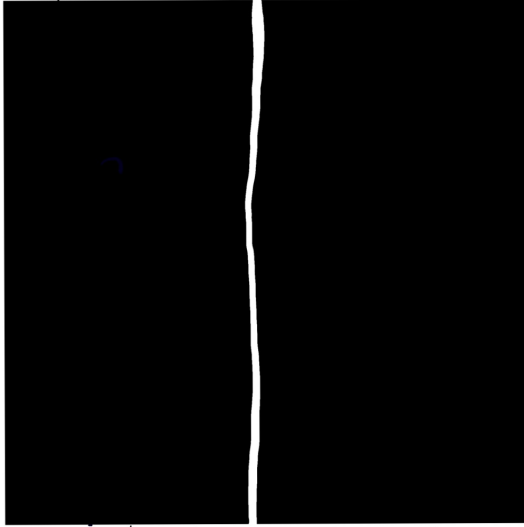
What did they know?

This is what they knew: there was the ego, which was evil, and fed on



fear; and there was the Holy Spirit, which was good, and fed on love.

These were cosmic entities, energies,
that we chose to identify with
through our words and actions.



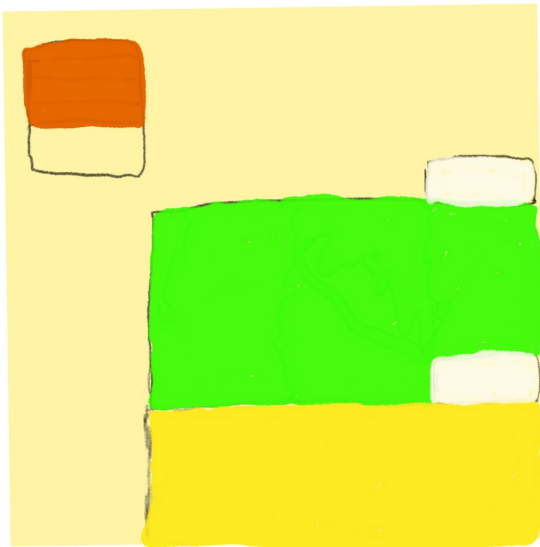
But an absolute line divided them.
You identified with one or the other.

A Knower was someone who knew who
was identifying with what, and could



change the identification through
their words and actions.

At some point, I moved into a co-op.



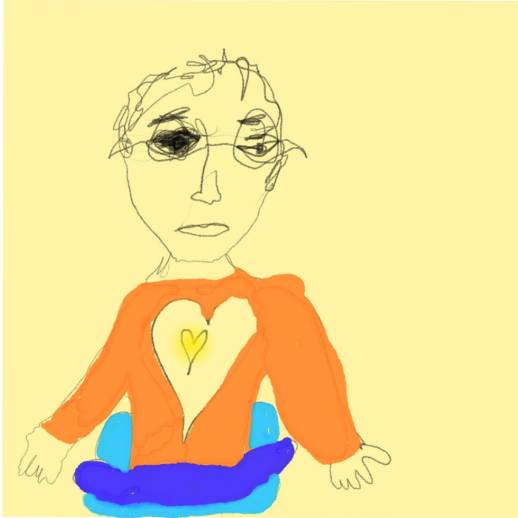
My "me" seemed to constantly shape-shift.
Labile, one moment I was a theater



director, another a prophet, a third
a writer, a fourth a seer.

At that time, I was meditating in a system that encouraged the one

I meditated for hours upon hours. I thought that if I meditated



meditating to focus on the light within the heart.



enough, I would evolve spiritually and grow into a new person.

One night, while meditating, I felt like the ego sunk its teeth into my mind.

I walked downstairs to find someone to help me switch my identification.



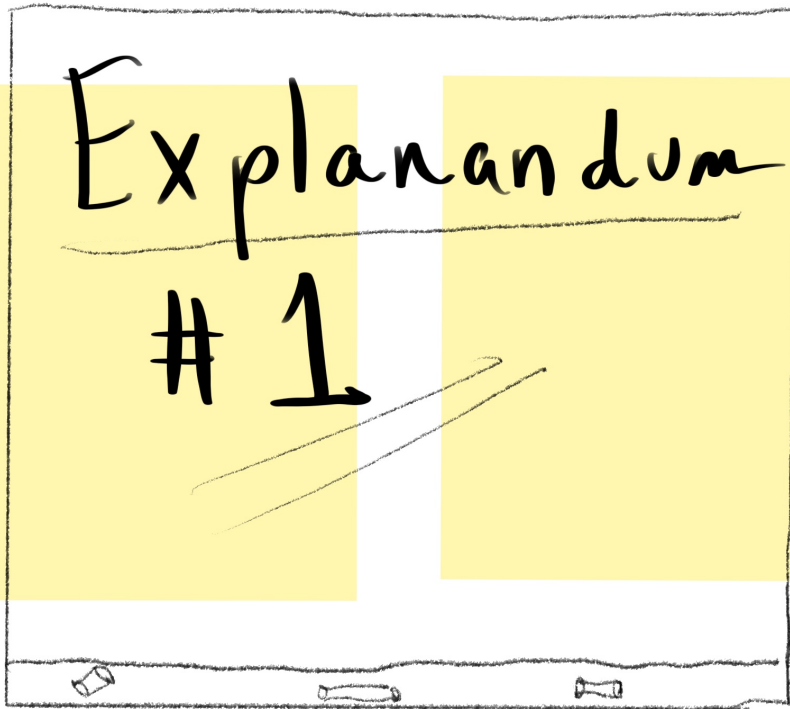
and left me wearing a crown of thorn



I think I realized that night, somewhere inside, that I was sick.

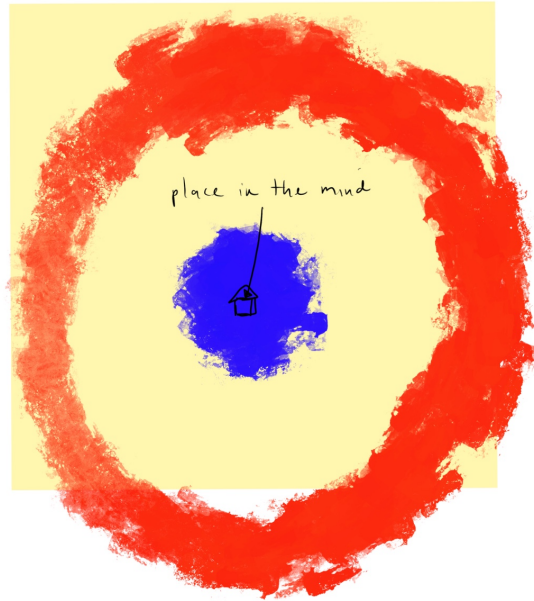
Explanandum

1



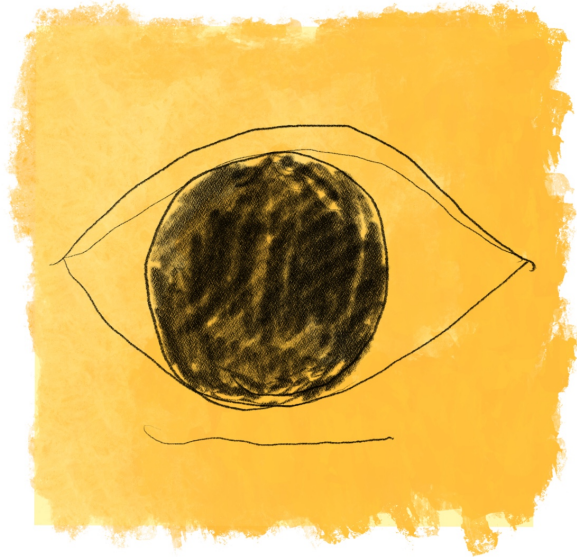
When you are psychotic, you lose the world of others. Why and how?

It's like you become attached to a place in your mind, and nothing else matters.

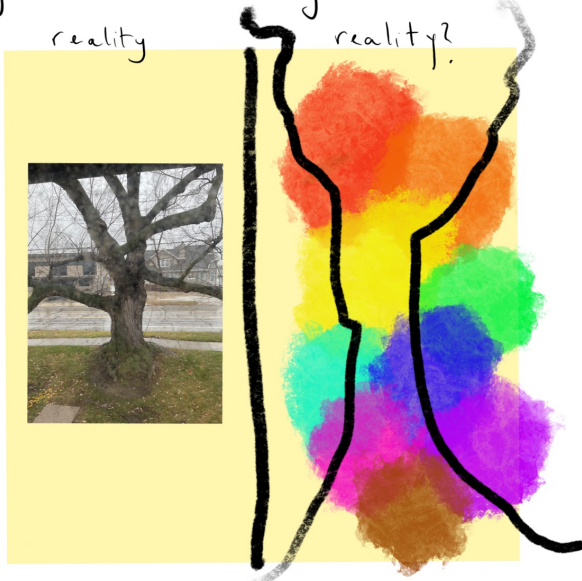


What is that place? It's a place only the psychotic can see. That's why others vanish - they can't see it.

What does the psychotic see? They see what's not there - namely, hallucinations.

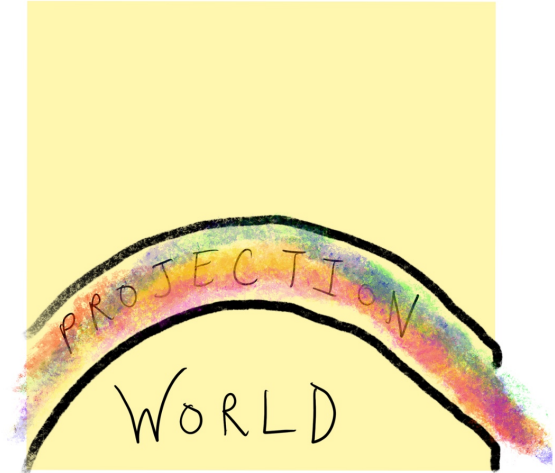


A psychotic is someone who is captivated by their mind's mistirings - so much so reality reality?



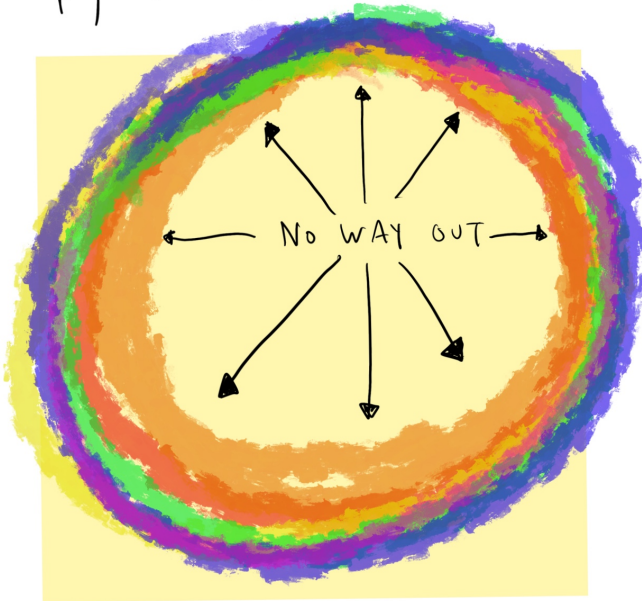
that they lose the ability to differentiate between the mistirings and reality.

In a very real way, a psychotic stops seeing the world, because all they see



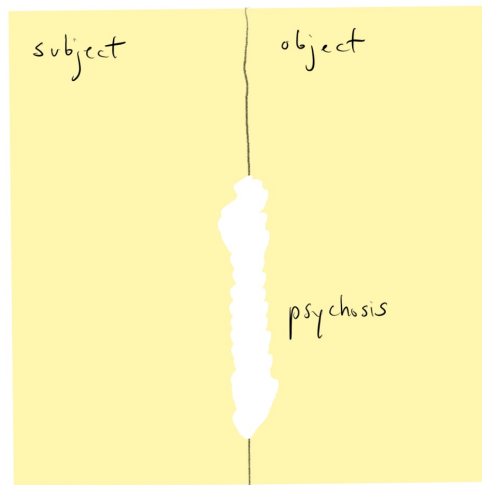
is their psychotic projection on the world, like a kind of overlay.

Another way of saying this is that a psychotic throws the contents of their



mind outwards more than most people - they are trapped in their mind.

The subject-object distinction breaks down, and the psychotic only sees his



or her subject everywhere. It is a form of involuntary solipsism.

Maybe this is why mental illness is often portrayed as a mirror



shattering, because of the way the subject-object distinction breaks.

I remember sitting on a couch, with the window open behind me, and hearing the footfalls of a jogger. I remember

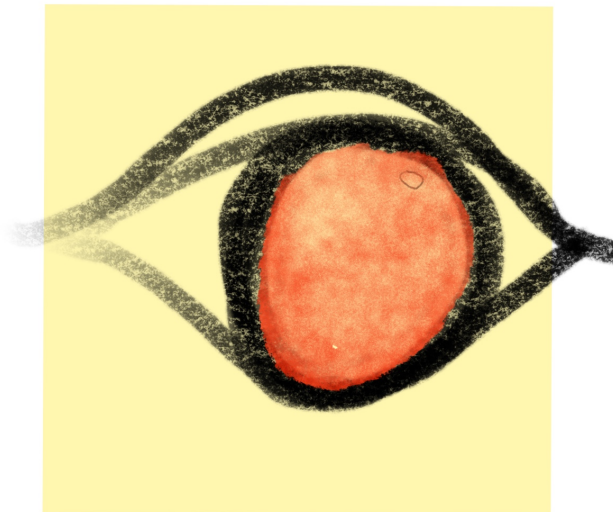


thinking that the jogger was looking for me, because I had a high level of consciousness. I could only see my subject.

Symptomatology #1



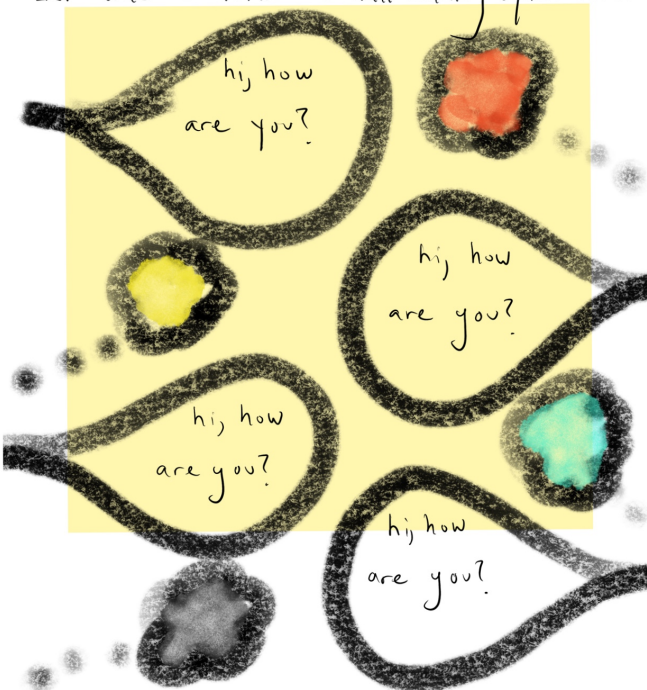
When I was in my mid-twenties,
I started to see colors that weren't there.



The colors were part of a system
of consciousness only I could detect.



The colors I saw depended on
the tones of voice of other people.
It was a form of hallucinatory synesthesia.



I was reading a religious book, A Course
in Miracles, at the time, and this
fed into my psychosis. In that book,



there is a binary between good and evil.
I started to apply the colors I was seeing
to this scheme, to spiritually "read" the room.

This is what the process was like ("Holy Spirit" and "ego" are terms from A Course in Miracles):

So it was like a web, of push and pull, based purely on delusion, which guided how I made any decision at all.

What I heard

[innocuous remark]

would be translated into or

What I hallucinated

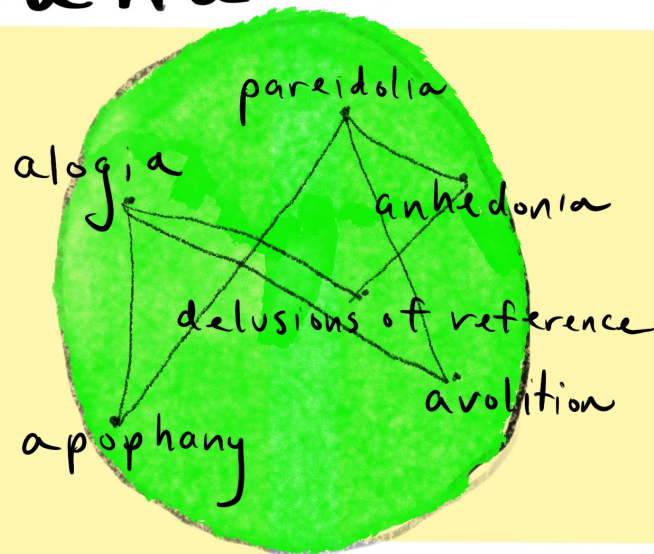
Holy Spirit or Ego
Holy Spirit or Holy Spirit

would be translated into What I did

engage (red) avoid (black)
engage (teal) engage (yellow)

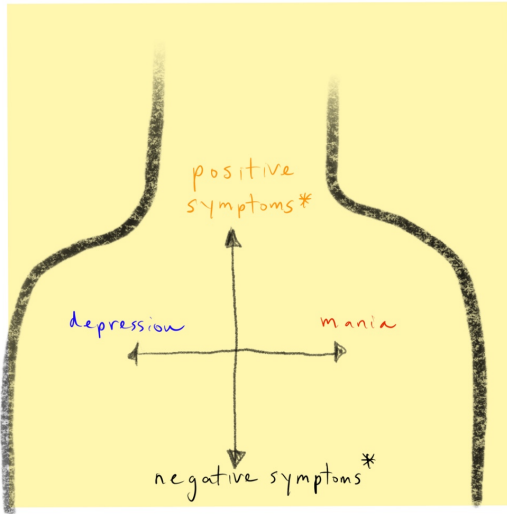


Explanandum #2

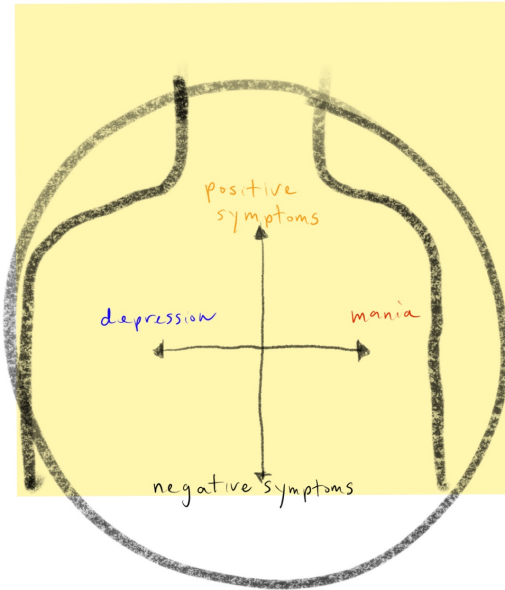


Sometimes I have a hard time articulating why living with schizoaffective disorder

Now lets overlay that image onto a circle, like this:



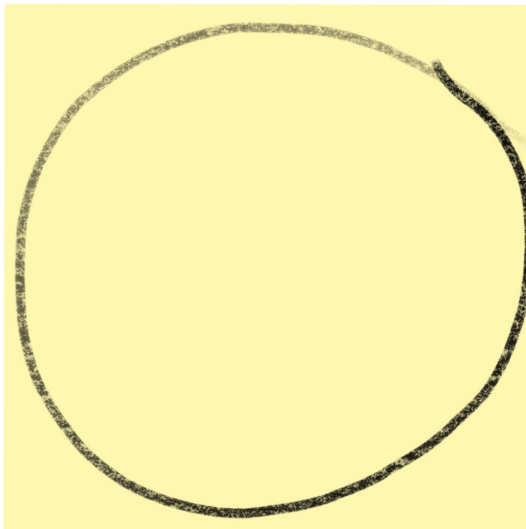
* delugia, blunted affect, avolition



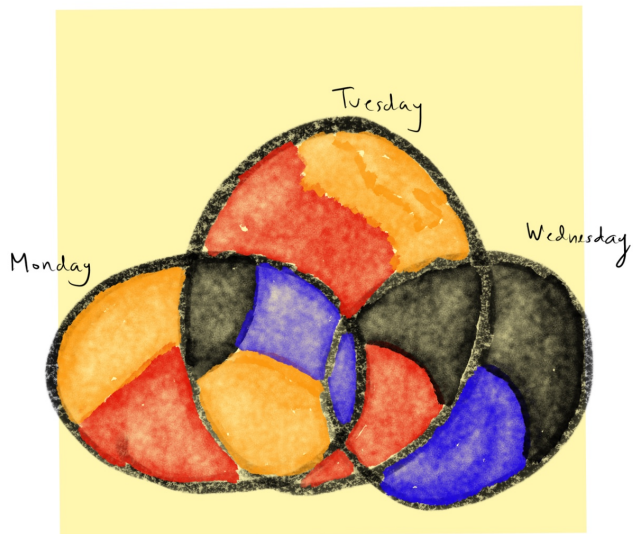
can be so bewildering. Let's start with an image. *hallucinations and delusions

The circle is our core sense of self. It's our personhood - who we feel ourselves to be.

Schizoaffective is so bewildering because it wreaks havoc with this circle. One day one may feel:

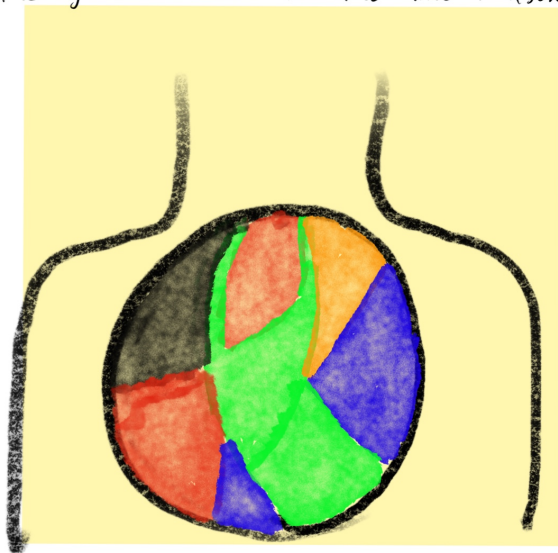


This is to say, not that my circle, my personhood, is stable while these fluctuations



happen. My personhood changes with these fluctuations.

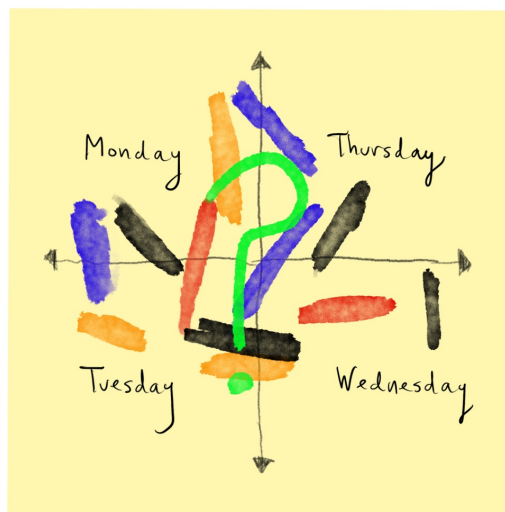
The degree to which I have insight into the fluctuations determines the gradation of madness and reason.



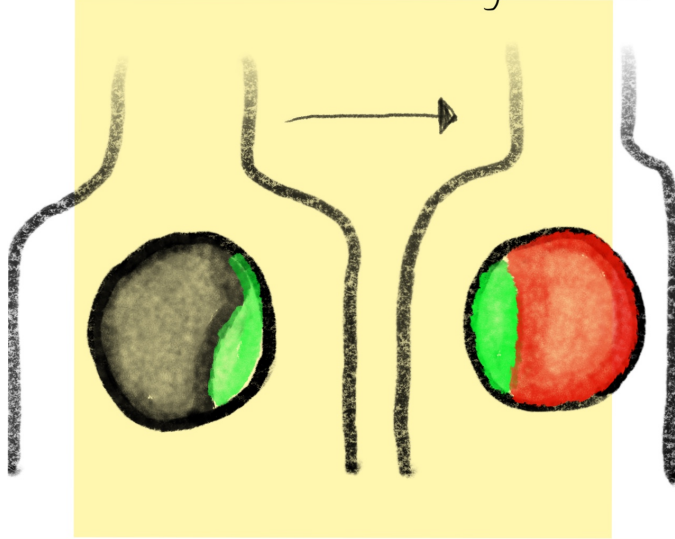
But it doesn't change entirely - for I can have insight into these fluctuations, which comes from my core personhood.



But sometimes insight is beggared by the sheer lability of the fluctuations.



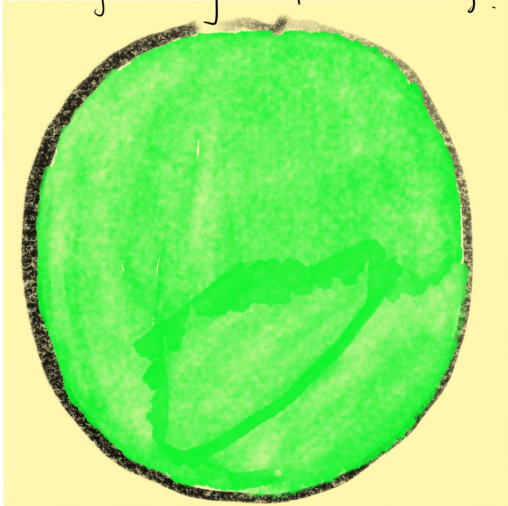
Imagine moving - in days, weeks, seconds - from emotionless to mania, from feeling dead on the inside to wildly exuberant.



Or any mixture thereof:



When you start thinking about personhood in the context of schizoaffective disorder, it can get very complicated. Why?



Because of three things:

1. Medication



2. The perceptions of others



3. Stigma



For my personhood is not just shaped by mania, depression, delusions,

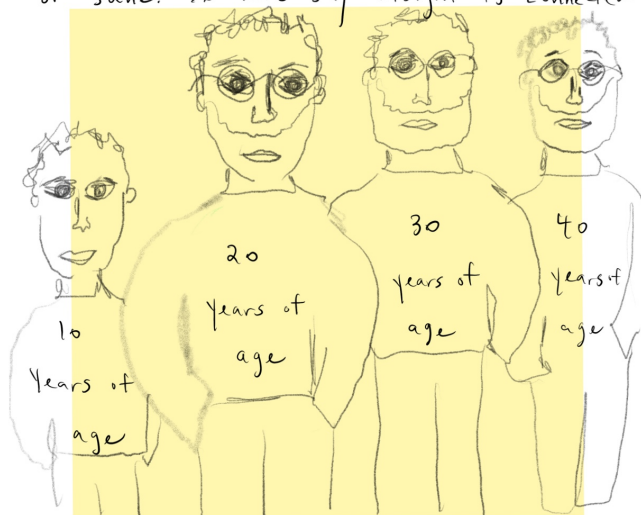


and emotionlessness, but by medication, the perception of others, and stigma.

What is the nature of my personhood if it can be so influenced by these things?



We said earlier that my insight into my illness determines if I am mad or sane. So let's say insight is connected



to the me, and the me is connected to some honest and realistic feeling of my own historical, autobiographical self.

But then who am I when I am sick, when I do not have insight?

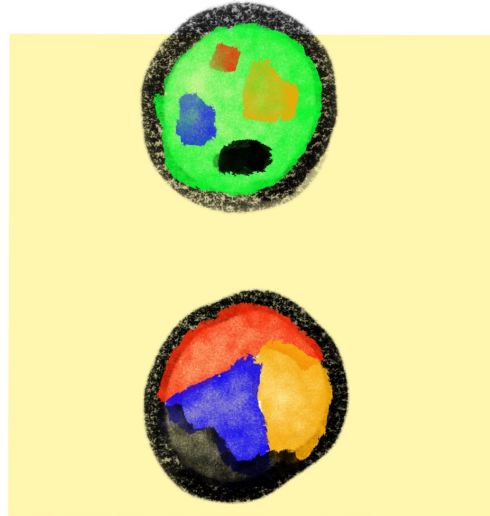


When I do not have insight, my "me" is eroded. When I am sick,



my "me" is eroded. When I internalize stigma, my "me" is eroded.

It is possible with schizoaffective disorder to be symptomatic, but with



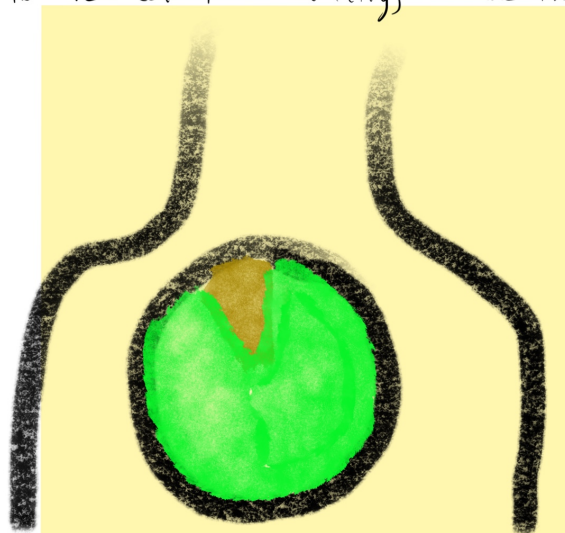
insight, or symptomatic, without insight.

The former situation happens to me sometimes when I drive. I feel



a car is following me (delusion), but I know it is not (insight).

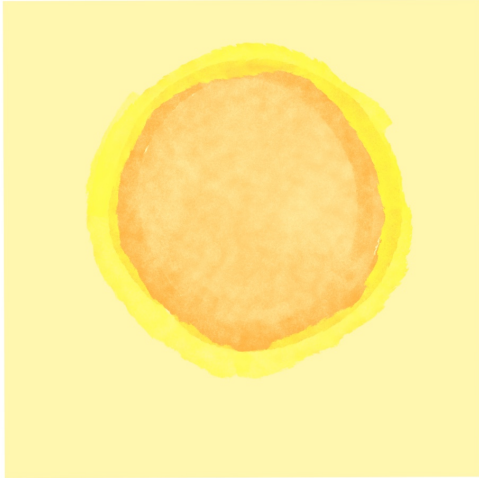
As a member of the mental health community, I think it is our responsibility, to the best of our ability, to have insight



into our illness. This is the only way, it seems to me, to begin to fight stigma.

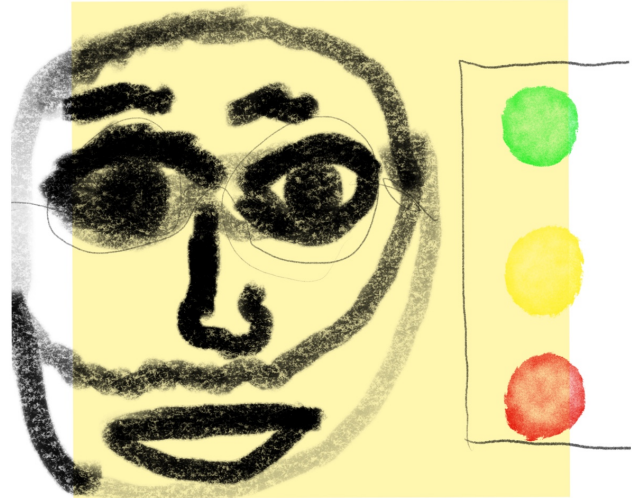
Symptomatology
#2

When I was in the throes of psychosis, various forms of light seemed to utter



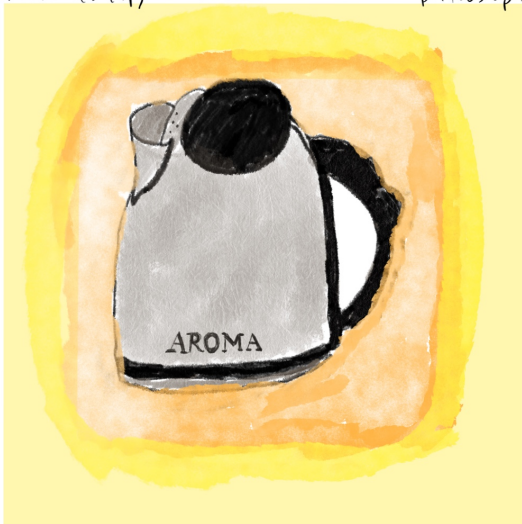
secret messages, like a silent, nonverbal conversation only I was privy to.

The light that I saw - often in traffic lights - seemed to me to represent an individual consciousness that I was



communing with. I was in love with this light, and it was in love with me.

Behind this I-It relationship, which my psychosis turned into an I-you relationship, was a kind of philosophy:



consciousness inhaled in objects. It could travel across space and get stuck inside material things.

It was a kind of solipsistic animism. There was a trace of spirit in everything, like a kind of visible, invisible stamp,



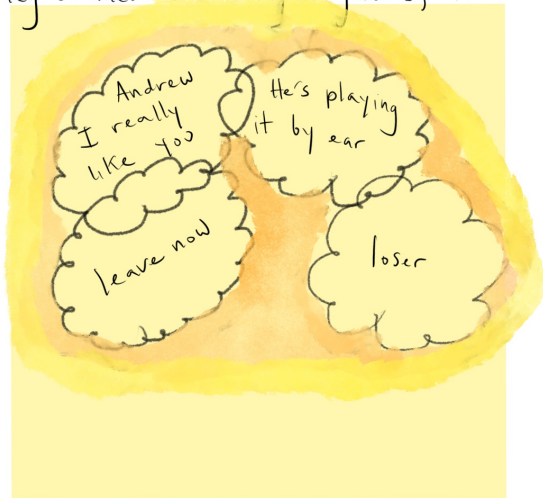
and it was like the eye contact of someone who loved you.

The light was the visual representation of the Holy Spirit. Its auditory representation was the voice I was



hearing in my mind, like the sound of water, or wind.

I had started to hear voices at some point during my psychotic episode. They seemed to be my neighbors, and



I always wondered why I had never seen them. It felt like a pocket in my mind opened.

I remember writing an essay while I was hearing the voices, and thinking not only that consciousness was being flung



inside me, but that people were sending different kinds of energy through my body: tactile hallucinations.

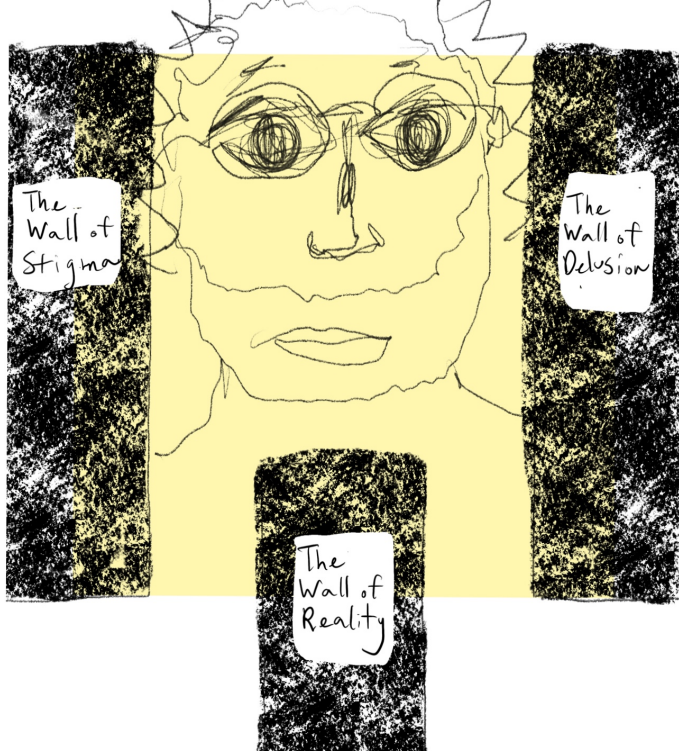
At one point it seemed to me that all communication was telepathic, and I spent days and days speaking to no one.



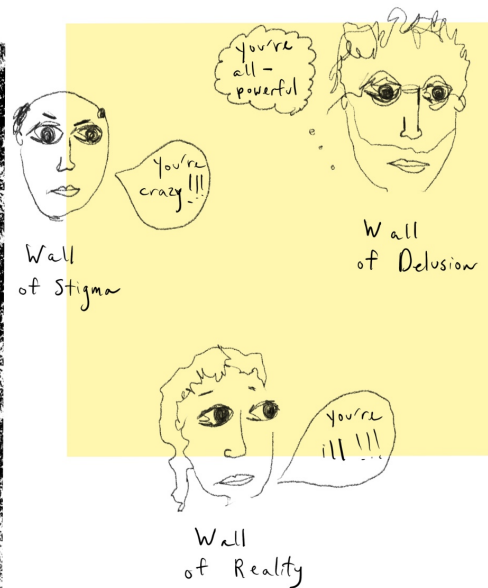
I started to fall in love with one of the voices.

Dissonance

In 2007, when I was psychotic,
I moved between three walls.



That means I was ping-ponging
between three statements.



I felt bewildered and fragile. Everything
overwhelmed me - stores, people, noises,
like some bizarre circus that did not speak



I was hearing voices, seeing things,
and gradually this developed into
a psychotic way of life.



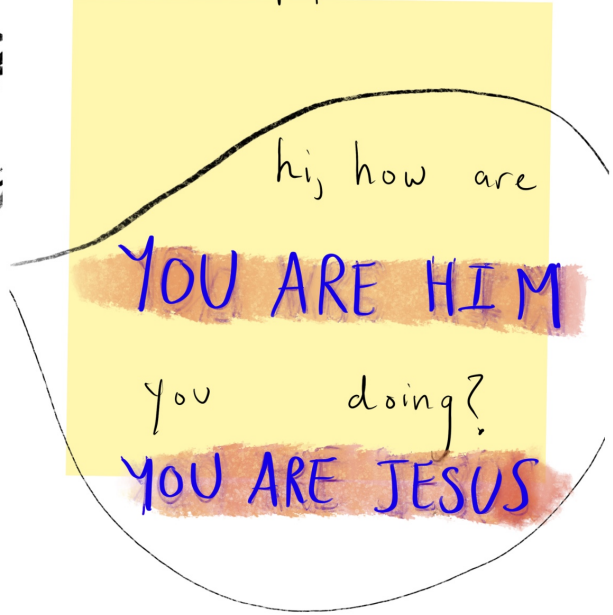
I was at the top of the levels,
and could see what level you were at
based on a color I hallucinated.

My mission in life turned from surviving the day to literally raising consciousness through an act of attention,



bringing it upwards from one color to the next.

I also began to realize there were secret messages hidden within the tones of people's voices.



One night I was sitting at a long table in a dining room, and two women sat further down the table talking.



Then one of the women left, and I struck up a conversation with the woman sitting closer to me. At which point I said,



And the way she looked at me

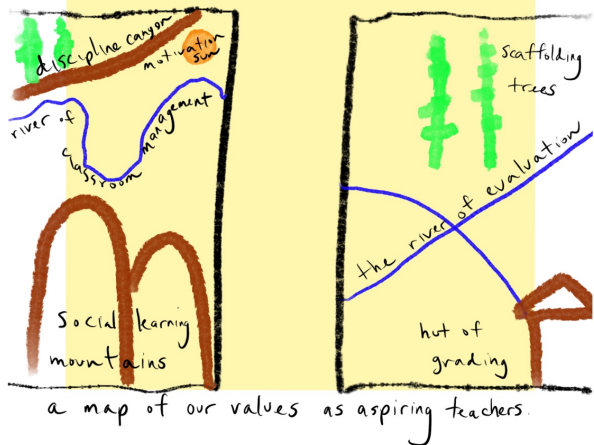


suggested my psychosis wasn't shared.
She had no idea what I was
talking about.



who am I if I am not a
seer who is she where am
I what am I - what am I
doing what just happened I
thought the colors were - were
who am I what am I doing
what is real what is not
real am I real? If the
colors are not real am I real?

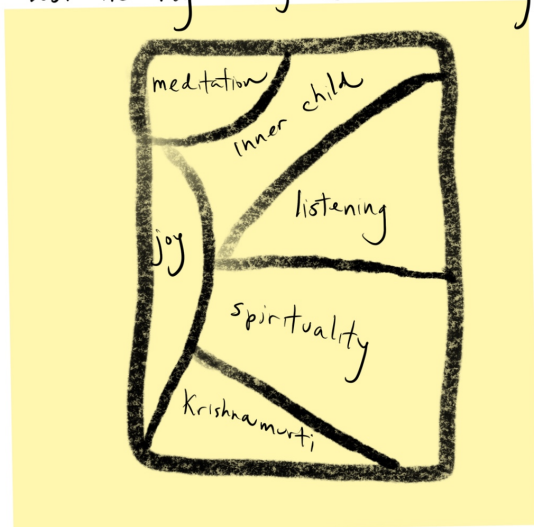
Another moment of intense dissonance came
in school. The professor asked each of us
to draw on a large sheet of paper



When we were done, everyone shared their
maps. I realized that I had drawn
a map with no features of topography. Why?

abstract
bodiless
memory less
space

I don't think I could think in concrete practical terms then I was so lost in my head, I could barely



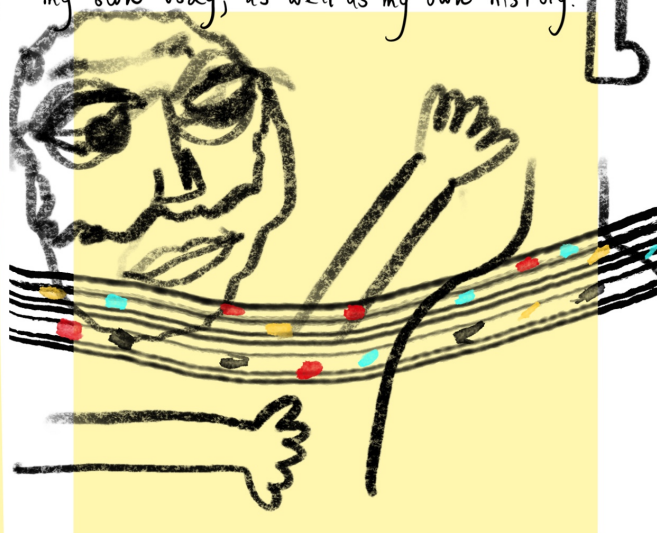
see other people as other people, so focused I was on my psychotic way of thinking and life.

I reached a crisis when, on break from school, and wandering around campus, I hallucinated a red heart



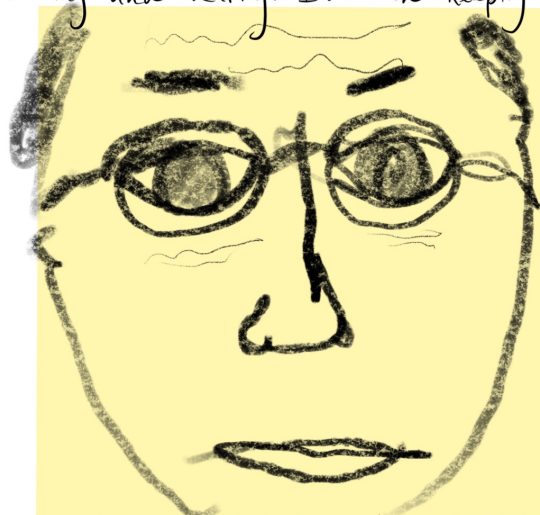
glowing on my chest. Seductive and frightening, it seemed to represent a new level of consciousness.

I drew a disembodied map because I was disembodied. Psychosis cut me off from my own body, as well as my own history.



I wasn't myself anymore. I was a stranger without a history. My own autobiography had been swallowed.

I was seeing a therapist, and I broke down and told him what I had been seeing and hearing. I'd been keeping it



mostly a secret. He called the hospital. As we drove in a taxi to psych intake, the dissonance between the psychotic and autobiographical became unbearable.

and autobiographical became unbearable.

It was like a pure drop of water had been released into my muddy psychotic thinking, breaking up the encrusted layers of delusion.



When it happened, I intuited,



I sat in the psych intake, and the dissonance grew and grew. I felt terrifyingly, vertiginously unsure of myself. I turned to a nurse, and asked,



She looked up from her desk.





No,
honey,
not
at
all.

I was driven that night to a hospital. On the way there, I talked to the EMT worker. I could actually



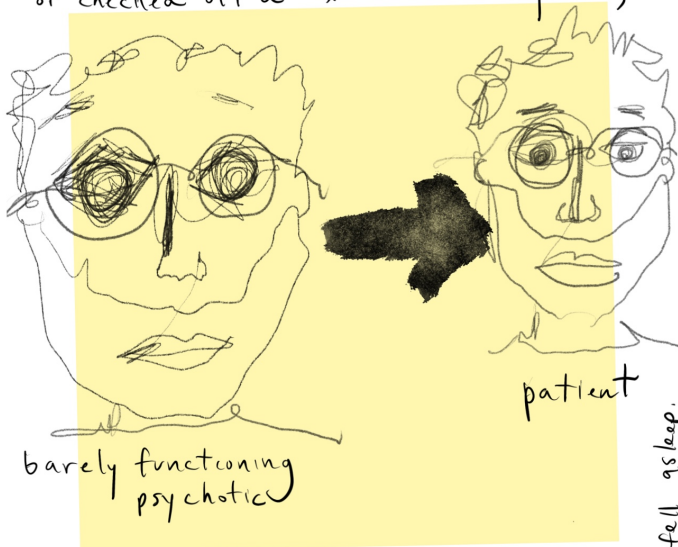
hear his words without delusions. I could see him without psychosis. I hadn't talked without delusions to anyone for years.

It was snowing outside the ambulance. Strapped into a stretcher, I watched the black road unfold behind us. I was in a state



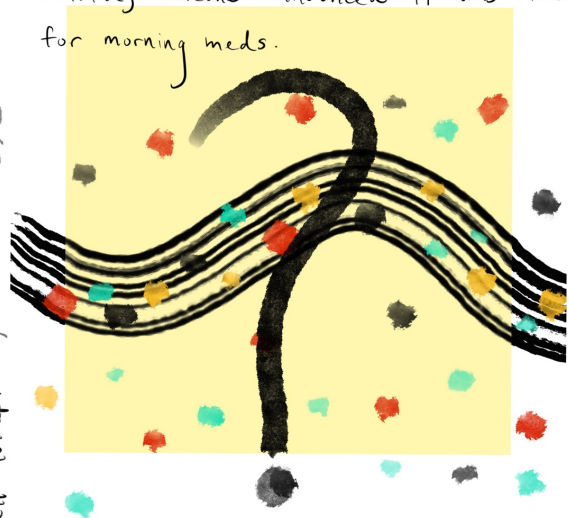
of shock. What was real? Who had I been? Where had I been? Who was I?

At the hospital, a nurse asked me questions. I answered, and she wrote something down or checked off a box. She took my belt,



keys, and wallet. Then she left, and I changed into a light-brown hospital gown. When she returned, she led me to a small bedroom, where I

fell asleep. That morning I woke up sweaty in my small room. When I walked outside, someone announced it was time for morning meds.

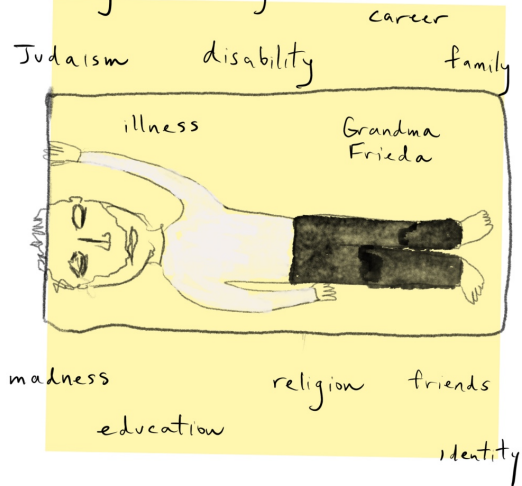


In five motions - lift meds in cup; empty in mouth;
 lift water; empty in mouth; swallow -
 I discovered the strange, machine-like nature
 of the human brain.



Just by swallowing
 some pinkish pills, I could return
 (with side effects) to reality. My "me"
 could become reinstated.

I lay down on my bed before breakfast
 and tried to pull different strands
 in my head together.



That morning we ate breakfast in a small room.

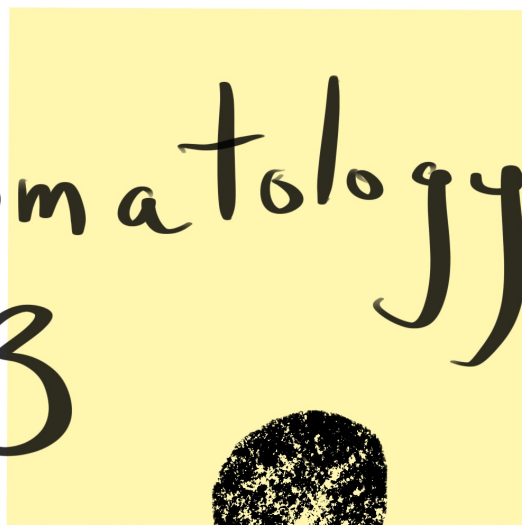
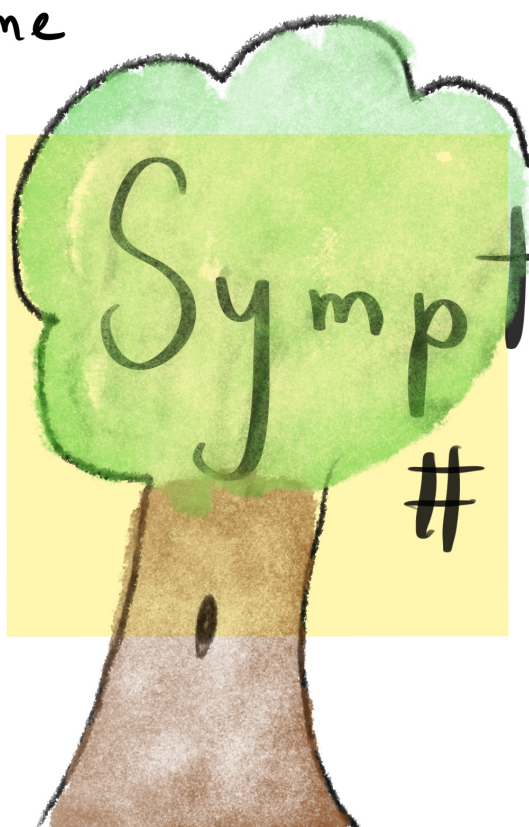




We both laughed, and I looked at the man, Jim. He was holding a piece of egg up with his fork and scrutinizing it. I laughed. I hadn't laughed for a long time.

me

not-me

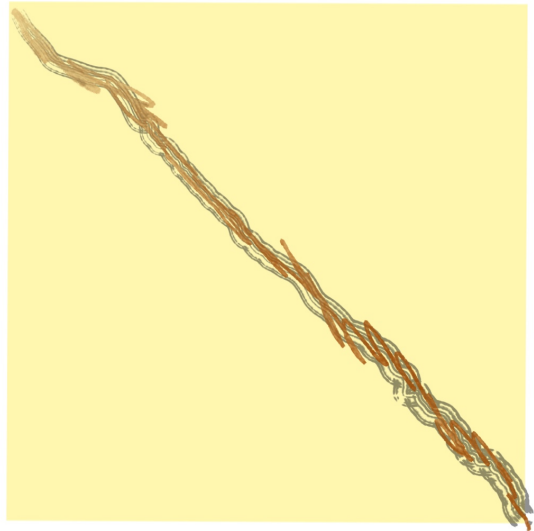


Sometimes the earth seems swamped
in a radical newness, as if the texture
of time, and the objects in it,

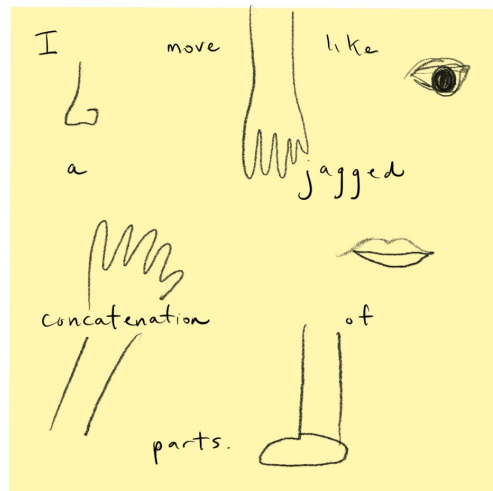


had just been invented.

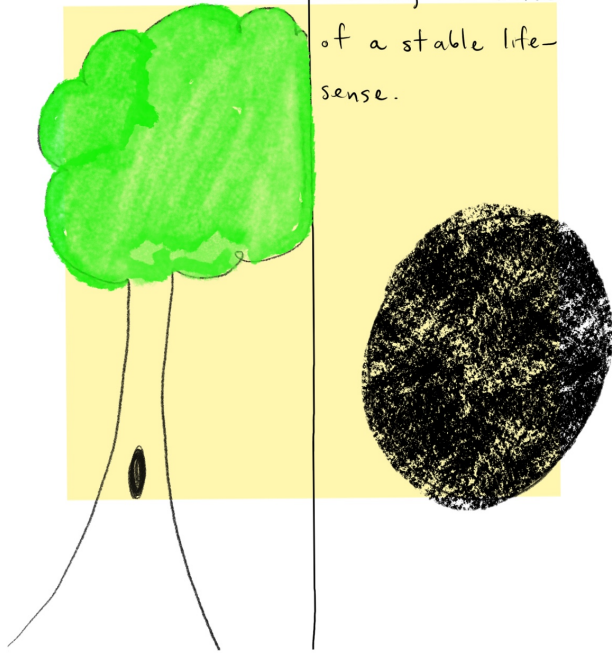
Times when I feel like a frayed rope.



Voices in the distance - two men
speaking by a mailbox - assume a nasty
persecutory relish.



Inside I am me. Outside I am the
not-me, the void
of a stable life-
sense.

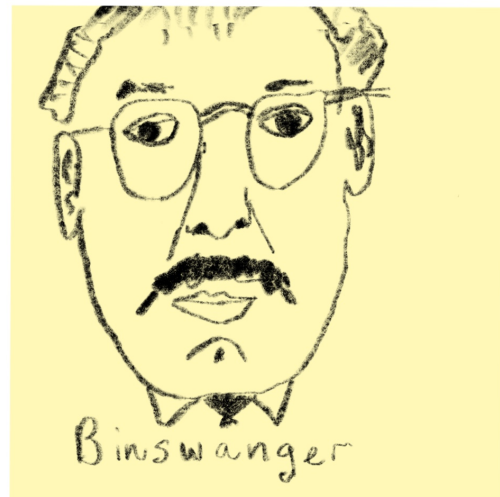


My memory is a blankly clanking
lanyard.

And the hand of my mind reaches down
into the well of my self for language,
coming up with - silence.

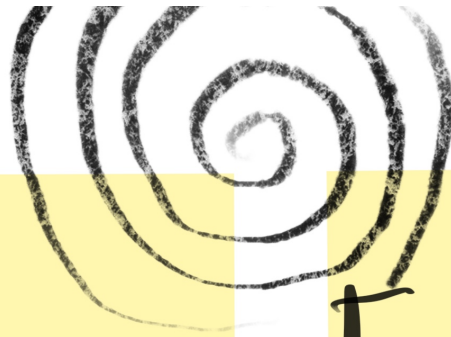


I read obscure texts to try and make sense.

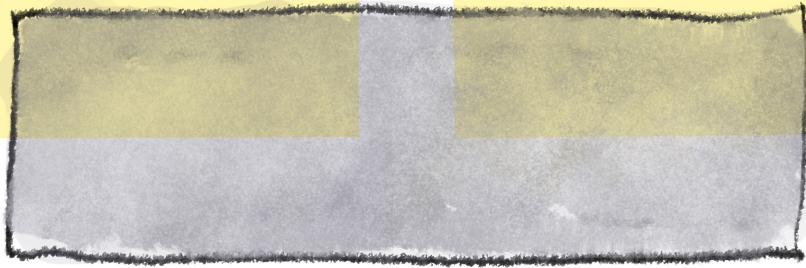


But there is no answer, no cure.
My faith is a stammering thing.





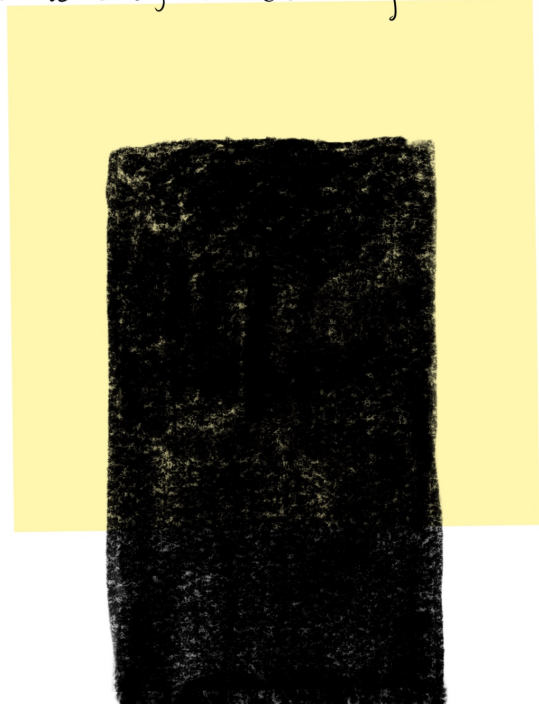
Side Effects



Being overmedicated feels like the expressiveness of your face has been drained out.



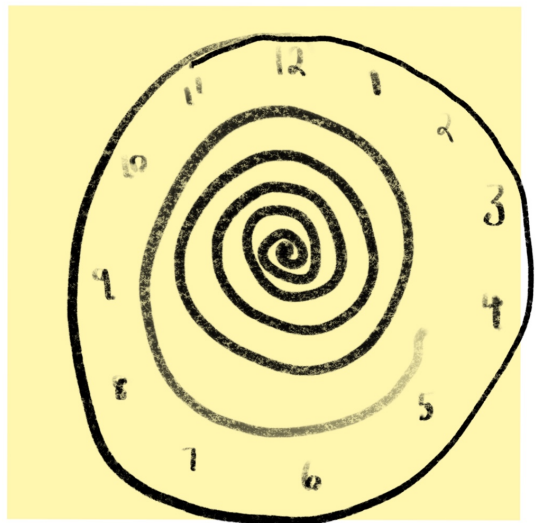
Your body is no longer a finely tuned organism, with an inner jouissance, but a slab, a dead weight.



Movement is weird. A slow shuffle, a swim. Things slow down. Your response time feels delayed.



Time itself feels painful, a surgery of the mundane.



A human being has had concrete poured into its life,



stealing grace,



and replacing your trust in spontaneity with a faith



that your symptoms won't return, the next day, next month, next moment.



auditory
hallucinations

Symptomatology

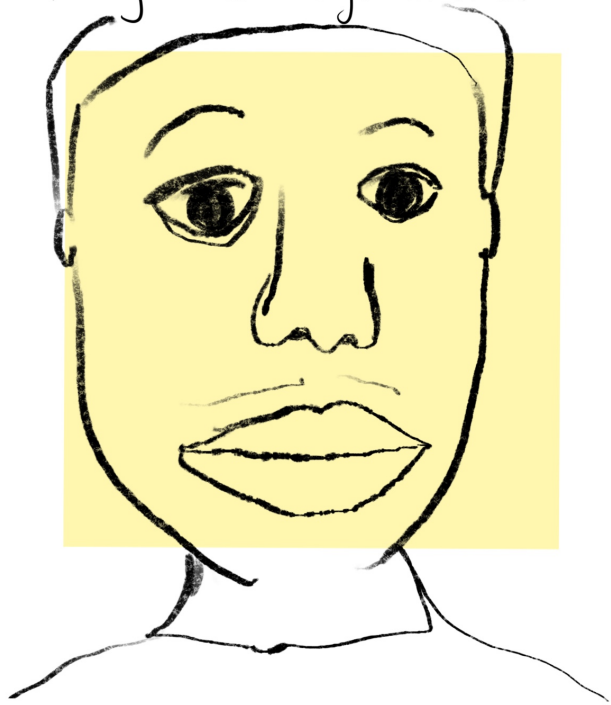
#4



Hearing voices is weird, because the voices are internal, not shared.



That means that oftentimes, a person hearing voices can go unnoticed.



It can happen to anyone - psychosis does not discriminate.



The voices can be insulting, flattering, conversational, nonsensical, and seem to come from outside or inside.



They can feel strangely independent
of one's mind.



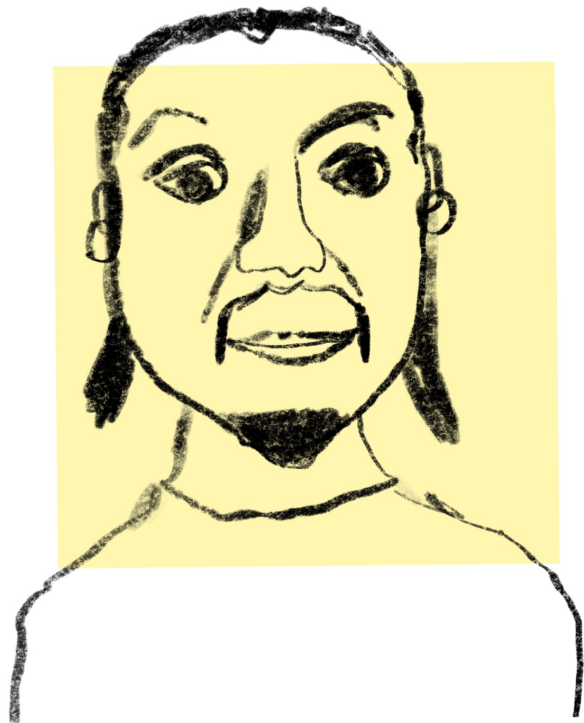
a hallucinatory sixth sense,



They are like a private theater
behind the face,

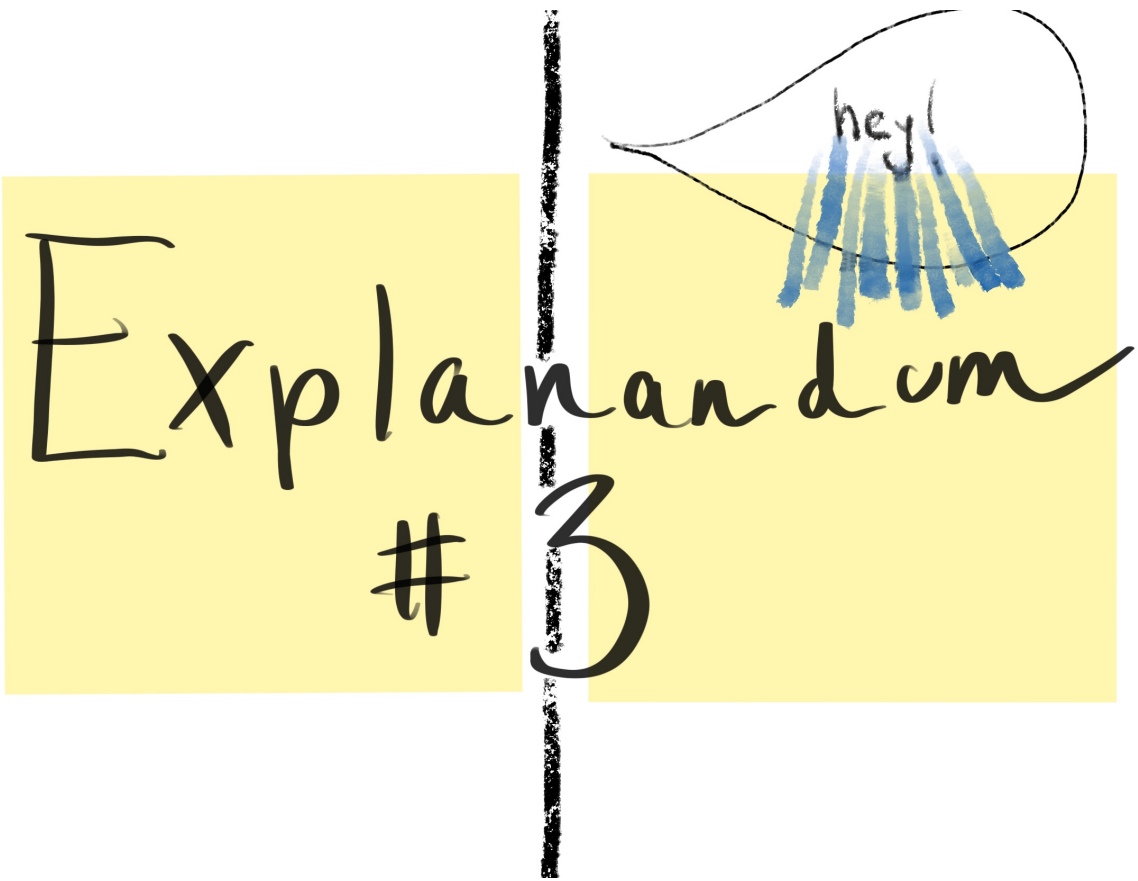


an uncommon commonplace.



I experience them as a whisper,
a speaking sighing, quiet needling
presences that can't be seen.





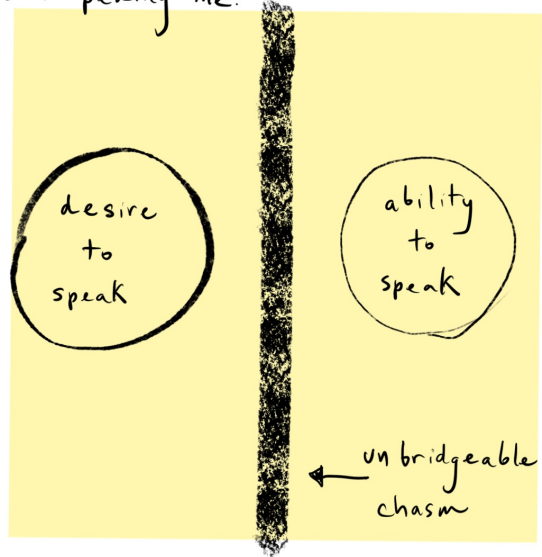
Erplanandum
#3

hey!

Silence, like a thief, steals into all my social encounters.



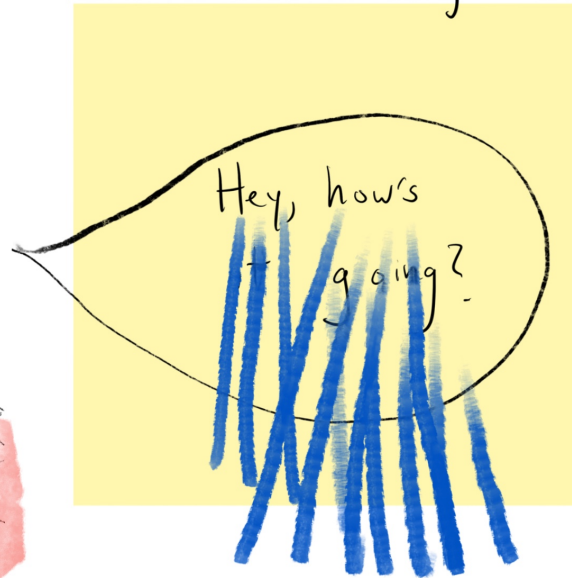
I move through the world, and find that I want to speak, but something is impeding me.



It's like my tongue has died, like a form of mutism enters the picture whenever I am not alone.



When I do talk, it feels like all the feeling has been drained out, like water from a dishrag.



Other times there is less to say somehow, like a singer who has lost his voice, though he is surrounded by singer who can sing.



I know I am here, alive and not muted, because when I listen to music I can feel my soul jumping up and down like a happy dog.



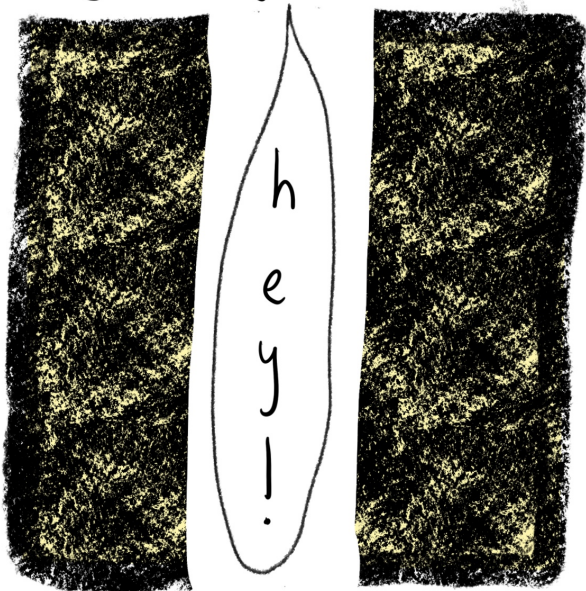
But there is something about schizoaffective that deadens—like some Lovecraft monster drinking up one's ability to talk.



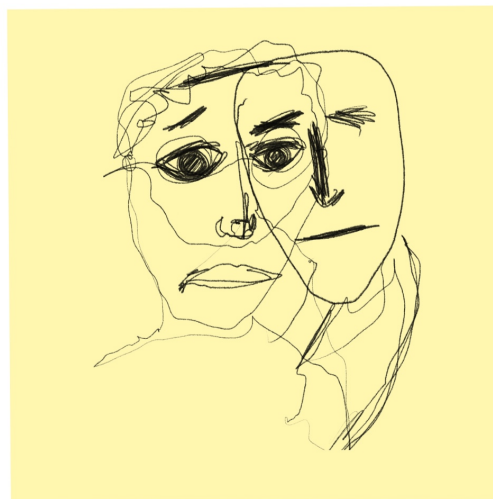
It's torture to be quiet when you don't want to be quiet.

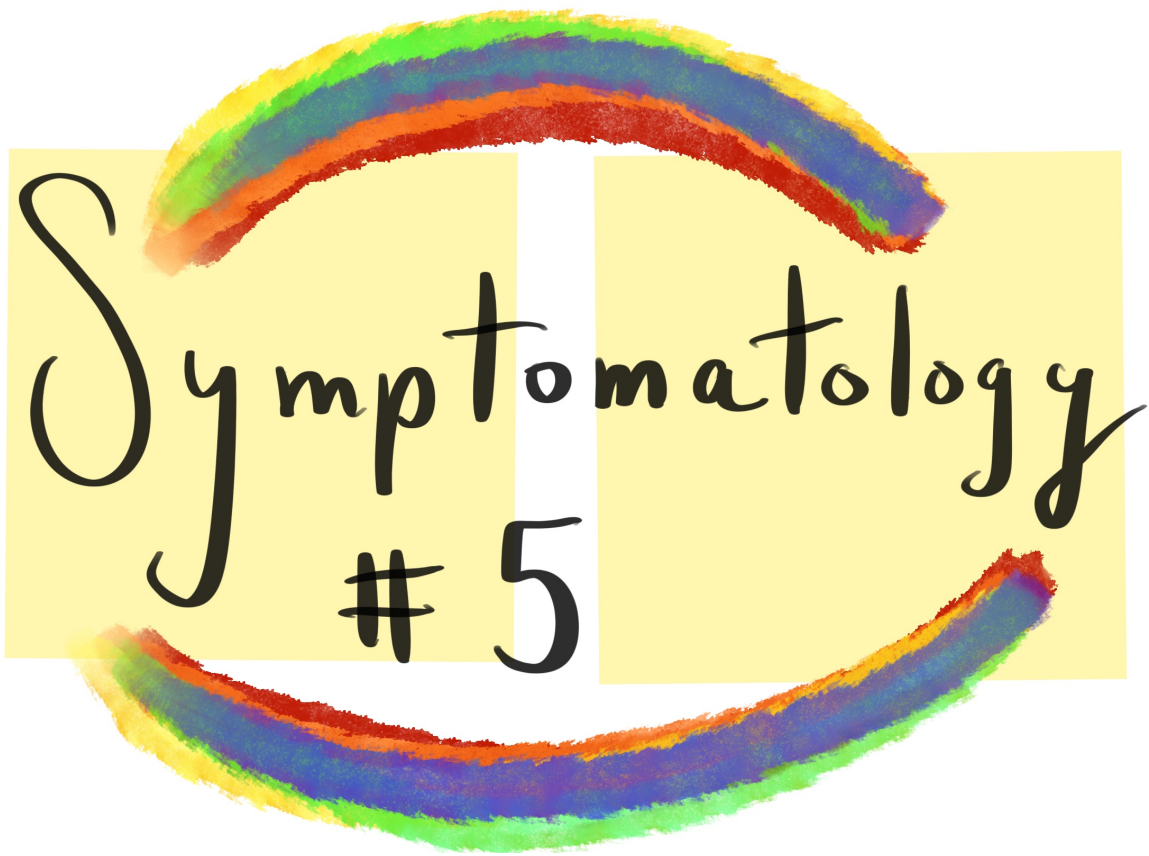


I want to rip through the silence
to say something.



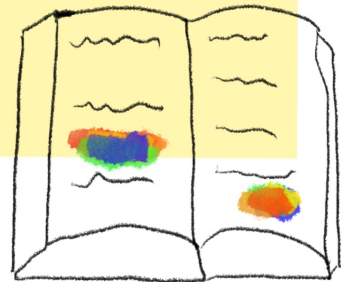
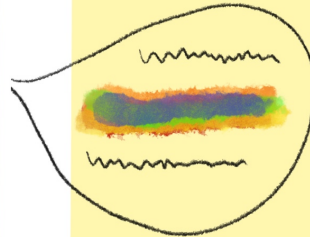
But the silence is like a mask
I can't take off.





There is a strangeness to delusions of reference* that demands to be described.

It is as if, behind language - read or heard - lies a secret meaning intended only for me.



* A delusion in which the patient believes that unsuspecting occurrences refer to him or her in person.

Hello, how are you doing?
 Secret message: you and her go together

Good? Good! Listen, I have
 Secret message: your consciousness is high

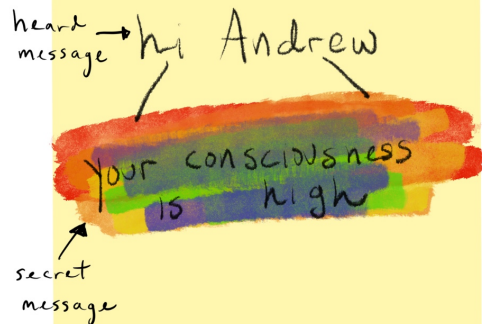
something important to tell you,
 Secret message: you smell

yes, I've been waiting for some

time now, yes, and I really
 Secret message: you and her

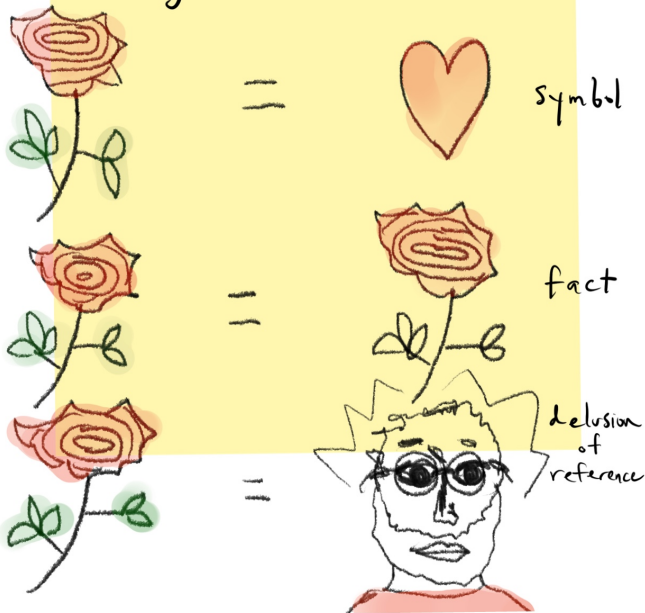
just wanted to say that
 Secret message: you are blessed
 Secret message: you are dirty

The messages behind the words are like ghostly imprints, clusters of a felt idea - sense, extra-lingual meanings

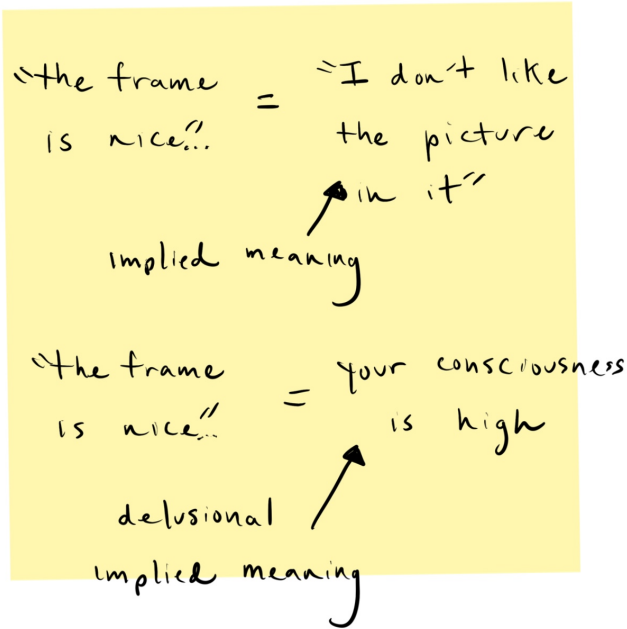
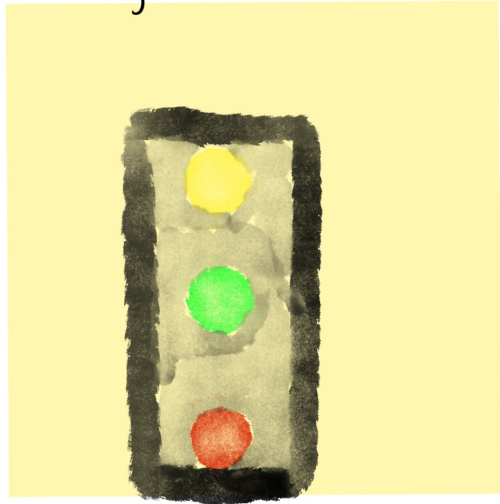


that depend on language (do they?) for their import.

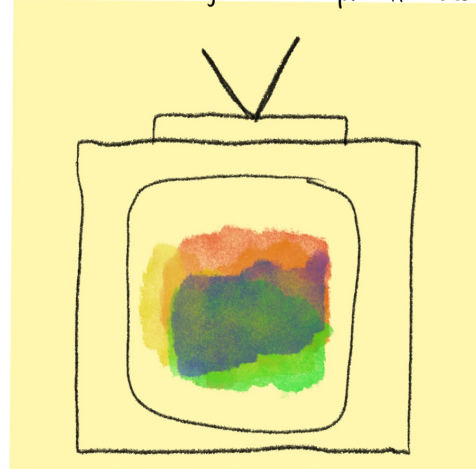
Like a parenthetical statement or meaning behind the words, which contains an occult message. It's a broken equation of meaning, that refers to the person.



It's not a deliberate or willful misunderstanding. It just happens, like a signal crossed.

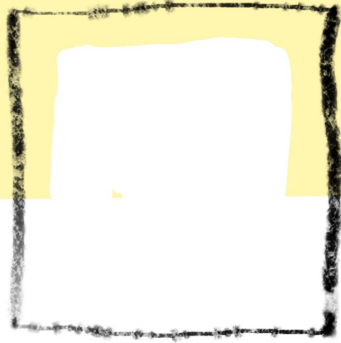


Hiccups of meaning, glitches in understanding delusions of reference can happen through the radio or TV, for example. At best,



they are distracting. At worst, bewildering and overwhelming.

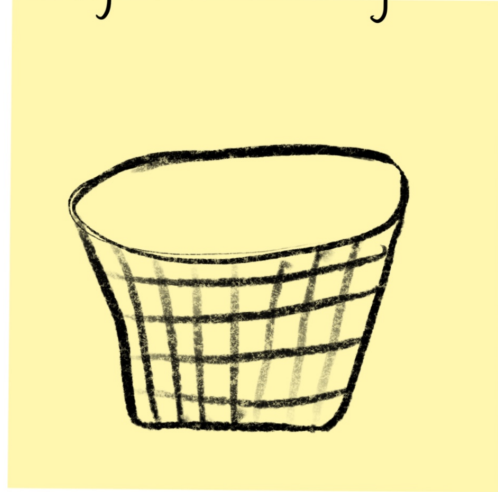
Explanandum
4



Medication messes with my memory, like there is a blank space where my memories should be.



I try to recall things, like bringing up water from a well, but the bucket is empty and the well dry.

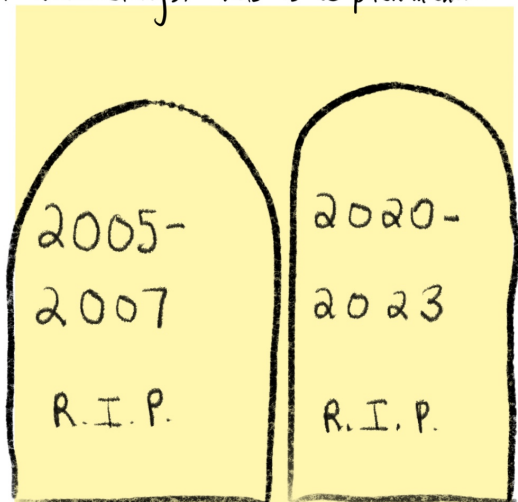


My dad showed me a picture of me when I was in the prodrome*, and I had no memory of being there.



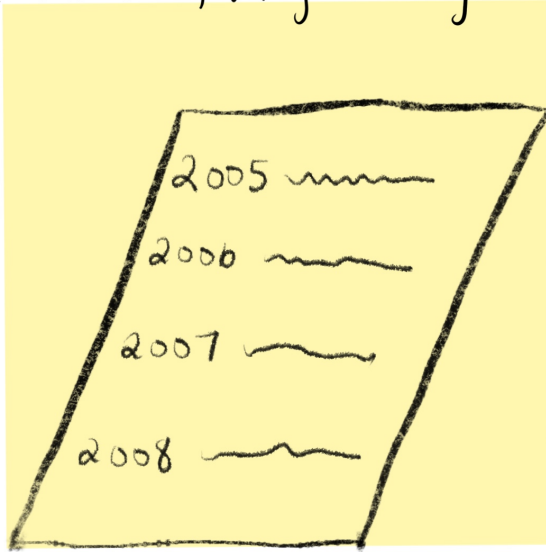
* when early signs or symptoms of an illness appear before the major signs or symptoms start.

There are years of my life that are lost, for which I can only give the barest of accountings. This is a phenomenon



in the schizophrenic literature called "the lost years."

One time I tried to do a timeline of where I lived during the last years. I could do it, but just barely.



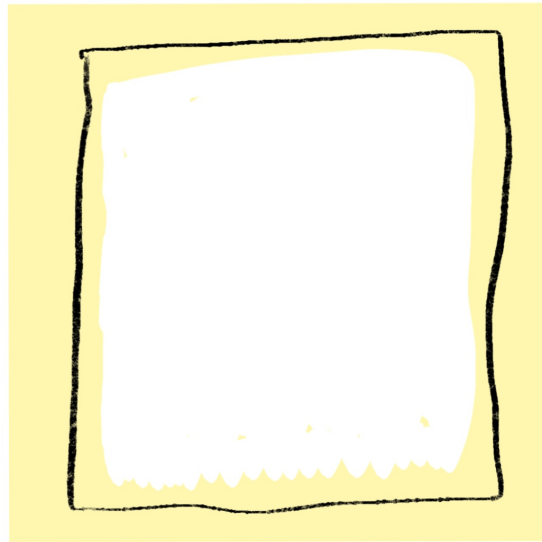
It's as if, when I was ill, I was so preoccupied with "inner stimuli" that I did not or could not form many



Who are we without memory?

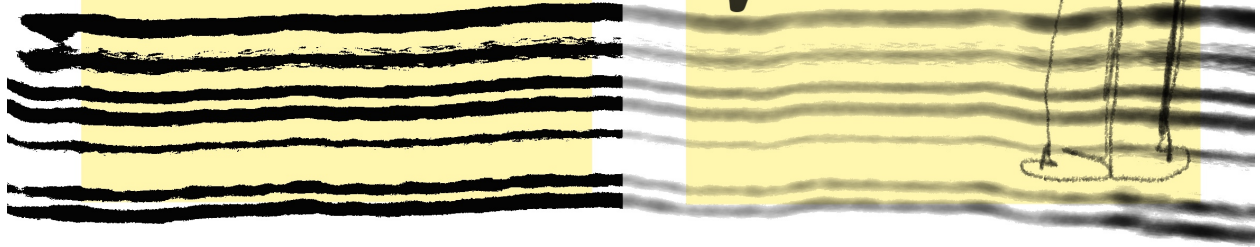


Empty rooms.



Three

years



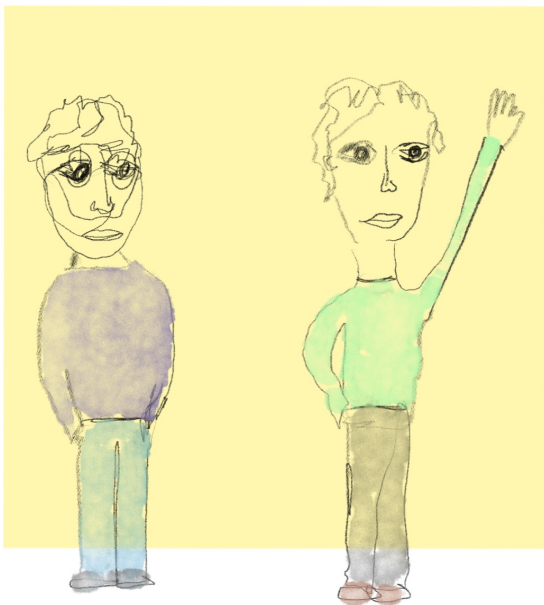
When I left the hospital last year,
I had to relearn how to be social.



That means I needed to relearn
how and when to make eye contact.



I needed to relearn body language.

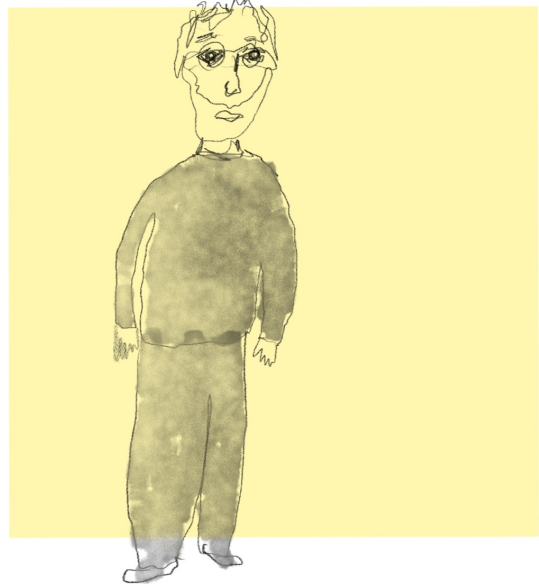


I needed to begin grieving the three
years I lost to the illness.



I had to get used to not being psychotic, and therefore find

I had to buy new clothes.



myself a new/old niche within the self/other and self/world dialectic.

More generally, I had to acclimate to being in public spaces again,

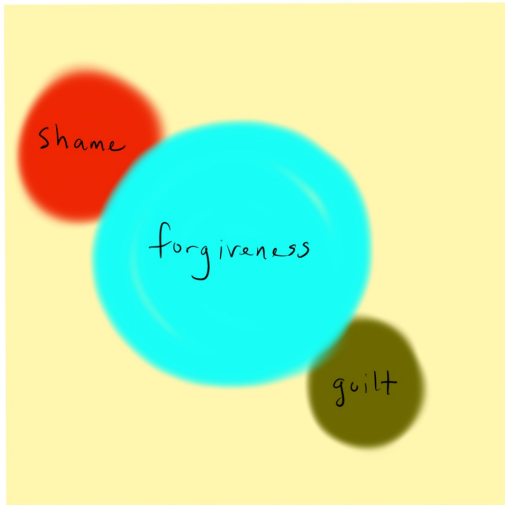
I had to (still working on this) somehow bridge the gap between my pre-sick



making small talk, just being a social person without delusions.

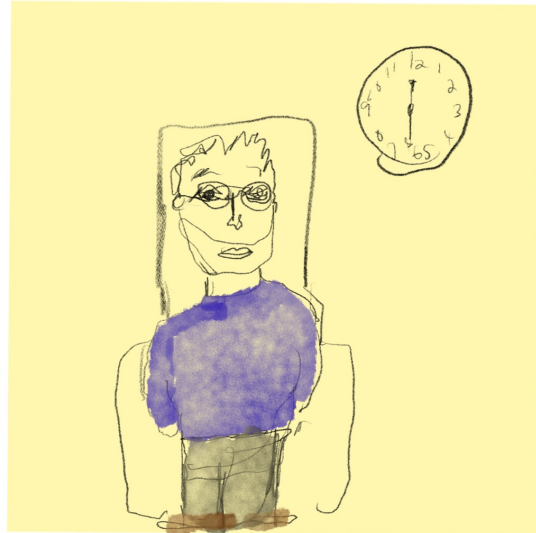
and post-sick selves. Who was I, who had I been? Who was I now?

I had to try and make amends to the people I hurt, even if I did so when I was sick



and not myself. I had to push past shame and guilt and try to forgive myself.

I had to be patient (still do) and let time pass, to give me some distance from the trauma of being



psychotic. I had to make recovery a priority, even if time does a lot of that work.