

*Amy's Hyperspaces:
Creativity, the Bird of Paradise,
and the Doorway to Parallel Worlds*

by Amy Mindell, August 2004



Am I dead *or* alive? Awake *or* asleep? Is this happening now *or* in the past? Am I a reincarnation from an earlier time *or* is *it* a reincarnation of me? Questions like these preoccupied me as a child. They especially preoccupied me as a teenager when just about *everything* about the world stopped making any *real* sense! Why can't the world just stay still for a moment? Why can't my experiences be simple and clear?

I tried to put these questions aside and simply *do* my life. Wasn't that what everyone else did? People went to work. They drove their cars or took busses. They went to school or to their job, went home, ate, went to sleep, and got up again. So, what was going on with me? Why all of the extra stuff in *my* head? Perhaps as I imagined, everyone had similar experiences but I was, for some reason, a bit more aware of them. In any case, why couldn't I be an ordinary kid growing up without all these unruly thoughts?!

The Many Worlds of Quantum Physics

You can imagine the relief I felt many years later when Arny began to discuss and teach about the concept of parallel worlds in quantum physics. Now, quantum physics is about as far from my early artsy education in dance and theater as possible and I must admit it scared the hell out of me. But, Arny explained it in easy to understand terms that relate to our psychologies and experiences.¹ And when he began to talk about parallel worlds in this way, it was as if consensus reality and modern scientific thinking suddenly opened their arms to me and said, "What you have been feeling and thinking all along is natural. This is the stuff the universe is actually made of!" Imagine that! Modern quantum physics became an ally rather than a dreaded science that I would never understand!

Referring to the famous "collapse of the wave function" in quantum physics in which something exists in many states but then collapses into one state when observed (I would never dare, or attempt, to truly explain this – please see the reference), Irwin Schroedinger, one of the parents of quantum mechanics, apparently agonized over the mind-twisting thought that his cat could be *both* alive *and* dead before it is observed. I can relate, Irwin! Hugh Everett interpreted the collapse of the wave function with his *many worlds theory* in which he postulates that these parallel worlds do not actually collapse but that you slip into, or participate in, one of the states while the others continue to exist simultaneously.

¹ See Arnold Mindell's *Quantum Mind: The Edge Between Physics and Psychology*, Portland, Oregon: Lao Tse Press, 2000.

In everyday terms, Arny explained this idea of “many worlds” by saying that when we begin to focus on something we see its most *probable* state, the one that fits into our culture and consensus reality. Yet, in each and every experience there is a multitude of other experiences lying in wait, though in Arny’s interpretation, we choose one and *marginalize* the others. To say it very simply, the moment we call something “a” or “b” we have marginalized all of its other possible states (c,d,e, etc). That doesn’t mean that the other states do not exist, it just means that we are not focusing upon them. In other words, we are *both* alive *and* dead, awake *and* asleep! We need *second* attention as the Yaqui shaman Don Juan² described, to stop our ordinary world and to focus upon, and open up to, the many *parallel* worlds.

We are Walking Parallel Worlds

In any case, I suddenly began to see consensus reality as if it were a closed fan that, when spread open, revealed layer upon layer of parallel worlds that were always there, but unseen. It was as if there were a thousand playful elves all around and I was now going to meet them all!

Of course, the idea of parallel worlds is fundamental to Process Work as a whole. The concept of process structure reveals that I have a primary process that I identify with *and* a secondary process that is beyond that identity. The idea of double signals reveals that I can have one body signal that is related to my identity and *simultaneously* another, separate signal, that is related to my more unknown, secondary process. Double signals are natural phenomenon. There is always something that is closer to our momentary identity and simultaneously a *dreaming process* that is further away from our identity and which expresses itself in incongruent, incomplete body signals and experiences. In fact, all of us are walking parallel worlds! We just normally try to force our personalities to identify and act as if they were *one* single entity. That’s fine, but we usually do it at the cost of marginalizing all of our other experiences that don’t go along with our primary identities. For me, the notion of parallel worlds put the icing on the cake...or is it cakes, assorted pastries, and cake-like worlds?

Creativity and the Doorway to Parallel Worlds

As a child I played guitar and piano, sang songs and danced, made lots of weird crafts objects, and found myself going more deeply into “other worlds”. I realize now that I was touching on parallel worlds that were simultaneously present, yet marginalized in my everyday life. When I went to school, I went to school. When I sang, I sang. In fact, my family could never understand why I always closed the door to my room whenever I started to play the guitar and sing. I went into another universe that just didn’t fit the reality outside the walls of my room.

I remember a song I wrote a couple of years ago. It came to me one day when I was operating a marionette that Arny had given to me as a present. It’s a children’s song and I now realize that it’s actually about parallel worlds: the worlds of the puppet, the puppeteer, and the dream that moves them both. Here are some of the words:

² See Carlos Castaneda’s *Journey to Ixtlan*. London: Penguin, (1974) and *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*. London: Penguin, 1970.

*Oh, I'm a purple unicorn
and I'm here to do a show,
I'm the one who that does the dances
and the one who makes me go,
An invisible conductor, is pulling on my strings,
Is it me or is it **IT** that makes me do these crazy
things?!*

*...You see we're all things in one,
and that is really such fun!
We're not what we seem,
we're all joined in a team,
We're the puppet, the puppeteer, and the dream.*



Today I realize that, for me, the creative process hangs heavily upon the doorway to parallel worlds. If I am able to go through that door (and often it is quite a struggle!), I know there is an immense amount of energy and creative potential awaiting me. The ability to embrace a multiplicity of worlds and their potentially contradictory nature, `a la Schroedinger's cat, has been recognized by some researchers as a central key to creativity and the discovery of new insights. For example, this attitude contributed to the physicist Niels Bohr's discovery of the "principle of complimentary" which states that light can be seen both as a particle *and* a wave, and to some of the original insights of such artists and musicians as van Gogh, Picasso, and Mozart.³

The ability to open up to parallel worlds has also been crucial to my work as a therapist. The earliest dream I remember when I became interested in psychology was about a group of shamans dancing on a mountaintop and I have realized ever since that my path as a therapist has to do with relating to ordinary consensus reality *as well as* opening up to parallel worlds with my clients. This makes therapy a very creative process for me. I notice that when I become too ordinary as a therapist, too stuck in one world, I don't feel well; something is missing and my work does not have its creative spark.

I have experienced parallel worlds during many of my creative meanderings. I remember one evening a few years ago when I had just begun to compose music.⁴ I

³ See Michael Michalko's, *Cracking Creativity: The Secrets of Creative Genius*, Berkeley, California: Ten Speed Press, 2001, p.183.

⁴ See Lane Arye's, *Unintentional Music: Releasing your Deepest Creativity*, Charlottesville, N.C.: Hampton Roads, 2002 for much more on Process Work, creativity and music, and the use of mistakes as pathways to the creative process. See also Maurie Shaw's article "The Music that Dreamed me Today," *The Journal of Process oriented Psychology*, Spring/Summer 2001, on music and Process Work and Jan Dworkin's article "The Daemon Creativity: My 800 Year Old Soul," on the creative process in the *Journal of Process Oriented Psychology*, Portland, OR: Lao Tse Press, Winter 1994-95.

was frustrated and wanted to write a song but it just wouldn't come out. I thought, "I wish I could write a song that sounds like Joan Baez singing in a synagogue or a church!" I mentioned encouragingly, "Why there and just notice started to hear "her"



this to Army and he said not listen to her singing what happens?" Instantly, I

humming a tune and before long my instrumental song, *Sounds of the Old World* was born. I realize only now that just saying, "I wish I could..." was already a parallel world that I could step into.

On another occasion, I was feeling a bit stuck and down. I let myself go into that feeling and felt as if I were decaying and dying, letting go of who I am. As I went deeper, the very core, or essence, of this experience was the sense of being utterly free in a world in which there was no time, endless space, and no physical boundaries. In that moment when I touched the essence, I felt a surge of creative energy and out of that experience came my song *Sittin' in a Rain Barrel*.

*I'm sittin' in a rain barrel
Listening to the tides
I've already started to decay
I'm dreaming of the moment
When I turn to dust
And success and failure fade away*

*How long will it take me to die?
Like a plant slowly crumbling down?
I was once a great vision in the sky
But I'm vanishing, melting to the ground
Without a sound.*

That was the beginning of a very "earthy" period in my life!

Sometimes, the doorway to another world appears when I play and create with fabric and string. Instead of only staying with a particular idea of what I *want* to make, I allow myself to veer from my conscious plan and notice a flickering image that emerges from the fabric, or a form that beckons to be filled. Out of this process have come unusual, woven paper baskets, a statue of a green lady who has become my teacher about nature, and a whole host of weird and unwieldy puppets.



Some of my puppets

When I choreographed dances my dance pieces usually particular piece of music. I dance form. The most exciting often connected with the body made when I wasn't



in my late teens and early 20s, emerged from inspiration from a would suddenly see the music in aspects of my choreography were mistakes or strange motions my

paying attention! If I followed these anomalies, they always led to interesting movements that were outside of my conscious intent. I was delighted, of course, when I discovered years later that Process Work focused on these "mistakes" as the seeds of the dreaming process, other worlds poking their heads out and wanting to be noticed and unfolded.

Pathways to Creativity and Parallel Worlds

There are times when a surge of creativity unexpectedly breaks through our conscious will and presents its fruits. And, at other times we can use any one of a multitude of methods to *enter into and gain access to* our creative processes. For me, the whole of Process Work provides a repertoire for this journey. As I study my own process just now, I notice two particular pathways that have helped me open doors to parallel worlds and their creative harvests.

1. Parallel Roads: In this method, you begin by walking down one road and then become aware that *another* road is running along next to you. You then step outside of your original road and explore this second parallel pathway. A few methods come to mind for this method:

❖ **Notice Double**

Signals: This is one of the most familiar and simple Process Work methods. Here, you notice the signals you are making which are



congruent with your momentary identity and then notice *another* signal that you are making that is *not* congruent with your momentary identity. Focus on this *double* signal and allow it to unfold. This was the method I used in the choreography mentioned above when I noticed the "mistakes" in my movement.

❖ **Listen for the past or future:** While speaking, listen for the use of past or future tense, or imaginations of "what could be" and go

deeper into them. They are doorways to other worlds.⁵ This was the method for finding the song, *Sounds of the Old World*.

- ❖ **Noticing flickering experiences.** Think about your conscious identity and problems. Then relax and let your mind and eyes become a bit foggy and unclear and look around and notice something that quickly catches your attention like a color, a shape, a flash of light, a crack in the wall.

Crack in the Wall



Then let this thing that caught your attention unfold further and express itself.⁶ This is the method I mentioned when I worked with fabric and string.

- ❖ **Changing Channels and Modalities.** Notice what channel you are in and then continue with the same experience but switch channels. This is the method I used in my choreography when I *heard* the music and then saw it *visually* in dance form.

You can also switch “modalities”. For example, I have sometimes created a song on piano and then imagined how it would sound if it were played by a violin or a trumpet or it was sung by a bear!



2. Worlds within Worlds: Another pathway involves noticing my momentary identity or mood and then going *deeper into it* in order to discover a parallel world that lies *imbedded within* it. This pathway has the advantage that you don’t have to do much to begin with! You simply start with whatever mood you are in! Here are a couple of methods that have emerged from Arny and my recent seminars:

- ❖ **Find the seed or essence of a momentary mood.** Notice/feel your momentary mood. Make a motion that goes along with it while feeling that mood. Now make the motion a bit less while feeling the same intensity and ask, “What is the seed or root of that experience before it became so big? What is its very core?” If you stay with this essence

⁵ See Arny’s *Dreammaker’s Apprentice: The Psychological and Spiritual Interpretation of Dreams*, Hampton Roads, Charlottesville, NC, 2001, for discovering what he calls “dreamdoors” into the dreaming process by listening to the way that we speak.

⁶ See Arny’s *Dreaming While Awake: Techniques for 24 Hour Lucid Dreaming*, Hampton Roads, Charlottesville, N.C., 2001, for more on catching, flirt-like, flickering experiences.

you will discover that it is a spot full of spontaneous, creative potential.⁷ This method led me to the song *Sittin in a Rain Barrel*.

- ❖ **Make a tone and an overtone:** Feel your momentary mood. Make a sound that goes with it and imagine a story that goes with that sound. Then find the overtone. That means the tone an octave higher than the original sound. Imagine a story that goes with that overtone. Let these two sounds and stories interact to form a third, creative and spontaneous sound/song⁸



Levels of Parallel Worlds

There are different *levels of experience* hinted at in the methods described above. Arny developed a map for these levels, which are parallel worlds for one another.⁹ One level is called,

Consensus Reality which includes the *doings* of the ordinary world.

Underneath that is a *non consensual* realm (meaning that experiences here are not agreed upon in consensus reality) called,

Dreamland. This is an area that includes such things as our dream images and figures, non consensual body experiences, the messages of our double signals, overtones, the future and the past, etc.

And there is another non consensual level called the

Essence. This is a non-dualistic level in which there is a sense of oneness and unity. From this level, dreamland and consensus reality emerge. In this level, we find the seed or root experiences before they appear in material form. When the essence begins to express itself, we notice it as flickering experiences that are quick and subtle, slight tendencies or "flirts". When it further unfolds it expresses itself in dream images and non consensual body experiences and then finally unfolds into the things of everyday consensual reality.

The Essence level is akin to the "Dreaming" of Australian Aboriginal peoples who say that it is from the Dreaming that the material world is born. It is also close to the concept of the quantum wave function in physics, which describes the very basis of all matter. And in Taoism, the essence level would be called "the Tao that cannot be said." The seed of creative energy can be seen as the flow of energy that moves up from the level of the essence to the various other levels.

In order to get in contact with this creative stream, we can begin at any point. By going deeply into our consensual mood, we can discover worlds within worlds. Noticing our double signals and body experiences can help us step into parallel

⁷ Ibid.

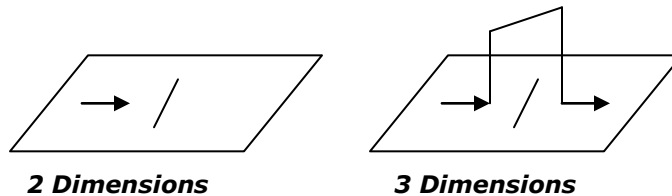
⁸ We experimented with this idea in our seminar in 2001 entitled "Stone Songs" and more on this will appear in Arny's upcoming book, *Big Medicine*.

⁹ *Dreaming While Awake*.

universes. By getting in contact with the essence level we notice how it generates flickering, flirt-like experiences and is the mother of all other experiences.

Hyperspaces

The art of moving from one parallel world to another and discovering creativity therein is analogous to the concept of *hyperspaces* in physics. Stated very simply, and in a layperson's terms, if you are unable to untie a knot in one dimension, that is, if you are stuck and blocked in one dimension, you can untie that knot or difficulty by adding dimensions or what are called *hyperspaces*.¹⁰



If you have a problem in three dimensions, add a fourth. Psychologically, if we go deeply into our consensual mood or switch to a parallel path, we are gaining access to a hyperspace that has its own sense of space and time, contains solutions, and creative potential. There are countless stories about scientists and artists who are stuck with a problem, go to sleep, and then dream the solution! In fact, simply letting go and relaxing (as mentioned above under "Notice Flickering Experiences") is one of the most useful methods for going into a hyperspace. The ordinary mind gets out of the way momentarily and clears the space so that something new can emerge.

What is it about this process of shifting into a hyperspace that is creative? I believe it has to do with two things. First, we get in contact with the flowing of generative energy that seemed static from our "one-world" state of consciousness. This is Arny's original idea of *process*, that is, the dynamic energy hidden within seemingly static experiences. And secondly, by doing so, we gain access to another world, a hyperspace, full of its own concepts, feelings, and images that we did not have contact with before.

Seeking out hyperspaces is something all of us do unconsciously by using addictive substances, going to the movies, going dancing, etc, in order to get a breather from our three dimensional worlds. However, for better or for worse, many of these experiences remain split off in this other world and are not brought back in such a way as to positively influence and transform our everyday lives.



For me, one of the most creative parts of going into a hyperspace is, once I have gathered new information, bringing this information back to my everyday world in some creative form. When this happens, I find myself getting in contact with new ideas, sounds, movements, or images that enhance my ordinary life.

There are other times, however, when the creative act remains solely in a hyperspatial realm. For many artists, this is a sacred experience that should be left as is. The transition to a parallel world and its ensuing experiences is of most

¹⁰ To find out more about hyperspaces in physics, see Arny's, *Quantum Mind*.

importance. In any case, the creative process itself guides us as to how it wants to unfold.

The Bird of Paradise

To close, I'd like to mention something that has troubled and preoccupied me for years. It would seem a simple thing to go from one world to the other, to shift to a hyperspace. However, the most surprising thing about parallel worlds, from my own experience, is that from one viewpoint, when I am solidly locked into my ordinary mind there is definitely only *one* world, the world of consensus reality! From this perspective, everything else either does not exist or is impossible to reach. In this mood, I feel frozen into my consensual world. If a parallel world indeed begins to emerge, I either slough it off and stay with the superiority of my present state or feel that I am standing at the edge of a gaping abyss that is utterly impossible to cross. The distance seems immense.

Let me turn to one of my own songs, a mini opera called *The Master of Gloom*, for some guidance here.



The Master of Gloom

In that opera, a woman who has been locked and bound into an endless miserable relationship with a nasty critic (the master of gloom), sings of her longing for another world that she is unable to find:

*Why must I wait in the cold?
Dreaming of the day?
Where is the land that I know?
Oh, so far away?*

For her, this other land is somehow known, it is even like her home, yet it feels as if it is in another country that is extremely far away and unattainable.

The paradox for me is that, from a very different viewpoint, parallel worlds are really just a *breath away*. All it takes to shift worlds is to notice a flickering vision or sound or movement and to let it unfold. It takes almost no energy. But from consensus reality viewpoint it seems practically impossible! Each world has its perspective and the difference between a million miles and a simple breath has always baffled me.

How have I dealt with this? I am not sure. Sometimes I have sat on the brink of something new and have felt it is just too far away to attain and at other times I

have simply shifted my attention and in a moment's time, I have landed in a new world.

Perhaps the *Master of Gloom* can provide some hints about this difficulty. There, a bird of paradise comes along and teaches the woman and the critic to fly and shift worlds. She makes it all seem quite easy by enticing the characters to simply notice flickering experiences. She sings:

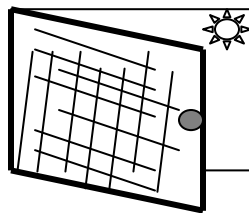
*So come on in to my lovely room
See all the jewels that gleam
Don't waste your time, it's getting late
Come on and join the dream!*

The bird seems to be saying, it doesn't take much energy, just notice those experiences that flirt with your awareness (the jewels), climb into them, and you will be free! In the song, the characters become interested in what the bird is saying and the bird of paradise finally helps both figures to step out of the conflict that has possessed them, and to travel to a new world:

*So fly away to paradise
Think of the beauty to come
Spread out your wings and let them glide
To the ends of time*

Finally the bird sings about the fine crack between parallel worlds:

*So we will glide between the worlds
Finding our faith and our fears
No turning back, we've found the door
And we'll wait and watch what appears*



The Crack Between the Worlds

Who is the bird? I think she is that part of us who is familiar with the map between our many worlds. She is the *loving* nature of our metacommunicator; that part which can stand back and notice all the facets of our experiences. She is the part that is fluid and who can support our fullness, who can be realistic, and who can dream. She is the lover of our consensual minds and also the one who embraces the multi-dimensional nature of who we are. She is a *feeling* toward our experiences, a metaskill, rather than a specific skill.

How do we find her? Each has her or his own way. I wish I had a recipe for that! Perhaps the answer will come in the next dream or song! Or is that a parallel world happening already now?

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