

MOVING THE DREAMBODY

MOVEMENT WORK IN PROCESS ORIENTED PSYCHOLOGY

by Amy Mindell

The following is an example of the application of movement work in process oriented psychology.

One day, a client of mine sat down and began to talk very seriously about problems she was having making plans and commitments. As she talked, her motions were quite intense and linear except for a fleeting moment when one of her hands quickly tossed a sweater she was carrying into the air, throwing it in a nonchalant manner off to the side. When I encouraged her to notice this unexpected tossing of the sweater and to focus her awareness on the quality of that movement, she seemed shy but curious to find out what that motion was about. She picked up the sweater again and seemed to enjoy flippantly tossing it into the air. After she did this a number of times, I asked her to stand up and try the same movement but this time without the sweater.

She stood up and experimented with quick, indirect, flicking movements as she threw her arms, legs, head and finally her whole body in unexpected spurts in many directions around the room. She laughed, thoroughly enjoying the sense of abandon and freedom. But suddenly she stopped and said sheepishly, "I don't know what I'm doing. It feels great but could it be helpful?" I suggested that she follow this mysterious dance just a bit longer and let its meaning reveal itself to her.

I joined her in her dance as we threw ourselves in quick lunges and spurts around the room. As we moved I asked her to make a face to go along with the quality of her movements and possibly add sounds as well. Her eyes opened wide as she made strong blowing sounds with her mouth. I then asked her to "see" what she was doing, or tell a story about it. She said she saw and felt the image of a great wind goddess who was following the winds of fate! She continued to unfold the story of this wind goddess as she tumbled and turned in an unexpected and thrilling way.

When she finally landed on the ground, smiling, she said she realized that this was the quality she needed in dealing with her everyday problems: not so much organizing, analyzing or planning life but instead—living it spontaneously!



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This is an example of a woman who unfolded her process through the tools of process oriented psychology. The woman is not a dancer, but found her own natural dance by focusing on her spontaneous motions and allowing them to unfold. She discovered through her dance a new attitude toward her life, and a world of possibilities.

Process Work

Process oriented psychology, commonly called 'process work', was developed by my partner Arnold Mindell and associates in Switzerland and the U.S. over the past 25 years. Process work is a form of psychotherapy which at its core is based on the ancient knowledge of Taoism and the inherent wisdom of nature. It respects the known and understandable world while delving into the mysterious, dreamlike and unknown dimensions of life. Its application ranges from working with people in near death and comatose states to group and political work, relationship work, movement and bodywork, meditation, and art work. Process work reveals that the seeds of solutions and great sources of creativity are found just in those places we least expect it: in our most difficult problems, in our spontaneous movements, and in our dreams.

Movement, in the most general sense of the word, is the core of process work because the term "process" means the flow of experience, the movement which is inherent in life and nature. Like Taoists who spend their lives studying and adjusting to the on-going transformations in nature, the process worker notices and joins the river of our experiences and attempts to assist nature in its unfolding. Whether focusing on a body symptom, dream, movement, relationship conflict, a group interaction, or an extreme state of consciousness (otherwise called psychosis), the process worker asks, "What is moving? What is changing?" and attempts to follow nature's winding path.

States and Processes

A process orientation towards life contrasts with a state-oriented view of events. A static view of life tends to label experiences with names which are only momentarily applicable. Such names as "pain," "relationship trouble," or "movement difficulties," are only static descriptions of dynamic processes which are in the process of unfolding. Once we tap into and follow the movement inside of these momentary states, we discover fluid and creative processes. Like all movement-oriented people, process workers understand events by getting into the stream of experience rather than analyzing life from the outside. Most importantly, process work focuses on the creative spark behind our individual, couple or group experiences.

Perception and Channels

When I went to Zurich in 1980, I had been trained in dance and was looking for a way to work with people with movement which delved deeply into each person's individual nature and creativity. I absolutely loved dance, but felt that I was a bit stuck in my movement repertoire. Process work afforded me a vocabulary to understand my movement processes and go beyond my own perceptual movement boundaries. Let me speak generally about process theory and then specifically about movement.

Signals are bits of information which manifest in different channels—a stomach pain, a gesture, a relationship situation. **Channels** are modes of experience, neutral or empty vessels through which information manifests. The channels most commonly identified are the *kinesthetic* (movement), *visual* (visions, dreams, hallucinations), *auditory* (outer and inner sounds or voices), *proprioceptive* (inner body sensations and/or feelings), and *relationship* and *world* channels which occur when we focus on our interactions with other people or on events in the world and environment.

Process, as we use the term, refers to the evolving flow of signals as they appear and move through the various channels. The art of process work is to follow and aid the natural flow or movement of process as it winds its own unique path of development.

Processes are structured by their relative distance from one's awareness. The term **primary process** refers to those aspects of our process which are close to our awareness, with which we identify in a given moment. In the example of the wind goddess, we notice that her primary intention or process was quite serious and focused on problems having to do with making plans and commitments. **Secondary processes** refer to all events which we experience as "happening to us," which are farther away from our awareness and with which we do not identify, like the toss of the sweater that led us to the great wind goddess.

The terms primary and secondary are different from the terms "conscious" and "unconscious." This difference is due to several factors. Our primary process is normally not completely conscious or under our conscious control. It is a particular identity which we have adopted and which may be hard to change even if we want to. Also, primary and secondary processes can flip back and forth, depending upon what we are identifying with in a given moment.

We use certain channels as part of our primary and other channels as part of our secondary processes. The channels that we use in conjunction with our primary process are called **occupied channels**. These we use regularly with some degree of awareness. Occupied channels can be determined by listening to the way in which we use language, particularly by the use of the active verb form. For example, sentences like "I see myself as a

business person" indicate that the visual channel is occupied by 'I' or by our primary process. An occupied movement channel might be indicated by a statement such as "Sometimes, I just jump out of my skin." Occupied movement can also be recognized when the movements, or movement gestures, complete themselves, and also when the movements closely mirror what the person is saying verbally.

Unoccupied channels are aspects of our secondary processes. These channels are not used with conscious awareness. We determine unoccupied channels by noticing the way we use verbs passively in our speech. In a therapeutic context, phrases like "people are looking at me" indicate an unoccupied visual channel because other people are doing the looking, not me. Unoccupied movement may be detected in such sentences as "She can stand up to the boss, but I can't," or "The tree bent in the wind." Unoccupied movement is also indicated by recurrent, spontaneous and incomplete gestures, movement-oriented accidents, and unintentional body motions.

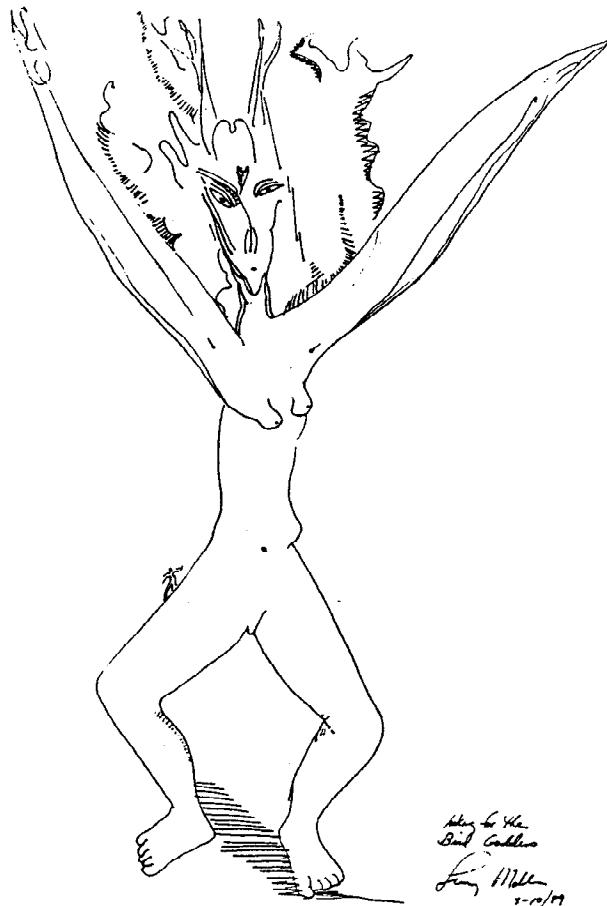
It is important to notice unoccupied channels because they give us the most rapid access to our deepest processes by virtue of the fact that they are very far away from what we are allowing ourselves to notice. That is why encouraging a client to use an unoccupied movement channel by simply standing up, can reveal both her or his entire life history and current process in the space of a few seconds.

Process work embraces secondary experiences as the seeds of new life and helps them unfold through the technique of **amplification**. Amplification means strengthening a signal in the particular channel in which an experience is occurring in order to bring out its full message. My client, for example, amplified her movement first by putting her focus on it, then by standing up and using her whole body, then by making a face which mirrored her movement and finally by creating a dance. Processes can be unfolded in great depth by using the technique of **changing channels**, or adding on other channels. In this example, I asked the woman to change channels by making sounds which mirrored her movements. I then encouraged her to switch channels once again and create a visual image of her experience in her mind, which she further developed into a story.

Differentiating Movement

The differentiation of movement into primary and secondary movements has been extremely helpful to me in going beyond my own movement repertoire and delving deeply into my own and my clients' "dreaming" processes. Primary movements are intentional and congruent with our momentary identity. We understand them, they make sense to us. In the example of my client, her intense and direct motions are primary because they mirror her primary intention to talk seriously about her problems.

Secondary movements are unintentional, spontaneous



Process Journal Drawing, 1989-90, by Lucy Mahler.

Looking for the Bird Goddess. I drew [this] on the airplane 'flying' back to New York from Zurich where I did an eight-week intensive in Dreambody Process Work...

For me the drawings sometimes offer a surprising and creative new vantage point from which to view a conflict, illness or strong emotional state. Out of the drawings hidden wonders can emerge to transform my primary experience of myself as ill or afraid. [L.M.]

and incongruent with our primary identity. These secondary movements are dream-like communications which are mysterious and surprising. They do not complete themselves, and we do not readily understand them. Secondary movements are like the beginning of a sentence which stops in mid-air! They have a tendency to repeat themselves until we notice them and help them unfold. A secondary movement in my client's process occurred when she threw her sweater in the air. The quality of this movement was incongruent with her primary intention.

It is not easy to recognize these secondary movements and stay with them, although this can be one of the goals of improvisational and creative dance. Unintentional movements can happen very rapidly like a quick stumble, a shrug of the shoulders, or a movement tic. It is all too easy to fool ourselves and focus on those aspects of our movements which we like or favor, and to ignore or simply not notice those aspects which we do not understand, or which are distasteful, fleeting, strange, unintentional or different from the way we have identified ourselves. We might get attached to moving in a certain way and ignore secondary movements which momentarily disrupt our primary movement flow.

Noticing primary and secondary movements that occur while we are speaking or moving, and focusing on them with awareness not only leads to more creative options but also minimizes movement injuries. We have found that because secondary processes have a tendency to amplify and repeat themselves in order to be known, forewarnings of movement injuries can be seen in tiny, secondary movement signals.

The Edge

Central to process oriented movement awareness is the ability to notice movement "edges." The edge is the boundary between primary and secondary processes. It appears when something new arises and we are confronted with the boundaries of our known world.

The edge appears in movement when we begin to explore a secondary movement and suddenly stop, become confused, giggle, or doubt the value of our experience. If we continue to move, we may subtly revert back to our primary process movement theme. All of our fears and beliefs which forbid us to explore new territory arise at the edge. Remember the woman in the example? She stopped at one moment, became shy and doubted her experience. She was perched at the edge of something new, something unknown. This woman only needed a bit of encouragement to go over her edge and explore a new world. But always take care to watch which way the process wants to flow! At times it might be necessary to go more deeply into the belief systems which stop us from exploring secondary signals before attempting to go over the edge.

If you are moving and feel that your movement is repeating itself or if you feel bored, you might check out if

you missed an edge. At this point you might ask yourself "Where was the last point of energy?" The answer to this question may lead you right back to the moment when a secondary movement appeared but was let go of.

The edge can be very elusive. I remember watching two women moving together in a very fluid way. They faced one another, palms together, and rocked smoothly back and forth. This was their primary movement process. As they moved, however, there were very slight pushes with their hands which were incongruent with the rhythm and force of the rest of their movement. Here was an edge to notice and explore. When encouraged to follow these pushes, they began to wrestle, challenged one another and enjoyed feeling their strength.

Metaskills

I have just mentioned a number of process oriented tools. Yet, process work, or any therapeutic method, is more than a set of technical skills. The art of process work also includes what I am calling **metaskills**—feeling-oriented attitudes which accompany and enhance techniques. The way in which we work with ourselves and others, the way we approach numinous and mysterious movements, is a matter of feeling. Certain metaskills and feelings make it possible to open up to new experiences and value our stream of experience.

Whether working with herself or with others, a process worker *compassionately* embraces both those elements of experience which are close to awareness and those which are farther away, which are unknown and surprising. She creates a *nurturing* vessel in which even the tiniest secondary signals can grow. She does not throw away disturbing or surprising experiences but *recycles* them, providing a fertile soil in which they can develop. She also needs the metaskill of *courage* to make room for new aspects of life to emerge when consensus reality seems to forbid them. She will use the metaskills of *creativity* and *playfulness* as well as the Zen '*beginner's mind*' which do not prejudge experiences but allow them to explain themselves as they unfold. She *sensitively* explores the edge and notices in which direction the river wants to flow. And perhaps most importantly, she must have a basic movement orientation which *fluidly* adapts to the unique changes and surprises in any given process.

The Dreambody and the Dreaming Process

Let's return to the development of process work and the connection between movement and body symptoms.

Army made a fascinating discovery many years ago. At that time, he was a Jungian analyst in Zurich, Switzerland and believed very strongly in Jung's idea that our dreams are meaningful expressions of our inner lives. Jung approached dreams like a medieval alchemist. He took the

dream (the alchemists would call it 'prima materia'), focused on it (or put it in a pot so to speak) and with appreciation and dedication cooked the contents until they instructed us about our lives (turned to gold!). Arny wondered if the same attitude could be applied to body symptoms. What would it be like to follow body experiences as if they were potentially meaningful?

During that time, Arny had a client who was dying of stomach cancer. After an operation, and while still under partial anesthesia, the man told Arny in an excited, almost elated, tone that his tumor was still growing. Though Arny reassured the man that his tumor had just been removed, the man insisted that it was still growing and began to make movements that pushed out and expanded his stomach. Wanting to validate this man's experience, yet worried that continuing this movement might burst the man's stitches, Arny encouraged him to change sensory-oriented channels by translating this movement experience into a visual picture.

The man reported that he saw a picture of fireworks and suddenly said, "Oh, but that is what I dreamed the other night! I dreamed that there was an explosion of fireworks on Independence Day and that that would be my healing!" In other words, the experience he had in his body was mirrored in his dream. This man was ordinarily quite shy. Arny helped him to explode his sense of shyness by becoming more expressive in his everyday life. He lived much longer than expected. (See Arny's Working with the Dreaming Body, 1984.)

From this experience and countless others, Arny developed the concept of the **dreambody**: the idea that our secondary body experiences and our night-time dreams mirror each other. In fact, this example shows that we do not only dream at night but that our bodies are dreaming all of the time in our sometimes disturbing, mysterious and unintentional secondary body signals and movements. We need only notice these experiences throughout the day and help them unfold in order to tap into our on-going dreaming process.

The Neglected Channel

In industrialized cultures, the movement channel is often unoccupied. Furthermore, for most people, even for some of us trained in movement, it may be unusual to learn to use our awareness to follow unintentional movement processes. Many people learn to walk and move properly, but not to follow their unique, mysterious, often unpredictable movement signals.

There are numerous examples which I could give from our process oriented movement clinics (led by Kate Jobe, Nisha Zenoff, Arny and myself) or the Lava Rock body symptoms clinics (led by Arny, Max Schuepbach and staff) on the Oregon coast. The following example occurred

during a session with a woman with cerebral palsy at a Lava Rock clinic. It illustrates the difference between "learned" and "spontaneous" movement.

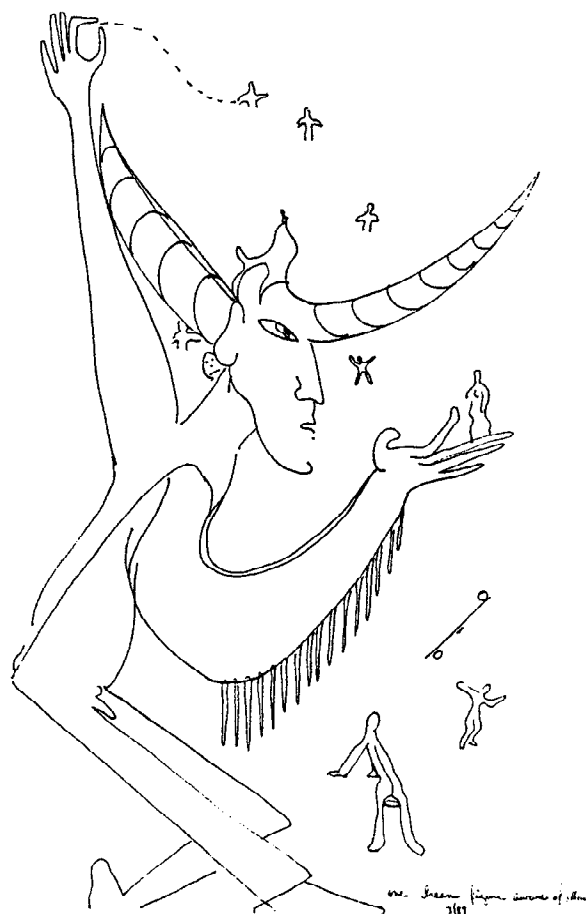
The woman came to the center of the room in order to focus on her movement process. She began to work with Arny as other seminar participants looked on. She said that she had cerebral palsy from birth. She also said that she was interested in a childhood dream she had had in which she was with her family in a castle and everyone was having a really happy and fun time together. (Arny's research has shown that childhood dreams are connected to life myths and chronic symptoms).

The woman continued to explain that in order to move somewhere, she must first concentrate very exactly on where she wants to go and only after careful deliberation is she able to begin to move in that direction. She said that this sort of concentration is very tiring but that nevertheless this is the way she had learned to get through life. This is her primary way of moving, her intention and means of getting along with her movement process.

In order to stay close to her physical movement process, and hopefully in this way to find out more about her dream, Arny asked her how she would move if she did not concentrate on where she wanted to move but allowed her body to move in its own natural way. He was asking about her secondary movement experience. The woman was excited to find out what would happen but afraid that she might fall. Arny encouraged her to sit on the floor and to experiment from this safe position.

She sat down, closed her eyes, and followed her natural movement tendencies. Arny sat with her so she would not feel alone and helped her to follow her movement. She began to sway back and forth, and started to crawl sideways across the floor. She then wanted to try this movement standing up. Others from the seminar stood around her in case she lost her balance. She started to move sideways and her motions began to transform as she added a slight lilt, a kind of light, rhythmic quality to her motions as she moved and swayed from side to side. She began to laugh and laugh. She said, "Oh, this is so much fun! It is so easy! I don't have to work hard!" Arny joined her in her movement as they played and experimented with this movement.

Encouraged to allow the movement to unfold further, the woman's fingers began to snap, her head bobbed back and forth, and she started to hum a jazz tune. Her body bopped from side to side and she danced freely and sublimely. The rest of the group spontaneously started to sing and celebrate and joined her in her dance. She said it was like being with a happy family and suddenly recalled her childhood dream!



Process Journal Drawing, 1989-90, by Lucy Mahler.

One Dreamfigure Aware of Others was my fanciful depiction of Amy Mindell at the Zurich intensive coaxing out all the dreamfigures in our group. [L.M.]

By following the natural tendency in this woman's chronic movement process and allowing it to unfold, she entered into her dreaming process, discovered her childhood dream, her connection to others and a splendid, magical dance. This experience was the beginning of a new way for her to live in her body and the world.

Quick Access to the Dreaming Process through Movement

Interestingly enough, we have found that because movement is far from awareness (unoccupied) for many people, it gives us quick access to the dreaming process, for it is in those places that we have least awareness the dreaming process comes up most rapidly. Simply asking someone to walk around the room and to notice the movements she or he is making which are "not simply walking" can be the beginning of unfolding the dreaming process!

I remember an elderly professional man who was the head of a social agency and had developed programs in many places around the world. As he talked about his work he glowed. He had decided, however, that it was time for him to retire. He complained that he had weakness in his left leg. He had already explored and taken care of the medical causes for this weakness and was interested in finding out more about this movement difficulty.

Amy and I asked him to walk around the room and notice anything that "wasn't just walking." He said that he noticed that his left leg was slower in recovering its step than his right. With our encouragement the man slightly amplified or exaggerated the slowness of this leg. He focused intensely on his experience as if in meditation. He bent even further down on his left knee and then stepped up to his right.

Suddenly, the man walked over to one of the seminar participants, bent down all the way to the ground and bowed his head. He repeated this motion several times until he knew why he was bowing. He finally said, "I am giving respect, I am a servant." He continued, "Wow, I thought I should retire because of my age, but actually I am excited about going back to work and doing more for people and the world!"

This man's movement difficulty was not only pathological but a meaningful aspect of his process. By asking him to walk around the room and amplify that aspect of his

movement which was "not just walking," he unfolded the experience in his leg and discovered his desire to continue in his role as a servant of the people.

Movement and Coma Work

As process work began to develop and a school began in Zurich and in Portland, Oregon, it branched out into many areas. But one area which has been most significant in my life has been the work with people in comatose states. Movement and other forms of nonverbal communication are important in coma work because people in these altered states of consciousness do not relate in ordinary verbal ways. We have found that individuals in comatose conditions feel they are being intimately related to when we are able to enter into their communication system. Coma work involves noticing even the most minute movements and signals, following and helping them unfold.

An extensive description of process oriented coma work can be found in Arny's *Coma: The Dreambody Near Death*. Let me briefly mention however, a few of the movement signals which we have seen in coma work. For example, the signal of a head turned slightly to the side can, when amplified and encouraged, transform into the gesture of a child putting its cheek forward, so to speak, hoping for a caress. I have seen how the apparently spastic motions of the arms of a comatose person become the beginning of a wrestling match! In the same way, the slightest movements of a finger or a hand have transformed into the response to an imaginary embrace from a lover. A heaving of the chest and gasping for breath became, from a person near death, the singing of the inner child.

Conclusion

Process oriented movement awareness requires the ability to differentiate intentional movements from unintentional ones and to perceive edges. By embracing those aspects of our movement experience which are far from our awareness, which are unknown and mysterious or "secondary," and unfolding these through amplification and channel changing, we discover our on-going dreaming process, night or day. In so doing, we break through consensus reality revealing our own unexplored worlds. ★

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