

TMFRS

LET'S MAKE SENSE OF YER STUPID FUCKING BRAIN

Working WITH Trauma Brain Pt I

And no longer fighting a neuro-battle you'll always lose

Fall 2021

Broad Introductory Concepts

You know how there are times when your brain just doesn't work? You go to reach for a certain memory and it's 404 file not found? Or you try to file new data away, but can't get the information absorbed into your head? It feels like you're hitting a mental wall, with your brain simply REFUSING to interact with the topic at hand?

[FREQUENTLY
USED]

{ FUCB's }

[FORGOTTEN
FRAMEWORK]

FEELINGS

• FEAR •

Or you know that LOGICALLY you have X, Y, and Z to complete, but your brain can't be pulled away from its preset direction for the day? You want to stop being so spacey and lost in old memories, but you're not able to be fully present in anything you try to accomplish?

Maybe you're trying to force up emotions, but they just seem to be inaccessible. OR maybe you're just existing ON emotions, running through feelings and experiential memories on an automatic basis without a chance to purposely, holistically think or complete high level tasks.

Perhaps you're all lit up with survival responses and nervous system upsets, feeling like a frantic Fanny despite your best efforts to reign it in and do whatever job at hand. Hell, maybe you're not sure you're existing at all.

Maybe it's been a while since you felt decidedly like a "whole human" that you recognized from the outside or had any sense of lifelong direction or balance... and you honestly

don't know how to BEGIN to fix that lost identity and acting-in-my-own-best-interest willpower absence.

Well. As long as we've been talking about sewing up unsettled historical information and engaging the high-level performance metric known as "having a sense of self and daily control over a multidimensional personality for several decades," let's talk about the reasons why these things *don't* always naturally happen.

Why our mental capacities are often blocked.

Why we can't force our heads to do the tasks we've deemed most necessary for the day.

Why our emotions can be like dark tides that roll into the port and drown the whole town, even though that town has been functionally very skilled at swimming at some points before.

Why we struggle to have what we consider a baseline "expected" human quality - complete control over our mental and emotional processes, and ability to regulate everything from our "working towards a lifelong goal," task managing center?

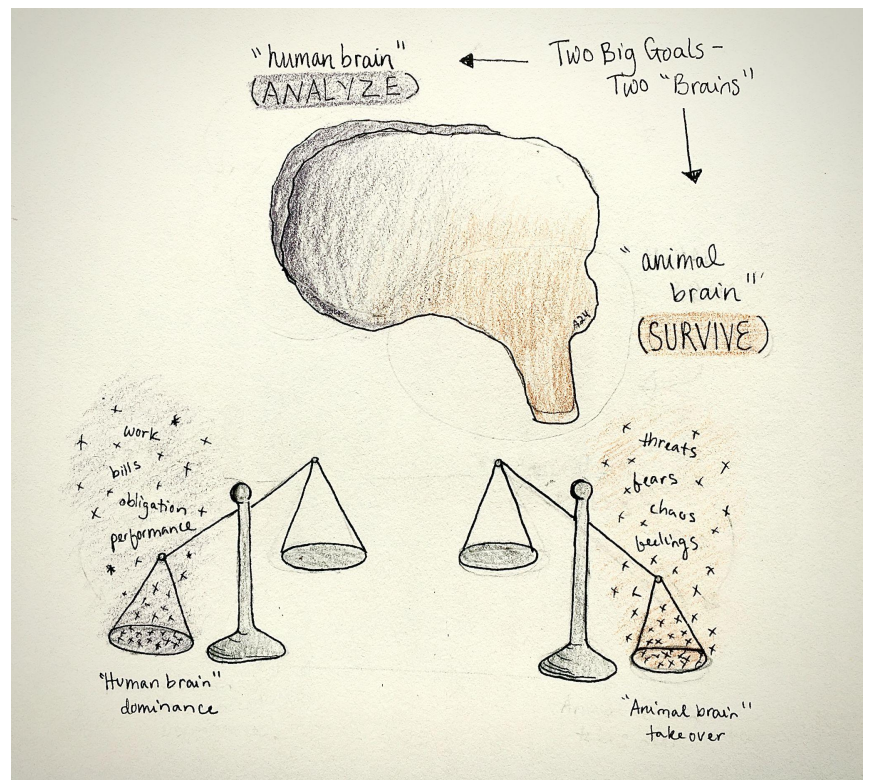
Big surprise! If you've ever wondered why your brain operates at level 100 some years, and yet you can't get past 20% other months... You're not alone. You're just a biological being.

Neurologically, there are reasons why it feels like your brain isn't under your control all the time.

Because a good portion of your life... it really isn't.

Thanks, as usual, to our survival system prioritizations and the hierarchy of important mental behaviors we need to enact.

As in, not all brain abilities are weighted equally. And there's an order in which your cognitive capacities becomes available to you; a logical flow of the compartments you can unlock and which processes you can then enjoy (instead of endure).



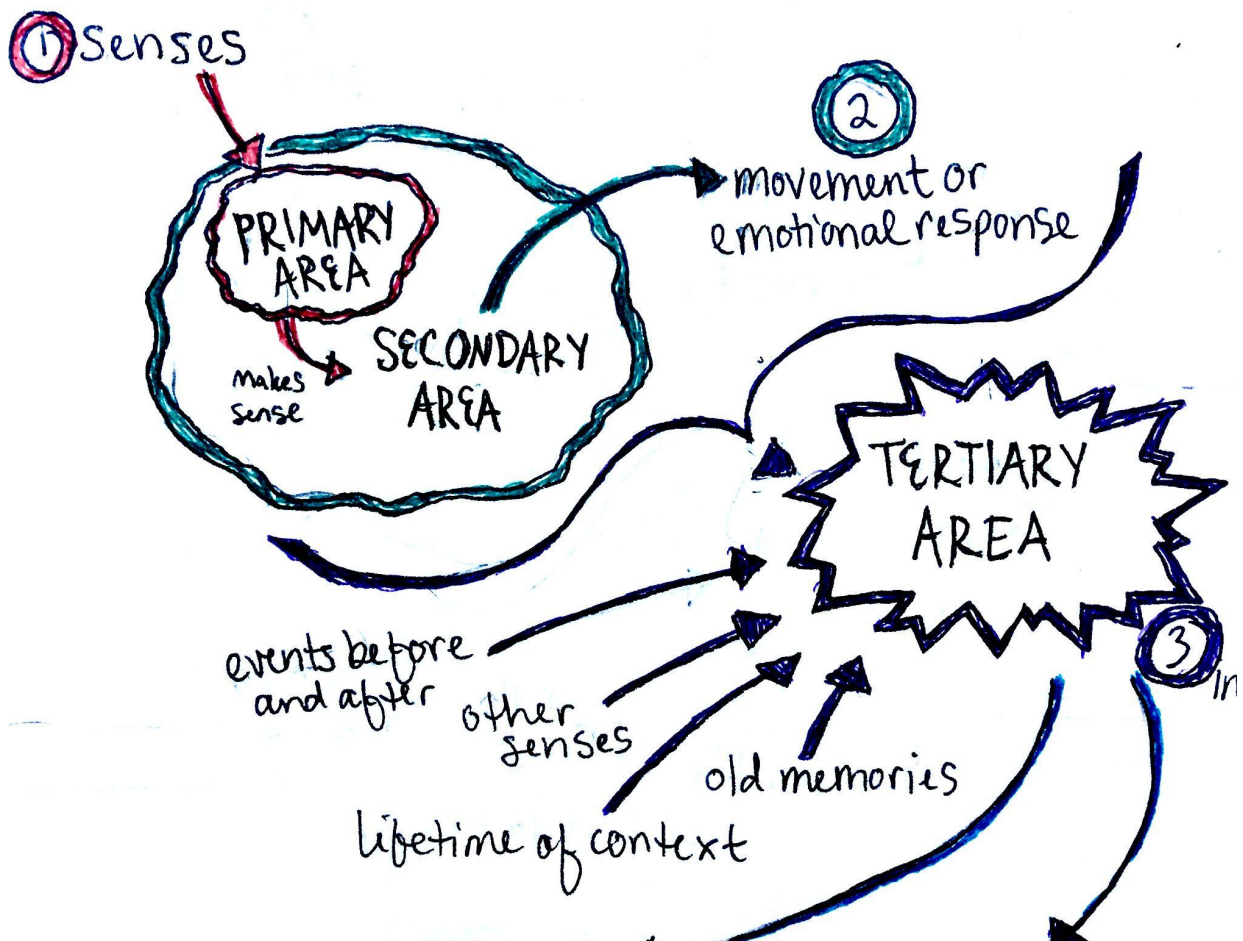
Which seems like good information to share, as we tend to be folks who most often appraise our entire Selves as “broken,” our brains as “horrifying freak shows,” and really just need a better education about what’s actually buzzing below the hood. And WHY it has to be that way.

Not only, so we beat ourselves up slightly less. But also so we can WORK WITH our heads instead of hating these salt satchels we know as brains.

So, first things first. Here’s a super quick way to think about your multilevel brain organization, and everything that happens because of it.

At the most basic level, you have what’s called primary, secondary, and tertiary areas of the brain.

They’re pretty simple.



The primary areas collect your sensory inputs.

Your vision, hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling incoming information. These are the first data streams to be dealt with, since they tell you everything you can find out about your environment.

Makes sense. If you're about to run into a tree, your head needs to get that incoming trunk visual information right away, before it can do anything else.

The secondary areas are near the primary sensory input areas.

This is where incoming information is processed to draw some basic meaning and to be reacted to.

As in, "holy shit that trunk is getting closer, that means my face is about to hit it, these semi-automatic motor activities need to be enacted so that doesn't happen." And you react.

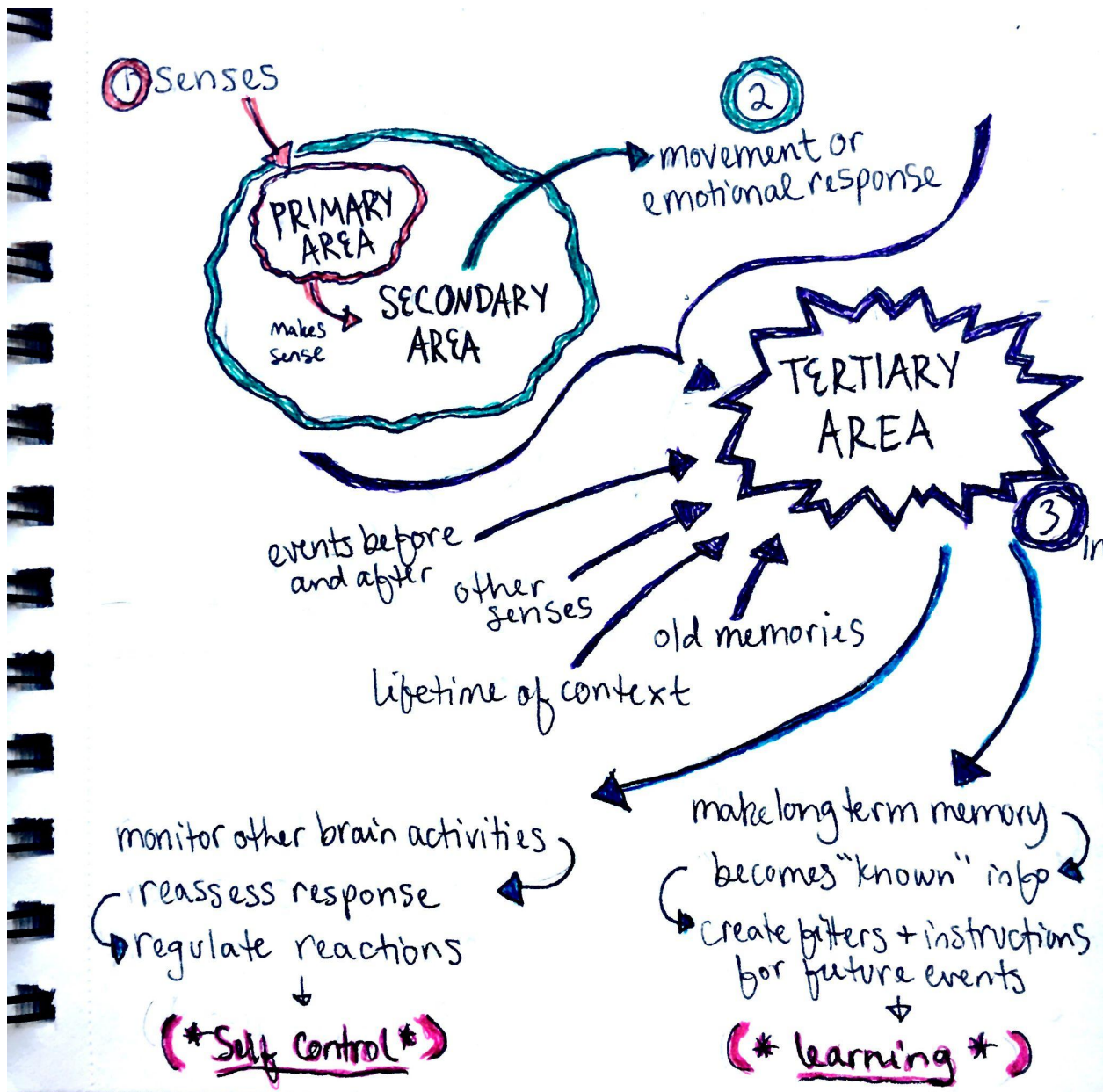
The tertiary areas are THEN enlisted last. Possibly with a great delay from the initial sensation or reaction.

These tertiary areas are distant from the primary sensory areas - in the more elaborate and origami-ed area of the brain, where information INTEGRATION and learning takes place. Taking MULTIPLE information streams, both from now and in the past, and tying them together to make notes for the future.

As in, "Based on the visual stimulus and the rapid "oh shit" response, along with our memory of physical pain when we faceplant... What have we learned about walking down trails without looking up? Don't do it, you almost just ran into that tree, idiot."

A new lesson was just learned... but you realize even THIS LEVEL OF LEARNING is actually pretty complex, considering how many past, present, and predictive bits of information had to be pulled together to make it happen.

This melding of old and new brain activations only happens in one area of your head, the humanly-hailed prefrontal cortex. And it's expensive to complete.



So, overall, your brain works like this: We sense. Then we make rapid judgments and reactions to those informational streams based on old instructions and experiences.

Then, if we survive and have extra resources to expend, we get around to placing those judgments into larger stories that pull in various other compartments of the brain and our memory systems, in order to make logical, long-term data packets, filters, and instructions from the event.

And if you're already nodding along, thinking that this sounds a lot like a common-sense brain-processing prioritization of survival, then emotional responses, and then human reasonability making narratives out of it all... you're correct.

If *that* sounds a lot like the process of therapy and some of the trauma-contextualizing activities we talk about around here on a regular basis... you're correct.

And if it alllll sounds like we're moving from a basic, primitive, ancestrally shared among species brain... through activating a more advanced "mammalian" brain... and finally into the realm of our very special, obsessed with learning big lessons, "human" brain...

You're also absolutely on the money.

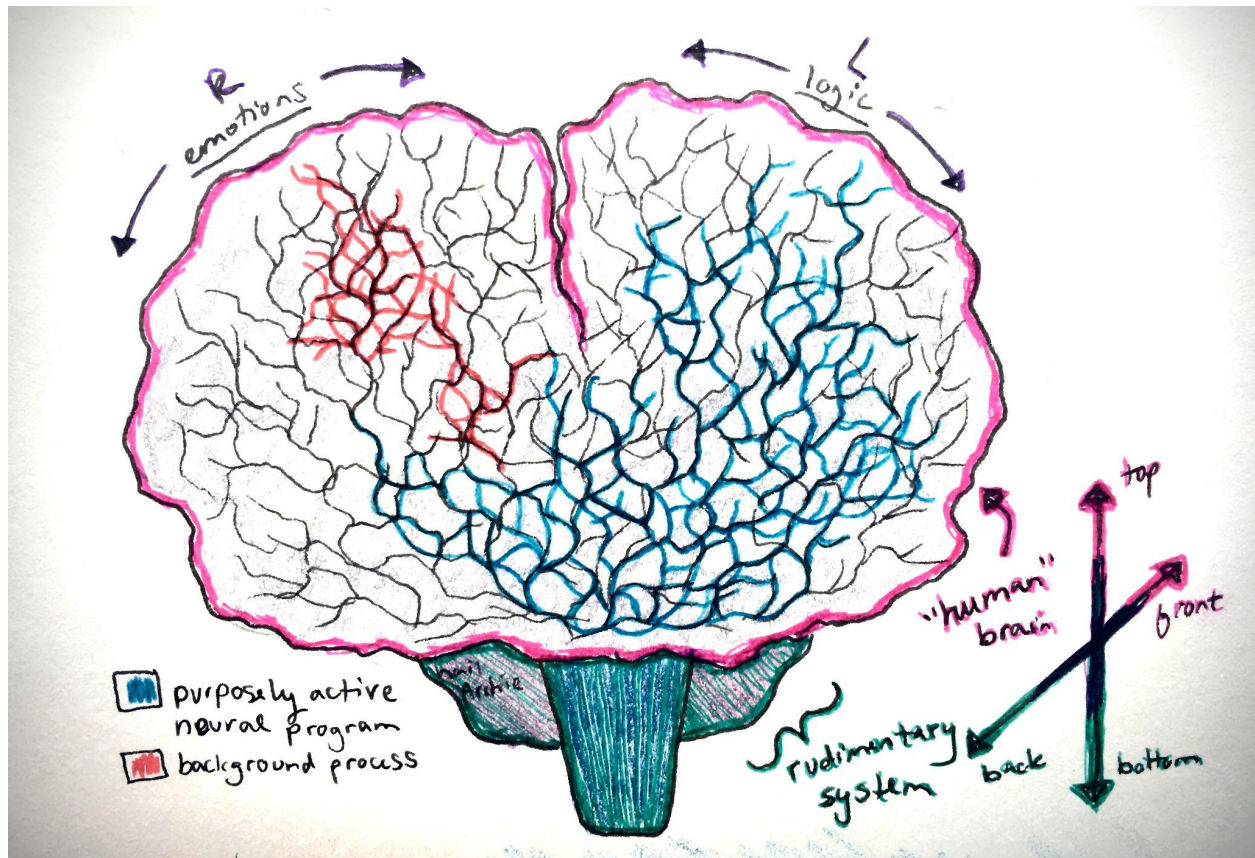
Yer Stupid Fucking Brain Processing Order :

- 1) Sensing + risk detection
- 2) physical reactions, inc. emotions
- 3) placing memory of #1+2 into context, integrating info from multiple areas of the brain with prior learning
- 4) regulate all of the above

And those are the things we're going to talk about today, in greater detail... so we can get down to all the ways this is important information to have in order to manage your brain, life, goals, and social experiences better. With so much less self-hate about your sometimes-diminished mental capacity.

Ready to get started?

So... Remember the video I released last? In the “closing open brain processes,” episode? With the drawing of the brain that shows how the complexity of localized activities increases as you move upwards, outwards, and forwards? With the center, back, and bottom of the brain constituting the more simplistic actions?



Think about it this way. Your brain activities start nearest to the spinal cord and are redirected from there, towards the outside and front of the brain as the information is filtered, sorted, and connected to other current and past-collected info.

This way, your neural energy has the least distance possible to travel from perception to taking action, with high-level decision making being a bit of an “optional” category, depending on the necessary degree of timely responsiveness that’s being perceived.

In other words...

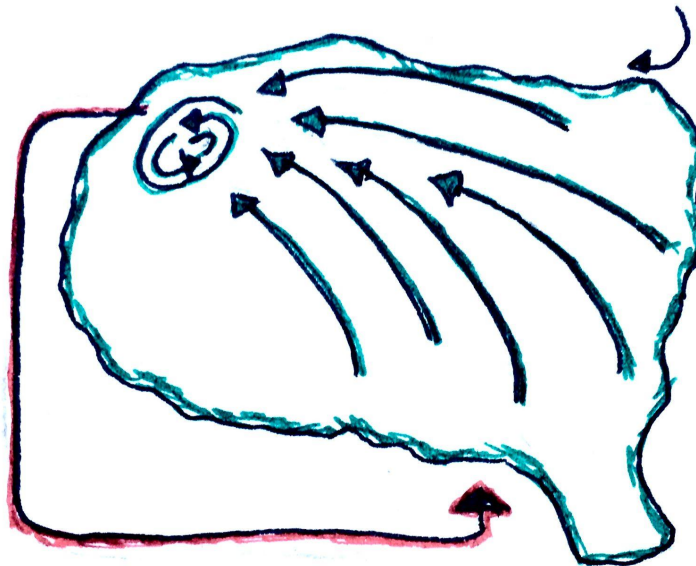
If you touch something sharp, you don't waste time thinking about all the times you touched something sharp before, or how it connects to the larger narrative of your experiences with pointy objects BEFORE you stop touching the sharp thing.

If you find out your dad just died, you have big emotional reactions BEFORE you process the fact that your entire life just changed and all the ways to respond differently to innocent questions about how he's faring from this point forward.

In both cases, the priorities are obvious: Get basic information into brain, have initial physical response to that information, and THEN, sometime down the line depending on the level of previous brain area activations and available energy resources... decide what it all actually means.

Makes sense, right?

IDEALLY, all areas will feed to PFC...

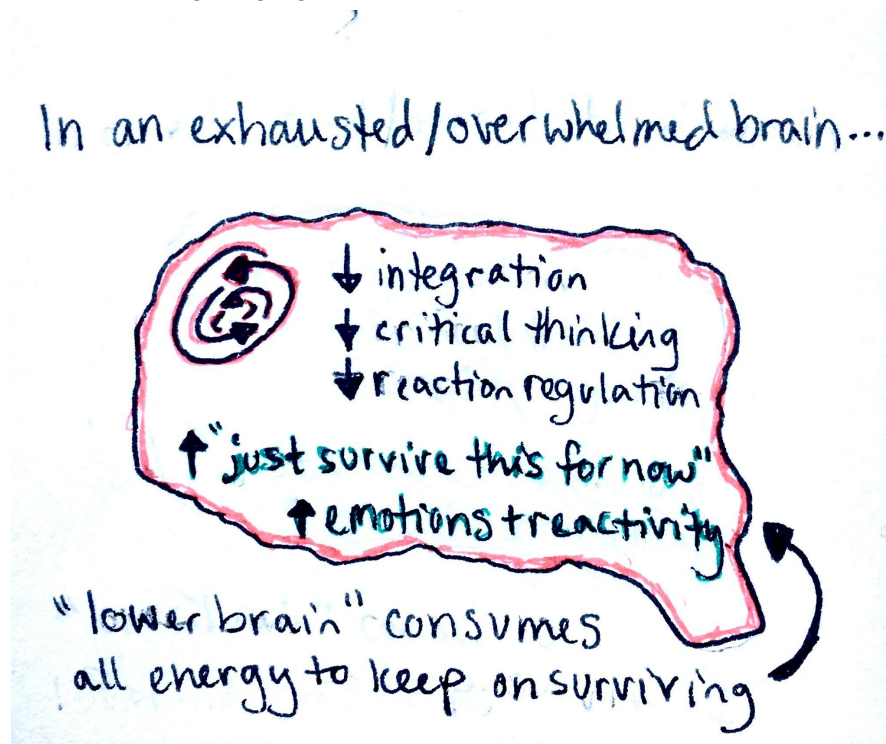


PFC analyzes + integrates data -
sends feedback signals to
regulate "lower" responses

Welp, in my little world, this is helpful information for a lot of reasons. And expanding on it also helps to explain a lot of that brain-blank-out and uncooperative behavior we opened the episode talking about.

Because, no, you can't always make your brain do what it wants.

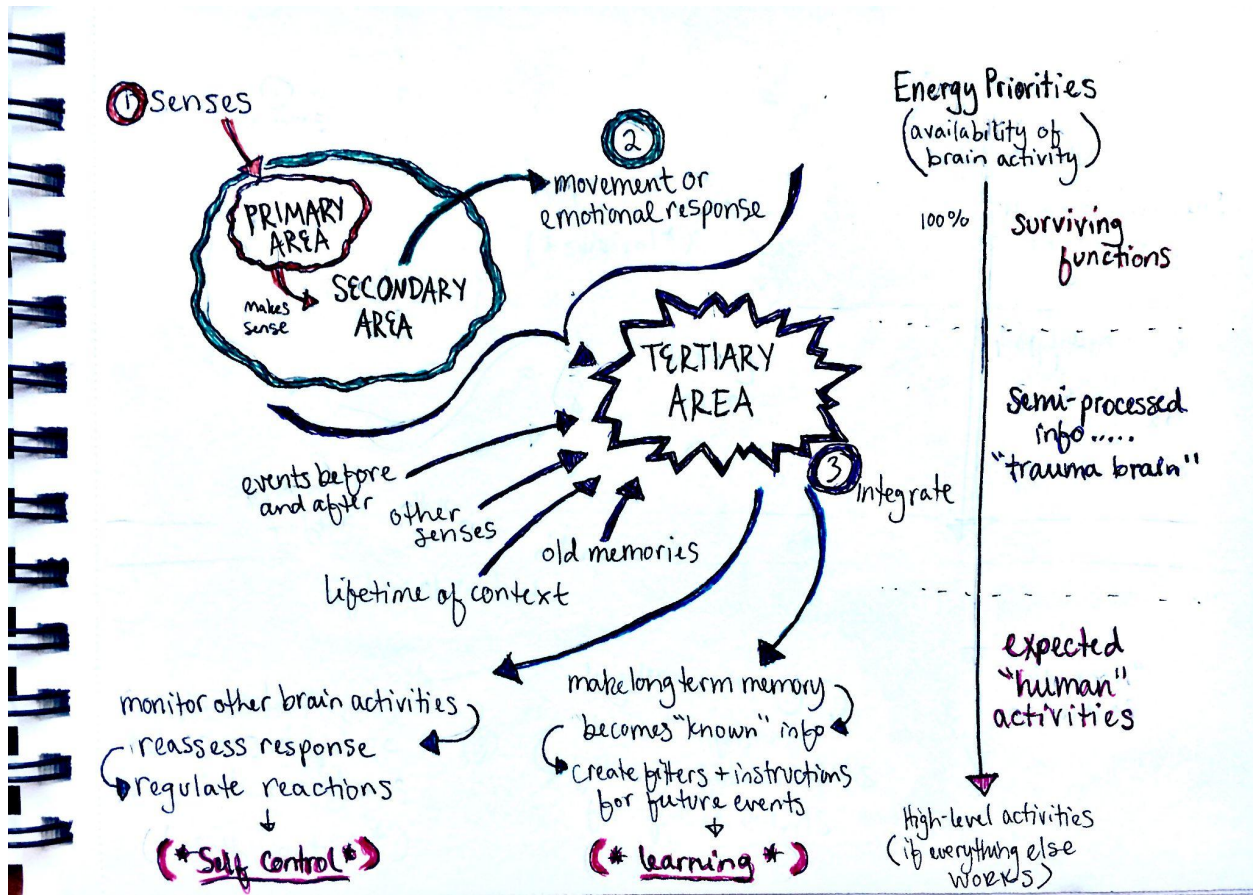
And actually, the best way to get to your final higher-processing destination, where you can regulate your emotions, make long-term memories, engage your central executive, and see your life as a single timeline with one main character... is to go THROUGH all the lower-level brain behaviors instead of fighting against them.



Stop trying to battle your lizard brain against your human one.

The basic one is more efficient and has more energy allocated to power it, so you'll never win that war long-term.

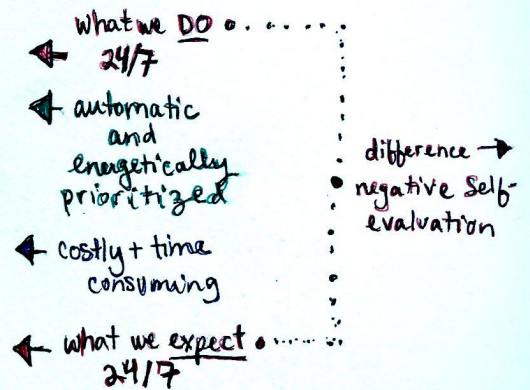
And instead figure out how to work the system from the ground, up... so you can stop feeling like you'd rather be ground-down... without all the resistance to your most necessary mental processes that is ultimately holding you back from ever making any progress or regaining cognitive control.



I hope this very surface-level talk we've had so far is already a good start to remind yourself "I have to get through the senses, experiences, and emotions before I can act like a fully associated person with an accessible life history."

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But next time... let's dig in deeper, and get a lot of extra reassurance that the shittiest stages of trauma-recovery and reintegration are completely necessary.

That you might have to go through these hellholes on a regular basis, as new events regularly upset the system.

And that you won't be able to move on to the final boss - regaining control of your prefrontal cortex to make sense of anything you *actively want* to make sense of - without getting through all the pains and fears fostered by the simple-brained areas containing your lower-level mental processes.

Cheers, Fucker.

Jess