

Rather Art than Pills

Creative Gestalt Program: Rather Art Than Pills

Basic Needs, Fears and Demands

Speaking & Writing are perfect ways to communicate and connect

Rather Art than Pills



Voices in my back

“Art opens your eyes to three very important realities. Even if you only see one of the three, it can already make you a much happier person. The three of them form an extremely intoxicating happiness cocktail. Being:

- the reality of the world**
- other people's reality**
- the reality of yourself”**

Bridget Watson Payne in 'How art can make you happy'

About fifty years ago I decided: I'd rather have Gestalt therapy than pills so as not to disappear into a mental institution - like my father - or - like my husband - to become a slave to alcohol. Now that I'm 80 plus and healthy with some ailments but without a medication list, I know that the listen-to-my-feelings path I'm taking is right. From client I became a Gestalt therapist and discovered that Gestalt is also an art and realized art can be magic.

By following this program you will become aware by writing and meditating of your feelings that are playing the leading role in the undercurrent. Feelings are not seriously valued in this society that is head directed. To be true things have to be scientifically proved. But how can we prove feelings, that are changing all the time. Yet feelings are about our personal reality. By giving signals to our bodies they tell us whether or not we feel happy. Being confronted with the language of our feelings seems to make life more difficult to live. Yes, there is pain, yes there is sadness, yes there is love, yes there is longing, yes there is excitement and joy. Yes we can be angry, sexually aroused and anxious. By suppressing all those feeling that don't make us feel good, we mistreat our bodies and ourselves. Yet it is what we had to do as children and not able to deal with an emotionally overwhelming world. Then it helped us to survive. But now we are stuck in our survival patrons that limit our potential, our power, our strength. We are blessed to have a whole life to reconnect with the treasures hidden in our inner world. Be like an explorer and go for the adventure living your life on a deeper level.

What? How? Why?

Rather Art than Pills is a basic program that we can use if we want to write our life story or it can be used in a therapy- or in a training group.

RAP is a way to communicate and connect

- **when you are in love** and disconnected, excited and misunderstood, curious and ignored, angry and sad, creative and not heard, not seen.
- **when there is no one to talk to** or no one willing or able to listen, we still have our self as a listener, as a partner, as a cocreator.

All we have to do is sit down with a pen and a note book, take time to focus on a question or a problem and write without stopping for at least ten minutes. When we are ready we will need courage to read out loud what we have written. But when we do we will be relieved, for our hand knows and our hand cocreating with our heart is very efficient and wise. To our surprise we will find we have written the perfect answer to our question or the perfect next step concerning our problem.

GPW can be used during individual therapy when talking is not working, but it can also be a trap if we do not share on a deeper level afterwards.

GPW in groups: when there is not enough time for everyone to speak up. After a short meditation to focus and become aware, everyone – also the leader(s) - can write for ten minutes or more. Reading out loud is important. It can happen in pairs or triads or in the whole Group.

To structure we can explore the triangle:

‘Content – Process – Meaning’ by using the words: What? How? Why?

Content: WHAT are the facts?

Process: HOW is it to experience this?

Meaning: WHY do or did we need it?

Looking for Satisfaction

If our basic needs were not answered during our youth, they will keep asking for attention when we are grown-ups. We will go on searching for what we did not get then, when we needed it badly. Our longing will direct our lives in the undercurrent and will leave painful traces in the body.



**In this creative program we concentrate on
overcoming our Basic Fears by fulfilling our Basic Needs
and answering the Demands life poses**

Basic Fears

**The Fear of Existing
The Fear of being Abandoned
The Fear of Guilt and Punishment
The fear of not being Good Enough**

Basic Needs

**To have a Place and Belong
Nourishment, Warmth, Loving Attention, Care
Support, Stimulants, Encouragement, Trust, Safety
To be seen and accepted for who we are**

Demands

**- say Yes to life
- stand on our own feet
- become autonomous
- become who we are instead of the wo/man
we thought we should be**

*A human being suffers most of the suffering he fears and never were or will be his share.
(Dutch expression)*

The Five Gestalt Layers

According to Fritz Perls in Gestalt Therapy Verbatim the theory of the five layers gives insight into what our undercurrent looks like and is hiding.

The first layer is the cliché layer.

If we meet somebody, we exchange clichés like ‘How are you?’ with cliché answers like ‘Good’ or ‘I am not allowed to complain’. The main aim is to be polite and behave.

In the second layer we play games and roles,

we are the son, the daughter, the husband, the eldest, the youngest, the beautiful girl, the strong man, the intelligent professor. In the roles we play ‘as if’ we are better, weaker, tougher, nicer than we really feel. The good thing about this layer is that we cannot do without it, we need it to function. Here we discover if we rather say Yes or No. If we make ourselves small or big. If we answer the expectations or not. It is a layer we can stay in till the day comes, that we discover that our once successful answers do not work anymore. We lose our job or our loved one or become ill and have to face the confusion of the impasse.

The third layer which is the impasse.

In this layer we feel stuck, lost, confused. We have a phobic attitude and try to avoid suffering. We do not want to be frustrated, we stay immature, we go on manipulating the world, rather than to suffer the pain of growing up. We prefer being looked after and do not realize our blindness and the possibility of getting our eyes back again. This is the difficulty in self therapy; when we come to the difficult parts, we are not willing to go through the pain of the impasse and think alcohol or drugs or food or money or sex can help.

The fourth layer is the implosive or the fear of death layer.

It appears as death because of the paralysis of opposing forces: Yes contra No. We pull ourselves together, we contract and compress ourselves and implode. Once we really get in contact with this deadness, something interesting happens: the implosion becomes explosion. The death layer comes to life, and this explosion is the link up with the authentic person who is capable of experiencing and expressing his/her emotions.

In the fifth or the explosive layer

we can experience four basic kinds of explosions: we can explode into genuine **grief** if we work through a loss that has not been assimilated, into an **orgasm** if we were sexually blocked, into **anger** and into **joy**, laughter, *joie de vivre*. These explosions connect with the authentic personality, with the true self.

Do not be frightened by the word explosion. It means more setting into motion than explode to pieces. Exploring by writing the undercurrent is a way to experience it.

Demands to overcome our fears

Often we live with those fears from our childhood without realizing it.

**Precisely because we were not allowed to be afraid,
we suppressed and denied our fears.**

**In that way we could survive but did not see reality,
which possibly made our surroundings threatening
without us knowing why.**

**Only by becoming aware of the undercurrent
can we step out of our childhood fears
and into a life that leads to freedom.**

It is true that in accepting fear, healing is hidden.

**Learning how to live with fear is not enough
because time and time again there will be new fears
that will revive the old ones.**

**We can free ourselves step by step by realizing
that we have to identify with the innocent, lonely, anxious child
in us and with the adult who has to go out into the world
to study and make a living.**

**We will discover that we have to look fear in the eyes
to become a complete human being.**

**What helps is the knowledge
that life does not only provide fears
but also means to overcome them.**

Every fear is connected to a special demand:

- *Saying Yes to Life*
- *Stand on our own Feet*
- *To Be Autonomous*
- *To Be Who We Are*

To overcome the fear of existing we have to say Yes to life And fulfil the Basic Needs to have a Place and Belong

The fear of existing

Fear starts the moment we are born. When we come out of the womb, completely helpless and vulnerable, we are demanded to trust the world enough to say Yes to life and start breathing independently. A matter of life and death. The question is how welcome we are. Are our parents so happy with their new baby that they are fully prepared for us? Is the whole family waiting with excitement and love for the newly born? Or is it the wrong moment because we are not wanted? The first fear that is an existential fear starts doing its work. What we need is a mother figure who comes regularly to feed us, gives us warmth and attention, a mother who changes our diapers, cleans and cuddles us, a mother who takes time to give us the feeling that we belong on earth and came home.

Basic need: to have a place on earth and know that we belong.

Every human being has a right to have his or her own place and space. It starts early. A child that is being born needs its own place. The first and most literally own place of a child is the womb. By carrying the child in her body the mother gives implicitly the message: 'You have a place in me and I will take care of you.' Children love to play with having a place: they built huts, they hide away, they creep into holes and play changing trees. Later their own place will become more a spiritual one by creating a world of books, stories, music, hobby's, clubs, sport. If a child has the feeling it belongs, it is depending except on its family on its social surroundings. A child belongs to this family, this neighbourhood, this school, this social class. When a family is moving a lot and a child often loses its school and friends it can become unbalanced because it does not have enough time to root and feel the ground. Questions to explore your own birth and the beginning of your life:

Did you feel safe when still in the womb?

Did you have a difficult or an easy birth?

Were you born just on time, or too early or too late?

Were you welcome in the family?

Who were present when you came out of the womb?

Were your parents happy with you being a boy or being a girl?

Did you have your own room growing up?

Was your mother there for you?

Was your father present when you were born?

What do you know about the time you were a baby?

Were you the first born or the middle one or the youngest?

What was your role in your family?

To what kind of family did you belong?

*Please find a safe spot where you can take time for you,
concentrate on those questions and write when you are ready.*

Maybe it is an idea to look intensely of the pictures of yourself as a baby.

What do you see? What do you feel? What is new to you?

When you start writing your own story, follow three steps:

- 1. Content: what are the facts*
- 2. Process: how did and do I experience this?*
- 3. Meaning: why was and is it as it is?*

And Now?

Can you say Yes and No to life?

Having a place and belong is a continuing process. We are always busy with it. It is good to realize that we are our own director living our own stories, creating our own plays or films by the choices we make. Living a creative life means becoming more aware and therefore more able to take responsibility. Creating a place and belong is a fascinating process. It is not stable, but changing all the time. You are the artist, you have a free will. You decide. Of course you are not completely free. You have to live with circumstances and with people who have their own free will and their own dreams and longings.

Content: start with writing or drawing your reality:

- Do you live alone or together?
- What does it mean?
- What does your place look like?
- Is it your own choice?
- Is it your dream place?
- Do you belong with your family?
- Do you belong to a church or a religion?
- Do you belong to a special group?
- Do you have pets?
- Do you belong to your neighbourhood?
- What else is important for you in this context?

Process: how do you experience what is?

- Decide that you stop judging yourself and others
- How is it to live alone or to live together?
- Do you feel at home in your place?
- How is it to belong or not to your family?
- How is it to belong or not in your profession?
- How is to belong or not in your neighbourhood?
- How is it to belong or not to a group, a religion?

Meaning: why is it as it is?

- What is the Red Thread in your story?
- Are you in the role of the victim? Or the prosecutor? Or the saviour?
- Step out of whatever role by creating a new story by writing
- Or by creating a painting, a song, a poem, a play
- Start living your story or other creation
- Find the right teacher in real life or in books or in museums
- Don't be too modest. Just create your own pleasure
- Do not expect to be recognized, applauded, received, admired
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To overcome the fear of being abandoned we have to stand on our own feet by getting the right nourishment

The fear of being abandoned

The second fear that can dominate our lives is the fear of being abandoned. When we discover that our mother or another mother figure is the source that provides in all our needs, we get afraid of losing her. Without her we have no chance of survival. Without her our life is empty. Without her we are out of food, out of warmth, out of being held and cuddled. Even if we get a clean diaper and milk but no loving attention, we will feel unwelcome. The question of how the mother can be forced to be present in our life can become dominant. The strange thing is that a mother who spoils us by always being available can make us even more anxious than a mother who neglects us. If we are spoiled we don't learn to trust our own power step by step and become completely dependent. In the period when we are most vulnerable, we are already confronted with the inevitable existential loneliness of life.

Basic needs: nourishment, warmth, loving attention and safety.

Nourishment is a vital basic need. Having to fight for food is humiliating and beneath human dignity. The way your mother did feed you as a baby, determined if you felt content or not. Nourishment is not only about milk and other food for your body, but also about nourishment for your soul like being touched and caressed. If you were mistreated or beaten as a child instead of lovingly held, you have become sincerely confused. A child can get so used to being beaten and decide that to feel pain is better than to not feel anything at all. Being nourished also means being taken care of. Care for your bodily, mentally and your spiritually wellbeing.

Questions to chew on:

What do you know about the period when you were a baby?

Were you breast fed?

Were there more people to take care of you?

Did you have a mother who was there for you?

Were you spoiled or neglected?

Were you emotionally nourished?

Did your parents play with you?

Did they touch and hug you?

Did they read to you out loud?

Did they take you into nature?

Did they take you on holidays?

Were you taken to museums?

And to theatres and concerts?

To play parks?

To church?

Time to write your story

Sit down, close your eyes, follow your breathing, straighten your back and go back to the house you were born in. What does it look like?

How many people are there around you? Do they have attention for you?

Attention for each other? What are they doing? Do they talk? What do they eat?

What kind of food are you getting? Do you say Yes to it or No? Can you talk?

What kind of clothes are you wearing? Are you afraid? Of what or of whom?

And Now?

Are you independent and giving yourself the right nourishment?

Every day we have to nourish ourselves. We need healthy food, but what is healthy for you? Eating can also become an addiction to fill this empty spot we feel nagging constantly inside. Rather stuff ourselves with food or alcohol or drugs than to feel this pain. But the pain is about what we missed when growing up. As long as the basic need of getting the right attention or warmth or love or mental and spiritual nourishment is not fulfilled, our body will give us signals that we have work to do. For now we are grownups there is no use to wait until what we long for comes from outside. We will have to do something ourselves. Something like:

Content what are the facts:

- How many meals a day do you eat?
- Are you aware of what you eat?
- Does it keep you busy?
- Do you take time to shop and eat?
- Do you eat alone?
- Do you eat together with others?
- What do you drink?
- Do feed yourself mentally?
- Do you feed yourself emotionally?
- Do you feed yourself spiritually?

Process how do you experience it?

- Is eating a pleasure or a must?
- Do you eat different food when you are alone?
- How is the company of others feeding you when eating together?
- Are you a reader of books of newspapers of magazines?
- Do you go to concerts and to theatres?
- Do you go to church or other spiritual places?
- Do you find nourishment in nature?
- What do you watch on tv?
- Does it nourish you?
- Do you like watching films?
- Do you enjoy traveling?

Meaning why is it as it is?

- Did you discover what you did and still are missing?
- The thing to do now is to give yourself what you still miss
- Create on paper the meal you have always been dreaming of
- Go out to collect the ingredients you need to make it real
- Cook it first for yourself before you invite other people to join
- Find a poem that inspires and touches you
- Write your own version
- Rewrite your story by adding what you have been missing like attention, love, warmth, friendship, passion
- Create a serial of intuitive drawings and explore their messages

To overcome the fear of guilt and punishment we have to become autonomous

The fear of guilt and punishment

As we grow older and have to become more free from the close bondage with our mother, the fear of guilt and punishment are born. We learn how to walk and talk and discover we have our own will that can be diametrically opposed to that of our father or/and mother. Our parents can become angry and will make it clear to us that there are orders, commands and prohibitions. In this way a new fear enters, a fear of not doing the right thing. We are lucky when we have parents who give us boundaries that can be talked about. Parents who make it clear that we even as a child need discipline and rules to live our lives. But if we are raised by parents who behave rigidly and dominantly, who punish us without adding a kiss, we are liable to become so afraid of being guilty that we hardly dare to take the risk of making our own choices and making mistakes. The result is that we as adults will have big problems in becoming autonomous. Does this mean that we are lucky when we have parents who were anti-authoritarian? The advantage is that we miss this fear for guilt and punishment, but it does not bring a real solution. Being raised in relative freedom means not being educated about borders and possibilities. It means not having a clue about what we can achieve and what we cannot. The result is that we do get anxious and uncertain after all, not knowing our norms and values.

Basic need: support, protection, safety

Needing support is related to being carried and held. You can feel in your body, if you were literally carried and supported under your bottom. Feeling uncertain and not grounded can be connected to a lack of support when you were small. Falling and back- and legs complaints can be a problem. The kind of support you need will change with the age we have: being carried, walking hand in hand, being brought and collected, homework support, back ground support, financial and moral support.

If everything went as it should you were as a child so protected from the outside world that you could develop an inner shield that distinguished outside and inside. This shield can keep inside what is vulnerable and soft and keep outside what is hard and dangerous.

It is about experiencing safety. If you did not learn to protect yourself, you will harden to maintain yourself in the outside world. Protection you get by clothing, by warmth, by being cuddled in when you go to sleep, by lullabies or simply by feeling the presence of your parents or caretakers. True is that you can also feel unsafe when there is too much presence of the family. Like when everybody shares the same space and knows everything of each other.

Questions concerning the past:

- ***Did your parents listen to you?***
- ***Were you allowed to be angry?***
- ***Did you have to be the best or/and the wisest?***
- ***Were your parents real authorities?***
- ***Did you get strict rules and learn about boundaries?***
- ***Were you carried when small?***
- ***Were you supported doing your homework?***
- ***Were you afraid to make mistakes?***
- ***Were you supported in your study?***
- ***Were you stimulated to make music?***
- ***Were you stimulated to be creative in any way?***
- ***Did you feel protected and safe in your house and with your family?***

And Now?

Did you become autonomous?

Becoming autonomous is a rather private process in the sense that no one can do it for you. Of course we need teachers, we need role models we can follow, we need to communicate to know if we are received in our thinking, in our convictions, in our ideas. A way to do it is to choose a teacher who is doing what you think you want to do in life. Or of course start a study that speaks to you. But be aware of what you are learning by keeping in touch with your body. If your body gives you signals of nausea or stress or pressure or pain, you better take time to explore if you are on the right path. Meditation is a way to do it. Learning the difference between living in your head or being in the reality of the now is vital. Your head can play games with you. One day it is like this, the next day like that. It makes us uncertain. That's why we have to become aware and take time to listen to the wisdom of our inner truth. Not an easy process. I did it by taking a bite a day, a bite of music, a bite of wise words, a bite of visual arts, a bite of films and by meditating and being in the now. From looking and listening and reading I went to writing, drawing, singing, dancing while listening to the signals of my body who told me: this is about you or not.

Content: the facts

- **Are you a perfectionist?**
- **Are you afraid to make mistakes?**
- **Do you try to keep control?**
- **Do you give and receive support?**
- **Do you feel safe in your house, on the street, on your work?**

Process: how does it feel?

- **Do you dare to feel?**
- **Do you close off when you sense danger?**
- **Do you rationalize your feelings?**
- **Do you meditate?**
- **Are you talented?**
- **Do you dare to be creative?**

Meaning: why are things as they are?

- **Take time to sit and listen to your inner voice**
- **Start writing whatever comes up in you**
- **Discover where the pain stops you**
- **Take time to meditate and feel the pain**
- **Go on writing by following your intuition**
- **Feel what it is about: anger, joy, longing, sadness, fear**
- **Create a drawing or a poem or keep writing the story**
- **Select two or three words that are essential**
- **Say them out loud and transform them into a mantra**
- **Sing and keep singing until you are connected**
- **And feel that those words are your words**
- **Feel that indeed you can be autonomous**
- **By repeating it again and again and again**

To overcome the fear of not being good enough we have to become who we are instead of who we thought we should be

The fear of not being good enough

When we get older we discover that there are boys and girls, big and small children, ugly and beautiful people, rich and poor ones, strong and weak men and women. We are confronted with the questions: who is better, who is the best? The fear that appears now is the fear that we are not good enough as we are. Would it not be better if I were a boy instead of a girl, big if I am small, have curly hair when it is straight. Shouldn't I be strong when I appear sensitive and weak, beautiful when I seem to be ugly, fast if I am slow, coloured when I am white? Does our family, does the world love me now it seems I do not answer the perfect image?

What we need are role models we can identify with. That is why we have idols and look up to our parents, but often our heroes and parents tend to fall from their pedestals, leaving us with the longing to be at least better than they are. But how can we?

Basic needs: limits and to be seen and accepted for who we are.

Protection is about dangers from outside, limits is about danger from inside. If you cannot limit and restrict yourself it will be difficult to determine the boundary between yourself and your surroundings. The result will be that you are overwhelmed by feelings of omnipotence. You will swing to and fro between feelings of being able to do anything or nothing at all. It will be difficult for you to experience your own constraints and those of others.

Frustrations will be the result. You will have to give up the illusion that the world is turning around you. If you are unable to make your borders clear, you won't have a clear image of the Other as a human being with good and bad qualities. It will make connecting difficult and not really satisfying

Questions concerning the past:

- *Were you welcome as a girl or as a boy?*
- *Did you get approval from your parents and your family?*
- *If yes. For what? Your appearance? Your brains? Your talent?*
- *If not. Why not? What did they think was wrong with you?*
- *Were you the oldest, youngest, middle kid? Or only child?*
- *What were the consequences?*
- *Were you a good scholar? A good student?*
- *Were you good in sports?*
- *Were you creative?*
- *Did you dance and sing?*
- *Were you confronted when fantasizing?*
- *Were you a social child?*
- *Were you stimulated to speak?*
- *Did you feel seen as you were by your parents?*
- *Were you loved without conditions?*
- *What was expected of you?*

And Now? Are you free to be who you are?

To be who we are is the quest, the ultimate challenge life poses us. When we become aware we discover that we function on different levels. Whatever we do, we always have to follow the five Gestalt Layers. In the first one, *the cliché layer* we stay polite and communicate by giving predictable answers. Nothing wrong with in itself, we just behave as we should. Very practical when we need information or are shopping.

In the second one, *the fobical or roleplaying layer*, we act as if we are the role we are playing. We act as if we are the mother, or the father, the daughter, the son, the teacher, the sporter, the artist, the nurse, the doctor and so on. We answer expectations or not. We say Yes to life or No. The problem is that we do not have a choice. We believe we have to do it or we think we cannot do it, depending on our survival patrons.

When crisis and confusion enter our lives, we have arrived in *the impasse*, the third layer. May be we get ill, have a burn out, lose our job, end our relation and feel we are in the wrong film. We thought we knew the answers, but as it turns out life has some difficult surprises for us. For fear of feeling the pain we hold our breath, constrict ourselves, stop taking risks and become rigid.

It is how we land in the fourth layer, *the implosion or the fear of death layer*. The power of the opposing forces paralyze us. Only when we face the threat something remarkable will happen. We will start breathing again giving our bodies the energy to stream and be open for the fifth layer: *the explosion*. Now we are able to express our feelings of anger, of sadness, of joy of fear. Now we feel as a human being we can be authentic. It is a process that will repeat itself daily. We have to go through it again and again.

Content: the facts

- Where are you in your life?
- Do you feel you are in the right place, with the right people?
- Are you doing what makes you happy?
- Are you free to move?
- Are you proud of what you have been doing?
- Do you feel seen and heard?

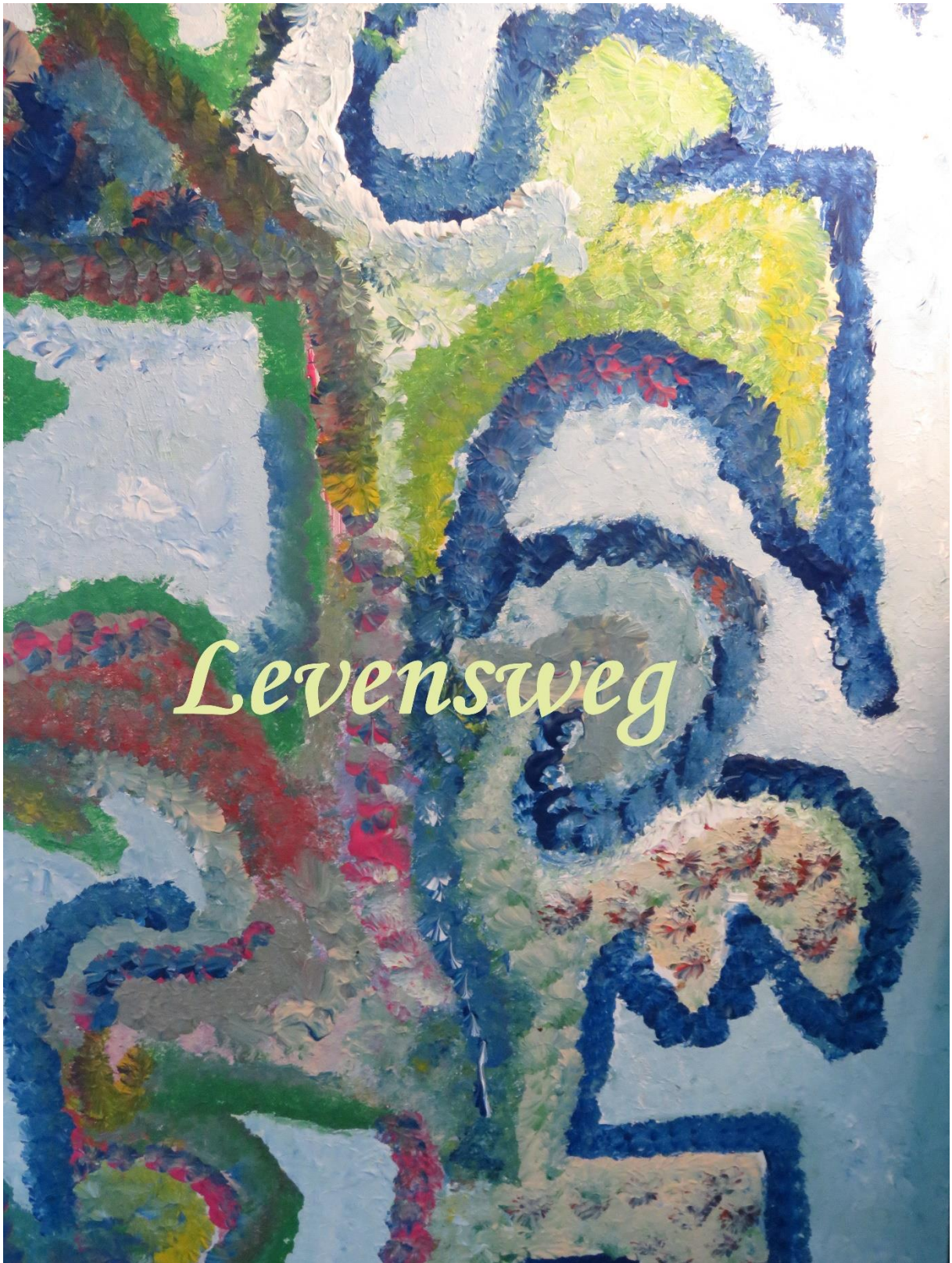
Process: your experiences

- How do you experience your everyday life?
- Does it make you happy or not?
- What is it you miss?

Meaning: your responsibility

- Create your life story by writing, playing, making music, being an actor
- Inspire yourself by going outside into nature, to museums, to theatres
- Become a member of a group of inspiring people
- Take time to celebrate life together with your family
- Realize that life is a gift, not a burden
- Be open to the miracles that will reveal itself by coincidence

This program is a work in progress. It is meant to be lived by using it just for you or if possible to work with it in a group like we want to create in Factor IJ: www.tinevanwijk.nl



Levensweg

www.tinevanwijk.nl