

# The Way Forward Beyond The Dysfunctions Of Modern Culture

## Part 2: Skillful with Diverse Modes of Cognition

Dr Robert Gilman – November 16, 2021  
The Stoa's Philosopher in Residence series

# The Way Forward with 3 New Capacities

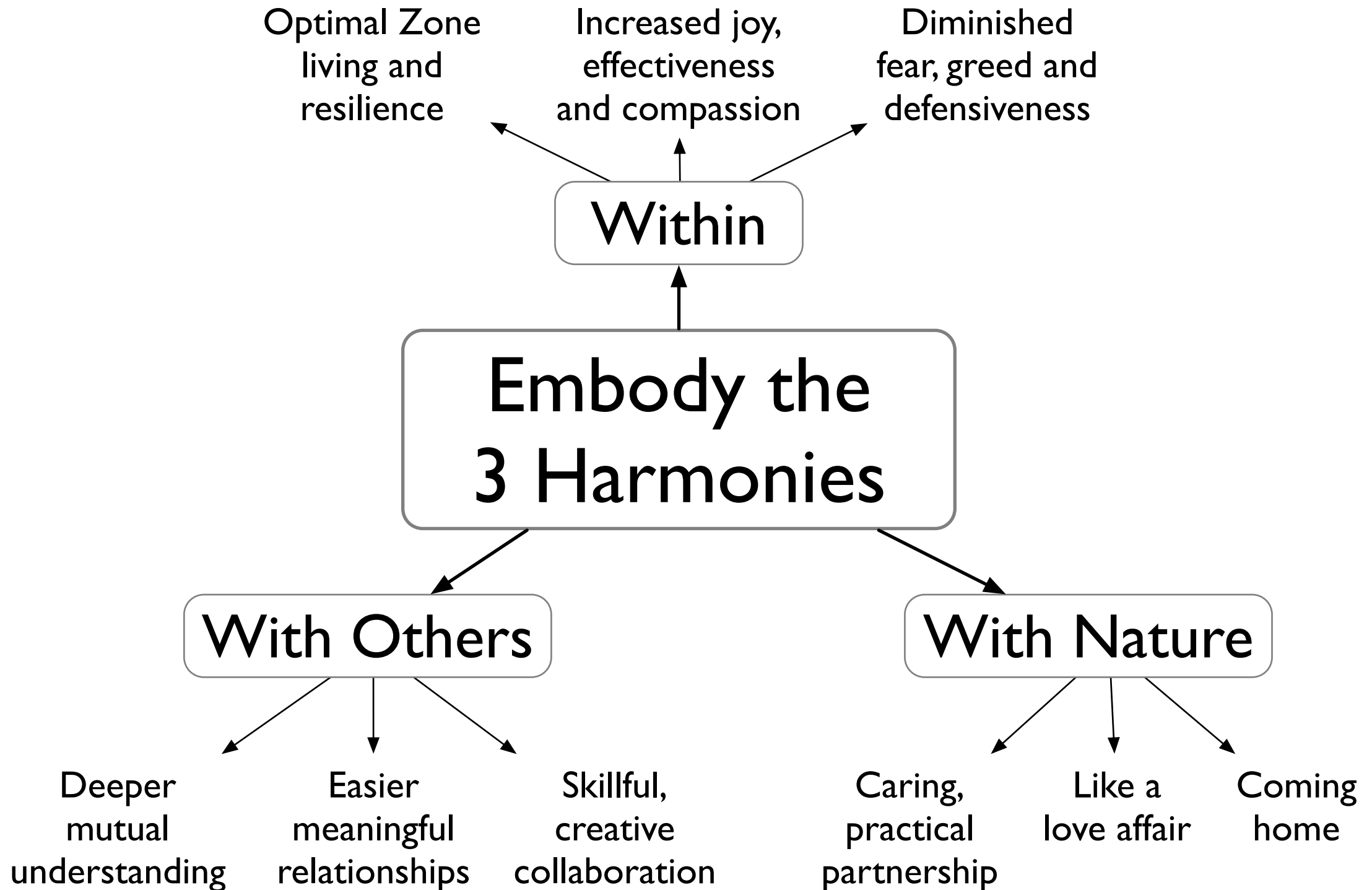
- Savvy about psychodynamics
- Skillful with diverse modes of cognition
- Adept at the new strategy for success

# The Opportunity

Imagine a culture where  
the people and their institutions

embody the harmony  
within, with others and with nature

# The Opportunity



# The Opportunity

Imagine a world  
of such cultures



# The Opportunity

The end of

- war as an institution
- dominance systems of government
- dominance organizational forms
- poverty
- systemic traumatization in all its forms
- all the Polycrisis issues

# The Opportunity

The emergence of a truly  
compassionate and creative  
humanity  
ushering in the Planetary Era

# Cognition

“The mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses”



# Being Skillful with Diverse Modes of Cognition

Enables us to

- experience life more fully
- communicate more effectively
- think with more clarity and refinement
- find better solutions
- reduce and resolve conflicts
- accelerate the emergence of the  
Planetary Era

# How Cognition Begins

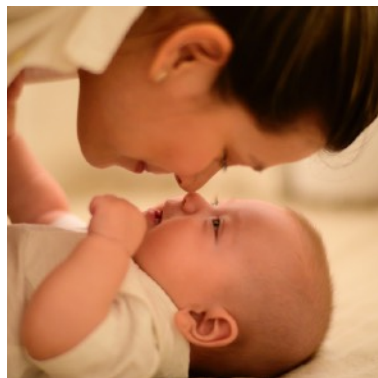
# Core Knowledge Systems



**objects**  
cohesion,  
continuity,  
contact



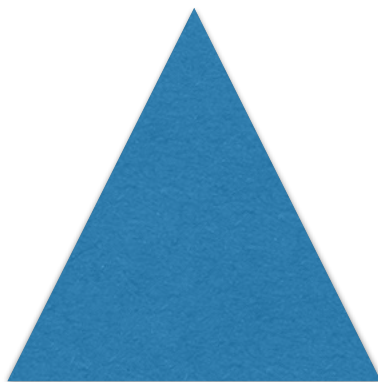
**agents**  
goal,  
cause,  
cost



**persons**  
shared  
experience



**places**  
distance,  
direction



**forms**  
relative length,  
angle



**numbers**  
order,  
composition

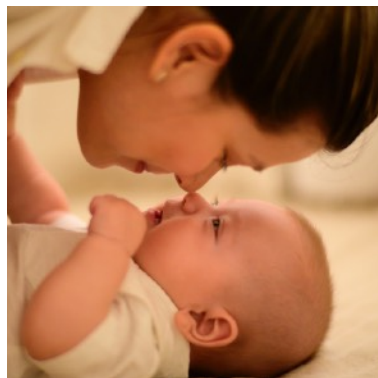
# Core Knowledge Systems



objects



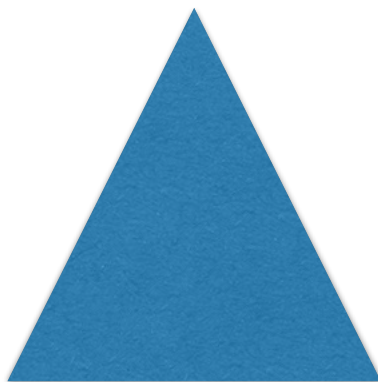
agents



persons



places



forms



numbers

- They are innate
- They emerge early and are present throughout life
- They are present in other animals and therefore ancient
- They activate specific systems in human and animal brains
- They are foundational for learning and cognition
- They are rudimentary



# Infant's Concept of "Object"



- Cohesion
  - \* continuous, enclosing edges
  - \* solid, can't interpenetrate
  - \* associations connect to it as unit
- Continuity
  - \* all parts move together
  - \* continuity in time
  - \* ignores context and relationships
- Contact
  - \* only affect each other through contact

# Object Permanence

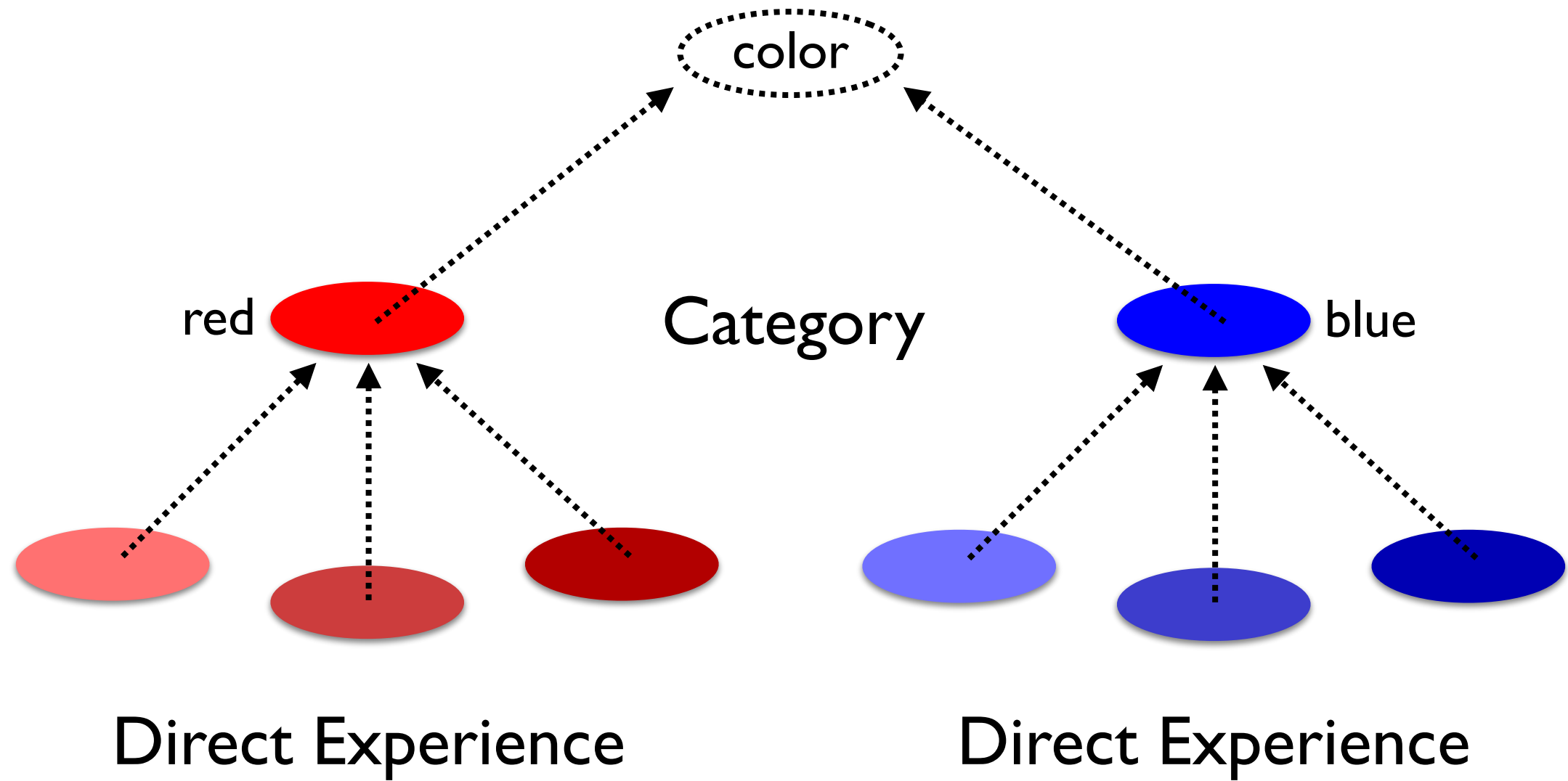


**Building On The Core**

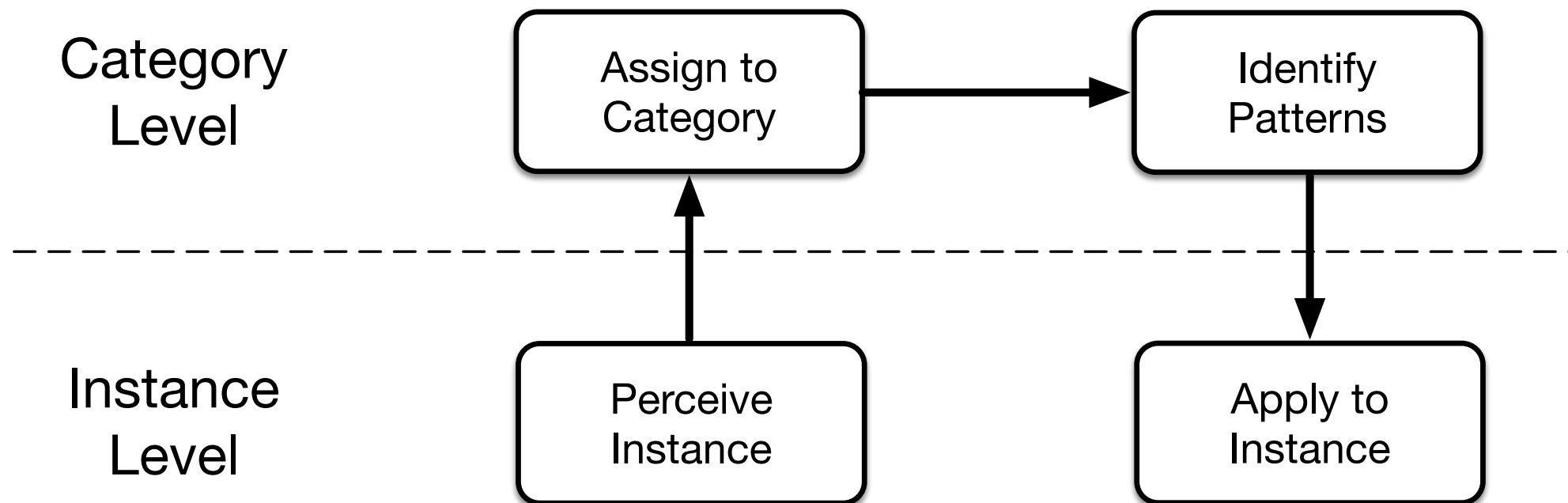


# Categorization

Generalized Category



# Categorical Thinking

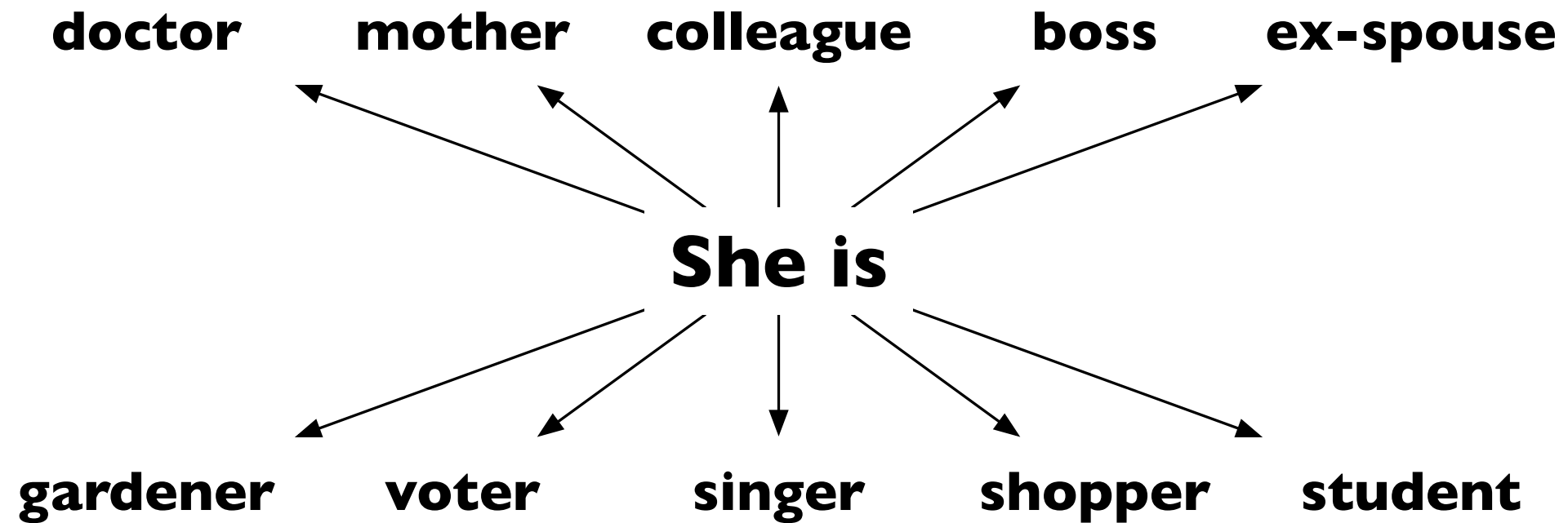


# Categorical Thinking

It doesn't work well when

- the individuality of the instance matters
- the context of the instance matters
- continuous variables can't be categorized
- the wrong category is used
- no single category is sufficient

# Which Category?

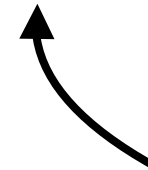
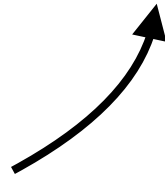


# Metaphor

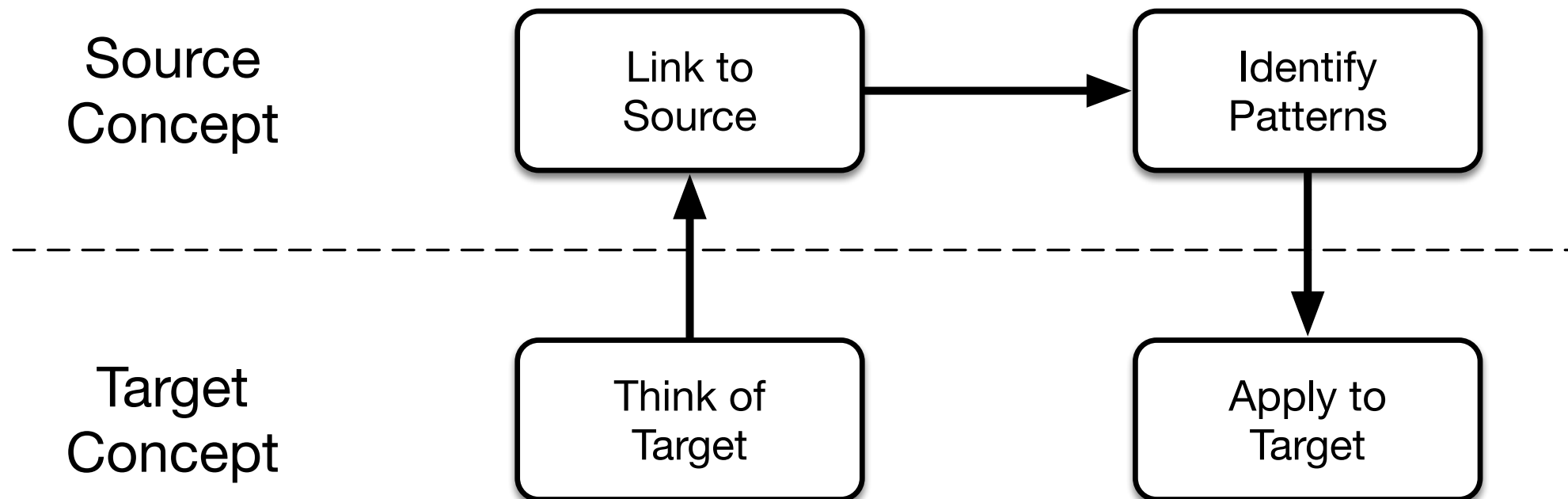
“Her ideas are brilliant”

Target  
*intangible, abstract*

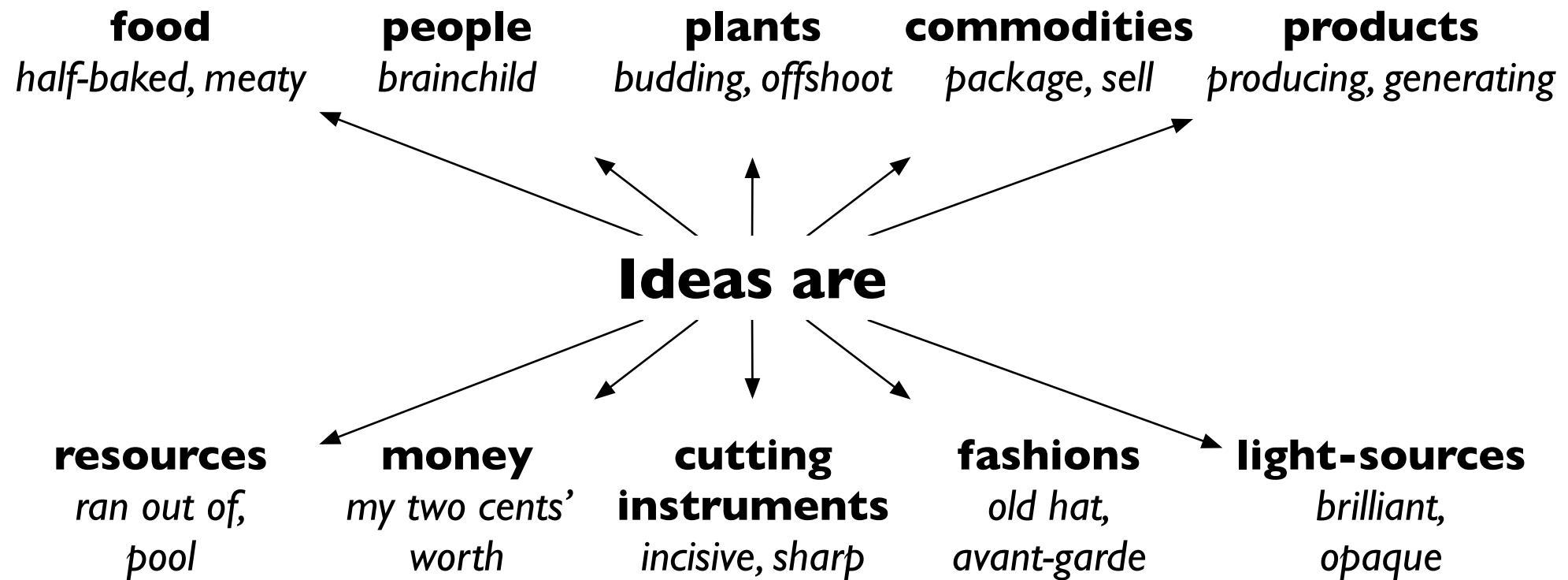
Source  
*embodied experience*



# Metaphorical Thinking



# Which Source?





# Language

**Words + Grammar**

# Language

- Words
  - \* shareable labels on concepts/categories
  - \* open-ended stock
  - \* require shared definitions



# Language



Fighting over the definition of God



# Language

- Grammar
  - \* enables structured connections among words
  - \* enables the creation of novel concepts
  - \* complexity of expressions limited by four chunks of working memory

# Language

- Builds on Core Knowledge innate concepts, e.g.
  - \* nouns mostly from objects
  - \* verbs mostly from actions of agents
  - \* prepositions from places
  - \* conjunctions from numbers
- The original technology for creating virtual reality
  - \* shared imaginary worlds
  - \* lots of opportunity for falsehood and deception

# AoE/Modernist Dysfunctions

The *monopoly* of object perception

- Limitations of object perception
  - \* designed by evolution for quick identification and simple, categorical descriptions
  - \* encourages stereotyping
  - \* breaks down for anything that violates the principles of cohesion, continuity and contact
  - \* poor fit for persons, abstract concepts (“freedom”), systems (“climate”) and internal experiences - the culture struggles to deal with all of these

The Polycrisis is the result

# AoE/Modernist Dysfunctions

The *monopoly* of language-based thinking

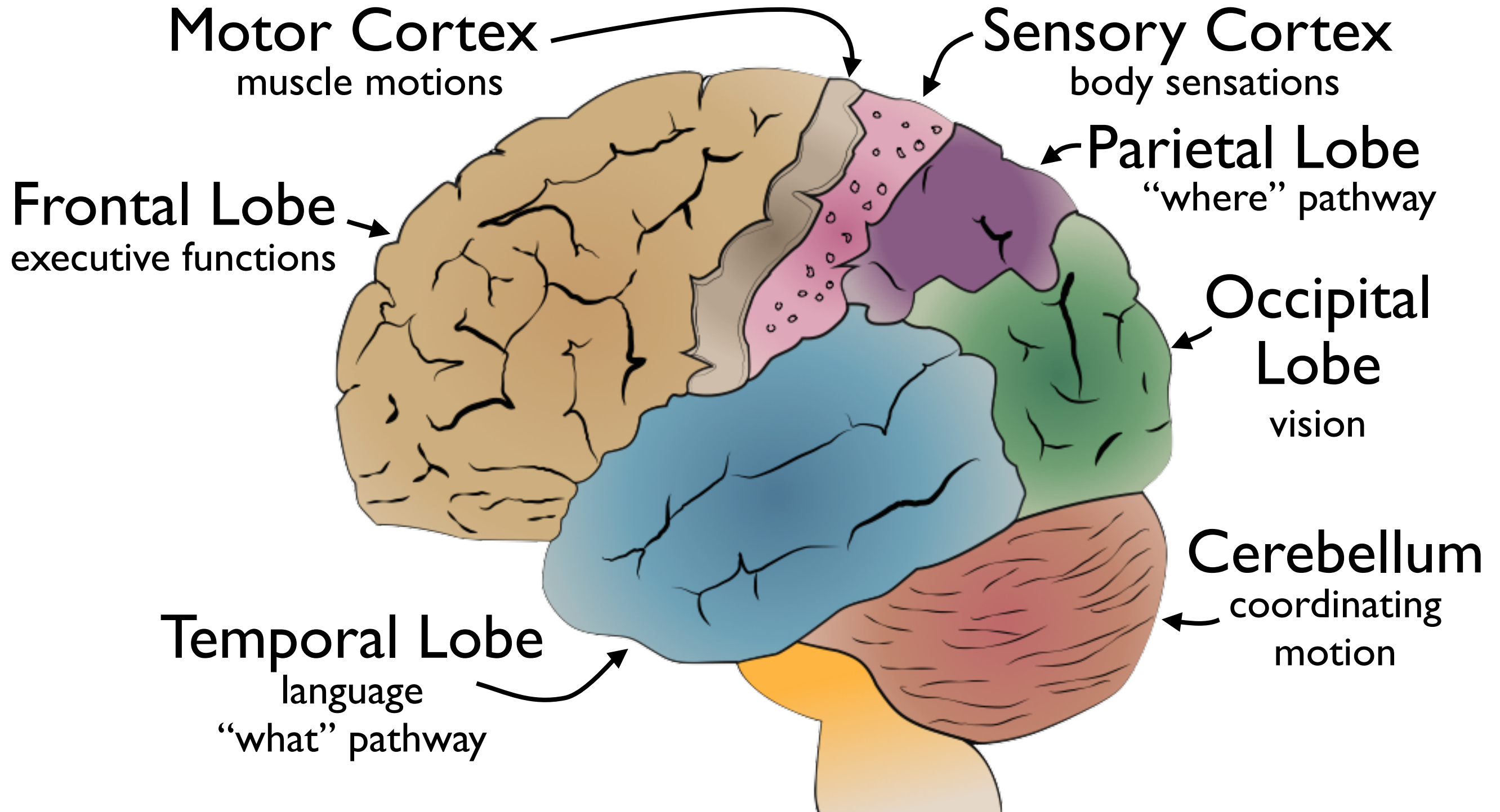
- Limitations of language-based thinking
  - \* good for linear storytelling, poor for complex systems
  - \* complexity limited by four chunks of working memory
  - \* depends on simple, shared definitions
  - \* inherently categorical
  - \* for complex domains and challenges, more likely to generate conflict than understanding

The Polycrisis is the result



# Breaking Out of the Monopolies

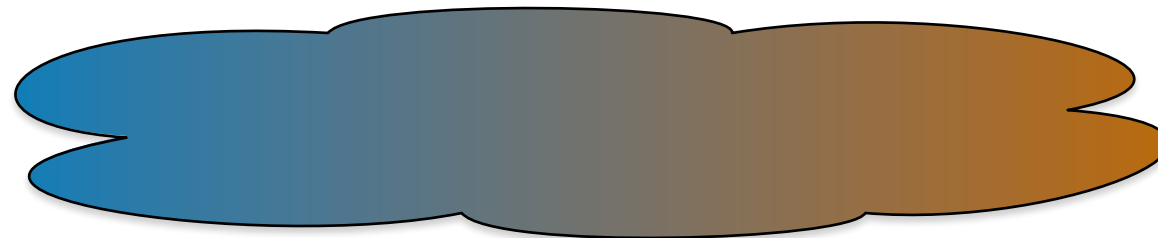
# Using the Whole Brain



# Breaking the Monopoly of Object Perception

# Territories And Maps

- “Territories” use “place” as their metaphor
- They are an alternative to “object” as a basis of perception
- Can be used for non-physical things/domains
- They are identified by their “boundary”
- You assume you don’t know all of what’s inside

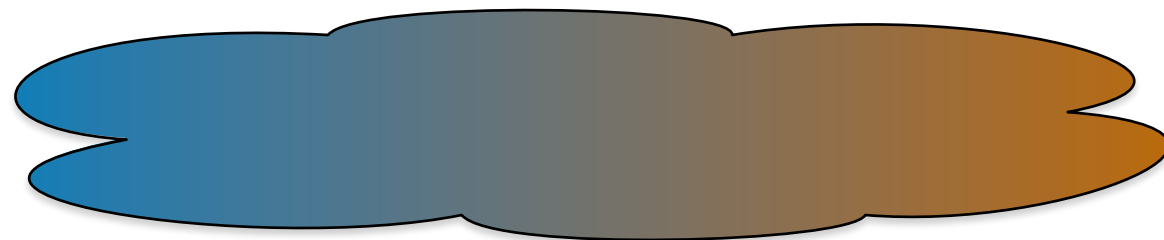


# Objects vs. Territories

	Objects	Territories
<b>Core metaphor</b>	object	place
<b>Focus</b>	thing as a unit	inside the boundary
<b>Useful for</b>	simple inanimate things	people, systems, concepts
<b>Thinking mode</b>	fast	slow
<b>Description via</b>	categories	maps
<b>Thinking type</b>	categorical	system

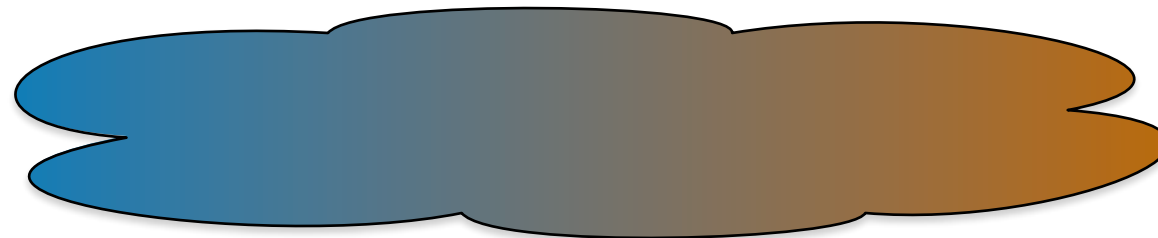
# Territories And Maps

Switching from object-perception  
to territory-perception is a  
case-by-case choice



# Territories And Maps

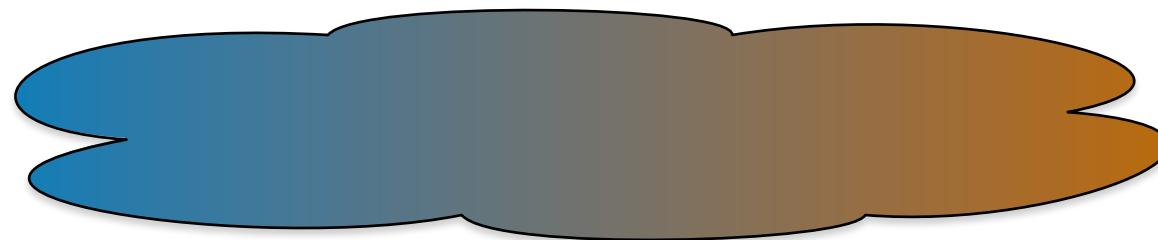
“Maps” are derivative,  
created by people  
using selective information  
about a territory  
to serve some purpose





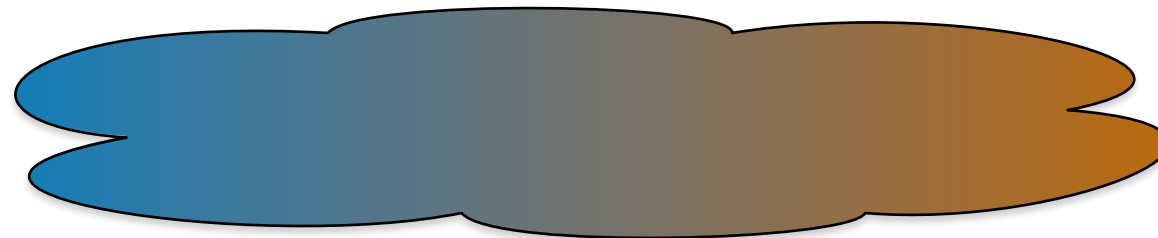
# Territories And Maps

Every map is  
partial,  
selective and  
provisional



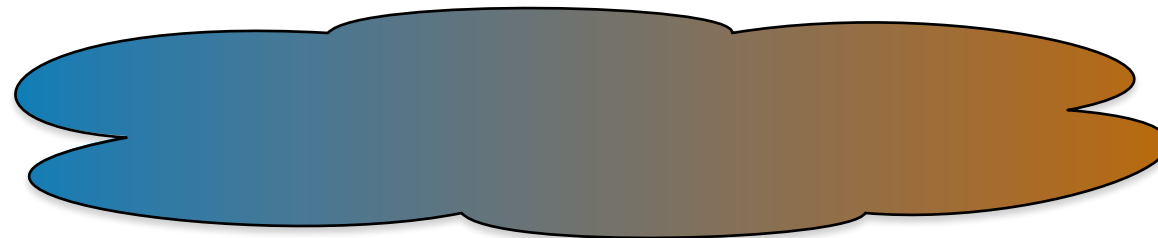
# Territories And Maps

Any single territory  
can have many valid maps  
serving diverse uses



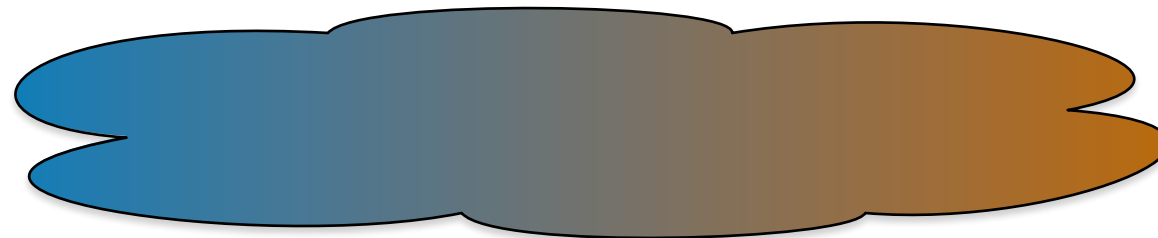
# Territories And Maps

We don't have  
to fight over  
which map



# Territories And Maps

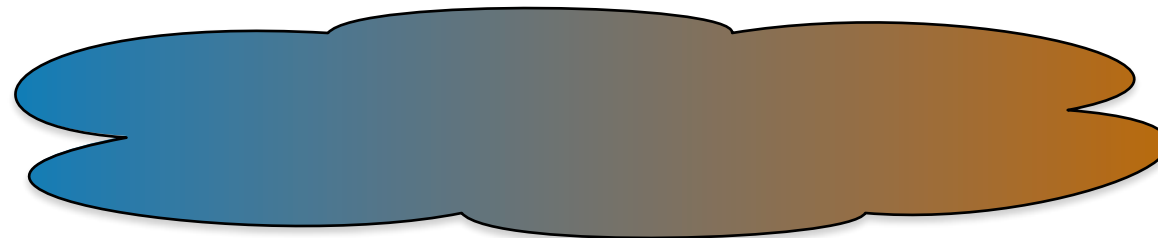
Seeing people as territories  
is core to ending  
racism, sexism, etc.



# Territories And Maps

Times you might switch to territories and maps:

- For people, systems and abstract concepts
- When the thing's uniqueness matters
- When the thing has parts, relationships and/or context that are important
- When a shared understanding about something is important and not obvious



# More Alternatives to Object



composites



layers



sliders



spaces



fields

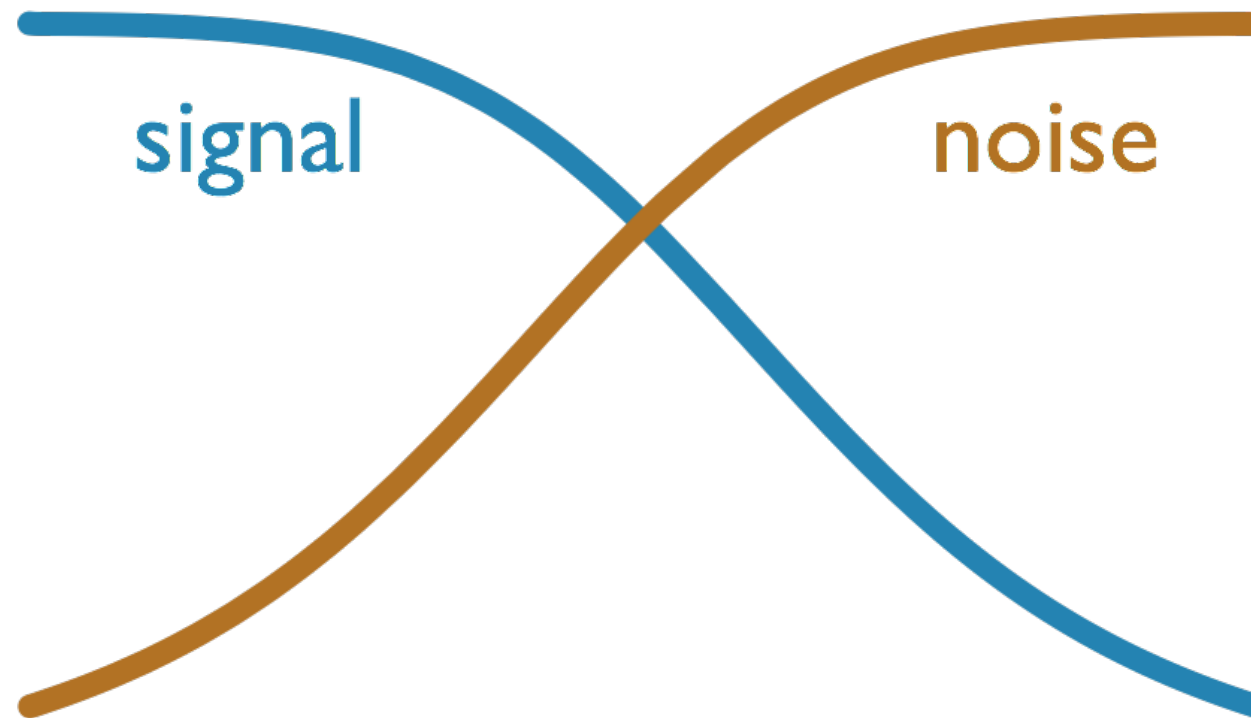


systems

# Categorical vs. Continuum



vs.



[context.org/crossfade](http://context.org/crossfade)

# Skillful Take-aways

- Be quick to distinguish between
  - \* simple, mundane, non-controversial situations in which object-perception and categorical thinking work well
  - \* complex and/or controversial situations in which the extra effort of territories, maps and slow thinking are worth it
- Be skillful at switching to and using territories and maps
- Hold your maps lightly, with humility - but still use them!

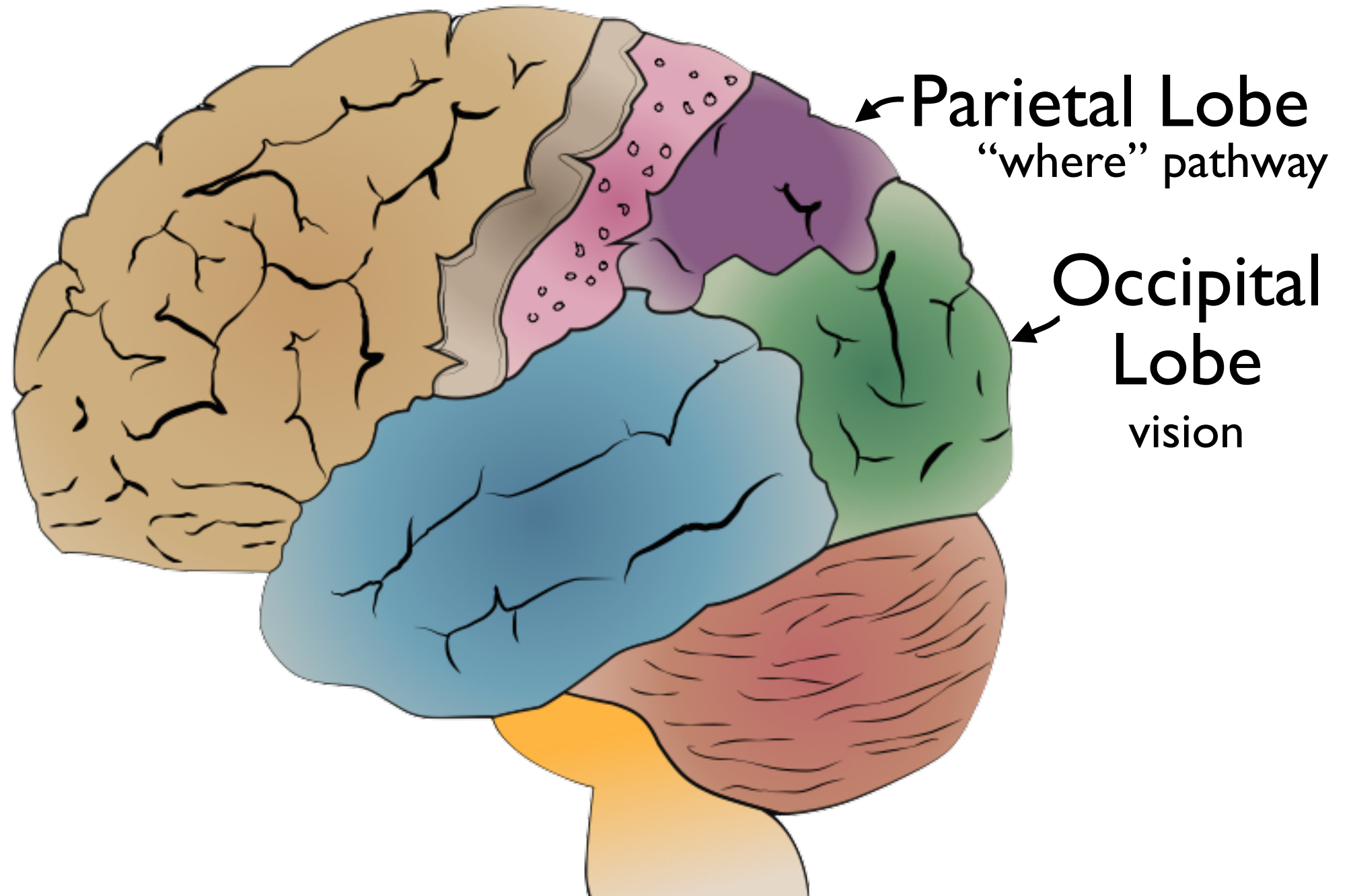


# Breaking the Monopoly of Language-based Thinking

# Visual/Spatial Cognition

- Uses massively parallel processing, like the subconscious
- Accesses much more simultaneous info than language
- Directly includes relationships and context
- Breaks out of linearity; 2+ dimensions
- Doesn't impose a narrative
- Can use symbol systems – or none
- Can be shared directly thru visuals without the abstraction of language
- Can still use words to identify concepts

# Visual/Spatial Cognition



# Visual/Spatial Cognition



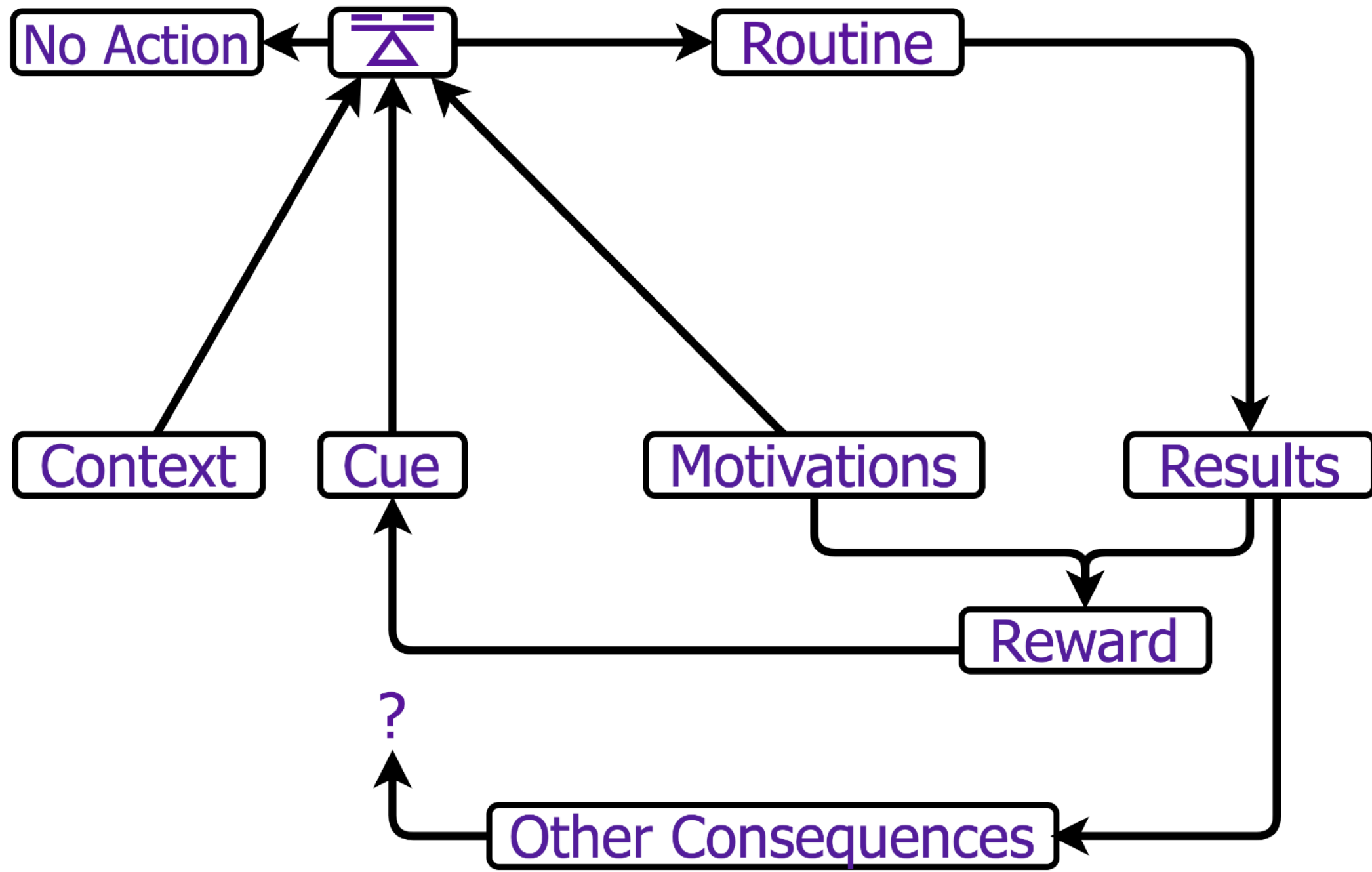
Worth more than a thousand words

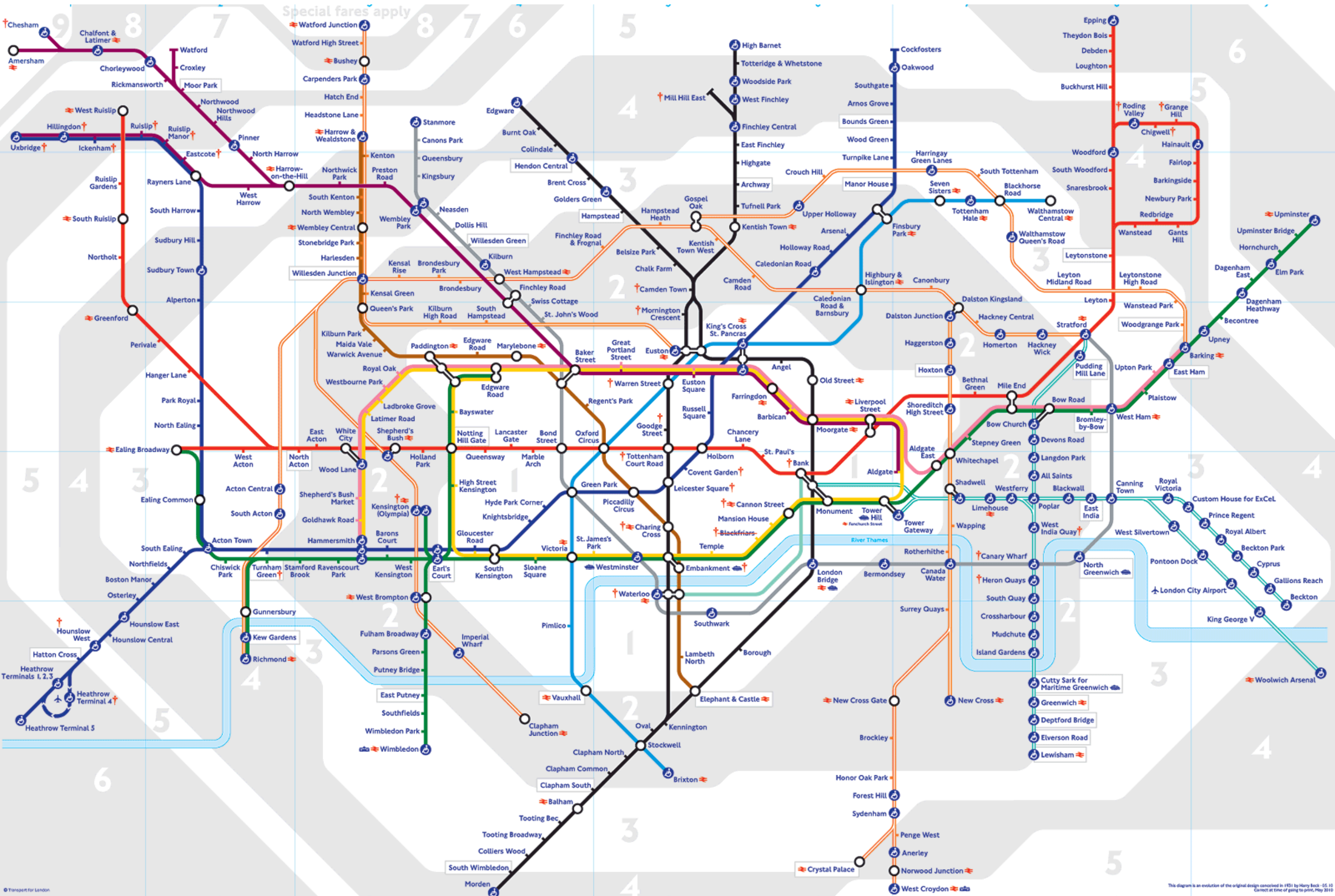






# Visual/Spatial Cognition





# Skillful Take-aways

- Anything that merits slow thinking merits visual/spatial support
- Expand your toolkit – diagram, whiteboard, etc.
- Use whatever tools support your creative flow and clear communications



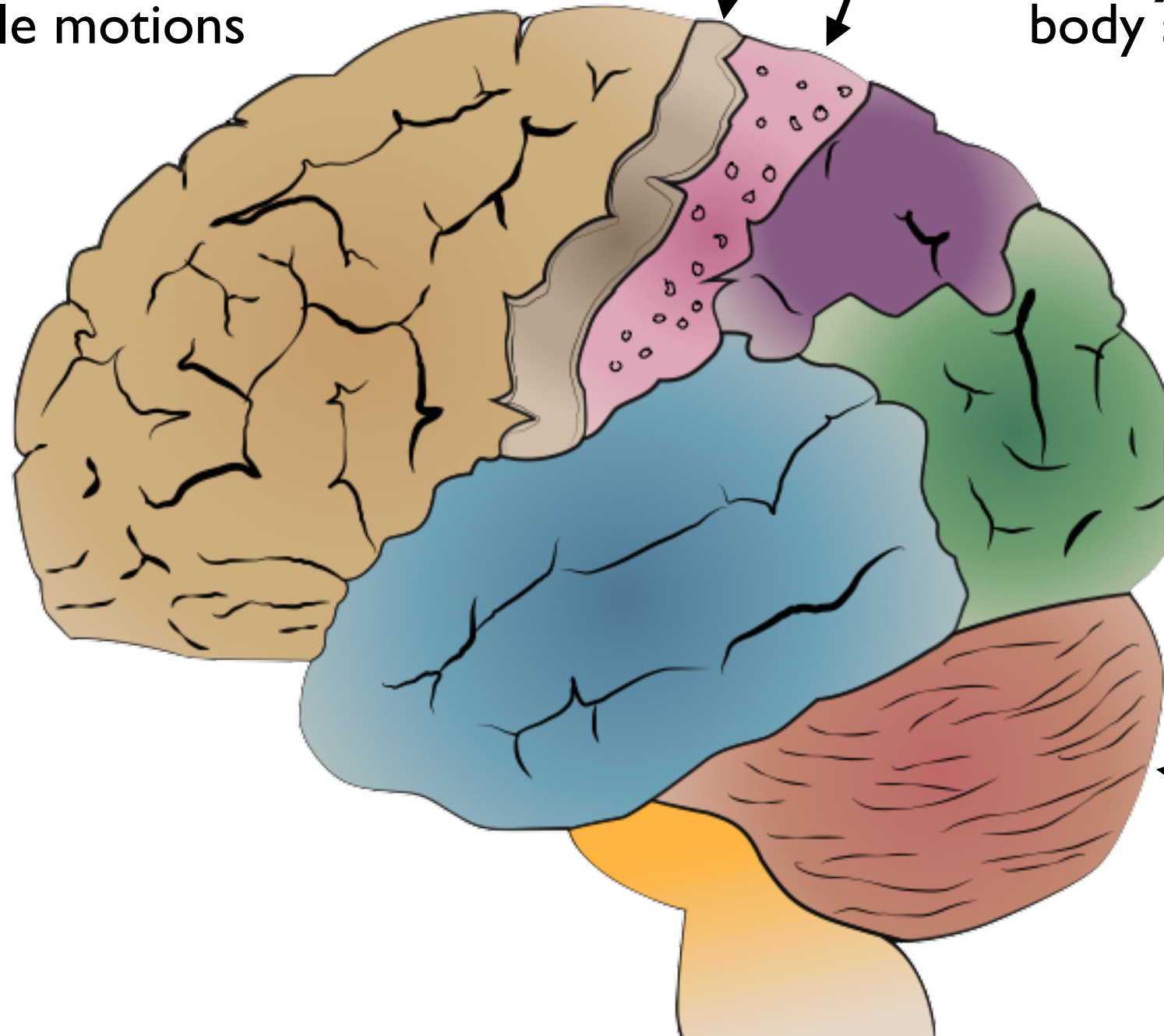
# Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition

- Involves a close interaction with the subconscious
- Involves massive parallel processing
- Connects to deep roots of metaphorical sources
- Doesn't need any part of language
- Communicates through neuron mirroring
- Increases attunement to the body
- Increases overall cognitive agility

# Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition

**Motor Cortex**  
muscle motions

**Sensory Cortex**  
body sensations



**Cerebellum**  
coordinating  
motion

# Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition





# Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition





# Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition



# Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition



Improv Dance

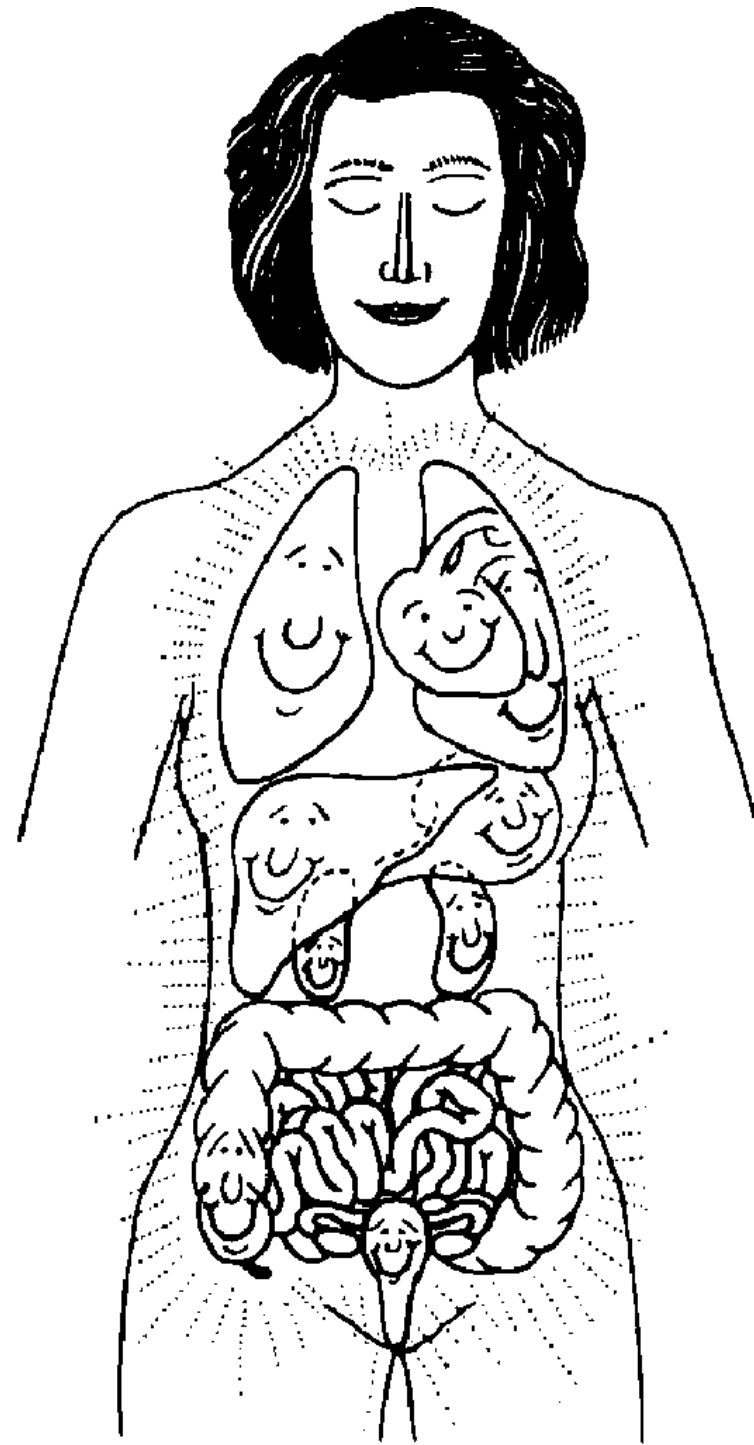
# Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition



Bodystorming



# Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition



Somatic Awareness

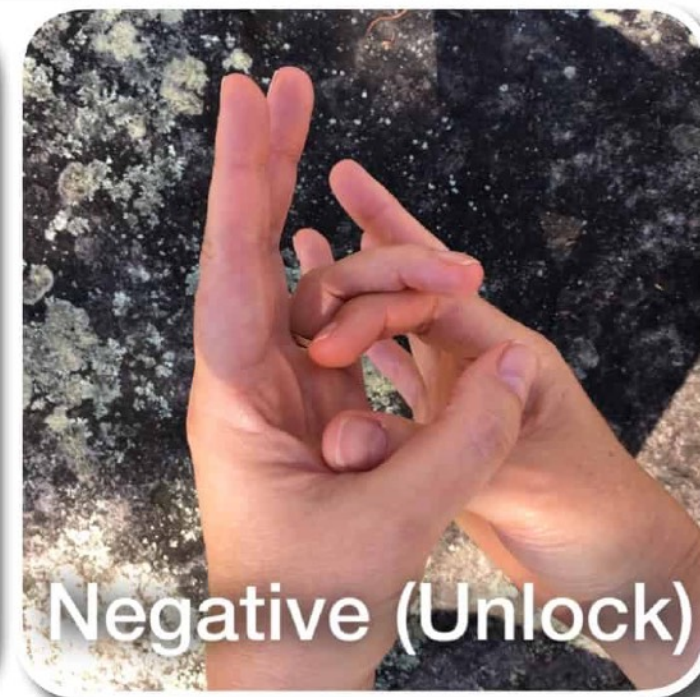
# Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition



**Muscle Testing**



# Kinesthetic/Somatic Cognition



Self-Muscle Testing

# Skillful Take-aways

- Fast thinking always involves the body – be aware of it
- Anything that merits slow thinking merits kinesthetic/somatic support
- Expand your toolkit – movement, somatic awareness, etc.
- Use whatever tools support your creative flow and clear communications

# Optimal Zone Intuition

- Most of what we think arises out of the subconscious
- Novel thoughts are everyday intuitions
- Our defenses introduce a lot of “noise”
- Optimal Zone living improves the quality of normal thinking
- To the extent that intuitions come from a wider field, Optimal Zone living supports a clearer signal
- Quieting your defenses may be at least as important as quieting your mind

# Knowledge Systems

- Western Science
  - \* Seeks reliable properties of categories
  - \* Aims for timeless, context-free truth
  - \* Works well in the objects-categories-categorical-thinking paradigm
- Pattern Languages
  - \* Accumulate common patterns among similar instances
  - \* Apply custom constellations of patterns to individual situations
  - \* Work well in the territories-maps-system-thinking paradigm

# Skillful Take-aways

- Territories and maps break the monopoly of object perception – use them
- Visual/spatial and kinesthetic/somatic thinking break the monopoly of language-based thinking – use them
- Breaking those monopolies is core to the emergence of the Planetary Era



*“We can not solve our problems  
with the same level of thinking  
that created them.”*

**Albert Einstein**

# Coming Up

- Adept at the new strategy for success  
(Nov 30)
- Weaving the threads of the 3 capacities  
(Dec 7)

# Want To Go Deeper?

*Next Bright Future Now*

Community-building and self-study  
begin as soon as you register

Experientials and group interaction  
run Jan 8 - Mar 5, 2022

Early-Bird registration ends Nov 27

[context.org](http://context.org)