

## CONNECTEDkind: Where Play Opens the Door to the Unconscious

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Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, a story beloved around the world, begins with a bitter memory of a drawing. The narrator, a pilot, recalls how he drew a boa constrictor digesting an elephant as a child. Yet, when he showed his masterpiece to adults, their only response was, "It's a hat." He even drew an "inside view" to explain what was happening in the snake's belly, but the adults simply told him to focus on geography and arithmetic instead. Disheartened by their lack of imagination, the pilot gave up drawing altogether.

I, too, once had a time when I could use my imagination freely. When I was in elementary school, I attended an English language class where we practiced cursive handwriting. The model written by my teacher on the whiteboard consisted of flowing curves that looked to me not like mere letters, but like a beautiful drawing. Moved by a sudden intuition, I picked up a marker and began "doodling" across the entire board. In the brief moment when the teacher looked away, I had filled it with an entire story. Instead of scolding me, she praised me: "You have the talent of an artist," affirming my world of imagination.

### **Labeling and Logos: The Loss of My Creativity**

And yet, at some point, I stopped drawing. I cannot clearly recall when or why. Perhaps I simply assumed that outgrowing art was a natural part of becoming an adult. Still, one decisive incident stayed with me. As an adult, a friend's young child begged me to draw an anime character. Reluctantly, I took a pen and tried to recreate it from memory. But a child's eyes are honest. Looking at my sketch, the child whispered, "...That's not right..." and burst into tears.

In that moment, I labeled myself: "I am bad at drawing." After that, even after my own children were born, I never drew for them, leaving that role entirely to my husband. They asked me a few times, but eventually, they began to say, "It can't be helped—Mom isn't good at drawing," and gave up. I told myself that was fine. Everyone has weaknesses. I even justified it by thinking, "I am a 'Logos' person—someone who lives by words and logic—so I didn't need drawing as a way to express feelings."

This tendency became even more entrenched when I entered graduate school and returned to academic life. Academia is a world governed by strong Logos: specialized terminology, rigorous argumentation, and days spent writing papers late into the night, as if squeezing myself dry. While there is intellectual excitement in this, I also carried a persistent discomfort—as if my head were growing larger while my bodily senses were being left behind.

### **Where Shadows Bloom: Encountering CONNECTEDkind**

In that state, I was introduced to “CONNECTEDkind” in a university course. This activity uses photographs of natural objects—fallen leaves or petals—and the shadows they cast. Participants then freely add drawings to create an imaginative world. With a strong insecurity about art, I approached it defensively. But once I began, something surprising happened: my hand moved with unexpected freedom. I found myself expressing images exactly as they came to me. It felt just like that childhood moment at the whiteboard. The realization—“I can still draw”—was a moment of reconnection with a part of myself I had long abandoned.

[Picture: My drawing created in class (using an iPad)]

Why was I able to draw so fluently in CONNECTEDkind? The psychologist Lev Vygotsky viewed imagination as an “activity of combining what already exists.” We do not create out of nothing, as if by magic; rather, we break apart past experiences and memories and recombine them in a new order, forming a newly imagined world. In CONNECTEDkind, what lies before me is a fragment of reality: the shadow of a natural object. Like an inkblot, it is ambiguous—without a single correct answer—and it holds many possible forms. Those shadows became a trigger, stirring images sleeping within me and allowing forms to emerge from deeper layers, without overthinking.

There was no room for the pressure to “draw well.” I simply listened to what the shadow seemed to suggest and added lines in response. It seemed receptive, yet it was also deeply active and creative: a true time of “play.”

### **The Door to the Unconscious: Encounter as Constellation**

Hayao Kawai, a pioneer of Japanese clinical psychology, wrote that the human mind contains both “consciousness” and “the unconscious,” with a world of images flowing between them. In everyday life, we tend to live within the narrow realm of consciousness. Yet within the freedom of play—when we surrender ourselves to imagination—we can descend into the vast unconscious beneath. What I experienced through CONNECTEDkind was precisely this movement toward the depth of the psyche. Overlaying inner images onto the shadows of nature loosened the shell of the “individual self” and opened a door toward a deeper, universal place where we are all connected—the collective unconscious.

This feeling became a conviction two years later when I met Laura, the creator of CONNECTEDkind, for the first time. We connected instantly. Even before we exchanged many words, I felt our deeper selves resonate. We were of a similar generation, and our children were astonishingly close in age. While she felt a strong inspiration from Japan, I was deeply moved by her rich sense of nature and embodiment. Despite language and cultural barriers, we became friends in an instant. We even laughed, “Perhaps we were friends in a past life,” because we both cherished something that logic alone cannot fully capture.

Kawai also used the term “constellation” (布置) to describe how seemingly unrelated events and people can, at a certain point, come together as a meaningful pattern. Just as we connect stars in the night sky to form a constellation, events in life also reveal connections. For me, my childhood doodles, the child’s tears, the dryness of my academic life, encountering CONNECTEDkind, and meeting Laura—all of these formed a single constellation. We are not isolated. At the deeper layers of the psyche, we are connected at our roots.

In *The Little Prince*, the pilot—whose drawing of a boa constrictor was never understood by adults—meets the Little Prince in the desert. As he tries to respond to the Prince’s request, “Draw me a sheep,” the pilot gradually regains his freedom and finds himself drawing naturally. “What is essential is invisible to the eye,” the Prince teaches him. At the end of the story, the pilot draws the desert and entrusts the readers with a wish: if you should ever travel there and happen to meet the Prince, please let me know.

For me, Laura was like that boy. She appeared in my life filled with Logos, handed me a shadow, and seemed to remind me: “Because what matters most is invisible, you are free to draw.” Through drawing, I could reconnect with the depths of my own heart. And

beyond words, I could feel connected with someone, somewhere in the world. She helped me remember that invisible yet certain sense.

I feel excited just imagining the day I will meet my “Little Princess from Latvia” again. Until then, we remain connected through CONNECTEDkind. Whenever I open the door to the unconscious, the leaves and the shadows are there, waiting to tell a new story.