While Waiting For Homo Systemicus:

Creating Robust Human Systems of Power and Love

by

Barry Oshry
For

Lester
Although we are by all odds the most social of all social animals – more interdependent, more attached to each other, more inseparable in our behavior than bees – we do not often feel our conjoined intelligence.

Lewis Thomas, *The Lives of a Cell*
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Prologue:

While waiting for *homo systemicus*.

This manuscript is part of what can be described as a single ongoing project whose purpose is to convert system blindness into system sight.¹ Underlying this effort is the observation that although we humans are systems creatures – members of the widest variety of whole organic systems – *we tend to be blind to ways in which the processes of the whole shape our experiences of ourselves, others, our systems and other systems*. The costs of that blindness include debilitating personal stress, dysfunctional relationships, reduced system effectiveness, as well as the more catastrophic human system phenomena – unjust and cruelly discriminating beliefs and practices, bigotry, oppression, slavery, ethnic cleansing and genocide. All for lack, I maintain, of system sight. The overall project’s goal is to portray how system blindness, along with its costs, plays out in the widest range of human systems, and to

¹ See *Additional Resources* for other books, articles, and other resources that are part of this ongoing project.

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demonstrate how, with system sight, we are able to avoid those costs while creating more satisfactory and productive human systems.

I don’t believe that we humans, except under rare, sometimes mystic conditions, are able to experience directly the processes of the wholes of which we are a part, no more than bees, termites, birds, and fish experience directly the processes of the wholes of which they are a part. For this we await the hoped for evolutionary arrival of *homo systemicus*\(^2\). I am aware of playing loosely with what is a fundamental dispute in evolutionary thinking. On the one hand there is the view that evolution is essentially a random process, that it’s not particularly headed anywhere, versus the view, espoused notably by Teilhard de Chardin that evolution is a steady ongoing process that will ultimately end in uniting all humans in a single consciousness. Without taking a scientifically-based stand in that dispute, I do have an emotional attachment to the notion that evolution is

headed somewhere, or, put another way, given the
destructive nature of our current evolutionary condition,
there must be something better than this in store. So, the
existence of homo systemicus is less a scientific position,
than a myth to live by. Yet even with our limited abilities
as homo sapiens we do have the capacity to understand,
to notice, and to choose, and those capacities can take us
a long way.

What’s Love got to with it?

The current work grew out of a conversation with
Adam Kahane. Adam had been exploring Power and Love
as critical success factors in his change projects. The
questions his work raised for me were: Are there whole
systems parallels to Power and Love? What do whole

3 Personal conversations with Adam Kahane. Adam’s work
with power and love is presented in Kahane, A., Power and
Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change, Berrett-
Koehler, 2009.

4 Before we go very far, we encounter difficulty in
identifying what are whole systems, or more accurately to
acknowledge that there are none, only systems within
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systems do when expressing their Power and when expressing their Love, and, more significantly, when they are expressing Power without Love, Love without Power, and neither Power nor Love? And since Power and Love seem like archetypal drives, I began to speculate about the role of Power and Love in the full range of systems from the individual as a whole system, to the project team, to organizational systems, economic/political systems, and religious and ethnic social systems.

My underlying goal is to see if through this systemic illumination of Love and Power, we are able to eliminate some of the recurring destructive aspects of system life in all of the above arenas, while creating more sane, healthy, and productive social systems.

Re-working familiar ground. Those who are familiar with my previous writings will recognize much of the territory that is being worked here. In an effort to explore what new light Love and Power might shed on that systems within systems. Yet each of these systems within systems can be profitably studied in terms of its interaction with its immediate environment.

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work I have in a sense given the kaleidoscope a slight turn to see how this changes and, one hopes, improves the view.

**This is not your poet’s love.** I am very much afraid of disappointing readers who may be coming to this paper in the hope of finding support for their positions regarding Love that are bolstered by certain preconceptions regarding Love and Power – *Love is Romance, Love is the answer, God is Love, All the world needs now is Love sweet Love, Love is emotion, Love is good Power is bad, Love is the missing ingredient in organizational life.* The reader will soon find that the Love I am working with here exists in a different domain. My focus will be on whole systems – families, groups, organizations, belief systems, ethnic groups, and such – and **whole systems do not have feelings**; members **within** systems have feelings but the wholes have processes with which they interact with their environments. The assumption I am working with is this: although we do not see directly these processes of the whole, understanding them will give us another important perspective on Love.
and Power, and that this knowledge will give us practical solutions to otherwise intractable problems.

As valuable as this approach may be, it may be less “juicy” than the personal, emotional, romantic approaches to Love. So my invitation to you is this: Even if your inclination is toward the drama and immediacy of the romantic notion of Love, join me in standing aside of whole systems and observe their process as they struggle to survive in their environments.
Part I

Seeing Whole Systems
In this section I will describe four whole system processes, fundamental building blocks of system life. These are processes all of our organic systems – persons, belief systems, families, groups, couples, communities, teams, economies, organizational units, and nations – engage in as they interact with their environments.

As we humans go about our lives as members of these systems, we tend not to attend to these processes of the whole, yet, attended to or not, the patterns of the whole have profound effects on all aspects of our system lives: how we experience ourselves, the quality of our relationships with others, the effectiveness or our systems, and the nature of the interactions between our systems and other systems. There are costly consequences to our non-attendance to the processes of the whole and rich and productive possibilities when we are able to see them, understand them, and master them.

In chapter 1, I will describe characteristics of four whole system processes: the potential contribution of each to system survival and development, and the nature of the
interaction among the four: in oppositional tension with one another and, at the same time, essential to one another.

In chapter 2, we will see how these processes combine in ways that enable systems to exert their Power and Love.

In chapter 3, we will observe Power and Love playing out in a range of systems. More in depth analyses of Power and Love are the subjects of Parts II and III.
Chapter 1
What Whole Systems Do

Seeing the whole. Over the years, in my work with organizational and societal simulations - the Power Lab, the Organization Workshop, and the Merging Cultures Workshop - I have had hundreds of opportunities to observe the patterns of processes whole systems employ in interacting with their environments. What follows are some basic observations.

[Note to reader] In order to fully grasp the material in this section, the reader must shift his or her perspective.

To understand the evolution of my work over the past forty-plus years and how it has led to the current framework, I refer the reader to the Afterword.

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from inside to outside. Our usual perspective is as a member inside systems in which we see and experience bits and pieces of the whole. Here you are asked to step aside of the whole and see it in its entirety, observing what this entity does as it engages with its environment.

I. What do whole systems do?

The fundamental business of all organic systems is survival. Whether the system is General Motors, your local football team, the Catholic Church, or the country of Greece – its fundamental business is to continue, to perpetuate itself over time. These systems also have the capacity to move beyond survival, to thrive, to realize their full potential, to be all they can be. This is the possibility of Robust Systems: surviving and thriving.

Systems exist in environments of danger and opportunity; they survive and develop by creating processes for coping with dangers and prospecting among opportunities. The more successful they are at coping and prospecting, the more likely they are to survive and thrive.

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II. Processes for coping and prospecting

The Power Lab and the Organization Workshop have given me countless opportunities to observe systems and systems within systems as they interact with their immediate environments. (See the Afterword.) In time I developed a language for describing these processes of the whole.

- **Individuation**
- **Integration**
- **Differentiation**
- **Homogenization**

Each of these processes has potential for contributing to the system’s capacity for coping and prospecting.
1. Individuation

Individuation is the process in which whole system parts – members and groups – function independently of one another. Individuation is:

**Freedom**

**Separateness**

**Independence**

**Responsibility for self**

**The pursuit of individual goals, interests, and agendas**

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Individuation has the potential for contributing to system survival by liberating individuals and groups to freely explore the environment, to operate independently, test themselves, compete, learn, look for dangers and seek out opportunities, and then – and here’s where the potential contribution comes in - to enrich the system by bringing back to the system the fruits of their explorations. When there is no return and sharing, there is no system contribution.

2. Integration

Integration is the process in which whole system parts – individuals and groups - come together functioning as an integrated whole, with the parts feeding and supporting one another in pursuit of a common mission, goal, or purpose.
Integration is:

**Connectedness**

**Interdependence**

**Mutual support**

**Mutual responsibility**

**Teamwork**

**The pursuit of collective interests, goals, and agendas**

Integration contributes to system survival by harnessing and focusing system resources on the mission of the system. The system gains strength so long as members *freely* feed and support one another and modulate their behavior, strengthening one another in the

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service of the system. When integration is coerced, the individual contributions of members are diminished, as is the quality of their interactions with one another.

3. Differentiation

Differentiation is the process in which the system develops ever-shifting complexity and variety in form and function.

Differentiation is:

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Variety

Change

Being all it can be

Adaptability

Richness

Differentiation contributes to system survival by generating a rich repertoire of forms and functions for coping with dangers and prospecting among opportunities, as well as the capacity to change form and function in response to changing environmental conditions.

4. Homogenization

Homogenization is the process in which system information and capacity are distributed across the system.
Homogenization is:

**Oneness**
**Common knowledge**
**Shared information**
**Common language**
**Mutual understanding**

In complete homogenization, for example, any member of a system can perform the function of any other system member. Yet even a highly differentiated system can be homogenized to the extent that there is common language across the system and widespread understanding of one another’s different structures and functions.

Homogenization contributes to system survivability by reducing its vulnerability to damage to or loss of key parts, as well as providing the basic commonalities – e.g., agreements, language, values - that hold the system together.

**III. Processes are in tension with one another**

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Certain of these system processes are in tension with one another. Although each process in itself has the potential for contributing to the survivability of the system, as the system strengthens one, it may weaken the other.

**Individuation is in tension with integration.**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>System parts moving independently of one another</th>
<th>System parts functioning as components of an integrated whole</th>
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The more the system supports the independence of parts - the freedom to pursue their individual agendas - the greater the strain it can place on integration, the
working together and supporting one another in common cause.

Likewise, strengthening integration – stressing collaboration, working together in common cause – can suppress individuals and dampen the contributions that could come from individual initiatives. Essentially, this is the tension between independence (individuation) and interdependence (integration).

**Differentiation is in tension with homogenization.**

| A system elaborating its differences | A system maintaining commonality throughout |

The more emphasis the system places on differentiation – specialization, the development of variety

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in form and function, the elaboration of differences – the more this can come at the cost of homogenization, such that there is less shared information and capacity across the system; systems become vulnerable to a loss of mutual understanding across specialized forms and functions.

Likewise, strengthening homogenization – stressing commonality (We’re all working on the same page) – can come at the cost of the system’s ability to develop a rich repertoire of forms and processes for coping and prospecting. Essentially, this is the tension between difference (differentiation) and commonality (homogenization).

IV. Oppositional processes strengthen one another

Although these processes are in tension with one another, it is important to recognize how they also strengthen one another’s potential system contribution, and how the system is weakened when one exists without the other.

Integration needs individuation

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Integration unsupported by individuation can be desultory, uninspired, sluggish, unmotivated, and coercive. We may be working together in common cause but with little passion or drive. Individuation is \textit{freedom}, and it is only when members \textit{freely} connect that the potential of integration is realized.

\textbf{Individuation needs integration}

Likewise, integration strengthens individuation. By connecting with one another we gain emotional support, system-wide information, more solid grounding which then strengthens us as we venture out in individuated activity.

\textbf{Differentiation needs homogenization}

Differentiation without homogenization leads to divisiveness – tension between different parts of the system, lack of cooperation, potential warfare between differentiated elements: in organizational life the result is dysfunctional silos; in society the result is bigotry, oppression, religious and ethnic warfare. It is through homogenizing, working on the commonalities underlying
our differences, commonalities that restrain us from hurting or destroying one another that we are able to elaborate our difference and benefit from the differences among us.

**Homogenization needs differentiation**

Homogenization without differentiation results in a system that doesn’t do much - a barren system with a limited repertoire for coping with dangers and prospecting among opportunities. Differentiation brings homogenized systems to life.

* 

So these are the building blocks – four processes of the whole, each with its potential contribution to system survival and development, existing in tension with one another, while at the same time being essential to one another.

My conversations with Adam Kahane led me to shift my lens on these processes and see them in a new configuration, one that struck me as the whole systems equivalents to Love and Power.
Chapter 2

System Power and System Love

Prior to my conversations with Adam Kahane I had been focused on the interplay between processes in tension with one another: individuation vis a vis integration, differentiation vis a vis homogenization. Discussions of Power and Love led me to consider configuring these processes differently, seeing them as compatible pairs capable of working together in the service of some common system function:

individuation and differentiation working together to express the Power of systems,

and integration and homogenization working together to express systemic Love.

The Power Processes:

Individuation aligned with Differentiation

Individuation and differentiation are the high-energy processes, the Power processes. They are the system reaching outward, interacting with the environment on multiple fronts; they are the system striving to be all that it can be, testing, experimenting, expressing its full

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potential. Differentiation is about elaborating differences, change, growth, and continuous adaptation. Individuation is about liberty, independence, freeing up individuals and groups to go full-out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A system expressing its power through individuation</th>
<th>A system expressing its power through differentiation</th>
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**The Love Processes:**

**Integration aligned with Homogenization.**

Integration and homogenization are the whole system equivalents of Love, the inward energy of the system, the focus on the fundamental commonality of

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system members, their connectedness, and their mutual responsibility.

1. **The expressions of Power and Love**

System Power processes turn us loose,

system Love processes bring us together;

system Power heats up the system,

system Love calms it down;

system Power unleashes competition,

system Love supports cooperation;

Through system Power we elaborate our differences,

through system Love we focus on our commonalities;

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through system Power we operate independently of one another,
through system Love we function interdependently with one another.

2. **Love and Power as forces in the environment**

**Systemic Love is a weak force in its environment.**

With minimal differentiation, the Love system is limited in its repertoire for achieving whatever are the system’s ends – *It doesn’t do much*; and with minimal individuation, there is limited outward action on the environment.⁶ Members may be cohesive and aligned internally, but externally they are a weak force. Groups that are ideologically committed to Love are especially vulnerable to debilitation or self-destruction through their indifference to or suppression of the power that difference and separateness could provide.

**Systemic Power is a strong force in its environment.**

Differentiation yields a wide repertoire of forms, tools, and

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⁶ Weak does not imply low survivability. Common earthworms, compared to the human organism, are Love systems with minimal differentiation and individuation, yet they might very well survive long after the human species has disappeared.

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processes for achieving the system’s ends along with the capacity to change in response to changing conditions; individuation results in widespread independent action. Internally there may be tension, misunderstanding, and conflict, but externally they are a strong force. Groups that are ideologically committed to Power - individuation without integration, and differentiation without homogenization – are vulnerable to falling into internal tensions that can weaken and ultimately destroy them.

3. The interconnectedness of Love and Power

Power and Love depend on one another for their full expression. Individuation is a component of Power, but as we have pointed out\(^7\), individuation is strengthened by integration, a component of Love. Homogenization, a component of Love, is strengthened by differentiation, a

\(^7\) See IV. Oppositional processes strengthen one another
component of Power. So Power and Love contain one another’s seeds.

*Therefore there is no inherent incompatibility between Love and Power.* It is more than rhetoric to state that Power strengthens Love and Love strengthens Power. The issue is not choosing between them, but in managing and balancing the whole system processes, which brings us to the challenge of creating Robust Systems.

**4. Robust Systems: Power and Love**

Systems have the *potential* for developing themselves into Robust Systems, systems that are capable of exerting *both* their Power *and* their Love. Robust systems seek to capitalize on the strengths of *all* four system process, and the capacity these processes have for strengthening one another. The Robust system gains its strength through the zestful pursuit of all four system processes.

As we shall see in Parts II and III, there are systems in which either Power or Love predominates, but, so long
as a system does not express both Power and Love, it limits its potential for survival and development.

The Robust system zestfully pursues those processes that are both in tension with one another and essential to one another: individuation and integration, differentiation and homogenization.

5. You call that Love:

The two faces of Love and Power

It is important early on to disabuse oneself of any notion that either force – Love or Power – is any better or worse than the other. Simplistic views of Power as the evil force and Love the redemptive one miss the complex nature of these two forces. Each has a positive constructive capacity and a negative destructive one.
The Two faces of Love

A system expressing its love through homogenization

+ A system expressing its love through integration

**Constructive Love.** When systems are homogenizing and integrating, equality predominates; hierarchy is reduced or eliminated. Members experience their unity, their oneness, their connectedness; they are collaboratively engaged in common venture.

**Destructive Love.** Yet Love without Power is coercive; freedom, individual initiative, and uniqueness are suppressed. Members feel confined, restrained,
limited, and under-stimulated. And it is here that our everyday images of Love may be put to the test as we describe stifling relationships and oppressive regimes as Love systems. Yet this is what they are: oppressive systems in which homogenization and integration are uniformly imposed while individuation and differentiation are suppressed.

**The two faces of Power**

Power also has its constructive and destructive faces.

![Diagram showing constructive and destructive faces of power](image)

| A system expressing its power through individuation | A system expressing its power through differentiation |

**Constructive Power.** When systems are individuating and differentiating, energy is released;

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members are set free to compete, explore, test themselves; the system explores and elaborates its potential. In its constructive form the Power system is a continuous process of becoming all it can be.

**Destructive Power.** Yet, in systems of Power without Love, parts of the system grow increasingly different and separate from one another; homogenization and integration are suppressed; commonality and connectedness are lost; and it us under such conditions that relationships deteriorate, while animosity, class warfare, bigotry, and oppression flourish.

In the chapters to follow, we will see how systems – sometimes by blind reflex and sometimes out of misguided ideology- fall into dysfunctional patterns that have negative, at times destructive, consequences for system members, their relationships with one another, and their systems.

**6. Insight #1:**

Insight #1: There is strategic leverage that comes from recognizing the difference between how

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a system is experienced on the inside by its members, from how it is seen from the outside.

Throughout this paper, I will be demonstrating how insight #1 is the key to transforming imbalanced, dysfunctional systems into Robust Systems of Power and Love.

My experiences with the Power Lab and the Organization Workshop have given me many opportunities to study both the inside of whole systems – what system members are experiencing – and the outside – the processes of these whole as they interact with their environments.

As an anthropologist\(^8\) I’ve been able to stand aside of systems and observe the processes of wholes. I’ve also had the opportunity to listen to people as they described their experiences inside these systems. These are two very different aspects of whole systems with significant action implications.

\(^8\) Anthropologist is the title given to those Power Lab staff whose job it is to document the life of the lab and, at the completion of the program, interact with participants around their observations. They are generally not professional anthropologists.
The inside personal experience. On the inside, members’ experiences feel specific to the unique characteristics of the people involved and to their particular conditions. These feelings about themselves and others seem solid, based on reality, as true measures of who the parties are. On the inside, since problematic relationships, for example, are experienced as personal and specific, so are the potential solutions to these problems seen as personal and specific: fix, fire, rotate, replace, separate, divorce, therapy for one or more parties, and, in the extreme, eliminate them.

The outside systemic view. From the outside we observe our systems engaged in more general processes. We see them individuating – with the parts functioning independently of one another - or integrating – with the parts coming together, feeding and supporting one another in common purpose. We observe our systems differentiating – with the parts growing increasingly different from one another - or homogenizing – reducing difference, maintaining commonality. We observe our systems falling into patterns of destructive Love without
Power or destructive Power without Love. We recognize that what is happening is less about us and our personal characteristics than about the configuration of our system. We understand that this is an archetypal system story we are living.

The strategic implication of insight #1 is this: Change the pattern of whole system processes – insert Love into destructive Power, and Power into destructive Love - and the inside experiences of system members, which had seemed so solid and grounded in reality, will change.

Throughout this paper we will see the implications of Insight #1 for the widest range of system interactions – person-to-person, organizational, political, cultural, and in the interactions among religious, ethnic, and national systems. We will notice how, in the absence of this insight, we blindly fall into destructive interactions. And, finally, we will see the transformative power insight #1 has for each of these systemic arenas.
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<th><strong>SYSTEM LOVE</strong></th>
<th><strong>INTEGRATION</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• We work together in common effort</td>
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<td>• We can influence and control one another</td>
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<td>• We are responsible for one another</td>
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<td>• We submerge self interest in the interest of the whole</td>
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<th><strong>SYSTEM POWER</strong></th>
<th><strong>HOMOGENIZATION</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• We emphasize our fundamental commonality, our one-ness</td>
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<td>• We avoid or suppress role, hierarchical, and cultural differences that divide us.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>INDIVIDUATION</strong></th>
<th><strong>DIFFERENTIATION</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• We are free and independent.</td>
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<td>• We go all-out, testing our limits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• We are responsible for ourselves,</td>
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<td>• We freely choose our relationships</td>
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<td>• We elaborate difference.</td>
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<td>• We live with, value, and maintain our difference, specialness, cultural identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• We continually reshape ourselves, discarding unproductive forms and developing new forms for coping and prospecting.</td>
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Chapter 3

Love and Power are Everywhere:

The Multiple Arenas of Love and Power

The universal significance of Power and Love is reflected in the fact that these two sets of whole system processes play out in the widest range of organic systems: in social class warfare, in the tensions between free market and communist economic systems, in the variety of settings in which diverse cultures meet, in the relationships between parent and child and between parent and parent, and in the peer to peer relationships among organizational Tops, Middles, and Bottoms.

Power and Love are fundamental organic whole system processes. A variety of familiar settings are
described briefly below; each is then observed through the lens of Power and Love.

There is no effort to resolve any of these tensions in this chapter (e.g., What would Robust System resolutions look like?); the purpose here is merely to demonstrate the ubiquitous interplay of Power and Love.

1. **Class struggle in the Power Lab and other plutocracies**

In the Power Lab, a three-class society is created with sharp differences across the classes in wealth and institutional control. There are the Elite who control all of the societies resources and institutions – its bank, food, housing, court, transportation, and cultural institutions. At the other end of the society are the Immigrants who have few resources. And between the two are the Managers who enjoy a moderate standard of living *so long as they manage the institutions of the Elite to the satisfaction of the Elite*. There are recurring tensions that occur across class lines.
A student of political science or sociology observes these tensions through the lens of Power and Love.

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<tr>
<th>IMMIGRANTS: Love is in their interest</th>
<th>POWER</th>
<th>OR LOVE?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MIDDLES: Their interest is not so clear</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ELITE: Power is in their interest</td>
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It appears to be in the interest of the Elite to maintain a Power society that values *individuation*, a society in which the Elite can preserve their independence, their freedom to act however they choose, to resist being controlled by the Immigrants; and it appears to be in the

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interest of the Immigrants to create a Love society that values integration, a society in which they can rein in the freedom of the Elite.

It appears to be in the interest of the Elite to create a Power society that values differentiation, one that enables them to maintain their difference – their wealth and institutional control; and it is in the interest of the Immigrants to create a Love society that values homogenization, one that equalizes wealth and institutional control.

So the structural tension between the Elite and the Immigrants is one of Power versus Love. And then the student notes the plight of the Managers who are torn between these two sets of conflicting interests. Do they support individuation or integration? Differentiation or homogenization? Power or Love? What is in their interest?
2. Communist versus Free Market economic systems

Wars, hot and cold, have been fought over the competing ideologies of free-market versus communist economic systems: Karl Marx or Milton Friedman? The student of economic systems looks at these struggles through the lens of Power and Love.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>COMMUNISM: Love-based</th>
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<td><img src="image1" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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<th>FREE MARKETS: Power-based</th>
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Free market systems are seen as Power-based; they value **individuation** and **differentiation**. *Turn us loose to freely compete; we will develop an ever-changing variety of products and services; we are responsible for ourselves;*

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do not control us; we freely choose our associations; we take our chances on success or failure.

Communism is seen as a Love-based economic system: it values integration and homogenization. We work together in support of the common good; we are responsible for one another; we share the labor and the wealth; we collectively own the production of society’s resources; there is no private ownership of property; we emphasize the equality of all societal members.

3. Immigration, mergers and acquisitions, and diversity initiatives

Whenever differing cultures meet there is turbulence both in the system that is being entered and in the system that is entering, and in both systems there is internal tension between separatists and integrationists regarding how to respond to this meeting of cultures.

The student of diversity observes these scenarios through the lens of Power and Love. The Separatists – among both the enterers and the entered – are the Power people; they value differentiation and individuation. Let us ©Barry Oshry, 2012
maintain our difference and remain separate from the others. The Integrationists are the Love people, valuing homogenization and integration: Let us integrate with the other and focus on our commonality.

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<tr>
<th>INTEGRATIONISTS: Love-based</th>
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<th>SEPARATISTS: Power-based</th>
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<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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4. Love and Power parenting

A father looks at the Love/Power chart and it sheds light on his troubling family dynamics. He sees himself in a Love relationship with his son: homogenized and

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integrated; they are “buddies,” the parent/child distinction is minimized; they easily connect with one another, are comfortable with one another, and enjoy engaging in activities together. And the father sees his wife in a Power relationship with the son: differentiated and individuated; she is separate from the son, they are not “buddies;” she maintains a clear distinction between parent and child; she sets limits and maintains discipline; there is ongoing Power tension between her and the child. And the father sees the troubling family dynamics stemming from the tension between Love/Dad and Power/Mom.
5. Group Relationships

In group interaction, there is a common tension between the Collectivists and the Individualists. The Collectivists value working together, making decisions by consensus, and minimizing status differences among group members. The Individualists value their freedom and uniqueness. The Individualists feel constrained by the Collectivists; the Collectivists experience the Individualist as disruptive, and feel abandoned by them.

As viewed through the systemic lens, the Collectivists are the Love people, valuing integration and homogenization. The Individualists are the Power people, valuing differentiation and individuation.
6. Organizational Groups

In organizational life, we see familiar dysfunctional peer group relationships: Tops falling into territorial/turf issues with one another; Bottom groups falling into the conforming pressures of groupthink, and Middle peers becoming alienated from one another, separate, unconnected.
When observed through our whole system lens, we see Tops falling into patterns of Power without Love: differentiation and individuation predominate; in their separate responsibilities Tops grow increasingly different from and separate from one another, each elaborating, protecting, and defending his/her territory. Homogenization and integration are ignored or submerged.

We see Bottoms falling into patterns of Love without Power; integration and homogenization predominate: Bottoms coalesce, unifying, connecting with one another in common cause, sharing resources, minimizing differences. Unity is maintained by suppressing individuation and differentiation.

And we see Middles falling into patterns of neither Love nor Power; individuation predominates: Each Middle operates alone. There is not the Love that would come with integration, nor the Power that would come with differentiation.
These organizational scenarios are explored in detail in our next section: Power and Love in the Organization.

* 

In this section my purpose has been limited to demonstrating the pervasiveness of Power and Love in

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organic system life. The continuing challenge is to employ this lens in the service of creating sane, healthy, and effective Robust Systems, which is my intention in the sections that follow.
PART II

Power and Love in the Organization
In Part II, I will build on material described in the previous section, exploring how organizational systems, with the potential for developing into Robust Systems, instead blindly and reflexively fall into dysfunctional patterns of Power without Love, Love without Power, and neither Power nor Love. The basic scenario is as follows:

1. Systems adapt to their immediate environments.
2. In their adaptive responses, patterns develop in which certain processes predominate while others are submerged.
3. Patterns, once established, perpetuate themselves, and in doing so generate data that reinforce the pattern.

We will see how Tops, blindly and reflexively reacting to their immediate environmental conditions, fall into becoming a Power system in which peers grow increasingly different and separate from one another.

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9 I have dealt with these organizational issues previously, notably in Seeing Systems: Unlocking the Mysteries of Organizational Life, (2nd edition), Berrett-Koehler (2007), In The Middle, Power+Systems (1994), and Space Work, Power+Systems (1992.) The material is sharpened and expanded here with fresh insights generated by the Power/Love frame.

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with resulting territorial/turf issues affecting their relationships and the systems for which they are responsible. (Chapter 4.)

We will see how Middles, blindly and reflexively reacting to their environment fall into becoming systems of neither Power nor Love. (Chapter 5.)

And we will see how Bottoms fall into the pressures of Love systems internally and Power systems externally. (Chapter 6.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYSTEM</th>
<th>IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT</th>
<th>ADAPTIVE PROCESSES</th>
<th>SUBMERGED PROCESSES</th>
<th>SURVIVAL PATTERN</th>
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<td>TOP</td>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Integration</td>
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<td>Accountability</td>
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Blindness has far-reaching consequences. In each chapter I will demonstrate how once the survival patterns are established, dramatic scenarios unfolds: personal stress, damaged or broken relationships, system-wide effects, lost opportunities, diminished contributions. It is as if there is a door to a tunnel, and once we blindly and reflexively slip through that door, all that is available to us are these dysfunctional outcomes.

In each case there is an obvious solution: Robust Systems. Top, Middle, and Bottom systems have the potential for becoming Robust Systems, systems of Power and Love. But, for that to happen, we need to be able to see, understand, and master whole system processes.
Chapter 4

Top Systems Falling into Power without Love
Summary

This chapter will focus on Top teams, those collections of individuals who have designated responsibility for their systems, whether those systems are corporations, privately held businesses, families, professional associations, or other joint endeavors. We will observe a familiar story in which these teams begin in great promise for what they can accomplish collectively, only to end in failure with painful consequences for the individuals, their relationships, and the systems for which they are responsible. We will see how these Top entities fall into becoming systems of Power without Love, in which members grow increasingly different from and separate from one another, relationships in which commonality and connectedness are lost. We will see how all of this happens without members’ awareness or choice, from their failure to see, understand, and master the four fundamental whole system processes.

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And finally we will see how, with an understanding of whole system processes, it is possible to create durable, satisfying, and productive Robust Top systems by infusing Love into Power in the service of the whole system.
Top partnerships begun in great promise, but...

Case 1. It was heralded as the partnership of the century: Mr. Organization paired with Mr. Entrepreneur. This was the potential synergy that would re-vitalize a sagging organization. A few years have past; the partnership has dissolved due to what has been described as "irreconcilable differences". The separation package has been one of the costliest in the history of the industry.

Case 2. Two people went into business together; they had been great friends in college, enjoyed many of the same activities: sports, vacations, concerts, and more. They felt certain that their camaraderie and shared interests would provide a solid foundation for
business. Several years have passed and the partnership has now dissolved because of what has been described as irreconcilable differences regarding the direction their business should take. Toward the end the partners rarely spoke to one another except in anger and with derision. One partner bought out the other just to be rid of him.

Case 3. Two people got married because they loved one another; they looked forward to a long life together building their home and raising their children. Several years have passed; the relationship is fraying with frequent disagreements regarding the children and finances. There are few signs of the original joy in the relationship; to the contrary, there is talk of separation.

Case #4. Two distinguished social scientists, invigorated at the prospect of tackling some
of the world’s most intractable social issues, founded an organization for that purpose. As work proceeded, the partnership began to fray over disagreements regarding the direction and priorities of the organization. There were struggles over control – who was top dog and who was underdog. When the pain grew too intense, the partnership ended.

Each of these relationships began in great promise with the partners respecting (if not loving) one another and looking forward to satisfying and productive futures. And then it all fell apart. What happened? To the partners the breakdowns all felt personal. Love, respect, and hope turned to hate, fear, mutual distrust, and hopelessness. Each partner could point to his or her version of the history that led up to the breakdown, specific actions and interactions, disagreements, hurt feelings, anger, and resentment. One painful event led to another until it was clear that ©Barry Oshry, 2012
the relationships could no longer continue, and so it ended.

**Insight #1:**

**On the inside: the specific story**

The experience on the inside is that each of these relationship breakdowns was felt to be specific to the personal characteristics of the individuals and to their unique circumstances; in other words, that each was its own unique story explainable by the characteristics of the parties involved and their special situation.

**From the outside: the general story**

The view from the outside is quite different. From the outside, we see four versions of the same systemic story, one that happens *not always, not with everyone, but with great regularity*. It is a story in which Top systems fall into becoming systems of Power without Love: **differentiation** and **individuation** predominate; members grow increasingly different from and separate from one another; while **homogenization** and **integration** are submerged: commonality and connectedness are diminished or lost.

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The challenge is: Can we see understand, and master those processes that lead to this outside story and in doing so create Top Robust Systems that yield more satisfying and productive outcomes for ourselves, our relationships, and our systems? First, let’s see how the Top story unfolds.

**The systemic Top story:**

*A system in its environment of complexity and uncertainty*

A Top system is a system within a larger system. The members of the Top system – the corporate executives, the business partners, the parent couple, and the professional colleagues – have designated collective responsibility for the corporation, the business, the family, and the enterprise respectively.

Top systems exist in environments of varying degrees of complexity and uncertainty; there are multiple issues to deal with, difficult issues, unpredictable issues, issues that are not resolved elsewhere in the system come to Tops; issues that Tops
thought were taken care of return. And the Top system faces considerable ambiguity - issues and decisions for which there are no easy clear-cut answers: *Do we grow fast or slowly? Take risks or be cautious? Stick to what we know or venture into new directions? Be financially adventurous or cautious? Should our relationships with our employees (or children) be democratic, hierarchic, laissez-faire, controlling?*

As the Top system interacts with this environment of complexity and uncertainty a Power-without-Love scenario unfolds without awareness or choice. Here is how it happens:
Falling into Power-without-Love

**Step #1.** A potentially Robust Top System enters a space of complexity, accountability, and uncertainty.

![Diagram of a potentially robust Top system entering a systemic space marked by complexity, accountability, and uncertainty.]

**Figure 4.1** A potentially robust Top system enters the systemic space marked complexity, accountability, and uncertainty.

**Step #2: Adaptation.** The Top System differentiates and individuates.

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Complexity becomes more manageable when the Top system differentiates, when members divide up areas of responsibility, and when the system individuates, when members operate independently of one another managing their separate areas of complexity. Differentiation and Individuation are functional Power responses to the Top system’s environment. They are not the problem; the problem develops when inertia sets in.
Step #3. Inertia sets in.

Figure 4.3 The differentiated parts individuate and begin operating independently of one another.

Once this pattern of differentiation and individuation is set in motion, it continues reflexively. Processes continue to move in the direction they are already moving. Tops burrow down into their areas.

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Differentiation deepens while homogenization weakens; Tops become increasingly knowledgeable about their territories and decreasingly knowledgeable about others’ territories; they become increasingly responsible for their territories and decreasingly responsible for the territories of others and for the system as a whole.

**Step #4. The system falls into a pattern of Power-without-Love.**

---

**Figure 4.4 The Top system hardens in its differentiated individuated form.**

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The parts of the system have become increasingly different from and separate from one another. Power processes (differentiation and individuation) predominate while Love processes (homogenization and integration) are submerged. The experience of commonality and connectedness among Top team members is diminished if not completely lost. Tops feel possessive, protective and defensive of their territories.

When the system is in this differentiated/individuated form, Tops falls into “mine” mentalities in which they are protective and defensive of their territories in a way that supersedes a “we” mentality regarding the Top system as a whole.

**Painfully familiar symptoms of Power-without-Love**

Once these territories are firmly set, with members having fallen into distinctly separate areas of

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responsibility, while integration and homogenization are diminished or lost, a familiar scenario unfolds, one that has consequences both for the relationships among Tops and for the larger system for which they have collective responsibility.

Some, if not all, of the following may be painfully familiar to Tops who have suffered, or are suffering, the pains of relationships that began in great promise only to end in bitterness and failure.

**Relationships among Tops deteriorate**

Top system members become vulnerable to a variety of interpersonal tensions. As these tensions develop they feel very personal - *issues specific to you and me* - and not as consequences of system processes.

**Relative significance.** There are issues regarding which Tops are the more and less important members of the system. Organizationally, there are the higher status entities and the lower status ones. For example, in any given organization, where do sales, marketing, human resources, manufacturing, and

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research and development stand on the status scale? And how do these differences in status affect people’s experiences of themselves and others? Similarly, in the family, are the contributions of one parent seen as more important to the family or of higher status than those of the other? And how do those differences affect members’ experiences?

**Figure 4.5 Who are the really important ones?**

**Respect.** There are issues around respect, with Tops – whether they are the more or less significant members of the system - feeling they are not getting adequate respect for their contributions to the system. ©Barry Oshry, 2012
Trust. There are issues around trust. Although Tops are separate from one another’s arenas, there are still concerns regarding whether other Tops are holding up their responsibilities. Are they handling their areas competently? There are concerns that they are not.
Figure 4.7 Issues around trust

Support. There are issues around support with Tops feeling that they are not getting support from one another, or even that they are being undermined, that others get delight from their difficulties.
Directional differentiations. The above tensions stem directly from territoriality, from the condition in which members’ areas of responsibility have grown increasingly different from and separate from one another’s, from the system having become differentiated without homogenization and individuated without integration. There is another set of tensions that can divide Tops that stems less from their territoriality than from the ambiguities that the system as a whole faces. Some of these were mentioned earlier.
having to do with issues regarding future direction, growth, culture, and such. There are no clear-cut yes or no answers to such questions, only possibilities. We could go this way or that.

![Diagram showing different perspectives on risk and caution]

**Figure 4.9 Directional differentiations**

Possibilities have a tendency to harden into positions. Initially minor differences of opinion – more homogenization than differentiation - can polarize into diametrically opposed positions – highly differentiated, little to no homogenization.

*Member A who is slightly more attracted to risk than Member B proposes a high-risk initiative which makes Member B nervous who then suggests caution which leads Member A, fearing*
for his position, to strengthen the case for risk which further heightens Member B’s fear, and on it goes until relatively minor differences have escalated into Pure Risk version Pure Caution blocking and being blocked by one another.

It is around these polarized directional differentiations that these once promising partnerships collapse because of apparently irreconcilable differences.

Total system consequences of Power-with-Love versus Power-without-Love

To this point we’ve examined the consequences Power without Love has for the relationships among Tops. The resultant territoriality also has far-reaching system-wide consequences.

Silos. Organizationally, each differentiated and individuated entity creates its own differentiated and individuated silo throughout the organization. The ©Barry Oshry, 2012
consequences include costly buildup of redundant resources, lack of cooperation across silos, loss of potential synergies, information that would be important to the system as a whole remains un-integrated and therefore lost. There is confusion below, conflicting messages coming from above; there is increased competitiveness among the silos within the system and decreased competitiveness externally. Similarly, in the small business and in the family, the tension among the Tops causes tension below: *The Tops (parents) are fighting*. There are conflicting messages from above, uncertainty about the future of the business or family and one’s position in it; employees (children) are torn between conflicting loyalties.
Figure 4.10 A buildup of redundant and costly silos

How to create Robust Top Systems

Power-without-Love results in quite a painful and costly scenario: personal stress, broken relationships, and whole system dysfunction; and it all happens without awareness or choice. From the outside the picture is clear:

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the Top system adapts to its environment of complexity and uncertainty by differentiating and individuating; these processes deepen and harden into separate territories with the resulting negative consequences for Tops and their systems.

All of this can be avoided, but for that to happen we need to be able to see, understand, and master whole system processes. In this case, Power – individuation and differentiation – must be infused with Love – integration and homogenization. The challenge is to infuse homogenization in a way that strengthens differentiation, and infuse integration in a way that strengthens individuation. Let me emphasize this point. The idea is not to decrease differentiation or individuation; these are the high-energy processes that are essential to the ability of the Top system to cope with the changing conditions in its environment. The challenge is to infuse Love into a Power-without-Love system in ways that strengthen Power processes and enhance the capacity of the Top system to interact effectively in its environment. The following are some approaches to doing that.

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Understand whole system processes. This is the fundamental transformation upon which all else is based. We need to grasp this concept of ourselves as systems creatures and to understand the connection between whole system processes and our experiences of ourselves and others. We have not evolved to *homo systemicus*, so we may not be able to see whole system processes directly, but even as *homo sapiens* we are able to grasp the concepts. Much heartache and system damage could be averted if, before joining together, members of Top systems learned about Robust systems – systems of Power *and* Love - differentiation and homogenization, individuation and integration, and learned about how these processes predictably play out in the world these Tops are about to enter. And it would be important for them to understand the need to infuse Love –homogenization and integration – into their ongoing interactions. The following are examples of such needed Love strategies.

1. Develop a powerful shared vision. The members of the Top system need to have a shared vision for the
larger system; this needs to be something more than a surface exercise. The vision needs to be something that taps deep chords in the partners, their fundamental commonality, their grounding in homogenization. What are our fondest wishes for this whole system for which we are jointly responsible? What deep personal meaning does this system have for us? Tensions and disagreement are inevitable in the Top world; the complexities and uncertainties will always be there. The vision, when it is heartfelt and shared, gives Tops something to re-ground themselves in in the face of the complexity of their situation and the inevitable tensions and disagreements.

2. **Take time to walk in one another’s shoes.** Find opportunities to live in other Top’s worlds; experience directly the issues, dilemmas, and choices that other Tops face.

3. **Share high quality information.** When we are in the grips of territoriality we tend to be selective in the information we share, withholding anything that might bring our competency into question or challenge our ©Barry Oshry, 2012
competitive position. The strategy suggested here deals with sharing information that would be useful for others to know, information that will give an accurate picture of system conditions, information from one part of the system that might suggest action in another. Such openness can then set the stage for mutual coaching.

4. Mutual coaching. Structure Top meetings such members take turns coaching and being coached by one another. Members bring issues that they are wrestling with and then allow themselves to be coached by others. Mutual coaching is a process in which all Tops are committed to and invested in one another’s success, and even more importantly, it is a process by which all are invested in strengthening the Top system as a whole: differentiation and homogenization, integration and individuation. Power strengthened by Love. Mutual coaching requires some skill, both in how we coach others and in how we receive coaching so it may be helpful to get some professional coaching education to get the process going. It should be worth the investment since
mutual coaching has the potential for fundamentally transforming Top systems.

5. **Interact in non-role settings.** Experience one another in settings other than the familiar system ones: community service project, bowling team, family vacation, that is, opportunities to see difference facets of one another.

6. **Avoid enthusiastic counter-revolutions.** The point behind infusing Love into Top systems is to enhance the robustness of these systems. It would be counter-productive to assume that *Love is the answer*, thereby putting too much emphasis on homogenization and integration while disvaluing and suppressing differentiation and individuation. These latter processes provide the expansive energy of the system; the purpose of infusing Love, using the methods described above, is to enhance rather than constrain the capacity of the Top system to cope with the complexity and uncertainty of its environment. Too much Love can smother that potential.

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**Is it too late?** System knowledge is likely to be most productive as people are just entering the Top world or early on in the relationship when people are able to see the processes in action – differentiation and individuation beginning to harden into separate territories. But, once Top relationships have fallen apart, Power without Love, commonality and connectedness gone to zero, it can be very difficult to heal them. The history of mutually inflicted pain may be so intense as to be beyond repair. At this stage, members’ experiences of one another can be felt to be so solid, so deeply personal, and so connected to specific actions and events that it would be difficult for Tops to experience them as *merely* the outcome of system processes. To do so runs counter to the evidence of our direct senses. The notion that this whole dramatic scenario of Power-without-Love may be nothing other than the consequence of blind reflex may simply be too much to swallow. In this Top world there is likely to be the added bitterness that we weren’t just random people brought together for this organization, business, family, or association. *We were special.* And then this!

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Even if the relationship is not to go forward, there may be healing resulting from revisiting that beginning place of great promise and retracing the systemic (not personal) scenario by which members went from that optimistic beginning to the current personal, interpersonal, and systemic dysfunction. Once having clarified that history, the members have a choice: to end the relationship or move forward with the commitment to infuse Love into Power.
Chapter 5

Middle Systems Falling into Neither Power nor Love
Summary

This chapter focuses on Middle peers – e.g.,
collections of supervisors, managers, executives, and staff
specialists, – whose members are drawn away from one
another and out toward other individuals and groups they
have designated responsibility for leading, coaching,
supervising, or managing. We will observe a familiar story
that develops, without awareness or choice, in which
members of these peer groups become alienated from one
another, with each member struggling to survive alone in
his/her independent world.

Such collections are so fractionated that they have the appearance of being non-systems, but they are in fact systems of a particular disabling type: systems with neither Power nor Love. They are systems that have neither the energy of individuated/differentiated Power systems nor the unity of integrated/homogenized Love systems. We will see how this neither-Power nor-Love pattern develops, how it weakens individual Middles and diminishes their individual contributions to the larger

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system, while also diminishing the potential contribution of the Middle system as a whole. And, finally, we will see how, with system awareness, it is possible to transform this individually and collectively weak system into a major force of system strength. A Robust Middle system of Power and Love.
What is the matter with those Middles?

Case #1. It’s a familiar story. A multi-billion dollar global corporation is launching an initiative critical to its future. Everything appears to be in place with the exception of the Middle Managers; there is resistance, slowness in implementation, inconsistency in approach, in short, an unwillingness or inability to provide the strong consistent leadership from the Middle that the initiative requires. A worldwide meeting of top leaders is coming up and one likely agenda item: a dressing down of Middles by the Top executives in an effort to bring them into line. This is just the latest in a long history of promising initiatives in which Middles are seen as the resistors or stumbling blocks to needed system change.

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Case # 2. A consultant\textsuperscript{10} has been interviewing Tops regarding their issues with Middles. There is a recurring litany of complaints: Tops can’t get their initiatives implemented consistently through the Middle; they don’t get consistent information up from their Middles; and there is too much dependency – not enough entrepreneurial behavior – coming from the Middles.

Case #3. In numerous organizations there are examples of system-wide disruptions resulting from the failure of Middles to think and act strategically. Cases in point: In organization A, ice cream trucks were allowed in some work areas but not in others. In organization B, part-time work was available in some areas but not in others. In organization C, exercise bikes were introduced in one area but denied in others. In organization D, workers in one

\textsuperscript{10} Personal conversations with longtime colleague, Robert DuBrul.

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area were given free jackets with the company logo while workers in other areas were not. In other organizations the issues were gym availability for some but not for others, better computer equipment for some but not for others, reduced hours on summer Fridays for some but not for others. The differential treatment resulted in bad feeling throughout the organization, tense relationships among Middle peers, morale problems stemming from what was seen as unfair, inconsistent treatment, headaches for Tops who most often were left with messes to clean up. And everywhere the question is: What is the matter with these Middles?

A good question. Is this a genetic issue, a missing Middle leadership gene? Or a Human Resources failure where H.R. consistently fails to indentify the critical “stuff” needed for effectiveness in the Middle? Or are competent people being promoted to positions above their level of competence? Or is this some sort of communicable disease ©Barry Oshry, 2012
that strikes previously healthy people once they undertake Middle positions? Diagnoses and treatments vary greatly depending on whether we experience these Middle situations on the inside or view them from the outside.

**Insight #1**

**On the inside: the specific story**

On the inside, each of these situations is experienced as specific to the individuals involved and to their unique circumstances. Each is a story about our Middles in this particular situation – whether it’s the change initiative, the ice cream trucks situation, exercise bikes, or new computers. In each case, the story is: our Middles are weak, confused, dependent, resistant, unable to get their acts together, and ineffective in doing what needs to be done. Since the problem is experienced as unique to our Middles, so is the solution: Our Middles need fixing.

**On the outside: the general story**

From the outside we see a more general story, a story that develops with great regularity, a story that is
both about these particular Middles and about Middles generally. It is a story in which Middle systems – collections of Middle peers – fall individually and collectively into a disabling pattern of neither Power nor Love: the system *individuates* and that is all it does. There is not the Power of individuation coupling with integration, nor the Love from integration combining with homogenization.

This pattern of neither Love nor Power weakens individual Middles and diminishes their individual and collective contributions to their systems.

The challenge is: Can we see, understand, and master the whole system processes that lead to this disabling story and in doing so create Robust Middle systems with more satisfying and productive outcomes for individual Middles, their relationships with one another, and their contributions to the larger systems of which they are a part? First, we will see how the Middle story unfolds.

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The systemic Middle story: A system in its diffusing environment

Middle systems exist in diffusing environments ones that draw individual Middles away from one another and out toward other individuals and groups they have designated responsibility for leading, supervising, managing, coaching, or otherwise servicing.

As the Middle system interacts with this diffusing environment, the disabling scenario unfolds without awareness or choice. Here is how it goes:

A system in its environment: falling into neither Power nor Love

Step #1. A potentially Robust Middle System enters a diffusing environment.
**Step #2. Adaptation. The Middle system**

*individuates.* In response to its diffusing environment, the Middle system individuates. Members move away from one another and out toward those individuals and groups for whom they have designated responsibility for supervising, managing, coaching, or otherwise servicing. Individuation is an adaptive survival response. This is what Middles need to do in order to cope with their environment.

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Step #3. Inertia sets in. Individuation hardens.

Individuation is not the problem; what happens next is. Members harden in their individuation; they become increasingly focused on and invested in their target individuals and groups, and less focused on and
invested in one another or their Middle system as a whole. Relationships within the Middle system gravitate toward irrelevancy.

![Diagram of Middles hardening](image)

**Figure 5.3** Middles harden in their individuated state

**Step #4. The system falls into neither Power nor Love.**

The Middle system functions on a single process: individuation. Whatever support and strength could come to individual Middles through integration with their peers is lost; and the notion of their being a whole
Middle system with an agreed upon collective agenda or mission of its own is beyond the reach of consciousness. There is no mission of the whole, so differentiation and homogenization are off the table. In the Middle system there is no experience of “We,” there are only independent “I”s each on his/her solo survival mission.

**Familiar symptoms of systems with neither power nor Love**

Once this pattern is set there are predictable consequence for individual Middles, their relationships with one another, with Tops, and with the groups they have designated responsibility to serve, and for their overall contributions to the larger system. First we’ll look at consequences for individual Middles.

**Effects on individual Middles:**

**Middles get torn, each in his and her own dysfunctional way**

In this stuck-on-individuation Middle condition, each Middle is alone, unsupported by other Middles, not a solid part of Top or Bottom or any other group, and ©Barry Oshry, 2012
experiencing the multiple conflicting demands and priorities coming at them from those above them, below them, and lateral to them.

In this tearing condition, Middles regularly find themselves in situations in which if you please one party, you displease the other, and if you please the other you displease the one. And if you attempt to please all parties, you end up pleasing no one. It is in this torn condition that Middles can feel weak, confused, not knowing which side to be on. Since Middles are generally falling short for someone, they are regularly getting signals – direct and indirect – that they are not performing satisfactorily, a condition that can lead one to begin to doubt one’s competence. In their alone condition, it is possible for Middles to take their experience personally – *Maybe the problem is me.*

Middle tearing is painful, and Middles are driven to find ways of coping, sometimes by conscious choice, sometimes on ideological grounds, and sometimes by mere reflex. In the case of hierarchical tearing, for example,
where Middles are torn between above and below, there is a variety of coping patterns.

**Middle can align up.**

![Figure 5.4 Aligning up](image)

Some Middles reduce tearing by aligning with Top; Top’s agendas and priorities become Middle’s agendas and priorities. Middle reduces the tearing from Top while increasing it from the Bottom by being even less open and

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responsive to Bottom’s agendas and priorities than Top would be. Aligning up gives Middle an *adopted* identity – *I am not me, I am Top’s person* – as a result, aligned up Middles are likely to be more Top than Top, more rigid in Top’s position than Top is, more difficult for Bottom to deal with than Top would be,

**Middle can align down.**

![Diagram showing alignment between Top, Middle, and Bottom]

**Figure 5.5. Aligning down**

Some Middles reduce tearing by aligning with Bottom; Bottom’s agendas and priorities become Middle’s agendas

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and priorities. Middle reduces the tearing from Bottom while increasing it from Top, resisting Top’s initiatives, pressuring Top to be more responsive to Bottom’s priorities and agendas. Middle runs the risk of being seen by Top as lacking “the right managerial stuff.” Here too, by aligning downward, Middle adopts Bottom identity, becoming more Bottom than Bottom, more rigid in Bottom’s position than Bottom is.

**Middle can bureaucratize oneself.**

Figure 5.6. Bureaucratizing

Some Middles reduce tearing by bureaucratizing, by surrounding themselves with barriers, rules, procedures, policies and whatever else one can muster to make it

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easier to resist the pressures from others. True bureaucratic success comes when Tops and Bottoms and others stop trying to influence them while seeking other ways to meet their goals. By bureaucratizing, Middles succeed in reducing tearing from others, but that success comes at the cost of having any productive personal or systemic influence.

Middle can continue trying to please everyone and burn out in the process.

5.7. Burning out

Some Middles also attempt to reduce tearing by being committed to satisfying everybody. This coping style requires considerable energy along with an ability to

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handle unsatisfactory feedback from all sides, for the effort to satisfy any one side is likely to generate negative repercussions from other sides. So, the harder Middle tries, the more likely the outcome is: You just can’t please anyone!

**Some Middle Team!** Whatever conditions separate Middle members from one another are exacerbated by these differences in coping styles. It is not unusual for there to be in any Middle peer group a mixture of the above coping patterns.

*There is a telling scene in the Power Lab documentary – Power Lab: Living in New Hope.*

There is a sit-in in the dining room with a group of protesting Immigrants on the floor refusing to budge. Joining them and acting as their spokesperson is one Middle. Standing directly above her, acting in the service of the Elite and attempting to end the sit-in is another Middle, while off to the

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side are two other Middles acting as if none of this has anything to do with them.

Once such differing coping strategies are established, the possibility of mutual support and collective action are virtually eliminated.

**Loss of independence: I wasn’t there.** The one common feature that runs through all of these coping styles is Middle’s loss of independence of thought and action. Middle is driven by what others want, what their agendas and priorities are. An independent Middle perspective is missing. What does Middle see? What is Middle’s view of what the system needs and where it ought to be going? I’ve had several startling conversations with high-level Middles. In each case they were discussing conflicts in which they were in the middle. Somewhere in their conversations each said something to the effect: “When that conflict was going on, I wasn’t there.” At first I thought they meant that they were not in the room; but that is not what they meant. They were in the room, but, as independent thinking persons, they were not present. It was as if they were invisible; all that existed in the room

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were the positions, agendas, needs, demands, and priorities of others. I wasn’t there.

**Effects on the Middle system:**

**What system? The Middle system simply disappears**

When Middles are locked into this individuated state of Neither Power Nor Love, there is no functioning Middle system, therefore no independent collective Middle perspective or independent collective Middle initiative. All that exists are isolated Middles each doing his/her own thing blissfully unaware of the significance of one’s actions for other Middles with the following results:

**It’s unfair!** It is this un-integrated condition that results in such scenarios as the Middle who brings exercise bikes into his unit, without giving a moment’s thought to the potential system-wide consequences of that action. And it is this reflexive isolation of Middle peers in organization after organization that results in similar tales of unconnected actions resulting in system-wide disruption.

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Thanks a lot, partner. One can readily see how these independent moves can produce negative feelings among Middle peers. Your allowing (exercise bikes, part-time work, new computer equipment, ice cream trucks, etc.) into your unit has made me look bad with my people. Now what do I do about exercise bikes...paid part time...ice cream trucks... Blackberries...!

More burden, just what Top needed. When Middles create system-wide inconsistency, it is likely to fall to Tops to deal with the situation. One more complexity Tops don’t need in an already complex world.

We’re not all playing together. Disconnected Middles fail to provide the system with needed consistency, support, and coordination across units resulting in tensions and disputes across boundaries, finger pointing, and disruptions in production and service.

Reinforcing dysfunctional Top silos. The separation of Middles supports the perpetuation of organizational silos with all their consequences: piling up of redundant resources, lack of cooperation across units, loss of potential synergies, and, as in the case of ©Barry Oshry, 2012
intelligence failures, information important to the whole gets lost between the cracks

**How to create a Robust Middle System**

No Power, No Love. A pattern with widespread consequences: weakened, isolated, unsupported individual Middles; diminished contributions by these Middles to the individuals and groups they supervise, manage, lead, coach, or otherwise service; lack of consistent support for Top initiatives, unnecessary complications for Tops; system-wide disruptions and inefficiencies. All of which happens without awareness or choice, and all of which are avoidable if Middles are able to see, understand, and master whole system processes.

**Insight #1**

On the inside, all of these dysfunctions feel unique to our particular situation and our particular Middles. On the inside, every organization is having its unique Middle
problem, and its unique challenge is: How do we fix our Middle situation.

From the outside, we see a very different picture; we see a Middle system having blindly and reflexively fallen into the Middle scenario. From the outside we see how this general scenario develops in organization after organization: a system enters a diffusing environment, adapts, and then spirals blindly into this disempowering scenario.

From the outside we see clearly the strategy that is required in order to create robust Middle systems in which individual Middles and the Middle system as a whole are effective contributors to total system performance.

In this next section, I will detail the steps needed – first, to create Robust individual Middles and then to create Robust Middle systems. And, finally, I will examine the roadblocks that need to be overcome in order to create and sustain such transformations. As usual, we begin with the need to create system sight, to shift from seeing the unique and particular to the abstract and systemic.

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Create system knowledge

We begin by creating an experience whereby Middles and all those they service recognize that the scenario they are in is not unique to them, that it is systemic, that their experience is what happens to Middles blindly and reflexively, and that with system knowledge it is possible to create fundamentally different experiences and outcomes. Systemic interventions – writings such as this book, experiential exercises, and conceptual presentations\(^\text{12}\) - that focus on illuminating the general Middle story set valuable groundwork. By contrast, focusing on the details of one’s specific situation, as most interventions do, can work against understanding by reinforcing the unhelpful notion that these are our problems uniquely.

System knowledge is an essential underpinning to the strategies described below. Without such knowledge – more of which will be presented later in this chapter – it

\(^{12}\) Power+Systems’ Organization Workshop along with such presentations as *Total Middle Power* and *Why there are no Top Teams* are intended to create the shift toward systemic understanding.

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can be too easy to dismiss these strategies as unworkable – My Middles can’t or won’t do these strategies. There is too much tension, animosity, or competitiveness among them for any of this to work. I suggest that the reader suspend these considerations trusting that they will be dealt with later on.

I. Creating Robust individual Middles:

**Strengthening individuation through integration.**

Middles adapt to their diffusing environment by focusing their energies on those individuals and groups for whom they have designated responsibility to serve in some way. The No Power/No Love scenario develops when Middles become stuck on individuation; and once that happens all the rest follows. So, a fundamental strategy is to create a pattern of interaction in which Middles regularly move back and forth between individuation and integration – moving off separately, supervising, managing, leading, coaching, then coming together and integrating.

I am careful not to describe this process as one of balancing individuation with integration, because, as we noted in Chapter 1, integration does more than balance; its function is to strengthen individuation, that is, for Middles to become more effective in their individuated actions as a consequence of integration. In order for this to happen, integration needs to be more than simply coming together and waiting for some “magic” to happen; it needs to involve processes in which Middles are committed to supporting and strengthening one another through concrete interactions such as the following all of which infuse both integration (mutual support) and homogenization (mutual understanding) into the Middle system.

Sharing information. Middles need to think of themselves as intelligence operatives as well as leaders, coaches, etc. Wherever they are functioning they are also potential gatherers of information that can then be brought back to the integrating group. What issues are you experiencing out there? New developments? Opportunities? Challenges? This sharing of information is a
vital part of strengthening individual Middles: as a consequence, each Middle has more system-wide knowledge, each is less vulnerable to being blind-sided by other Middles or events; each has better information to pass on to those they service, and therefore are in position to offer more solidly grounded leadership.

. Problem solving. The integration meetings are occasions for bringing problems members are experiencing and working together to solve them.

. Sharing best practices. They are also occasions for strengthening one another through the sharing of best practices.

. Coordinating. If there have been problems resulting from uneven treatment and lack of coordination, the integration process is the place to work them out.

. Mutual Coaching. The ultimate in mutual strengthening comes when Middles function as coaches to one another, where they develop processes in which Middles bring issues they are facing and allow themselves to be coached by others. It is a process in which all are committed to one another’s success.

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Integrate even remotely. Even when Middles are geographically separate, the individuation/integration pattern is still important and remains a possibility. For remote integration to take hold, it is essential that early activities be face to face – with the full range of above activities - in order that personal connections and commitments be established. Once these have been created, it is possible to implement remote integration processes – teleconferencing, Skype, and so forth - while supplementing these with face to face interactions whenever possible.

All of the above serve to strengthen individual Middles, supporting them in performing more effectively in their individuated responsibilities. If these activities are productive, we will have moved a system stuck on individuation with all its negative consequence to one in which individuation and integration interplay with the positive consequences for individual Middles, their relationships with one another, with their Tops, and with the various entities they serve. There is yet a further possibility for the Middle system.

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Creating Robust Middle Systems:

What are its agendas?

Until now the focus has been on Middles and their individual agendas. The question for Middles is: Is there a Middle system agenda, one that is separate from the agendas of individual Middles. Such an agenda would be built around such questions as: Is there a system issue that has not been addressed successfully, one that we Middles collectively can address? Is there something we could do in the service of the system that has never been done before? Is there something we can do better than it has been done before?

An independent Middle system has incredible potential. Through integration it transforms the weakness caused by the dispersion of members into the Middle system’s unique strength. It becomes the depository of system wide information – from Top and Bottom and all ©Barry Oshry, 2012
the territories that Middles touch. In this sense, the Middle system is ideally (uniquely?) suited to identify potential trouble spots and leverage points for creating change.

Once the Middle system identifies its agenda, then total system processes come into play: in addition to the continuing interplay of individuation and integration, now the system needs to differentiate, with members exploring different forms, structures, and processes by which this Middle system can effectively carry out its initiative. And as the system differentiates, it also homogenizes, with members regularly sharing developments with one another. The Middle system now functions as a whole independent Robust System pursuing its own agenda in the service of the larger system. It expresses its Power through individuation and differentiation, and its Love through integration and homogenization.

All of this is, potentially, a remarkable transformation from the individual and collective weaknesses with which we introduced this chapter; yet for
these transformations to develop there are roadblocks to be overcome.

**Roadblocks to be overcome**

Are any of the above strategies for creating Robust Middle Systems included in Middle job descriptions? Probably not. Are Middles compensated for functioning as a collective Middle system as well as for performing their individual duties? Again, probably not. Those are critical issues, and require fundamental shifts in how an organization views its Middles; yet these are policy and procedural issues that can be addressed if organizations recognize the value in creating robust Middles and robust Middle systems and if there is commitment to do so.

There are also the logistical difficulties in Middles integrating regularly given the multiple centrifugal pulls on them; yet even these can be overcome once the business criticality of integration is established and Middles come to treat their integrating sessions as what some have called “sacred commitments.”

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There is also the question of Middle motivation. Do Middle want to integrate? Do they think integration would work for them? Do they believe that it is possible for their collection of Middle peers to develop into a robust Middle system? Some Middles may relish the opportunity to give all of this a try. For others, however, the answer could likely to be No. *At best, it might work for some groups, but certainly not ours.*

To get to the heart of this resistance, we need another piece of system knowledge, Insight #1: understanding the connection between whole system processes as seen from the outside and the inside consciousness of system members. In the last chapter, we described how Tops, as they become more different and separate from one another, fall into a “Mine” mentality, in which they are protective and defensive of their individual territories. In the Middle place, when Middles are stuck in their separate, individuated state, they fall into an “I” mentality. In the “I” mentality what predominates is our separateness from one another, our disconnectedness.
The “I” mentality

When we are in the “I” mentality – which, by the way, we are in for much of our daily lives – we experience ourselves as being unique, having little in common with others. We tend to feel competitive with others – Who is better than us? Worse than us? Better off than us? Worse off than us? We tend to be evaluative of others, judging them often on surface items: their manner of speech, skin color, gender, temperament, body shape, the clothes they wear, how they do their hair, and such. And, in our “I” consciousness, we see no potential collective power among us.

So one can see how a vicious cycle develops: because Middles are isolated from one another, they fall into the “I” mentality, and being in the “I” mentality reinforces their staying apart. Why would I connect with people I feel that way about?

It won’t work with my group

I have had experiences where I thought I had made a powerful case for Middle integration only to have

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someone come up to me after a presentation and say something like, “Good idea, Barry, but it won’t work with my group” “And why is that?” I ask. “Because,” he says, “we work on different things, we have little in common, we’re competitive, we don’t particularly like one another, etc. etc.” And all of this feels very real to the speaker solid, unchangeable, the way matters really stand.

What may be difficult for people to grasp is the extent to which our consciousness is shaped by the configuration of whole system processes. This is the essence of insight #1. Without that understanding, we think that the reason we don’t integrate is because of how we feel about one another, and if we felt differently then we would integrate. The truth is: It’s the other way around. We feel the way we feel about one another because we don’t integrate; and if we did integrate the chances are we would feel very differently about one another.

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In our Organization Workshop we have a way of demonstrating this critical piece of system knowledge experientially. We create a one-hour exercise that is a condensed version of the integrating activities described above. People who are basically unconnected with one another, who live in separate worlds with separate agendas, come together to support one another in projects of importance to them. Through a series of structured activities, they listen – *really listen* – to one another; they coach one another; they support one another in creating presentations that they will eventually be making to key people in their organizations. By the end of the hour people have established very close supportive relationships. We ask them to describe the members of their group; they say such things as: helpful, supportive, non-evaluative, intelligent, committed, “I want to take them home with me.” Some relationships developed in this brief exercise continue long after the workshop. At the end of the exercise, the point is clear: *We feel the way we feel about one another because we do integrate.* And that is a point with the deepest ramifications.

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Middles do not have to fall into patterns of Neither Power Nor Love, patterns that weaken them individually and eliminate them as a collective force in their systems. With system sight it is possible to transform them into systems that are robust individually and collectively, systems that individuate and integrate, systems that differentiate and homogenize. Systems of Power and Love.
Chapter 6:
Bottoms Systems Falling into Power externally, Love internally
Summary

This chapter focuses on Bottom groups, groups whose members share a feeling of vulnerability to threat from other groups. A nation under attack, or under the threat of attack by another nation is a Bottom system. Workers in organizations who feel at the mercy of the decisions of higher-ups are Bottom systems, as are workers generally within the larger economic system, feeling that they are being exploited by others. Members of religious and ethnic groups who feel that their beliefs and practices are under attack by those of different ethnic groups or who hold different religious beliefs are Bottom systems. Bottom group members share the experience of feeling endangered, whether that danger is real or imagined.

We will observe a familiar story in which Bottom systems, in an effort to reduce their vulnerability, fall into scenarios of Power – in which differentiation and individuation predominate - against their perceived endangerers, and Love – in which integration and
**homogenization** predominate - in relation to one another. Difference and separateness externally, unity and connectedness internally. We will see how these patterns aimed at strengthening Bottom groups most often weaken them.

And, once again, we will see how, with system sight, Bottom systems are able to deal more effectively with their vulnerability by exerting Power and Love both externally and internally.
Case #1. Frederick comes from a family with a long history of military service spanning several wars. Recently Frederick has spoken out against the current war and has participated in a number of anti-war protest marches. He has been shunned by his family, and denounced as both a “Commie” and a traitor.

Case #2. Rankin is a town where factory workers and their families were once very neighborly; people picnicked together, attended community events, created a little theater group, mounted sports leagues, and participated in various school activities. Rankin had always felt like a good place to raise a family. Now all of that good feeling is gone. The town is divided into two camps, one camp committed to continuing the strike, the other to ending it. Once friendly neighbors are no

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longer speaking to one another, at least not civilly.

Case #3. Charlotte is depressed; she rarely attends union meetings, and when she does come she becomes emotional, acting in ways others see as irrational. Others treat her as if she is invisible; when she speaks no one bothers to respond. The general opinion is that Charlotte needs professional help.

Case #4. Once, in a Central American nation, there was a rebel group whose members were unified in their opposition to the government. Now there are two groups in opposition to one another: the Moderates who are trying to develop some accommodation with the government and the Radicals who are against any accommodation. Lately, Radicals have been assassinating their one-time moderate allies.
Case #5. During the Russian revolution, if you disagreed with government policy and principles, you could have been imprisoned or executed. You might also have been committed to a mental institution since disagreement was obviously a mental disorder.

A mental breakdown, internal conflict between two rebel groups, community tension in a once peaceful town, a war protester shunned by his family, asylums in the Soviet Union. What could such a diverse set of events have in common? As experienced on the inside, possibly nothing; from the outside, quite a bit.

Insight #1

On the inside: the specific story

On the inside, each of the above stories is its own unique drama stemming from the characteristics of the participants and their particular circumstances. People are at odds with one another; one’s antagonists are experienced as uninformed, misguided, ignorant,
malicious, or crazy. The feelings people have toward one another seem solid, firmly grounded in one configuration of personal attributes or another. And since the difficulties are experienced as personal, so are the solutions: overcome the opposition, argue them or love them into agreement, attempt to straighten out their thinking through therapy, crush them, shun them, exile them, imprison them, or execute them.

**On the outside: the general story**

And then there is the outside story, the system story, the archetypal Bottom story, variations of which are being played out in each of the above cases. In each there is a Bottom system whose members are experiencing a shared vulnerability to threat from some other group. That is the setting, and then the story unfolds: Power externally, Love internally.

The challenge for members of Bottom systems is this: Can they see the outside story as they are living it on the inside? And would that seeing enable them to create less destructive stories for themselves, their relationships with others, and their system?
The systemic Bottom story: A system in an environment of shared vulnerability

Bottom systems exist in an environment of perceived threat, real or imagined. Threats to the system vary in form and intensity; jobs and livelihood are in danger of being taken away, a nation is threatened by another, belief systems are under assault; lives are endangered. There is always some THEM that is experienced as endangering the system.

As the Bottom system interacts with this environment of perceived threat, the following scenario unfolds reflexively without awareness or choice – *not always, and not for everyone, but with great regularity.* Here is how it happens:

**Step #1.** A potentially Robust Bottom System engages an environment of perceived threat.
Figure 6.1 A potentially Robust System engages an environment of perceived threat

Step #2. Adaptation. In response to its experience of vulnerability, the Bottom system coalesces; reflexively it homogenizes and integrates; differences among members are submerged, commonality predominates; and members experience their connectedness and oneness with one another in common cause. This coalescence is accompanied by a “We” mentality, an experience of unity that cuts across previous separate and even conflicting social lines.
Figure 6.2 The system adapts by coalescing – integrating and homogenizing

Homogenization and integration are reflexive and adaptive responses to threat; minimally, they serve to reduce members’ experiences of vulnerability - *I am part of some thing big and strong*; they serve to make the system appear stronger and more unified to its attackers; and they marshal members’ resources in common effort – *Together we can lick this thing*.

Step #3. Inertia sets in.

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Without awareness or choice, the Bottom system hardens in its coalescence; pressures increase to maintain uniformity internally. At the same time it hardens in its difference and separateness from the perceived attacker.

**Step #4. The system falls into Power externally and Love internally.** The separation between the Bottom system and its perceived endangerer grows. Difference and separateness predominate, while commonality and connectedness are submerged. And that difference from the other is paralleled by the intensified cohesiveness of the Bottom system.
Power relationship externally.

In varying degrees the perceived endangerer becomes objectified – seen as different and separate – thus freeing up Bottoms to do to them things they would not do to one another – embarrass them, attach derogatory images to them, harass them, poke fun at them, gossip about them, sabotage their efforts.

It is in the extreme form of Power-without-Love, when all commonality and connectedness are lost, the perceived attacker is experienced as an “Other” – so different from and unconnected to those in the “We” - that they can be hurt or destroyed in good conscience. This, for example, is the Power-without-Love mentality that fanatics fall into enabling them to murder random collections of human beings who are simply experienced uniformly as “Other.”

Love relationship internally.

The external Power relationship is paralleled by equally strong internal Love relationships - heightened pressures to maintain the unity of the “We” while ©Barry Oshry, 2012
suppressing all thinking and actions that might threaten that unity. In essence, the drive is to maintain the homogenized/integrated state of the system while suppressing the potential disruption individuation and differentiation would create. The following are examples of the system’s drive to maintain its homogenized/ integrated state.

1. **Dissent is suppressed.** *Suppression is both internally as well as externally imposed.* So, for example, the fear of losing one’s place in this homogenized/integrated “We” may lead one to hide one’s difference. In case #1 cited above, for example, Frederick is shunned because of his expressed disagreement with the position of the “We” regarding the war, but doubtless, in wartime, there are others who also disagree and who can now see Frederick’s case as reason enough to maintain their membership in the community by cloaking their disagreement.

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Disagreement from the “We” threatens the coerced as well as the coerced. If I accepted the legitimacy of your disagreement, it would threaten the whole foundation upon which our unity is based. Your dissent raises doubts in me. So the challenge is: How does our Bottom system maintain the integrity of the “We” in the presence of dissent?

Understand, there may very well be substance to the positions of both the “We” and the dissenter; but, when a Bottom system is completely in the grips of Love-without-Power, such a complexity is beyond consideration.
2. **Dissent is marginalized.** Unity is preserved by trivializing or demonizing dissent from the “We”: the team member who disagrees with the group is an “eccentric;” Frederick is a “traitor;” the worker who dissents from the strike is a “scab;” the protestor against unregulated capitalism is a “commie.” Those who dissent from government policy may be mildly wrong-headed and in need of re-education, or severely wrong-headed and in need of institutionalization.

Maintaining a Power relationship with the dissenters - *they are different and separate from us* - serves both to render their dissent insignificant while intensifying the Love relationship internally.
3. **Dissent is made invisible.** Marginalizing can also take a more twisted form, rather than demonizing or trivializing dissent, simply ignore it while continuing to live with it. This is the back-story behind Charlotte’s “emotional breakdown” (Case #3 above.) Charlotte had been a vocal advocate for strong confrontational union action. In the early days, she had some support. As time moved on, she lost her support as the Union moved toward a more conciliatory stance. In meeting after meeting Charlotte continued to state her position although people paid less and less attention to her.
In time she was treated as the Village Idiot, someone who spouted irrelevancies and was to be ignored. Charlotte is experienced as the sick one, thereby preserving the unity of the system.

4. The “We” splinters: The Hards versus the Softs. Given the complexity of system life, despite all efforts to maintain uniformity, differentiations will inevitably arise. How best to handle our vulnerability? Do we go this way or that? Part of the archetypal Bottom scenario is the inevitable tension that arises between the Hards and the Softs. What is the best way to deal
with our oppressors? Do we deal harshly or mildly? The Hard/Soft tension will always arise; only the intensity of Hard and Soft will vary from system to system and situation to situation. Hard and Soft emerge out of the fundamental uncertainty of the Bottom condition; there is no clear obviously correct solution to the question of how best to respond to one’s vulnerability. In the presence of uncertainty there are only possibilities: We could go this way or that. In the back and forth give and take, possibilities have a tendency to harden into irreconcilable positions. What was once a unified Love system fractionates into two Love systems in Power relationships with one another. (See the parallel discussion regarding Top escalation of differences regarding the form and direction of their system.)
One version of Hard versus Soft played out in the painful fractionating of the once peaceful town of Rankin (Case #2), where the irreconcilable split developed between the strikers and those who broke the strike lines. A more intense version of the same tension developed within the once unified rebel group where the Soft position – *Let’s not murder innocent civilians* – came up against – *There are no innocents* – in which the Hards proceeded to murder not only innocents but also Softs.

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What difference can system sight make?

On the inside everything feels personal and particular – you and me and our particular circumstances, so persisting in our mutual attack and defense seems like a logical approach given the circumstances as we are experiencing them. From the outside we see systems reflexively adapting to perceived danger, whole system processes falling out of balance, and, once done, the predictable Bottom story unfolds. All of which leaves us with our fundamental question: What difference could it make if we could see, understand, and master these whole system processes?

Challenging the illusion. When Bottom systems are in the grips of Love, it is crystal clear to members that individuation and differentiation are dangerous, that, if allowed to develop, they would increase the system’s vulnerability if not destroy the system. In unity there is strength is the conventional wisdom. The fact that individuation and differentiation are experienced as dangerous does not necessarily make it so. In fact that experience on the inside may be the
very illusion of the “We” mentality that weakens rather than strengthens the Bottom system. From the outside, we see the possibility of creating a Robust Bottom System, strengthening the system through Power as well as Love – differentiation and individuation along with homogenization and integration. As example, let us take another look at the town of Rankin.

The town has fallen into the apparently irreconcilable conflict between the Hards (the strikers) and the Softs (the accommodators). Are these really irreconcilable directions? Would a differentiated strategy involving both forces be a more effective and unified approach to dealing with their shared vulnerability? Hard and Soft, two processes, part of the same strategy. *We shut the operation down, or slow it down, or threaten to, and use that as leverage for negotiating.* And notice, once the system adopts this unified, differentiated stance, members no longer need to be in oppositional Power relationships to one another; *it doesn’t matter who plays Hard or Soft.* In short, it becomes possible for individual members to function as
whole systems of Love and Power rather than one or the other. (More on this in chapter 7 when we examine individuals as whole systems.)

Even the oppositional rebel groups (Hard versus not Hard Enough) who are fighting one another might be more effective in their efforts if they were able to break through the illusion and see the possibilities of a differentiated strategy. *You hit them hard, get their attention; and then maybe they’ll be more willing to deal with us.* Thus, rather than being a system at war with itself, we become a unified system of Love and Power. Understand that in describing this possibility, I am avoiding whatever moral issues might exist, and simply describing the potency of robustness in all its amoral possibility.

**The fundamental vulnerability.** Creating even the most robust Bottom Systems of Power and Love cannot assure success. Vulnerability remains. Whatever robust strategies the workers pursue, the company might in the end, for its own survival needs, shut the plant down. Similarly, the government with its superior

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resources might simply crush the rebel group despite the group’s more comprehensive strategy. Creating robust Bottom systems does accomplish two worthwhile ends: it improves the chances of the system to survive, and it provides members with that special experience of participating in a Robust System, a system of Love in which members feel united in common cause, and a system of Power in which members and the system as a whole are able to explore their full potential. A system of Power and Love – differentiation and individuation, commonality and connectedness.

**Dissent.** As we have noted, a system maintains its unity by trivializing and demonizing dissent, or making it invisible. Frederick is a traitor; other dissenters are scabs or commies or, like Charlotte, are dismissed as village idiots. The preservation of unity is the payoff to Bottom systems, but at what cost do such payoffs come? Immediately following the 9/11 attacks on the United States, some raised the question: What is our part in this? What have we done or are we doing?
that could have provoked such brutality? Such questions were immediately quashed as “knee-jerk liberalism” or “self-hate.” Let me be clear: **Nothing justifies Al Qaeda’s policy of murder of innocents.**

*Nothing. Theirs is the ultimate Power-without-Love position in which the other is seen as so different and separate as to justify murdering them for some higher cause. It is the system equivalent of insanity under the guise of religiosity. At the individual level, we once saw such religious fervor in mental institutions, and we can still see it on occasion on our urban streets – messages from God that only the pure can hear. So there is no justification for that systemic insanity.* Given all of that, the question is still legitimate for whatever thinking and strategies it opens up. To block out any such self-examination may preserve unity but, perversely, it works against system survival by limiting whatever vulnerability-reducing strategies such self-examination might reveal.

This is the potential system challenge that dissent raises: Can we strengthen our Bottom system by
allowing in difference and independence in ways that enrich our capacity for coping with the threats to our system? This is the possibility that opens up for us once we are able to view our Bottom situation from the outside.

**Part II Summary**

All organizational systems – Top, Middle, and Bottom - have the potential for developing into Robust Systems: systems of Power – unleashing their energy through **individuation** and **differentiation** - and systems of Love – maintaining their unity and connectedness through **homogenization** and **integration**. Such systems have outstanding capacity to survive and develop in their environments, to cope with dangers and prospect among opportunities. And all organizational systems have the potential for squandering that potential.

We have seen how systems reflexively adapt to their unique environmental conditions using some combination of the four whole system processes. When we are blind to systems, however, we allow initially adaptive processes to
harden into dysfunctional patterns, patterns in which certain of these system processes predominate, while others are suppressed. Once these patterns are set, whole scenarios unfold with a certain inevitability causing stress to system members, weakening their relationships with one another, diminishing their individual and system contributions, and causing unnecessary harm to others.

Hope lies with system sight: seeing ourselves as system creatures, understanding the interaction between our systems and their environments, paying attention to processes that are predominant and those that are being submerged, infusing Love into systems stuck on Power and Power into systems stuck on Love.
PART III

Power and Love: From the Individual to Genocide

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Chapter 5: People as Power Systems and Love Systems
Summary

This chapter focuses on the individual as a whole system. We will take note of the fact that each of us is a whole system; we have differing patterns of survival processes; for some Love processes – homogenization and integration – predominate; their drive is to create commonality and connectedness in their relationships; while for others Power processes – individuation and differentiation – predominate; their drive is to maintain their separateness and elaborate their uniqueness.

Using the case of Ralph and Bill\textsuperscript{13} we will observe the clash between Love and Power for the light their situation sheds on our own interactions. We will note the tendency to personalize conflicts, to attribute them to one another’s negative traits – loose cannons, control freaks, bureaucrats, non-team players, selfishness, and so forth. And, finally, we will explore the possibilities that come with seeing ourselves as whole systems. Can this knowledge at least increase our mutual understanding and respect? And

\textsuperscript{13} The case is real; the names have been changed

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might it even enable us to transform our selves and our relationships into systems of Power and Love?
Ralph and Bill:
The “bureaucrat” and the “loose cannon”

Ralph and Bill are having trouble with one another. Ralph is Bill’s manager. The relationship is not working for either of them. Bill experiences Ralph as a rigid bureaucrat, committed to endless unproductive team meetings and time-wasting policies and procedures regarding what Bill feels are often trivial issues. Ralph experiences Bill as a loose cannon - self-centered, a non-team player who sporadically and reluctantly attends team meetings and complains and resists what Ralph feels are necessary policies and procedures. Bill is feeling suffocated and disrespected by Ralph, and Ralph is feeling unsupported, abandoned, and disrespected by Bill.

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Insight #1

On the inside the situation is experienced as a struggle stemming from the unique characteristics and circumstances of Ralph and Bill: Ralph the bureaucrat, Bill the loose cannon. The divisive issues feel very personal and solidly grounded in one another’s characters.

From the outside, we see a different story, a familiar scenario in which two whole person systems, having differing survival patterns, clash with consequences for them and for the system of which they are a part. It is a tale of Love versus Power in which the Power system – driven to *individuate* and *differentiate* - feels controlled and suffocated by Love; while the Love system– driven to *integrate* and *homogenize* - feels abandoned and undermined by Power.

In what follows, we will examine how this struggle between Love and Power develops along with its costs for both parties and for their system. And, finally, we will see what productive possibilities exist for Bill and Ralph and for all those suffering in the personal battles of Love versus Power.

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Archetypal Power and Love

Let me first state the obvious; not all women are Love systems and not all men are Power systems. There are Love/Power tensions between women and between men (as the Ralph/Bill case illustrates); it is also likely that there are Love/Love relationships as well as Power/Power relationships. It is possible that all variations are possible. At the same time it would be remiss to ignore how this Love/Power tension plays out in archetypal gender relationships.

The archetypal Power male separates from the female and embarks on his private odyssey, while the archetypal Love female strives to keep him close and connected and, when he is away, pines for his return. Consider what were once familiar terms but now for many are obsolete: “homemaker” and “bread winner.” Responsibility for “homemaking” reinforced a Love orientation – members together, connected, engaged with one another in common activities, the family as an entity.

14 An avenue for further research.

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a WE (it may be a conflictful or even dysfunctional WE, but a WE all the same). Likewise, “breadwinning” reinforced a Power orientation, the male separated from the family, a solo “I” out in the world struggling to provide (bring home the bread) for his family.

The archetype, even as an over-simplification, does serve to sharply delineate the Love/Power processes, and it is those processes and their interactions, more so than gender implications, that needed to be focused on here.

**Time Out.** *It would be useful at this point for the reader to do a self-assessment. Do you see yourself as a more Love-oriented system or a more Power-oriented one? If you do see yourself as one or the other, are you solidly one pattern or merely shaded toward one? Are you in a partnership relationship? If so, what do you see as your partner’s pattern? Based on what you see, is there a useful conversation to be had with one another?*

**The part played by the Top/Bottom relationship**
Power/Love relationships generate tension and that tension can be exacerbated by the particular systemic relationship in which the parties are engaged. Ralph and Bill are not simply two regular guys interacting with one another; they are engaged in an ongoing Top/Bottom relationship, and that relationship has a significant impact on their Love and Power orientations. In that relationship, Ralph, having designated responsibility for the department, is Top; while Bill, as a member in that department, is Bottom.

![Diagram of Top and Bottom Relationship]

**Figure 5.1 Ralph and Bill in a Top/Bottom Relationship**

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A predictable pattern unfolds reflexively in such Top/Bottom relationships - *not always, not with everyone,* but *with great regularity* - whether these relationships are parent/child, supervisor/worker, leader/follower, president/citizen, or meeting convener/meeting attendee. The pattern goes something like this: Top reflexively sucks up responsibility to him or her self and away from others, while Bottom reflexively holds Top responsible. These are not conscious actions on either part; it’s more like: put us in this Top/Bottom relationship and a light switch goes off; it’s crystal clear to both parties: Top is responsible for the process or project or endeavor they are engaged in, and Bottom is not responsible.\(^\text{15}\)

So long as the process is running smoothly, there is no apparent problem in the relationship.\(^\text{16}\) But when there are problems, both parties are in agreement: *Top is responsible.* Top feels burdened, unable to do well what he or she feels needs to be done well, while Bottom is feeling

\(^{15}\) Systemic relationships and the “dance of responsibility” are described in *Seeing Systems,* Act II, Scene 2.

\(^{16}\) There are long term consequences: increasing burden on Top, progressive disabling of Bottom, limited brain-power being brought to situations

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oppressed by an ineffective or malicious or incompetent Top.

![Diagram of Top and Bottom dance of responsibility]

**Figure 5.2. Ralph and Bill in the Top/Bottom dance of responsibility**

This is a fairly standard scenario; now add into it an oppressed Power-oriented Bottom, holding the Top responsible (not himself), blaming, feeling victimized, feeling that his freedom is being constrained and his uniqueness squelched. Stir in our Love-oriented Top, realizing that things are not going as well as they might, feeling responsible for it all, trying to keep it all together, one team working together focused on a common goal,

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and there is this Bottom, whining, complaining, pushing his private agenda, threatening to tear the system apart.

**Escalation sets in.** Once difference is in place, it is easy to see how real, yet relatively minor differences can escalate into the proverbial “irreconcilable” ones. Power, straining under Love’s constraints resists and rebels; Love, fearing the dissolution of the system, tightens the constraints on Power, and on it goes, until Bill and Ralph are locked into the struggle of Pure Love versus Pure Power, with consequences for each of them and their system.

**Consequences of Love versus Power**

Both parties are suffering in this relationship – one feeling constrained and the other abandoned - and each sees the other as the source of his suffering.

The system as a whole is also suffering; it is a distressed system; it is neither Ralph’s Love system characterized by unity, connectedness, and equality, nor is it Bill’s Power system in which all members are free,
independent, and supported in the elaboration of their uniqueness.

Is there hope for Ralph and Bill?

Insight #1

On the inside, there appears to be no hope for reconciliation between Ralph and Bill. It is crystal clear to both of them that their feelings about one another are solid and grounded in reality, and that they are unique to them. This is simply the way things are.

The question is: What difference could it make if they were able to see this story from the outside, seeing it as the abstract story – their version of the universal story of Love versus Power compounded by their Top/Bottom relationship? What possibilities could that seeing create? And how might that seeing come about?
Shift the systemic relationship

It would be illuminating for Ralph and Bill to experience one another in substantially different systemic relationships, if, for example, they were collegial Bottoms in a project some other Top was leading, or if Ralph were a member (Bottom) in a project for which Bill as Top had designated responsibility, or if they were peers in an ongoing men’s support group. How might their experiences of one another shift in each of these settings?

The Power Lab has given me dozens of opportunities to observe the principle: Shift the systemic relationship and dramatic shifts in experience will follow. In the Power Lab societal setting, Immigrant groups (Bottoms) tend to quickly coalesce; differences are submerged and commonality predominates; individuation is limited in favor of integration. An intense bonding - a WE consciousness - develops. And even as differences and tensions emerge over the subsequent days of their lives together, they remain a tightly bound entity. Once the society is over, all groups have an opportunity to share their experiences and the Immigrant group sharing is often ©Barry Oshry, 2012
quite moving; members describe the intensity of their bonding experience, the love they have for one another and their group. And all of that feels very solid and real and a function of the outstanding characteristics of the collection of people they were fortunate to find in this group. And then there is the next day.

On that day, a second systems exercise is created with shifts in all systemic relationships; previous Tops and Middles are now Bottoms, and the Immigrants are divided—some are Tops in the new organization, others are Middles, while others are Customers, and, in a matter of minutes, most if not all traces of that powerful WE are gone: there are divisive tensions within the new ex-Immigrant Top group; ex-Immigrant Customers are upset at ex-Immigrant Tops and ex-Immigrant Middles over the unsatisfactory service they are receiving; ex-Immigrant Middles are feeling weak, torn individually and from one another. This is a very different set of experiences and relationships these once bonded loving Bottoms are now having. Meanwhile previously burdened societal Tops and torn Middles are now luxuriating in their Bottom WE-ness.

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All of these radical changes in experience should be revealing fundamental lesson about our nature as systems creatures, yet these can be difficult lessons to grasp – that our feelings about one another are not as solidly grounded as we experience them to be. Shift the systemic relationship and a shift in experience will follow. It can be an unsettling view of ourselves, and yet a rich one that opens up new possibilities of being.

**The richness of self-awareness.** There is a potential fascination that comes with experiencing oneself as a whole system, and being curious about one’s pattern of processes – how weighted toward Power – *individuation* and *integration* - one is and how weighted toward Love – *integration* and *homogenization* - and noticing how one’s pattern shifts when entering differing systemic relationships. Does our system shift toward Love when functioning as Top in a Top/Bottom relationship, and toward Power when we are Bottom in that relationship?
And what new understanding and possibilities emerge for us as we shift relationships?

**Empathy and understanding.** Can this view alter our experience of the other? How might Bill’s view of Ralph change if he were to see him not as someone fundamentally different from him, and not as a constellation of personal failings – bureaucrat, control freak, fascist – but as a variation of his own pattern, an alternative survival pattern? And how else might their experiences of one another change as they noticed how system patterns shift as they interact in differing systemic relationships? *Is this you I am seeing or is it merely your Top shape? Or your Bottom shape?*

**Robust system.** And how might their relationship change if, with their knowledge of whole system processes, they understood that their idealized systems – pure Power for Bill and pure Love for Ralph – have no future; the more pure, the more likely they are to self-destruct. Pure Love – the unrelenting drive for integration and homogenization – suppresses freedom, crushes adventurousness, challenge, and the richness of variety. And pure Power

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devolves into anarchy, alienation, isolation, loneliness, and the inability of members to mount concerted initiatives.

With system knowledge, could both Bill and Ralph recognize their potential as a Robust System, a system committed to exerting Power and expressing Love? A system that encourages independence, and the elaboration of one’s unique talents and interests and functions as an integrated and homogenized whole with members periodically coming together, sharing with one another, learning from one another, supporting one another’s independent ventures while working together in common venture?

Robust person-systems. With system knowledge, is it possible for all of us to be whole systems of Power and Love? Could Ralph and Bill see the productive possibilities of each of them functioning as a Robust person-system, each being a system of Power and Love? What is the possibility of Bill relaxing his stuckness on Power and seeing himself as a whole system expressing Love as well as Power – becoming a part of the whole, supporting and being supported by team members, being committed to

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strengthening the team as well as liberating himself? Could he see the value to himself in drawing both emotional and intellectual support from his membership and in providing that emotional and intellectual support to others?

And what is the possibility of Ralph relaxing his stuckness on Love and seeing himself as a whole system expressing Power as well as Love - encouraging differentiation and individuation of group members, turning people like Bill loose, encouraging and supporting them in their unique pursuits.

As Robust person-systems we are not static entities; we are fluid and adaptive systems. We are systems in which our internal processes are in creative conflict with one another, shifting back and forth, with one never declaring victory over the other. As a Robust person-system,

- I am elaborating my uniqueness, my difference,
- and sometimes I am in touch with my commonality, my shared anxieties, aspirations, beliefs, hopes, and feelings with others.

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• Sometimes I am an independent operator, on my own, unsupported and unrestrained by others, testing myself in pursuit of my own venture,

• *and* sometimes I am part of the team, committed to supporting and being supported by others in our joint ventures.

Our ability to create robust relationships rests on the willingness and ability of each of us to function as a Robust person-system. The more embedded we are in either Power or Love - whether out of ideology, principle, or the experiences of early childhood - the dimmer are our prospects for creating such relationships.
Chapter 8

Power Versus Love Economic Systems

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Summary

In chapters 4-6, we described how organizational systems fall into dysfunctional patterns without awareness or choice. It is also possible for us to choose dysfunction; we choose it because we believe in it, and, if our ideology is strong, we continue to believe in it and choose it even when it fails to produce the results we expected it to produce. In this chapter we will examine the folly that comes with promoting political/economic systems based on ideologies rather than on an understanding of whole system processes.
Free Markets and Communism:

Two possibilities emerge from a fundamental uncertainty

Please note: The author is not a professional economist, a fact that might lead reasonable persons to pay his thoughts on profound economic matters scant attention. On the other hand, given the spectacular failures of professional economists to either predict calamities (the collapse of 2008 most recently) or remedy breakdowns, an non-economist, organic systems perspective might well be welcome.

Economics: And organic systems perspective.

Philosophical treatises, economic schools of thought, fierce political battles, wars hot and cold have been fought over free-market versus communist frameworks for organizing societies’ economic and social systems.

Regardless of the particular theories and ideologies attached to them - communism, libertarianism, socialism, communism – they all grow out of the underlying universal whole systems tension between Power and Love, between ©Barry Oshry, 2012
systems based in **individuation** and **differentiation**, and those based in **homogenization** and **integration**. *On what shall this whole system place its survival bets? Should we turn us members loose to create for ourselves whatever we can freely create? Or should we unify ourselves in common effort for the common good? Do we allow the system to develop great differences among members in wealth and power? Or do we minimize differences and press for equality?*

**Free-Market Power Systems**

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<tr>
<th>Turn us loose to compete...</th>
<th>and our system will have newer, bigger, better products and services</th>
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*Free market systems valuing individuation driving differentiation*

Free-market social/economic systems and variations thereon are expressions of Power; they value individuation

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and differentiation – the fundamental principle being that system strength comes from freely individuating entities creating newer, more competitive, more lucrative, faster, cheaper, sometimes better sometimes not, products and services. The Power social/economic system is self-propelling; it values responsibility for self; it needs no external impetus. Simply set individuation as the basic principle, and the system is off and running. The system becomes one of Power - individuals, groups, and institutions competing with one another, each struggling to survive and thrive by coping with dangers and prospecting among opportunities. It is a continuous competitive process of generating new products and services.

Communist social/economic systems are expressions of Love; they value homogenization (equality) and integration (mutual support and responsibility and working together in common purpose). The idealized state is a unified system that treats all members fairly and equally, in which members feel responsible for one another and for the whole.

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Communist Love Systems

We are equal and united

Communist systems valuing homogenization and integration

History has been marked by revolutions in which Love social/economic systems were envisioned and created to counter what were seen and experienced as the negative consequences of Power systems: greed, exploitation of workers, actions serving the interests of organizations and not those of the larger system, unequal distribution of wealth, personal alienation, waste, unnecessary and/or dangerous products.

In contrast to Power social/economic systems, Love systems are not self-propelling; serving the interests of

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others and the state (integration) may have a moral
foundation, but it does not have the self-propelling force of
self-interest. Founders of communist Love Systems
recognized that limitation by posing the need for a New
Man\(^\text{17}\). To make the Love system work, a different type of
human being was required: one who was naturally
altruistic, community oriented, and who would sacrifice
one’s self for the common good. In the absence of the
evolution of such a New Man, or while awaiting his arrival,
Love systems quickly devolved into authoritarian states –
corrupt Love systems - in which the principles of
homogenization were cynically adjusted (\textit{Some people are
more equal than others}) and integration was forced from
above. (\textit{You will want to serve others and the system.})

So the economic warfare that was waged between
two social/economic systems was not Power versus Love,
but Power versus authoritarian pseudo-Love systems.

\(^{17}\) Heller, Mikhail, \textit{Cogs in the Wheel. The Formation of
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Blame greed while preserving the ideology.

With the collapse of Soviet Communism and the infusion of free-markets into Communist China, it appeared that the battle between Power and Love was over, with Power emerging as the clear winner – a vibrant economic system that was spreading across the globe. Then, in 2008, came the worldwide economic collapse reminiscent of the 1930’s depression. One explanation of the economic collapses was greed. Greed is a simple and satisfying explanation; we can actually point our fingers at specific guilty parties thus enabling us to keep the ideology intact. There was nothing wrong with the ideology; it was just a problem of a few bad apples.

From an organic systems perspective, such economic collapses are inherent to Power social/economic systems. When individuation-without-integration is the underlying economic principle, there is no such thing as greed, only people being allowed to freely compete. The financial markets developed ever more refined and complex mechanisms for creating wealth, ever more differentiated

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products being freely developed and sold. Individuation and differentiation unleashed. And with the ideology-based suppression of integration, in the form of regulation (seen as socialist deviltry), the opportunities increased for corruption and fraud. The line between entrepreneurship and criminality is easily blurred. So long as the ideology of Power ruled, integration was too weak a force to check it.

While the economic boon was on during the ’90s in the U.S., the Chairman of the Federal Reserve was seen as the indispensable man\(^{18}\), freeing up markets, limiting regulations. When the market imploded, he was transformed from hero to devil. *Why didn’t he see it coming?* He didn’t see it coming because the lens he was looking through was ideological rather than systemic.

**Destroying the system by rescuing it.** Ideology transforms an adaptive whole system principle into the principle; an adaptive process hardens into a sclerotic one. We only have to look at the disastrous consequences of imposing pure Love on society – the terror of the French

\(^{18}\) Testimony before congress, October 23, 2008

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revolution, the forced starvation of millions following the Russian revolution, the murder of millions that accompanied the Cambodian experiment with Love. The endurance of ideologies lies in their capacity to maintain themselves in the face of counter-indicative data. There are those who maintain that Communism never failed, it just was never done right. When the government intervened in the U.S. economy just as it did in the 1930s to change the rules, to increase checks and balances, to restrain freedom and thereby rescue the system from collapse, the ideologists saw this not as a needed corrective but as the imminent collapse of the free enterprise system. *The Communists are coming!*

The point is: Ideologies have a difficult time dying.

**Insight #1 revisited.** From the outside we see systems struggling to find the appropriate survival balance between Love and Power – how much individuation (freedom) and how much integration (connectedness), how much “I” and how much “We.” How much

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differentiation (differences in wealth and power) and how much homogenization (equality).

On the inside, rather than seeing some ever shifting balance between Love and Power as essential to creating and sustaining a more robust economic system, ideologists experience Love and Power as antagonistic economic systems. Any infusion of one process threatens the purity of the other. Mixed economies, rather than being seen as wise and necessary accommodations, are experienced as betrayals by ideologists of either stripe.
The management of economic systems is a question in the presence of maximum uncertainty. (Really, who does have the answer to how to manage a complex economy?) Our minds, however, do not easily tolerate the anxiety of uncertainty; in its presence we generate possibilities – We could organize this way or that. “Organize us into a unified whole, together in common purpose” is one possibility; “Turn us loose to freely test, experiment, grow, and compete” is another. Each is a plausible possibility that can readily become polarized against the other. But possibilities are not answers; they are possibilities. It is likely that Marxism and Capitalism would have emerged as economic systems even if there had been no Karl Marx or Adam Smith. The underlying uncertainty generates possible adaptations, and Power and Love are two such possibilities.

**Pure systems self-destruct**

Polarizations are comforting; they help (falsely) to reduce uncertainty, in that they enable us to see (accurately) the limitations of the other’s position, while ©Barry Oshry, 2012
remaining blind to our own. Uncertainty is gone; in its place we are left with clear opponents and imperfect systems which we have disabled ourselves from correcting. The problem is: all ideologically pure systems, whether Love or Power, self-destruct.

Reality is more complex than purity. Love-without-Power economic systems have an unbroken record of failure (Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Cambodia, North Korea), and Power-without-Love systems have demonstrated their capacity for unleashing economic disaster – wiping out people’s life savings, generating massive unemployment, creating and then dashing dreams of home ownership.

**The essential connection between Power and Love**

Love and Power are in tension with one another, yet, as we have seen both in theory and in organizational applications, *they are also mutually enhancing*. This principle holds true in economic systems as well. Free market ideologues deplore the restraints of Love that come

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in the form of government regulations, yet it is the removal of these restraints or the laxity with which they are applied that periodically results in fraud, financial collapse, mining disasters, costly oil spills, citizen outrage, anti-industry and anti-government sentiment. Such outcomes then suppress Power by dampening people’s confidence in and enthusiasm for these under-regulated processes; progress is either halted or delayed, investment is more cautious. Power is weakened rather than strengthened. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is a rare example of consistently strong and effective regulation that has strengthened rather than weakened the pharmaceutical industry.  

19 In his review of this study of the FDA, James Surowiecki said, “If we want regulators to do better, we have to embrace a simple idea: regulation isn’t an obstacle to thriving free markets; it’s a vital part of them.”  

20 That is a hard lesson for ideologues to accept.

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Power and Love have a complex relationship; they are in tension with one another, and they are essential to one another. Ideologies of Power and Love sidestep that complexity; they are simplistic, and it is that simplicity that enables them to tap into the simplistic righteousness of their followers. The more complex challenge is to create an ideology-free Robust economic system, one that accepts and works with the underlying uncertainties of their endeavors, one that adapts and balances and corrects in response to changing conditions, one that has the energy of Power and the mutual responsibility of Love without either one crushing the other.
Chapter 9:
Love is not Enough
Summary

In chapter 6, we saw how Bottom systems, in the presence of perceived threat, reflexively fall into Love internally and Power externally, with the various consequences that reflexive action has for the system. In this chapter we will turn our attention to systems in which members, in the absence of external threat, choose Love over Power – a choice based on certain moral, theoretical or cultural considerations. Love is simply the way things are done. We will see how this ideological commitment for Love and against Power eventually suppresses member energy and diminishes the capacity of such systems to carry out their missions. And finally we will explore the challenges of infusing Power into such Love systems through two contrasting approaches: rational education and unilateral power moves.
Case #1. The Project. The project began in great promise; there was an impressive collection of experience and talent on hand; members looked forward to productive outcomes. But as the project wore on, energy dissipated, members became bored, distracted, less optimistic about what could be accomplished. A summary report was written, the group disbanded. Looking back, most agreed: Not much was accomplished.

Case #2. The conference was progressing well; participants were feeling quite good about their experiences. One member, however, felt that the group was falling far short of its potential and was in a dilemma about what, if anything, he should do about it.

Case #3. Two countries have been at war for decades. Theirs is what is known as an
intractable conflict. He, a fierce warrior for his country with a long history of opposition to the enemy, is now his country’s leader. He wakes one night with a thought that frightens him: Peace.
Stuck on Love

Each of these systems – the project, the conference, the ongoing relationship between the two countries – is in its own variation of a Love scenario. Homogenization and integration predominate. There is unity, members are part of something larger – potentially greater – than themselves; they are connected to one another; they appear to be in general agreement regarding the purpose and direction of their systems; there is consistency, systems continuing to move in the direction they’ve been moving in; the systems stays on track. These are some of the strengths of Love systems: unity, connectedness, agreement, consistency.

Yet each of these systems is either stuck or decaying or on the edge of collapse; each is suffering from a power shortage. Individuation is submerged; individuals in these systems continue to go along in the flow of the system; there is no overt questioning of the system, or breaking off from it, or testing alternative – counter-group - behavior.
**THE LOVE PROCESS**

We are united, connected; part of something greater than ourselves; we are equals, there is no hierarchy of power; we work by consensus, agreement is important.

**Differentiation** as an ongoing changing and adapting process is also submerged; each system has its form for doing its business; these forms persist but they are decreasingly satisfying or productive, and there are no new forms and directions emerging that could capture member energy.

Infusing Power into these Love systems may be precisely what these systems require: releasing individual energy, disrupting the deadening status quo, breaking out in new directions. Yet Power may be energetically or passively resisted. Systems remain stuck on Love-without-Power for any number of reasons. For some the

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notion of unilateral action may simply be beyond consciousness; for others Power may be purposefully rejected on the principle that Love is good, Power bad. The systematic suppression of Power has its consequences: the loss of vibrancy in its members, and a diminished effectiveness of the system as a whole.

**The pure Love system self-destructs**

**Falling asleep to one’s personal agency.** One of the strengths of Love systems is the experience it gives members of being part of something greater than themselves; we become components in some larger whole. A downside of that experience is the potential loss of one’s centrality and responsibility for the work of the system. It is easy to fall asleep to one’s own agency. It is easy to allow oneself to be carried along in the system’s movement; this is especially true when there is no external enemy against which to energize one’s self. The possibility of separating one’s self from the group or taking unilateral action may not even enter one’s consciousness. There is ©Barry Oshry, 2012
some comfort in this going along, in this lack of personal responsibility or agency; but it also comes with a lack of aliveness that will deaden a system and ultimately lead to its demise.

**Loss of vibrancy.** Another strength of the Love system is the experience of moving together in common purpose. But it is also the nature of organic systems that homogenization and integration eventually become deadening because of the absence of the energy that could be provided by individuation and differentiation - individuals within the system and the system as a whole testing, exploring, expressing their potential. Both the people and the system are less than they could be.

As a consequence, inside the system, members are becoming de-energized, bored, distracted. They find themselves caring less about the system and its goals. They are less optimistic about the system’s outcomes. Since they are unlikely to see their own agency in creating their own and the system’s current condition, they look elsewhere for the causes of their feelings: they blame the actions of other system members, the complexity/

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impossibility of the task they have set for themselves, the pull of competing interests, even, in the cases above, the organizers of the project or conference. Everywhere except themselves. Other members may not be suffering or complaining; as committed Love ideologues, they may be accustomed to and have come to expect this low yet even level of energy.

The outside story

From the outside, it is clear that the systems is suffering from a Power shortage: system members are coasting; they are not testing and challenging themselves, exploring new possibilities for themselves; the system as a whole has narrowed its approach; it moves ahead relentlessly even against evidence that the current form and direction are not working.

This is the situation in case #1, the project that began in promise and now is collapsing in defeat.

Differentiation: Dead or Alive. There is a special challenge involved in attempting to infuse Power into Love systems. Infusing Love is something we do together; infusing Power requires us to separate ourselves from the

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whole, to invest ourselves in our difference, and to risk success or failure. These are acts of courage.

There are technologies in which we form committees, divide into interest groups, or differentiate ourselves by other means. The questions are: how alive are those differentiations for the members; do they tap into deep compelling member interests, values, desires; are members willing to put themselves on the line; and are these differences in the service of the whole? When these conditions are not present, differentiation is likely to be a weak process that produces differences that make little difference, and actions that eventually peter out. Sometimes there are powerful potential differentiations just waiting to be set free from smothering Love, but it is the intensity of the commitment to the unity and togetherness of Love that keeps those differentiations bottled up to the detriment of all. The challenge is: How to unleash these. The following describes one instance of such an unleashing.

Two Teams: Opposed or Aligned?

21 Open Space and World Café technologies as examples. ©Barry Oshry, 2012
Long before the concept of Robust System was developed, my colleagues and I began to see the power of individuation and differentiation as they expressed themselves in Power Lab interactions. In one lab my colleague Fritz Steele had been functioning as a floating staff/resource person moving from group to group, observing, and if he saw an opening, making what he hoped would be a useful intervention. The Immigrant (Bottom) group he was now observing had spent endless hours arguing over what direction the group should take. The arguments went back and forth with no resolution. Fritz could feel the heaviness in the group, the frustration, the inability of either side to convince the other, the lack of action, the stifling confinement of being trapped in the weakness of non-action.

The basic disagreement was whether to take direct action against the Elite or to envision and possibly put into play an alternative Love social system, one that was counter to the current Power system, one based on consensual law-making, minimal hierarchy, egalitarianism. Each side, with predictable regularity, expressed its disdain.
for the other’s position. The “constitutionalists” were seen as weak and naïve; the “direct action” crowd was seen as reckless and endangering the safety of the Immigrant group.

After many fruitless back-and-forths, Fritz offered a simple observation: *It seems like we have two teams here.* The Immigrants thought about that for a few moments and then split in two as if struck by a jeweler’s hammer. Energy that had been bottled up under the pressures to remain homogenized and integrated was now released. With little discussion it became clear that these two positions were not in opposition to one another, but rather that differentiation in fact could be a more powerful strategy than either one alone. The “constitutionalists” were going to map out the details of the new societal order, while the “direct action” group would make their moves. One member of the “direct action” group said to the “constitutionalists”: *We’ll get their attention; then they’ll be ready to deal with you.* And off the two teams went, zestfully pursuing their differences in the service of the whole Bottom system.

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The Power Move

The unilateral power move is a high-risk approach to infusing Power into Love systems. We see the emergence of a potential power move in cases #2 and #3. In both situations, a frightening configuration of thoughts is arising in the mind of a system member: This situation is not all that it could be. I have been complicit in maintaining its current form. And I have agency in where it goes from here. I could act in a way that has the potential for fundamentally changing this situation. To do so is likely to make me vulnerable in the system. I could also choose to do nothing, simply stay in the flow. No one would know the difference. Except me. Such thoughts and feelings are the ground on which power moves might emerge.

The Power Move:

Injecting power into the Love system

There are two central values underlying Love systems: equality and togetherness. The first derives from the system’s commitment to homogenization: We are a collection of equals; there is no hierarchy of significance or ©Barry Oshry, 2012
power among us. The second derives from integration: We are working together in common direction and purpose. The Power move violates both of these values. It is an act in which one person or group separates itself from the whole, acts independently in a way that makes possible the emergence of new forms, processes, and directions for the system.

From the outside such an act is an infusion (or assault) of individuation and differentiation into a Love system. On the inside of the Love system such acts are experienced as some combination of capricious, outrageous, arrogant, insensitive, unfair, immoral, insane, foolhardy, and even treasonous. Such moves upset the status quo as it relates both to the nature of member relationships with one another and to the form and direction of the system.

The possible motivations for power moves are many: people may simply be struggling to free themselves from the confining pressures of the Love system; they may be acting in the service of their own private interest; or they may be acting for what they believe is in the service of
some higher purpose. Even in the latter case, though intentions may be noble, the outcomes can be quite different from what one had intended. Take “rescue missions,” for example.

**Rescue Missions**

In 2003 the United States invaded Iraq. Despite having cobbled together a “Coalition of the Willing,” the U.S. undertook this basically on its own; it was not a consensus act supported by the nations of the world. One may never fully understand the motivations underlying that act, but, for the purpose of discussion, let us put the best light on it and assume that it was undertaken with reasonably noble intentions: that is, by overthrowing a dictatorship and establishing a western-favorable-modernistic-democratic government in the Mid-East, one could transform that part of the world in ways that would be beneficial to governments and people in both the Mid-East and the West, and that doing so might even be an important step toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian issue. That may or may not have been the motivation underlying that rescue mission, but I do know about the ©Barry Oshry, 2012
motivation and outcomes of another rescue mission – one that I undertook.

It happened in a Power Lab several years ago. I was a member of the Elite. There was an unusual configuration of Immigrants: half were members of a militant teachers union and half were ministers. None of us in the Elite had any real knowledge of life in this Immigrant group, but that didn’t stop us from having our story, which was that the peace-loving ministers were being oppressed by the power-hungry union people, and our Elite mission was to liberate the ministers.

One night we had our opportunity; we had been negotiating with the Immigrants over some of their demands. For me, the content of their demands mattered less than the opportunity to once-and-for-all break up that Immigrant group and liberate those oppressed ministers. Throughout the negotiations I stuck with my condition: we could agree to their demands if I could meet with half of the group. The union negotiators, spokesmen for the Immigrants - a ©Barry Oshry, 2012
fact that reinforced my image of them as oppressors - resisted. I insisted; nothing could happen without that meeting of the half. After much wrangling, it was agreed: I could meet with half. This was a terrible concession for the union representatives; I had done the unthinkable; I had split the union. I was grudgingly granted my meeting. It was assumed that I would meet with the power people, even I had assumed that; but, in a last minute’s “inspiration,” I chose to meet with the “liberated” ministers; this was another blow to the prestige of the union people. So I met with the ministers and it was for me a most disappointing meeting. These “liberated” ministers were far from grateful; they were furious at me for what I had done. One told me was going to report me, write a letter to my bosses at headquarters. Which he did. So much for my noble rescue mission -- which should add a note of caution to all “rescue” missions. (On the day I had written the above, the Prime Minister of Iraq called the withdrawal of American troops - no mention of ©Barry Oshry, 2012
coalition - as a great victory for Iraq, a repulsion of foreign occupiers.\textsuperscript{22})

**The Many Faces of the Power Mover:**

**Initiator, Instigator, Adventurer, Experimenter, Energizer**

**Insight #1.** From the outside it may be clear that a power move is needed to energize or reform or redirect the system. The Love system is either weak - lethargic, low in initiative, member resources under-utilized - or its direction and purposes are wrong-headed.

On the inside, individuation is experienced quite differently both by the individuating entity (individual or group) and by the system that is being acted upon.

The power movers are separating themselves from the whole; they are disrupting the forward flow of the system. As I’ve already noted, the moves are likely to be experienced by others in the system not as necessary infusions of energy but as outrageous acts, unfair,


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arrogant, immoral, insane, self-centered, foolhardy, disruptive, capricious, or treasonous. And the experience of the power mover, even when simply conceiving the possibility of the move, may also have some of those elements: This is dangerous. What if I’m wrong? I’ll lose my legitimacy if not my membership in this system. At the same time, the power mover is exhilarated, having shifted from relative passivity to excitement and challenge, seeing the possibility of taking the system to its next level of potential.

Up to this point, the potential power mover has been coasting in the system, going along in the flow, not particularly challenged by events. And the member’s experience of the whole system is much the same; it is moving along, maybe not with much zest, but moving. It is in that condition that suppressed thoughts begin to emerge, possibilities for individuated action; and along with those thoughts come fear and excitement. The possibility of breaking out of a predictable but unsatisfactory present and into an unpredictable and malleable future. The possibility of success...and failure.

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One power move, along with all of these possibilities, is the subject of our next chapter.

**Systems Education: A less radical approach**

Education into the nature of Robust and non-robust systems also has the potential for energizing Love systems. An education intervention involves the following: The system is stopped for a period of self-examination. Whole system processes are explained along with clarification of the consequences of Power-without-Love and Love-without-Power. There would be an inquiry as to whether system members were experiencing the consequences of Love-without-Power, how the commitment to consensus, uniformity, smoothly moving together has de-energized system members and the system as a whole. *Have we just been coasting? Have we avoided putting ourselves at risk?*

Such an education/ intervention would need to probe for what has been suppressed by this commitment: what challenges, risks, feelings, and alternative directions have been set aside for the comfort of simply going along with the flow? In essence the effort would be to raise to the

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surface the suppressed energies of individuation and differentiation and to create a process whereby those energies are liberated: *individual members putting themselves at risk to produce results that have meaning for them.*

In some sense such an educational approach runs the risk of falling short because it occurs within the Love framework: something else we are all doing together, agreeing together. The fundamental energy of Power comes from individuation, breaking free, risking, for the purpose of elevating one’s system to a new level of possibility. The integrating and homogenizing Love processes have a way of reining in such energies. Power moves are not actions for which we seek agreement or permission.

**Organization Development: A Bias toward Love**

One way of looking at the field of Organization Development²³ is to see it as a counterforce to a prevailing

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²³ For a comprehensive review of the theory and methods of organization development see [Practicing Organization](#) ©Barry Oshry, 2012
Power orientation in organizations; among the purposes of Organization Development as practiced by consultants and change-agents through a variety of technologies, are to bring integration to individuals and groups that are fractionated, competitive, mutually antagonistic, and otherwise non-collaborative; and to bring homogenization – transparency, commonality of understanding and purpose - to groups, units, and businesses that have grown apart at costs to their own and their organizations’ effectiveness. I am part of this Organization Development movement in that much of my work also involves integrating the over-individuated and homogenizing the over-differentiated. But I also see my work as infusing Power into Love systems, liberating the over-integrated and differentiating the over-homogenized. At times this entails encouraging power moves, moves against the status quo, unilateral actions, stepping away from one’s peers, stirring the pot, withholding resources, saying NO.


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Such expressions of Power do not always fit comfortably under the Organization Development umbrella.

Organization Development that is grounded in Love is a valuable corrective to destructive Power, yet it also runs the risk of being too unequivocally committed to Love and against needed constructive Power. Does the change-agent, committed to Love, attempt to solve the problems created by Love with more Love? For example, when Love systems are draining member energy and producing anemic results, does the Organization Development consultant or change-agent see the situation as requiring more Love interventions: more conferences, more all-hands meetings, more agreements, more consensus, more coming together to deal with the problem? Does the concept of Power move, with all its implications, even enter the change agent’s consciousness? If it doesn’t, then much is lost. Daily we hear tales of over-integration in organizations, the lack of constructive Power – people who went with the flow when what was required of them were Power moves that disrupted the flow. Deficiencies that were noted but not acted upon with sufficient power to

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prevent faulty products coming to market, mining disasters, rocket failure, intelligence lapses, financial collapse. People had the data, they saw what was wrong, but they did not have the courage – or the cultural sanction - that individuation requires. Organizational health rests on the interplay of Love and Power – the unity and connectedness of Love and the independence and difference of Power. The challenge for the Organization Development specialist is to be as comfortable with the technologies of Power as with those of Love.
Chapter 10:

The Future Is Cancelled: A Personal Case
Summary

I do not know the thought processes that led up to history’s momentous power moves such as Anwar Sadat’s decision to go to Jerusalem in an effort to break the stalemate in Egyptian/Israeli relations, Yitzhak Rabin reaching out to Yassir Arafat – his longtime enemy - in an effort to create a breakthrough in Israeli/Palestinian relationships, Abraham Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation thereby freeing the slaves in the middle of the US Civil War. I wish I had access to their thoughts and feelings in the days and nights leading up to their decisions, but I don’t. I do have a personal power move experience, embarrassingly trivial in comparison with the momentous actions described above. It has the advantage of taking you inside the experience as the possibility of a power move emerged and as the action unfolded.
The Future Is Cancelled: A Personal Case

The year is 1970. The place is Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. I am Dean of weeklong program called PRIOR (Program to Reduce Institutional and Organizational Racism.) PRIOR was developed in response to a confrontation by a group of African-Americans asserting that National Training Laboratories – a training organization I was associated with at the time - was not doing enough to combat institutional racism. The commitment to creating PRIOR was one outcome of that confrontation.

PRIOR became our first total immersion residential program in which two social classes – the Haves and Have Nots – were created with sharp differences in wealth and power including such matters as whether you had money (Have-Nots had none), the quality of your meals (sparse for the Have-Nots) and housing (primitive for the Have-Nots), availability of transportation (by foot for the Have-Nots), the extent of your personal belongings (not much
more than the clothes you were wearing for the Have-Nots.)

A number of factors distinguish that first program from current Power Labs. First, there were the times – the late sixties and early seventies. Issues of racism, sexism, and war were in the air. The Vietnam War was still raging; Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated two years earlier; there were riots in many cities; there had been a violent confrontation outside the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago between protesters and police; revolutionary groups of all stripes had had arisen, from the street theater Yippies to the Black Panthers to the bomb-wielding Weather Underground.

Second, there were the participants in the PRIOR program. Today’s Power Lab participants are more corporate; they come to learn more about themselves primarily in the context of organizational life. Though some may come with goals regarding organizational change, their notions of change tend to be within programmatic organizational bounds; rarely are they focused on total system overhaul. The 1970 participants were of a different
order; they were more socially conscious and activist; they were more directly focused on the larger societal issues of racism, sexism, and classism.

Third, there was the composition of staff. Our plan was to deal with a variety of forms of institutional oppression: racism, sexism, and youthism. So we brought on staff people who were deeply immersed in these areas including Betty Friedan who a few years earlier had written *The Feminine Mystique*, re-igniting the women’s movement, and who at the time was president of NOW, the National Organization of Women; David X. Spencer, a Black activist who was heading up one of the newly-created community-based schools in New York City; James Kunin, a 21-year old who had just written *The Strawberry Statement*, a description of the student uprising at Columbia University; and a group from the Race Institute of Baltimore, Maryland who had been working to create racial awareness in that city.

And, finally, there is the matter of purpose. PRIOR was about institutional oppression. In our minds, that meant we were focused on institutional change; this was
not simply meant to be about changing ourselves or our groups, although those were considered important, but the larger goal was nothing less than institutional change. It may have been a grandiose vision, but those were the times and that was what we were about.

This last becomes a key factor in my story. There came a point in the life of the system when the matter of institutional change became relevant. Were we serious about it, and were we willing to deal with institutional change in the program if we the staff were holders of the institution in need of change?

The Have/Have-Not society was generating much drama, events none of us had been fully prepared for, events that mirrored interactions in the larger society: confrontations, sabotage, hard negotiations, a trumped up constitutional convention, even a hostage taking.24 Matters heated up to a point at which staff had to decide whether to continue the society or end it. One matter that influenced our thinking was learning from the manager of

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24 Events from this program are described in Leading Systems
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the conference center that the Have-Nots had approached him requesting gasoline. The Have-Nots had proved themselves to be a formidable, crafty, creative force in our society. What was up with gasoline? Were they thinking about fire? One of our inner city staff members was panicked at the thought of fire. He had had too many close encounters with fire and too many recollections of fire’s destructiveness. As far as he was concerned, this was the end; we needed to stop the society now before really bad things happened.

I disagreed. I felt that this was a critical point in our system life; until now, the struggle had been between the Haves and Have-Nots, and we staff had been mere sideline players. The action was getting closer to us, and that was fine. We were part of the reality of this institution, and if the society was to deal with institutional change, then we were in the game. That was my position, and there were opposing positions. There was the matter of fire, and there was the matter of racism and sexism that needed to be dealt with more directly with structured activities.
In the end, the decision came down to keys. The Haves did not control the Have-Nots’ belongings, the staff did. The staff had collected these at the outset of the society and locked them away: their luggage, other personal belongings, car keys, and money. Our choice was: Do we return all belongings and end the society, or do we allow matters to continue? It may have been symptomatic of this program that the decision was made not through rational discussion but by a wrestling match. The staff member with concerns about fire wrestled me with the keys hanging between us. He won, the belongings were returned and the societal phase of our program ended.

The program continued with other activities focused on racism (including a set of powerful participant and staff developed skits) and sexism (including a male beauty contest developed by Betty Friedan and Jim Kunin). These were well-designed events that contributed to our learning. I say this to make the point that ending the societal experience did not deaden the program; all of us continued to be involved and contributing.

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The activity on the next to last day of the program was built around planning for back-home. How were we going to use our experience here to create change in our organizations, institutions, and communities?

That evening Jim Kunin and I made the rounds of groups, listening in as people were describing their change plans. By and large, the plans were promising, but there was one commonality that caught my attention. All change efforts focused downward in systems; none were taking on their systems’ power structures. I confess to being sensitized to this phenomenon since it jibed with my losing argument: that the society needed to successfully deal with us, the staff, as a warm-up practice field for tackling the power structures in their systems. Jim Kunin agreed with this downward description of change plans. My reaction may have been tainted by sour grapes, but it was not merely sour grapes. Jim and I felt there was little we could do about this now; the opportunity had come and gone. I was experiencing a combination of anger, depression, “I told you so,” and futility.
Later that evening my despair deepened as I overheard a conversation between Betty Friedan and David X Spencer; there was some element of mutual congratulations in the tone of their conversation, not about this program – which they were downgrading as merely a “game” – but about the real, in-the-trenches work they were both doing back home. Maybe theirs was simply water cooler talk but I took it seriously. Not only were the change projects limited in scope and power, but, in the eyes of people I respected, all of our work here was just a game. Game or not, I knew that if the participants went home the next day they would have been satisfied with the program. It was involving like no other program they had ever experienced; people were having significant insights about power and social system life; powerful memories and good person-to-person connections were being made, and reasonable change plans had been developed. Yet for me, there was something missing. This system was less than it could be; the depth of our engagement was less than it could be, and we had not dealt with institutional
racism, which was a major piece of what we had set out to do.

I had trouble sleeping that last night. Somewhere toward morning a frightening and exhilarating thought came to me, the beginning of a plan. There may be many ways to interpret how I was feeling and what I planned to do: be the hero, prove that I was right and others wrong, gain revenge. It may be that some or all of those played into it, but for me this was the prototypical experience of the power move. The power struggles of the Have/Have Not society had been set aside. We were now a Love system – a collection of equals, no power differentiations among us, no unilateral actions, no crises or confrontations; we were moving smoothly toward our conclusion. My thought and plan was to disrupt all of that so that of all us – staff and participants - would experience, in the present, the challenges of institutional change. Our institution.

Here is the thought that both frightened and exhilarated me: This program was scheduled for two parts. We were about to complete part one; three months down
the road we were to gather again and review how our change projects were progressing. My move was to cancel the future.

The following morning I addressed the group. I shared with them my observations regarding their change plans. I also brought up the conversation I overheard between Betty and David as further evidence of the shallowness of this experience. Betty tried to downplay the significance of that conversation, but it served my purpose to take it seriously. Then I dropped my bombshell. I announced that the follow-up gathering was cancelled, that the anemic nature of our change plans did not warrant our getting together. A staff member shouted *He can’t do this!* *He can’t do this!* He was right; I had no legitimate authority to cancel the follow-up; I was just a contract worker for this program. For the follow-up to have been canceled I would have needed the agreement of the central office, and it’s not likely I would have gotten such agreement and certainly not in time for this move. But I acted as if I did have the authority to act – I was the *Dean* after all - and others seemed to accept that.

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And now I had my counter-offer. Funds had been set aside for the follow-up event; those funds were still available. I said that I would be up in my cabin and if people had proposals for real change projects, I’d be open to discussion with funds available for support. And then I left.

I spent the next period of time (was it an hour? two hours?) not in my cabin, but hovering just outside the meeting room building. I had no idea what to expect. Would anyone take me up on my offer? Would an angry mob burst out of the conference room and attack me? Would someone think to call the central office to see if in fact I could cancel the follow-up? (Was the fact that no effort was made to contact the central office more evidence of their blindness to or fear of dealing upward in the system?)

Periodically Jim Kunin emerged with a report. The first was a long time coming and it contained no surprise: they were furious at me. The second came a short while later: I had put them in a bind, telling them how anemic they were while their only recourse was to come groveling

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to me seeking approval of their plans. The third report was more promising: people were beginning to agree with my assessment of their change plans. Then came the final message: no one was coming to my cabin, but I was being summoned to the meeting room.

I entered with the proverbial “much trepidation.” There were no smiles or friendly greetings, but the room was electric with energy. This was not the collection of individuals I had left a few hours earlier; I was now facing a unified system with its own sense of power and direction. The power balance shifted; they were in charge and I was invited to join their process. This was the most energized system I had ever experienced. For me, this was as far as our laboratory experience could take us; we created institutional change here as a first step toward creating it elsewhere. Plans were made; the bar had been raised on change goals; participants had teamed up around projects for their institutions; plans were made for corporate Have/Have-Not programs; the groundwork was set for what eventually became today’s Power Labs. Some projects had great success - witness the two graduates
who returned to their state and worked successfully to enact equal opportunity legislation and diversity education throughout the state\textsuperscript{25} – while others had more modest outcomes.

For me, the enduring magic of that morning was to experience the full potential of the power move for success or failure—risky, outrageous, eruptive - yet capable of fundamentally transforming a system. In this case, we had a system whose members were thinking that it was awake, coming to the realization that it was asleep, and then coming fully awake to its potential. To see that once is to know that such a transformation is always a possibility.

Summary

\textsuperscript{25} As I was writing this section, I received an email from someone who had participated \textit{forty years ago} in the follow-up change efforts in that state. In part his message read "(We) used (the Power Lab) in our work with changing the ways teachers were trained to go into inner city schools. We had entire schools of (education) in a college or university in these labs with street folks, teachers, community leaders, etc. (We) adjusted the design... I imitated the roles that you showed us --a huge learning for each of us each time we did it. I counted around 30–40 of (these programs); big groups and smaller ones."

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A system, having undergone a period of tense yet exhilarating Power interactions, had at last settled into peace, the relative comfort of Love - differences were now submerged; members were moving together in harmony; homogenization and integration reigned. And the system could have ended its existence satisfactorily in that condition. But then the system was confronted by a power move, an action in which one part of the system exerted its power against the whole. It was Power disrupting Love, disrupting what felt like the inexorable form and direction of the system. It was a move that converted stability and certainty into possibility. It was an action that changed what was likely to be an acceptable future into the possibility of a still richer more productive one. Possibility is the key word. There were no guarantees. Nor are there ever.
Chapter 11:

Power and Love Respond to the “Other”
Summary

In this chapter, we will examine a familiar scenario in which a system forms, develops its culture, and then encounters a stranger in its midst, the “Other,” a culture within the culture, one that differs from the dominant culture in such characteristics as belief system, skin color, religion, emotionality, language, cultural practices, sexual orientation. We will see how Power and Love function in the engagement between the Dominants and the “Others,” the one focusing on maintaining separateness and difference, the other commonality and connectedness. We will see how, in these engagements, predictable relationship issues develop among the Dominants and among the “Others” – in both cases Power factions versus Love factions.

And this section will conclude with an exploration into the possibilities of creating Robust cultures, cultures with the capacity to express both Power and Love.
In the second part of this chapter we will examine the phenomena of genocide and ethnic cleansing through the Love/Power lens; we will see these as conditions in which Love has been dialed down to zero. The “Other” is seen as completely different and separate from us and, as a consequence, we can do to them things we would never consider doing to one another. Such scenarios that have been played out time and again throughout our history are the systemic equivalents of insanity: a Connection/Commonality deficit resulting in destructive behavior accompanied by feelings of righteousness.

We will see the special vulnerability we have to the appeals of Connection/Commonality Deficit, the meaning and depth that delusion gives us. And we will see how demagogues have used and continue to use that appeal to further their political agendas.

And finally, we will examine steps we can take to inoculate ourselves against the deadly consequences of CCD.

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Case #1. A history of assigning stereotyped roles to women and blacks based on “scientific” evidence of their limitations.

Case #2. A history of limiting or restricting immigration based on the supposed “inferior characteristics” of the potential immigrants.

Case #3. The holocaust in which six million Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and others were systematically murdered.

Case #4. A history of bloody massacres and efforts at ethnic cleansing fueled by religious and ethnic differences.

Case #5. Minority voices in all the cases described above who resisted or actively fought against their system’s oppressive, destructive, or murderous actions.

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Part I:

Encounters with the “Other”

Systems have a long, complex, and often tragic history regarding their interactions with “the other,” the foreigner, the one who is different. On the inside, the oppression of the “Other” is experienced as being solidly based on the specific characteristics of these particular “Others;” they are inferior or dangerous or sinful or criminal or potentially polluting of the culture. There is always good reason for the oppression of these particular “Others."

From the outside, we see a timeless systemic story of the engagement between two systems: the Dominants and “Others,” the turbulence that engagement creates, and the responses of Power and Love to that turbulence.

Once again, we will raise the question: If we are able to see and understand the systemic story, will that enable us to avoid the costly consequences of these engagements and instead create sane and healthy systems? 

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The System Story

Systems develop and perpetuate their cultures

Step #1. Organic systems develop cultures whose purpose is to support the systems’ survival. From the simple earthworm to the human organism to the supra-organic systems – organizations, units within organizations, street corner gangs, ethnic groups, nations – all organic systems create cultures whose purpose is to ensure the survival of these systems. Supra-organic cultures (human systems) develop rules regarding what are appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, beliefs, and values. These are passed down from generation to generation, taught as the paths to success and survival, as the way to live, the way to be.

Step #2. Cultural rules become invisible to system members. The indoctrination of members into cultures

26 The survival patterns on non-human organic systems – earthworms and slugs for example, are described in the Afterword.

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becomes complete when the culture’s rules are no longer visible to members; they simply become the way things are. Just as we might suppose fish to be unaware of the water in which they swim, so do we become unaware of the cultural rules that guide our behavior; they simply become the ways things are and should be.

**Stage #3. Cultures act to maintain themselves.**

Once established, cultures act to perpetuate themselves. The challenge comes when established cultures are confronted by “foreign” cultures with different cultural rules.

**The Dominant and “Other” systems engage one another**

**Stage #1. The dominant system meets the “Other.”**

The “Other” is any system with a different set of cultural rules: different religion, language, skin color, emotionality, manner of dress, modes of interaction, and such. The “Other” may be internal to the system, such as previously suppressed groups – women, people of color,

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homosexuals, members of religious or ethnic groups – now seeking to express their power in the system; or the “Other” may be external such as immigrants with different cultural rules entering the system.

**Stage 2. The engagement of the System with the “Other” produces perturbation both in the System and in the “Other.”** Since the dominant culture is invisible to its members, since to them it is simply the way things are or ought to be, then the culture of the “Other” is experienced as “off” in some way; the range and variety of “offness” can be considerable: strange, exotic, wrong, lesser, dangerous, inferior, sinful or criminal.

This engagement between the Dominants and the “Others” perturbs both the Dominants and the “Others.” First will observe how this engagement plays out among the Dominants and then among the “Others.”

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**The Dominants and the “Other” react to the turbulence resulting from their engagement**

The drive of the Dominant system is to maintain itself in the presence of this disturbance generated by the ©Barry Oshry, 2012
“Other.” There are no textbook solutions as to how to respond, only uncertainty and, in the presence of uncertainty, possibilities arise. The Dominant system can respond with Power or with Love. As different as these possibilities seem, it is important to note that they have the same purpose: to maintain the system in its current form in the face of the “Other.”

The Dominant System engages the “Other” with Power: the Separatists. In the Power engagement, differentiation and individuation predominate. Connection

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and commonality are diminished if not dialed down to zero. The “Other” is experienced as foreign and incapable of being incorporated into the System. To incorporate the “Other” is experienced as potentially damaging to the Dominant system. If the “Others” are already arising in the System, they are experienced as a danger that needs to be controlled or eliminated. The Power approach leads to such actions as: preventing the “Others” from entering the system, expelling them if they are already there, criminalizing their cultural behavior, herding them into ghettos where they can’t infect the system, stereotyping them and confining them to stereotyped roles that perpetuate rather than threaten the system (slavery, nursing, teaching, housewifery, secretaries), or eliminating them (genocide and ethnic cleansing).

The Dominants engage the “Other” with Love: the Integrationists. In the engagement with Love, differentiation and individuation are suppressed (differences and separateness are ignored or minimized) while homogenization and integration predominate. The emphasis is on the commonality with and connectedness.
to the “Other.” Members of the “Other” are treated as fundamentally no different from members of the Dominants; in fact, in the Love engagement there is no “Other,” just one unified and connected whole system. Just as Power resolves the issue of difference by eliminating or controlling it, Love resolves it by denying its existence.\(^{27}\)

So the Power possibility would lead to keeping the “Other” out or suppress them in ways that would maintain the System unchanged; and the Love possibility would bring the “Other” in while not incorporating the culture of the “Other” in any way that changes the Dominant culture. They are simply there.

As generally happens when we are blind to whole system processes, possibilities have a way of hardening into fixed and firm positions solidly grounded in the

\(^{27}\) As I was writing this section, there was a story in that day’s New York Times, May 17, 2010 describing the Rwandan government’s efforts to create a Love society by suppressing – criminalizing – anything that points to ethnic divisiveness between Hutus and Tutsis. This is understandable given the genocide that erupted from ethnic divisiveness. Suppressing ethnic tensions is not eliminating them. Tito’s Yugoslavia instituted a similar Love-by-law government that buried ethnic tensions only to have them erupt in murderous ethnic warfare.

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righteousness of their respective positions. So now we have conflict within the Dominant system between the committed Power camp and the equally committed Love camp.

![Diagram of Power and Love engagements with the "Other"](image)

**Figure 11.1 Power and Love engagements with the "Other"**

Both orientations have negative consequences for the System and for the "Other." Power both oppresses the "Other" and distorts itself by the energy it needs to expend and the methods its uses to keep out, expel, or control the "Other." The very effort to maintain the System changes it, creating an overlay of oppression. Apartheid, Jim Crow, Nazification may have been successful approaches for maintaining purity by suppressing or eliminating the ©Barry Oshry, 2012
“Other;” at the same time, doing so distorted their own system, corrupted its members, made the system grotesque and repellant to other systems. And Love, through its denial of difference, prevents difference from expressing itself, until difference erupts. We need only see the history of Yugoslavia, which under Tito was, by law, a Love system in which different ethnicities were suppressed; yet, once the lid was lifted, differences exploded in massacres and ethnic cleansing. France has been another Love system committed by law to Love, the suppression of ethnic differences – Liberty, Equality, Fraternity – which results not in the homogeneity of Love but in the violent eruption of difference.28

The point here is: Love and Power are coping mechanisms, but neither is the “solution” to the turbulence of engagement.

28 As I am writing this, there is a story in the day’s New York Times, May 17, 2010 describing the Rwandan government’s efforts to create a Love-by-law society by suppressing – criminalizing – anything that refers to ethnic divisiveness between Hutus and Tutsis. This is understandable given the genocide that erupted from ethnic divisiveness. Suppressing ethnic tensions, however, far from eliminating them, sets the stage for future murderous eruptions.

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The “Other” engages the System

The entry or increased prominence of the “Other” into the system creates uncertainty for the “Other” as well. For the “Other” the challenge is: How to maintain one’s culture in this engagement? Once again, there are no obvious solutions to this dilemma, only possibilities: We could maintain ourselves (survive) by engaging the Dominants with Power or with Love.

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The “Other” engages the Dominant system with **Power.** In the Power engagement, the “Others” strive to survive by maintaining their culture. Differentiation and individuation predominate; homogenization and integration are suppressed. The “Others” attempt to maintain their difference and separateness; they resist pressures to assimilate. In the extreme Power engagement, the “Others” try to impose what they believe is their superior culture on the Dominants, that is, to change the Dominant culture so that it looks more like them – e.g., to feminize what is judged to be an inferior and oppressive male-dominant culture, to sexually liberate a system that is experienced as stiflingly chauvinistic, to try to make one’s minority religion the religion of the whole system.

The “Other” engages the System with **Love.** In the Love engagement, the “Others” strive to survive by blending into the System. Homogenization and integration predominate; differentiation and individuation are suppressed. The “Others” strive to minimize if not
eliminate their cultural ways while adopting the culture of the System, to be like them.

Once again, what begin as possibilities morph into fixed and righteous positions with tension within the “Other” culture between the Separatists and the Integrationists.

Both Power and Love turn out to be counter-productive. The Power orientation of the “Other” adds fuel to the Dominants’ rejectionist orientation; and it confronts the deniers with the emptiness of their denial. *Sorry folks, there are some fundamental differences here.*

And the Love orientation – blending in – tends to distort the “Other” – Black needing to act White, women needing

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to act like men, Gays needing to act straight, Jews needing to hide their Jewishness, and so forth. Additionally, such integrationist efforts may not change how the Dominant rejectionists experience them; in fact it may simply create a new stereotype for the rejectionists to reject – those man-ish women, and such.

Once again, the two survival possibilities: Power or Love, maintain our purity or assimilate into the Dominants morph into fixed righteous and oppositional positions, conflict among the “Others.”

The challenge we face in these engagements of differing cultures is: Is it possible for us to create Robust cultures, cultures based in Power and Love.

**Robust Cultures**

In creating a Robust culture we acknowledge that our cultures are different, and we are willing to entertain the possibility that by exerting both Power and Love we can create a single culture richer, stronger, more productive, and perhaps even more satisfying for its members than can either culture separately.

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The Robust culture exerts its Power; cultural differences, rather than being suppressed, are freely expressed; differing cultures exist side by side; members enjoy the contributions they derive through their cultural identifications; members of differing cultures draw lessons from one another – what can men and women, blacks and white, gays and straights, Hutus and Tutsis, Serbs and Croats, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Atheists, contribute to and learn from one another?

The Robust culture expresses its Love; there are structures, mechanisms, and processes whereby members of differing cultures experience their commonality with one another. How do we extend the technologies we have for creating mutual understanding and connectedness to whole cultures?

Power without equal attention to Love has led to strife and will continue to lead to strife. So long as there is fundamentalism, systems that cling to Power-without-Love, maintaining their difference and separateness from others, there is no possibility of a Robust culture. And Love without equal attention to Power results in the suppression ©Barry Oshry, 2012
of what is important to people—a history, richness, and meaning that is inherent in their cultural identification.

Creating Robust cultures is not a simple task but, given our history with the alternatives, it is a possibility worth pursuing.

**Part II**

**Cultural identifications and the magnetic lure of Power**

In our interactions with other systems, we can respond with Love—experiencing our commonality with and connectedness to members of these other systems; and we can respond with Power—experiencing our difference and separateness from them. Throughout history various religions and spiritual belief systems have preached Love—*Love thy neighbor as yourself*—yet, of the two processes, Power is by far the stronger. Love is what we *should* do, but Power is what gives us greater satisfaction.

We love our Power; differentiation gives us affiliation and depth. It’s more than being a *part* of something big; ©Barry Oshry, 2012
we are something big through these identifications as Christian, Muslim, Jew, Man, Black, Woman, American, Southerner, Hutu, Shiite, Mason, White, Gay, Bostonian, Bavarian, and so forth. Each of these 
*uneearned* elaborations of self enriches our lives; each gives us a past and a future that extends our mortal existence; each provides drama, emotion, righteousness, our private history book replete with triumphs and defeats. Differentiation gives us our difference, and individuation our separateness. This is one potent brew, given the alternative of seeing ourselves as we are fundamentally -solitary creatures wandering the earth alone for the few years allotted us, un-enhanced by these elaborations. How relatively drab such a self-image that would be!

**Barry the sports fan.** Differentiation and individuation have their power even in relatively trivial matters, sports for example.

*I live in Boston, Massachusetts, United States of America. Boston is a sports town with championship baseball, football, and basketball teams. As I was writing this paper, my baseball team was involved in*
a thrilling championship series. I do not play on this
team, yet my emotions were tied to its
performances. I was tense when the outcome was
uncertain, exhilarated when my team was victorious,
depressed when it was defeated. What has their
performance to do with me? Rationally, nothing.
Emotionally, quite a bit. I feel connected to this team
not only in its present form but also with its history
going back decades. I feel connected to its heroes
who are my heroes, to its past triumphs and defeats.

It is interesting to note that the current owners of
the team refer to all of us – players, owners,
managers, and fans – as Red Sox Nation. So now we
are a Nation, and the nations of other teams are our
enemies.

If so much identification and emotionality can be
attached to a sports team, how much more powerful are
the lures of: my country, my god, my ethnic group, my
race, or my gang. How much more gripping are the
dramas associated with these self-elaborations.

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The attraction of demagogues. Previously we have explored two paths to Power: falling into it blindly or choosing it ideologically. Much of our more destructive history with Power grows out of a mix of the two. History is replete with demagogues who feed us this rich brew of difference and separateness and then draw us into deadly crimes against humanity. They give us an opportunity to experience our power – our difference and separateness – and then we do the rest.

In the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, for example, one candidate roused the crowd by assuring them that they were the “real Americans.” The audience reaction was, predictably, one of pride – Who doesn’t want to be counted among the real Americans? – and, along with pride, came anger directed against the “others,” those less than real Americans. We are different and separate.

The “real” people and the “others” is the formula that has resulted in our most devastating human-on-human catastrophes. The formula follows a regular pattern: leaders strike the opening note - We are the real people because (fill in the blanks) - then the mob eagerly
joins in – *Yes we are the real people*. Let the catastrophe begin!

**Fundamentalism: Systems in environments of perceived threat.** Fundamentalism, when viewed from the outside, is less about the particulars of one’s belief than it is about difference and separateness.

Fundamentalism defines itself as a system in an environment of perceived threat: *Our religion, beliefs, way of life are in danger*. Fundamentalism is a system struggling to survive; it is a system that places its survival bets on differentiation and individuation; it is different and separate. It is a Power system externally and a Love system internally. Fundamentalisms provide their members with certainty in the presence of what is fundamentally uncertain. *What is this existence about? Is there meaning here? Purpose? How did we get here? Where are we going?* In the presence of uncertainty, possibilities arise. It could be this, it could be that? Possibilities harden into comforting certainties. And inside fundamentalism there is no room for uncomfortable uncertainties. Pure Love. This is what binds together

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fundamentalisms that are so fundamentally antagonistic to one another whether they are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or exotic cults. From the outside they are systemic disorders differing from one another only in the degree to which they constrain members internally (Love) and do damage to others externally (Power).

**All Dominants have their unique “Others.”** When we are in the grips of system blindness, lacking the benefits of insight#1, our explanations of our condition are personal and situational: *We feel special because we are special and we see these others as less than human because they are less than human; and whatever is happening is happening because of the specific conditions we are in.* And all of this is experienced as reality; there is no sense that this is one more in a long chain of blind and deadly dances. When commonality and connectedness are dialed down to zero, there is no limit to what one can do to others.

Power, in its extreme forms, has fueled the Crusades, the righteous wars of religion, the Armenian genocide, the murder of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals. ©Barry Oshry, 2012
in the holocaust, slavery, the subjugation of women, the oppression of homosexuals, the brutal Hutu/Tutsi savagery, ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, Apartheid in South Africa, and more. Homogenization and integration dialed down to zero: We are wholly different from and unconnected to the “Other”. In the extreme we are human, they are less than human: vermin, leeches, cockroaches. Power makes it possible to dominate, oppress, enslave, and annihilate the “Other.”

Is there hope? By some counts, over 17 million persons have been murdered in 20th century genocide and ethnic cleansing. One frightening thought to consider: This Extreme Power-without-Love scenario may be incurable; it may be that oppression, bigotry, genocide and ethnic cleansing will always be with us. The appeal is universal: we are great, and then there are these “Others.” Unless we understand this process and our vulnerability to it, and unless we are able to notice how in the moment it draws us and others in, and unless we have the skill and means for stopping the outbreak before it gains momentum, then

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there is little reason to think that the old formula will cease to work.

We can’t count on the power of learning from one genocide to the next. There is nothing to be learned so long as, on the inside, each outbreak is experienced as specific and personal: our situation, and our “Others.” Nor can we count on the power of civilization, since genocide and ethnic cleansing have broken out in societies with venerable traditions in education, fine arts, law, science, industry, and philosophy. None of that slowed the outbreak.

What is required is a change in seeing: a shift from homo sapiens, the knowing people, to homo systemicus, the knowers of ourselves as systems creatures. As homo sapiens we are brilliant at observing and understanding systems that are separate from us, whether looking down through our microscopes or up through our telescopes, we see, we understand. But we are largely ignorant of our own embeddedness in whole systems and how the processes of these wholes shape our hearts and minds.

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When we don’t see systemically, we too easily fall into variations of Power-without-Love, losing our connection and commonality, burrowing down ever more cozily into our differentiated and individuated nests.

**Insight #1 revisited.**

There are two perspectives: our experiences on the inside and the view from the outside. On the inside, we have our evaluations of one another, our righteousness, and our defensive and aggressive tactics: avoid, escape, dominate, avoid being dominated, hurt, and, in the extreme, destroy. From the outside, we see Power and Love out of balance: *We need to inject more commonality and connectedness into this relationship.* Like a voice from the system’s engine room, (or is that homo systemicus calling out to us from the future?): *Pump up the processes! Homogenize and integrate!*

**Outside the nest.** System sight raises its own challenges. Who are we when we step out of those cozy, ego-enhancing nests? *What does differentiation get us?* ©Barry Oshry, 2012
What does individuation get us? Who are we without these? I suspect that some of these system identifications are so deeply entrenched that we can never be wholly detached from them. In fact, it is often dangerous to give even the appearance of detachment – you run the risk of being seen as a traitor to your country, your race, your religion, or your social class. Yet even if we cannot be wholly detached from these system connections, we do have the less extreme possibility of moderate detachment. We can notice our attachment to this greater, historical, and noble whole; we can notice our experience of superiority to these others; and we can smile at our vulnerability while not taking the whole business too seriously.

And, finally, when we are caught up in the grips of our greatness and superiority, this can be a signal to us that this is not the time to avoid, escape, dominate, hurt, or destroy the “Other.” Rather, our reflexive feelings can be a signal to us that we need to work on Love. It’s time to work on homogenization, finding ways of identifying and developing our commonalities with the “other;” and it is ©Barry Oshry, 2012
time to work on integration, finding ways to connect, to find projects we are jointly committed to, and to work on supporting one another in the service of those projects. Is it possible for us to find sustenance in these racial/religious/ethnic/national identifications while at the same time fully acknowledging and accepting our fundamental commonality with others? Differentiation and homogenization, individuation and integration. The acceptance of ourselves as Robust systems.
Conclusion

While Waiting For Homo Systemicus: Part II
Robust systems are systems of Power and Love; they are a possibility for all the social systems of our lives: the family, team, organization, university faculty, middle management, worker groups, social action entities, ethnic groups, government agencies, and nations.

The Power of Robust systems comes from individuation and differentiation: from the freedom and independence of system members to experiment, test, explore, and challenge themselves; and from the energy of the system as a whole as it elaborates its potential, adapting its shape, exploring the widest range of forms and processes for interacting complexly with its environment.

The Love of Robust systems comes from homogenization and integration: from recognizing and maintaining the commonality of system members, and from system members coming together, using their uniqueness to support and be supported by one another in common cause.

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The Robust system is energizing and challenging for its members - the energy and the challenge coming from mastering processes that are both in conflict with one another while also being mutually enhancing. Individuation is self; integration is community; individuation is freedom, separateness, independence, private cause; integration is connectedness, togetherness, collaboration in common cause. They are in tension yet they also strengthen one another; the fruits of individuation enrich integration, and the sharing and support of integration strengthens individuation.

Differentiation is difference, complexity, and change; homogenization is commonality, simplicity, and stability; yet homogenization is the comforting base that provides members with the support enabling them to change and elaborate their differences. Members can comfortably explore and elaborate their differences so long as all remain in touch with their underlying commonality. Yes we are fundamentally the same...and we are different.
We have also seen how potentially Robust systems diminish their potential by falling into, or choosing to be, either Power Systems or Love Systems.

We have seen how dysfunctional patterns result from reflexive response to immediate environmental conditions. We have seen how initially adaptive responses harden into dysfunctional patterns. And we have seen how systems can choose to be Love or Power Systems based on ideology.

We’ve seen how system sustainability requires both system Power and system Love, and how, without both, systems diminish their effectiveness and ultimately self-destruct. The Love system has neither the energy nor the differentiated repertoire needed to stimulate its members or effectively cope with the dangers in its environment and prospect among its opportunities. The Power System self-destructs as parts harden in their difference and separateness, lose their commonality and connectedness, and members feel justified in separating from one another, or hurting, and ultimately destroying one another whether in the form of turf warfare among members of Top

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systems or class, racial, religious, or ethnic warfare in society.

Hope lies in system consciousness, but system consciousness does not come easily to us. We do not naturally see and understand the processes of the systems of which we are a part, yet we are capable of such understanding. At one level, the antidotes to dysfunctional Power and Love systems are straightforward. Power systems need infusions of homogenization and integration. Processes need to be created whereby members experience their commonality with one another, and there need to be opportunities, in which members interact with one another, supporting and being supported by one another in common cause. Love systems need infusions of individuation and differentiation. Members need to be willing to separate themselves from the pack, pursue independent directions, and shake up the status quo, surface and elaborate differences.

**Insight #1.**

And there is this other piece of knowledge that is at the heart of system consciousness; it has to do with the ©Barry Oshry, 2012
relationship between our experiences as members inside the system – our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, evaluations - and how the processes of the whole are viewed from outside the system. When we are immersed in a Power system, we have strong feelings toward the other; we see them as foreign, dangerous, separate. And those feelings seem very solid to us, like the way things really are. We may be reluctant to see that those feelings are not the ways things really are, that they are a consequence of the process we are in. Change the process and the feelings toward the other will change. If Tops who are engaged in turf warfare infused more homogeneity and integration into their system, if they shared important information with one another, if they took time to walk in one another shoes, if they functioned as mutual coaches to one another committed to one another’s success, if they made opportunities to work together on projects unrelated to their organizational specialties, their feelings toward one another would fundamentally change. Instead of fearing, opposing, and defending, they would come to understand, value, and respect, and possibly like one another. When ©Barry Oshry, 2012
one is caught up in the Power configuration, such a transformation is inconceivable. Yet it is always available. And what is true for the Tops is also true for all members of systems caught up in Power relationships.

There is a parallel illusion in the Love System – the feeling that this system is weak and powerless. That feeling too may be experienced as grounded in reality - *That’s simply the way it is with this system*. Yet, if system members dared to individuate, if they sought to identify, liberate, and elaborate differences that are suppressed in that system, that “weak” system would be remarkably transformed.

When one observes the current status of our world’s system relationships – from broken marriages, to failed partnerships, to children’s alienation from their parents, to territoriality, alienation and we/them relationships in organizations, to strife within churches regarding homosexuality, to terrorism, to ethnic cleansing and warfare – all grounded in what feel to be solid and justifiable feelings about self and other – one cannot help
but see the costs of Power systems without Love and Love systems without Power. And, given that we have the capacity to see, understand, and master the whole system processes of which we are a part, there is hope.

The challenge we face is this: How do we create knowledge – a way of seeing the world - that contradicts the evidence of our senses? How do we do that not simply for you and me but as a world-wide shift in consciousness that can bring greater sanity to our organizational and societal interactions? Such shifts do not come easily. If I didn’t know better I would still think that the Sun revolves around the Earth; I see it happening every day. But knowledgeable people understand that, despite the evidence of our senses, that is not the case. If I didn’t know better I might still believe that human beings are a separate and unique creation; I have no direct evidence of the link between who we are and our ancient ancestors. But knowledgeable people understand that, despite the evidence of our immediate senses, such a link does exist.

Those paradigm shifts were met with great resistance: they seemed far-fetched; they didn’t jibe with
our everyday experience; and they ran counter to dearly held beliefs about our special place in the universe. I believe that we are in a similar place regarding the connection between whole system processes and consciousness. It will be very difficult, if not impossible for us, without such knowledge to question the solidity of our experiences. With such a paradigm shift, knowledgeable people will be able to question the solidity of their experiences of themselves and others; they will understand that by shifting Power or Love processes those seemingly solid experiences will also shift.

This writing is a step toward creating that shift. More voices than mine will be required.

CODA

Tillich’s essay deals with love, power, and justice. When I first undertook the current work, I felt that I could deal with Power and Love as whole system processes, but that justice would elude me. Justice implies morality, and morality is outside the realm of total system processes. Robust Systems are amoral; they build powerful

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relationships internally, and they have strong capacity externally. But robust can be for good or evil.

So there is no morality to Robust Systems. And then it occurred to me: There may be a whole systems equivalent of justice when applied to the one system of which we all are a part, the single system of humanity. This whole system is a Robust System, and the reality of life in that system is: We are similar and we are different; we are separate and we are connected. That is how it is on the outside; it is our reflexive blindness and ideological commitments on the inside that lead us to the limitations of Power or Love. Recognizing our underlying reality as a single ever evolving Robust System, understanding it, and acting on the basis of that reality may in fact be the whole system equivalent of morality. An organic systems perspective on Justice.

Three drafts of this essay were completed while working and vacationing on Key West, Florida, one in 2009, another in 2010, and still another in 2011. A bumper sticker seen on many locals’ cars reads: One Human

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Family...I would amend it to read: One Robust Human Family.

Barry Oshry

Key West, 2011
Afterword

The Research Story Behind a Systemic Perspective on Love and Power

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My research laboratories.

I did not set out to be a theoretician of system life. In my early career, I was basically a designer, a creator of learning experiences. The niche that I carved out for myself dealt with learning in the context of total systems – organizations and communities. It was as a participant and observer of these many organizational and community experiences that a framework for understanding systems – the wholes and the parts – began to emerge and then evolve over the years.

Two programs in particular have been central to my learning about systems – the Power Lab and the Organization Workshop. Both of these programs have been created as settings in which participants can deepen their understanding of themselves in the context of social system life; at the same time they have been rich learning opportunities for me to deepen my understanding of systems. Central to both programs are whole system experiences.

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In the Power Lab, participants are “born” into *The Society of New Hope*, a total immersion three class social system with sharp differences in wealth and power. At the top are the Elite who own or control the bulk of the society’s resources, among them its money, housing, food, court, and work opportunities. At the bottom are the Immigrants who enter the society with little more than the clothes on their backs. And between the two are the Middles who manage the institutions of the Elite.

In the Organization Workshop, participants are “born” into a system in which there is an organization composed of Tops, Middles, and Bottom groups that interacts with Customers and potential Customers.

What made both the Power Lab and the Organization Workshop particularly rich laboratories for my learning about systems is that these are not role-play situations, that is, no one is instructed how to react. Conditions are created, people are placed into these conditions, and events unfold. This gave me opportunity after opportunity to observe *naturally* unfolding events. Still there remained the question: what was I seeing?

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And what to make of it all? My framework for seeing whole systems has evolved over many years, yet I do remember one powerful moment – a literal “awakening” in the middle of the night, startling my wife by blurting out “It’s alive!” In that moment I experienced the organic nature of the whole, the sense that the society was an entity in itself, a whole thing with processes of the whole. Early on we would describe the whole as having cells and membranes, and boundaries that were impermeable (unhealthy), totally permeable (also unhealthy), and flexibly semi-permeable (some possibilities there). Yet I still had no language for the whole: what it is, what it does.

**What are whole organic systems?**

**Patterns of relationships.** Early on I found a welcoming, comforting, and inspiring conceptual home in the work of Ervin Laszlo, particularly his *The Systems View of the World.*\(^{29}\) Here is Laszlo describing systems as

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patterns of relationship, a concept that would eventually be fundamental to my work.

"Individuals come and go; (the systems) remain. It is not that (the systems) are immune to change themselves, but they do not change with the changes in membership...In each case there are sets of relationships which are conserved, even though all participants get themselves replaced sooner or later." (The parenthetical inserts are mine.)

It would be several years before I would be able to identify and name the consistent patterns of systemic relationship that characterized the organizational systems I had been working with, and likely all organizational systems: Top/Bottom, End/Middle/End, and Provider/Customer. Organization members are constantly moving in and out of these systemic relationships, sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other. In certain interactions they are Top with designated responsibility for some process, and in others they are Bottom as members in Top’s process; in other interactions

30 Laszlo p. 7.
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they are one of two or more Ends competing for a Middle’s attention, and at other times they are Middle between two or more Ends; in still other interactions they are Provider of product or service to a Customer, and in other interactions they are the Customer. These three patterns of relationship account for much of the consistency in organizational interaction across the widest range of organizational types, even though all participants get themselves replaced sooner or later.  

Patterns of Process. The Power Lab offered a unique opportunity to study three different systems (Top/Elite, Middle/Managers, and Bottom/Immigrants) within the larger system of the community (the Society of New Hope). Once again, although each program had a fresh cast of characters – none of whom were instructed how to play their parts - the scenarios played out by each system were remarkably consistent from Power Lab to Power Lab. In brief, Tops regularly had difficult

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relationships with one another, protecting their individual turfs, sending conflicting messages throughout the community, struggling with one another over the culture, purpose and direction of the community. Bottoms quickly coalesced and would eventually have difficulty in maintaining that unity in the face of conflicting pressures. And Middles regularly became non-groups, with individuals Middles turned away from one another, focused on their respective responsibilities and their connections with their Top, and with little to no connection with one another.\(^{32}\)

These were gross observations; what we lacked was a language of whole systems. Why were these Top, Middle, and Bottom systems developing so differently from one another? There were no systematic differences in the personal makeup of members from one system to the other, so the differences in subsequent system life could not be attributed to the characteristics of its members.

Again from Laszlo:


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Hence, to all intents and purposes, the characteristics of complex wholes remain irreducible to the characteristics of the parts... (N)ot only could we not compute the behavior of the whole from the behavior of the parts, but we would have to revise our computations with every change in “personnel.” A hopeless as well as futile endeavor indeed.  

What we were observing were initially identical systems – that is, systems, with no systematic differences in member makeup, interacting with three different environments. And the different scenarios that developed resulted from the processes each system employed in attempting to cope with the conditions of its immediate environment.

**Individuation and Integration.** The work then was to clarify these different environments and name the adaptive system processes. Middle and Bottom were the clearest and most dramatically different systems. In interacting with a diffusing environment, Middle systems

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33 Laszlo 8
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individuated, with members functioning as separate independent wholes; Bottom systems integrated, with members coming together and functioning as parts of an integrated whole. Part and whole. Separate and together. Independence and connectedness. This is a fundamental whole system dynamic that plays out in the widest range of systems. Laszlo described the phenomenon of entities being independent wholes and also component parts in systems from the sub-organic (sub-atomic) to the organic (human) to the supra-organic (groups and societies).34

Arthur Koestler coined his own term for this phenomenon of whole and part as it related to the human being.

*No man is an island – he is a holon. A Janus-faced entity who, looking inward, sees himself as a self-contained unique whole, looking outward as a dependent part. His self-assertive tendency is the dynamic manifestation of his unique wholeness, his autonomy and independence as a holon. Its equally*

34 Maszlo pp. 29-33
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universal antagonist, the integrative tendency,
expresses his dependence on the larger whole to
which he belongs: his “part-ness.”

And then there is Lewis Thomas’ description of whole
and part, individuation and integration, as they play out in
the life cycle of slime mold cells.

At first they are single amebocytes swimming
around, eating bacteria, aloof from each other,
untouching, voting straight Republican. Then, a bell
sounds, and acrasin is released by special cells
toward which the others converge in stellate ranks,
touch, fuse together, and construct the slug, solid as
a trout. A splendid stalk is raised, with a fruiting
body on top, and out of this comes the next
generation of amebocytes, ready to swim across the
same moist ground, solitary and ambitious.

What was unique to our organizational systems was
that there was no slime mold cell natural back and forth

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flow of individuation and integration; on the contrary, the
tendency was to get stuck on one process or the other to
the eventual detriment of system members, their
relationships with one another, and their system. Yet it
was the connection between individuation and integration
that illuminated the possibility of Robust systems.

**Differentiation and homogenization.** The unique
Top story gave us insight into another pair of system
processes. The Top system was entering an environment
of shared responsibility for the larger system; it was also a
complex environment the Top system was entering with
multiple difficult and unpredictable issues to deal with; and
it was an environment with critical uncertainties regarding
how best to shape and direct the system as a whole. Top
systems regularly differentiated in response to these
conditions. What is happening in the Top system is in
sharp contrast to developments in the Bottom. Whereas
members of the Top system are becoming more
specialized, more different from one another, in the
Bottom system differences are submerged, commonality
predominates. As the Top system is differentiating, the Bottom system is homogenizing.

The interplay between differentiation and homogenization cuts across a wide range of systems, organic and supra-organic. Difference. Sameness. Organic systems develop survival strategies based on the balance of these two processes. Earlier, for example, I contrasted the survival strategy of the human organism as a whole system with that of a common earthworm. The earthworm’s survival strategy is based on limiting differentiation and emphasizing homogenization. The result: the earthworm doesn’t do much by the standards of the human organism, but whatever capacity it does have is spread throughout the system. Cut off its head, and other parts of the earthworm have the capacity to generate a new head. The human organism’s survival strategy is quite the reverse: maximizing differentiation at the cost of homogenization with the result that we have a much more varied capacity for interacting with our environments, but our lost parts are not so naturally replaceable.
Supra-organic systems – families, organizations, institutions – also intentionally develop or reflexively fall into strategies based on some balance of differentiation and homogenization; and through that lens we were able to see how dysfunction develops when, for whatever combination of reasons, systems elaborate one process and suppress the other. At the same time, recognizing the connection between differentiation and homogenization opens the possibility of avoiding dysfunction and creating Robust systems.

**The two faces of consciousness.** There is a puzzle: Why do organic systems – the slime mold cell, the earthworm, the human organism – find successful balances of individuation and integration, differentiation and homogenization, while the supra-organisms of organizations, institutions, ethnic groups, and such are prone to imbalances resulting in painful and costly dysfunction? Why don’t these supra-organic systems naturally find healthy non-destructive system-sustaining balances?
I suggest, and I leave it to future generations of researchers to investigate, that consciousness lies at the heart of that puzzle. Laszlo makes a useful distinction between subjectivity and consciousness. All organic systems possess subjectivity; that is, they react to stimuli. Poke, heat or freeze earthworms, slugs, and the human body and they will react, but the capacity we humans have, thanks to our highly and fortuitously evolved cerebral cortex, is to think about our reactions; we can witness our reactions, and we can choose.

*Organisms endowed with consciousness are liberated from the world of here and now experiences and can enter a quasi-autonomous world of their own creation.... Mere subjectivity is bound to the immediacy of events; only consciousness can liberate one from his actual experience and enable him to control it by his own will.*

This capacity to experience and then reflect on our experience and then make choices based on those

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Laszlo pp. 91-95

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reflections would appear to be an unvarnished human advantage. It is an advantage, but unvarnished it is not. On the positive side, as we have seen throughout this paper, consciousness allows us to recognize dysfunction, understand it, and choose to remedy it. But consciousness is often what gets us in trouble in the first place. Our “special advantage” enables us to evaluate processes, to concoct myths and theories and value systems that elevate certain processes over others. Individuation is good and integration is bad, or the reverse; and once our myths and theories are established we are free to choose, to move straight ahead into self and system dysfunction. If Lewis Thomas’ slime mold cells had our human consciousness, some of those individuating amebocytes might well choose to remain out in the world foraging alone rather than return and become part of that “socialist” slug. Fortunately for them, amebocytes are incapable of making such choices, but we, with our double-edged gift of consciousness can.

**Power and Love.** It was only as a result of my conversations with Adam Kahane that I was able to re-
range the system process pieces, seeing that the whole system equivalent of Power was individualization and differentiation, individuals and whole systems expressing and exerting their possibilities, and that the whole system equivalent of Love was integration and homogenization, system members becoming one and uniting in common purpose. Through that lens it also became clear that the processes of Love support Power, and those of Power support Love, and that falling into – or choosing – one without the other leads to inevitable personal and whole system destructive consequences. And it also became clear that if we were able see, understand, and master these whole system processes, it would be possible for us to create sane, healthy, and productive systems – Robust systems, systems of Power and Love.

* References


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**Additional Resources**

For more on the Power Lab, see:


For more on the Organization Workshop, see:


Additional information on both of these programs can be found at powerandsystems.com.

For further reading on this organic systems perspective, see:

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